House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

FOPO • NUMBER 051 • 1st SESSION • 38th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Friday, September 30, 2005

Chair

Mr. Tom Wappel

Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

Friday, September 30, 2005

● (1345)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Tom Wappel (Scarborough Southwest, Lib.)): I will call the meeting to order, please.

We have quite a few witnesses this afternoon and we're going to go fairly late, so I'd like to get started right on time. I'm calling the meeting to order.

This is the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans of the House of Commons of Canada. The order of the day is that pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee is undertaking a study on the northern cod, including the events leading to the collapse of the fishery and the failure of the stock to re-establish itself since the moratorium.

Our witness right now is Tom Best, president of the Petty Harbour Fishermen's Co-operative. Welcome, Mr. Best.

I don't know if you've been monitoring the situation, but it's pretty simple. You have up to 15 minutes to make an opening statement, and then we'll take questions and answers for the remainder of the hour. If you run out of time, you can always flesh out in your answers what you didn't get a chance to say in your opening statement.

Welcome. We look forward to hearing from you.

Mr. Tom Best (President, Petty Harbour Fishermen's Co-operative): Thank you very much, sir.

Will I go ahead?

The Chair: Absolutely.

Mr. Tom Best: For the benefit of the committee members and others in attendance, my name is Tom Best. I'm an inshore fish harvester and president of the board of directors of the Petty Harbour Fishermen's Co-operative.

I wish to present this committee with my perspective as a full-time inshore fish harvester and as president of the Petty Harbour Fishermen's Co-operative on the topic of the status and recovery of northern cod.

For some background and for the information of committee members, the Petty Harbour Fishermen's Co-operative has a membership restricted to and composed of experienced inshore commercial fish harvesters. I was the founding president of the Petty Harbour Fishermen's Co-operative when it was incorporated in 1984.

I have had a long background as a full-time inshore fish harvester, dating back to 1963. Since that time I have served in numerous voluntary capacities, including chairman of the Petty Harbour Fishermen's Committee, for the most part, since 1969, until recently after the declaration of the moratorium.

In other voluntary capacities I have represented the position of a great many inshore fish harvesters throughout this province on matters of mutual interest on a number of occasions.

Since the early establishment of the community and subsequent settlement in the 1600s, and until the declaration of the northern cod moratorium on July 2, 1992, the fish harvesters of Petty Harbour, where I came from, have been dependent on the inshore cod fishery as their main source of income. In fact, in the year prior to the declaration of the moratorium, using just traditional bait and hand line and cod trap harvesting technology, those fishermen landed approximately 6 million pounds of cod. That was in the year just prior to the moratorium.

The fish harvesters of Petty Harbour have a long history of unity of purpose and determination as outspoken advocates in the long-term interests of sustainable fisheries and sustainable coastal fishing communities. Strong fishermen's committees elected at annual meetings by the fishermen of the community govern the fishing practices of Petty Harbour fishermen, dating back to the initiation of the annual draw for cod trap berths in the community in 1923.

The fishermen of the community had laws gazetted in the Fisheries Act of Canada in 1961 banning the use of long-line trawl harvesting technology, with an amendment in 1964 adding the banning of cod gillnet harvesting technologies in waters that are since commonly referred to as Petty Harbour waters.

It was an unlikely coalition of inshore fish harvesters from Petty Harbour and inshore processors from the Avalon area of the province that formed the Newfoundland Inshore Fisheries Association in 1986. I was chosen as one of the two founding co-chairpersons of that association, the other being the owner of a well-established private inshore processing facility.

The association reached a very high profile throughout the province through the late 1980s. Its mandate was to inform and warn the general public, politicians at both the provincial and federal levels, the hierarchy with the fishermen's union—

● (1350)

The Chair: Excuse me. Because we have simultaneous interpretation, I wonder if you could slow down a little bit.

Mr. Tom Best: I was wondering if I'm going to get it in in 15 minutes.

The Chair: Don't worry. Take your time. This is Newfoundland. Relax.

Mr. Tom Best: I usually don't finish on time.

Its mandate was to inform and warn the general public, politicians at both the provincial and federal levels, the hierarchy with the fishermen's union, fisheries scientists and managers, and the federal Minister of Fisheries and Oceans of the harsh reality that the northern cod stocks were in severe decline and that immediate management measures were required to stabilize that resource and the inshore commercial cod fishery along the east and northeast coast of this province.

The association conducted a major lobby emphasizing the need for significant reductions in the cod quotas being allocated to the Canadian offshore fishing fleets, recommended immediate action by the federal government to extend fisheries management jurisdiction to include the extent of the Canadian continental shelf, and recommended a total banning of bottom dragging technology in Canadian waters.

In the interim of implementing the banning of bottom dragging technology, the association recommended the proportional harvesting of cod by Canadian offshore fishing companies on the offshore spawning grounds along our east and northeast coasts. It recommended the banning of any fishing activity on these spawning grounds during the cod spawning season and recommended full observer coverage on all Canadian offshore fishing vessels and on all Canadian inshore bottom dragging vessels at that time. In addition, the association recommended a federal commission of inquiry to investigate the impact of bottom dragging on the ocean bottom and on the ocean ecosystem environment.

I wish to emphasize to this committee that it was this coalition of inshore fish harvesters and inshore fish processors who, from their wealth of knowledge and experience, relayed the message that the northern cod stocks were in major decline, and that if immediate and severe management measures were not implemented, the commercial northern cod fishery was in danger of collapsing. Those warnings, with support from the great majority of inshore fish harvesters and many others from throughout this province, were issued loud and clear through the media and at all relevant fisheries forums and consultations for several years throughout the middle and late 1980s, even up until the declaration of the moratorium in 1992.

At most major fisheries scientific stock assessment forums where we presented our views and recommendations, our warnings and advice were labelled as anecdotal information by lobbyists representing the offshore fish companies, by other self-serving industry interests, and by numbers of high-ranking fisheries scientists and fisheries managers in attendance.

Subsequently, our views and recommendations were, for the most part, discarded. This was a major error on the part of the management and scientists at the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. In fact, the discrediting of our knowledge and advice—which, in effect, questioned the experience, intelligence, and integrity of the inshore fish harvesters and processors of this province—eventually resulted in our warnings coming to fruition with the declaration of the cod moratorium on July 2, 1992. I'll never forget that day.

Ironically, the majority of inshore fish harvesters along the east and northeast coasts, including myself, are now stating there is enough cod in inshore waters along the east and northeast coasts of this province to allow for a responsible level of directed cod fishery. Contrary to those who are suggesting northern cod should be on the endangered species list, experienced fish harvesters are detecting an abundance of cod in a significant cross-section of inshore waters along the east and northeast coasts of this province. However, as in the past when we were issuing warnings of stock depletion and the implications of non-action, our experience, intelligence, and integrity once again continue to be challenged, and we will likely see no outcome of support in our favour on this particular matter.

To summarize, 14 years after the declaration of the northern cod moratorium, the continued closure of the inshore northern cod fishery, with some exceptions, has done nothing toward solving the real problem, the real problem, in our view, being the decline of the offshore component—and I refer to it as a component—of the northern cod stock and the lack of recovery of that component of the stock.

● (1355)

Seemingly the only objective being accomplished by the continued closure of the traditional inshore northern cod fishery is the total demise of that fishery and the demise and resettlement of the majority of coastal fishing communities in Newfoundland and Labrador. Unfortunately, in the minds of many people in the fishing industry, there appears to be a planned strategy of fishing industry rationalization aimed at eliminating the inshore cod fishery and forcing the resettlement of populations from coastal fishing communities that have depended on that fishery for approximately 400 years.

It has been a lengthy and frustrating process for those of us in the fishing industry who have continually recommended responsible management measures in attempts to maintain sustainable commercial fisheries and sustainable inshore fishing communities. It has been obvious that the decision-making process is heavily flawed by the self-serving political influences flowing from competing interests in both the harvesting and processing sectors of the industry. It appears more obvious now than ever before that those influences are heavily stacked in support of rationalization and concentrated corporate control, to the detriment of the inshore commercial fishery and coastal fishing communities.

By comparison, not too many years ago, growing up in a coastal fishing community in this province instilled a sense of cultural pride and enthusiasm about pursuing the traditional inshore fishery as a profession. The big fish killers, as they were referred to at the community level, using traditional sustainable fishing methods, were considered to be heroes by many of the younger community residents. Those who were known as successful fish killers were known to have unique skills and abilities, they were well respected, and they inspired numbers of young people to pursue the inshore fishery as a career.

Unfortunately, such is not the case today. In fact, the great majority of young people in the coastal regions of this province have lost all sense of pride and enthusiasm relative to the commercial fishery in general. They see no future in pursuing any aspect of the inshore fishing industry as a profession. For example, the average age of those currently involved in the inshore commercial fishery in Petty Harbour, a community that has always maintained a higher than normal number of inshore commercial fish harvesters, is 52 years of age. Most young people—in fact, most working-age people in most communities in this province—are moving away from traditional fishing communities in attempts to find employment elsewhere, and they're mainly going out of the province.

Coastal fishing villages and their populations are confronted with a truly demeaning and sad state of affairs. In my view, this situation has all materialized in recent years, mainly as a result of the destructive politics surrounding the industry, inadequate and less than appropriate fisheries science, inappropriate quota allocations and fisheries management regimes, and the introduction of modern-day destructive harvesting technology. Numerous fish harvesters, including me, remain firm in the view that the harvesting of sustainable levels of commercial quotas that are prudently determined and responsibly managed, within even a depleted resource scenario, should not be a problem.

As I previously noted, closing down the inshore component of the northern cod fishery has done little, and will do little, to contribute to the recovery of the overall northern cod stocks, and in particular to the recovery of the offshore component. That's where we believe the problem is. It would be far more responsible and meaningful to identify and acknowledge the major factors that have contributed, and continue to contribute, to the demise and non-recovery of the overall northern cod stock, or any other marine species, and implement stringent and effective measures to deal with any such situation.

In conclusion, I wish to note a couple of serious views and concerns regarding why, in my opinion—and I've had this opinion for many years—important, relevant groups and organizations that carry significant weight have not put forward concerns or positions on key factors that we all know have contributed to the decline and slow recovery of the overall northern cod stocks.

These two items are as follows.

The diverse and competing structural makeup of the fishing industry and of the membership of major industry organizations has been and continues to be a serious problem. Due to opposing views on serious matters of fisheries management, hands-off and watered-down positions are frequently and destructively the order of the day.

● (1400)

Second, the structural makeup of the Fisheries Resource Conservation Council has been and continues to be a problem. The membership of this high-profile council includes numbers of representatives from competing interests in the fishing industry. Public consultations, and I haven't been to many in the last couple of years, conducted by this council have taken the form of entertaining many differing positions on critical management issues put forward by competing interests in the fishing industry, some of whom are directly associated with various council members.

In closing, in no particular order of priority, I wish to list a number of factors that should be addressed and present measures that could be taken to reduce the negative impact these factors are having on the stability of the northern cod stocks and other fish species.

I'll list the factors and then I'll make something of a recommendation.

The continuation of the commercial capelin fishery in Canadian waters is a major problem. Recommendation: harsh as it may seem, implement a ban on the commercial capelin fishery in Canadian waters.

The second factor is harp seal predation on cod and capelin and on other species that are a major component of the natural diet of cod. Recommendation: continue with the development of expanding markets for harp seal products and continue to increase commercial quotas to accommodate such markets.

Number three is foreign fishing—a lot of which is allowed by Canada—and foreign overfishing, which includes blatant directing for cod bycatch while supposedly fishing for other species within the areas of the Canadian continental shelf. That is a major problem in the offshore. Recommendation: Canada must take custodial management of our fisheries to the extent of the Canadian continental shelf and not be playing around with NAFO, for Christ's sake.

Number four is the massive abuse of incidental cod bycatch allowance and other directed species fisheries by both Canadian and foreign fishing vessels. Recommendation: implement stringent management measures and penalties to minimize such abuse. Here's an example. It is a harsh one, but it would have significant meaning if we were to implement it. Harsh as it may seem, monitor at dockside all cod bycatch landed by Canadian and foreign vessels—if there is any landed by foreign vessels—in Canadian ports and have any financial proceeds forfeited to support an enhanced dockside monitoring program or some other equally important program. You would knock out the targeting of illegal bycatch.

Number five is the lack of appropriate management plans designed to govern directed fishing activity on a species with biomass levels at historic levels, such as the northern cod fishery right now. Recommendation: rather than simply closing down directed fisheries, design responsible management plans that can allow for reduced directed fisheries and at the same time allow for the rebuilding and the recovery of...any particular species, for that matter.

Number six is the use and abuse of groundfish gillnets as a harvesting technology. My opinion, and I think the opinion of a whole lot of fishermen, is that the two most destructive fishing technologies ever introduced into the ocean were bottom dragging technology and bottom gillnet technology. That's our opinion. That's not necessarily everyone's opinion, but I recommend you impose stringent penalties on those who abuse the use of groundfish gillnets on any species fisheries, because everyone doesn't. Ban the use of groundfish gillnets in areas where they are having a detrimental effect on any particular species. Groundfish gillnets, for example, may kill a particular species of critical importance to the survival of inshore fishermen, as well as other species different from what it's directing for.

Number seven is the use of bottom dragging technology in Canadian waters—any water in the world, for that matter. Recommendation: ban the use of bottom dragging technology in Canadian waters completely.

Next is the use of inappropriate harvesting technologies in specific areas at specific times. Recommendation: ban the use of any harvesting technology where and when it is determined to be having a negative impact on the sustainability of a species—and believe me, most in the industry know where these locations are and at what time of the year.

Next is the overconcentration of fishing effort in critical areas at critical times of the year. Recommendation: design management plans that include measures to minimize the overconcentration of directed fishing effort in areas where a species is detrimentally vulnerable, or could be vulnerable, because of that concentration.

● (1405)

The Chair: How are you doing in terms of getting to the end?

Mr. Tom Best: Two more.

Number ten is the lack of designated areas off limits to cod harvesting. Recommendation: establish sanctuary areas to protect the sustainability of species in areas where and at times when they are most vulnerable, cod being no different than any other species. We have talked about this for a long while, but no action has taken place.

Finally, there is the lack of an appropriate structure to effectively design and govern responsible, sustainable fisheries plans. We obviously haven't had one to date. Recommendation: with the input of relevant interest groups and individuals, design an effective, sustainable fisheries management and governance regime. I think that has been talked about across Canada for the last eight or ten years. I don't know whatever became of it. I don't know of one that has been structured anyway.

I have presented a number of my opinions, views, and recommendations, many of which have been put forward prior to this opportunity. I can assure you that my limited presentation—because it is limited—to this committee today incorporates the views and expressions of many participants in the inshore fishery, in this province and others, including many of those who have been displaced from their place of employment in the fishing industry in this province in recent years for reasons that are obvious to all of us.

I wish to thank the committee for the invitation and the opportunity to express some of my views here today, but I also wish to express a particular note of appreciation and thanks to the honourable Loyola Hearn for his interest, encouragement, and support in helping provide this opportunity and suggesting that I do this.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Best. On behalf of the committee, I'd like to thank you for not just complaining but offering specific recommendations that we can dig our teeth into and consider. So thanks for that.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): On a point of order, Mr. Chair, when we get back can we get those recommendations translated and distributed to all the committee?

The Chair: Oh, absolutely. We'll examine them very carefully.

Mr. Scott Simms: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Kamp, ten minutes.

Mr. Randy Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Best. I too appreciate the practical way in which you've summed this up and the experience that you clearly bring to this issue.

How many fish harvesters are in the co-op that you're the president of?

Mr. Tom Best: About 40 or 45 right now.

Mr. Randy Kamp: Those are enterprises?

Mr. Tom Best: Owner-operators, yes.

Mr. Randy Kamp: You lived through this, and you said that in the eighties, when there were signs of decline, that's when the co-op began to “inform and warn”, I think you said. You conducted a major lobby and you made recommendations to quite a few people, by the sounds of it.

I guess we're mostly concerned about DFO's reaction to the crisis, and their role in it. Can you tell us a little bit about how you or the co-op warned DFO and then the response you received?

Mr. Tom Best: The major emphasis back then was the fact that, in the view of the majority of inshore fish harvesters in this province, the quotas that were being allocated throughout the 1980s to the Canadian offshore fleets were way out of whack, way too high. There were all kinds of signals of less and less fish showing up in the inshore waters and inshore coastal fishing villages and in the gear types. People changed their ways of fishing to catch as much fish as they were catching years before with just natural...just their normal technology. So they converted, they did it all.

When we got to all those meetings where we issued those warnings and suggested that the northern cod stock were in decline... and we officially did it. Lots of other inshore fishermen were saying the same thing. We did it with the support of inshore fishermen, but we did it officially. The reaction for the most part, when you talked about reducing the quotas to the offshore dragger fleets, was that you purists are not going to get your way on this one. Basically, that was the reaction, in particular of federal politicians: we are not going to close down these offshore towns at the expense of all the plant workers who live in these offshore towns. That was the reaction over and over again. So it was a very political response that we continued to get all the way through.

In fact, when I say that a number of scientists and fisheries managers...particularly the Atlantic Groundfish Advisory Committee process is the one we started to go through in the 1980s. Every representative from the industry was there for the science, the reps, and for the recommendations to managers about where we would go with quotas. We were bombarded with backlash from the lobbyists representing the offshore companies. We were bombarded with backlash from reputable DFO scientists and managers, who figured that everything we were saying was hearsay and anecdotal. On the other hand, we had a significant number of scientists within that framework who were supporting our position. Obviously they didn't carry much weight, in my opinion.

So a simple answer is that the message was issued loud and clear from a cross-section of everyone in the inshore fishing industry in this province, and in fact by many people who were fishing on offshore vessels, crew members and things like that. We did not get a very good reaction.

● (1410)

Mr. Randy Kamp: Some have said that scientific information, and I suppose information from other stakeholders, was censored. In other words, it never really reached the decision-makers or the ones who could have made a different decision if they had heard the right information. How do you respond to that?

Mr. Tom Best: I don't think that was very factual. I think we said it, either in this hotel or somewhere else, with Bernard Valcourt, or the Minister of Fisheries, a year or two before the declaration of the moratorium, when he called us purists and said that we were going to destroy the livelihoods of people in offshore fishing villages. All of the politicians who carried any weight were aware of the views of the inshore lobby and the concerns being expressed about depleting northern cod resources, in my opinion.

Mr. Randy Kamp: Some have suggested, I think, that it might still be a valuable exercise to have a public inquiry into the events leading to the collapse of the northern cod. How would you feel about that?

Mr. Tom Best: I don't think much could be accomplished in a public inquiry other than what's already been stated. I think the message is loud and clear as to what caused the collapse of the northern cod stocks. We have reiterated it over and over again, beginning in the mid-1980s officially and right through to the present day.

I think I heard a comment today that it's flabbergasting to some people that the northern cod is not recovering in the offshore. But we have our views on why the cod is not recovering in the offshore, and we have a big problem with trying to make the cod recover in the offshore by closing down inshore commercial fisheries, which in our view are not in the kind of trouble people are suggesting they are.

Mr. Randy Kamp: I was going to ask you about that. We've heard scientists give us somewhat equivocal answers to the question of whether inshore stocks would contribute to the recovery of the offshore stocks. To me at least, there doesn't even seem to be a consensus on just the relationship of the two or the stock structure itself. What's your opinion?

Mr. Tom Best: It's a questionable argument, and it's obviously a very serious one, because in the interim, in trying to figure that out for the next 50 years, we will have wiped out rural Newfoundland, in my opinion. The question is, will we accomplish anything, and what destruction will we cause in the interim when we're trying to figure that out? I think people are trying to figure that one out and whether the rebuilding now of the inshore bay stocks, as they have been identified, will replenish the offshore.

There's a simple solution to fix the offshore: deal with the issues that are causing the problems in the offshore—foreign overfishing, targeting of cod bycatch, misreporting of catches, and all the other things not being dealt with in an appropriate manner—instead of trying to rebuild the fishery to the detriment, destruction, and demise of rural and coastal Newfoundland.

● (1415)

Mr. Randy Kamp: Coming from British Columbia, I'd always thought that there was a moratorium in place and that a moratorium probably meant something like cessation of fishing activity. It's sounding more and more like a lot of cod is still being caught. Am I right in thinking that?

Mr. Tom Best: To give you an example of the demeaning process we're now going through, if we as inshore fishermen in this province along the east and northeast coasts are going to be allowed to have any activities directing for cod, it's supposedly going to be in an incidental bycatch in another species' fisheries. A great number of inshore fishermen in this province totally disagree with the use of bottom gillnets, and they have been put in a position in late years where if they don't accept that, they get no access on the water to fishing, in an indirect or direct way, for northern cod.

That's a criminal offence, in my view, and it's totally demeaning. It's questioning the intelligence and integrity of every inshore fisherman in this province.

Mr. Randy Kamp: Finally, how optimistic are you about the future? I'm getting a sense for some of it, but in terms of having identified the problems and the solutions to them, have you had any involvement with the cod action team in particular and the development of the recovery strategy that's only now coming into place?

Mr. Tom Best: Personally, I'm not aware of any work that group has done, and I think a great majority of fishermen like me are as unaware of that as I am. With the exception of at the community level, where we do our own activities in trying to protect and maintain fisheries, which we have no control over with the moratoriums and closures, we have had no involvement with any of these groups.

Mr. Randy Kamp: So in terms of the future, are you pessimistic?

Mr. Tom Best: I have five daughters, none of whom is going to be pursuing the fishing industry. I pursued the fishing industry at a very young age, before I completed high school. I was an owner-operator by the time I was 17 years of age. I made the point that in my community right now there still exists 80 bona fide inshore fish harvesters.

The single biggest inshore fishing community in the province, by resident population, is Petty Harbour. It has always maintained a high number of inshore fishermen. The average age, as I pointed out in my presentation, is 52 years of age. When I started out, the average age in the fishing industry in my community, and that's not too long ago, was about 27 or 28, so we had a good influx of young people coming into the fishery. As I mentioned, when I was growing up in the community, my hero was whoever was the biggest fish killer, and I wanted to be like that person, or better. That was the way it was for a lot of people in coastal fishing villages.

Mr. Randy Kamp: Thank you, Mr. Best.

The Chair: Mr. Best, before we go to Monsieur Blais, perhaps I may be allowed to make a comment.

One of the things that I've learned in the time that I've been the chair of this committee is just how diverse the fisheries and oceans of this country are. I cannot conceive of anybody I know presently or I have known in my life who would be able to grasp, as fisheries minister, all the myriad of problems that float around of each and every fishery and...all of the different kinds of species and the different closing times. So those ministers have to take advice. They don't have to necessarily listen to it, but they have to take it. Where are they going to get it from? They're going to get it from people like you. They're going to get it from people like the directors general of their various regions.

So part of our study is examining the events leading to the collapse of the fisheries.

I'd like to ask you this. Was there a particular regional director general, or whatever he or she was called at that time, during the period of time that you're talking about in the eighties, or were there a series of them? If there was one person, who was it, first of all?

Mr. Tom Best: Mr. Eric Dunne, at the time.

The Chair: How did he come across to you and to other fishermen in terms of the kinds of complaints you made? What I'm getting at here is this. Was he sympathetic to you, and did he give that advice to the minister, and then the minister would perhaps go to his colleagues and would have to make a choice—do we close some towns down here—or did that particular regional director general completely ignore your comments? Can you give us the history?

● (1420)

Mr. Tom Best: That particular regional director general, in my view, was probably the best we ever had at that time. As a matter of fact, he wrote a report himself, and Dr. Alverson and Dr. Harris....

We already conducted a report for the Newfoundland Inshore Fisheries Association. Dr. Derek Keats, Dr. Green, and Dr. Steele, from the university, were people who volunteered their time and efforts to give us their version of what was going on with the models that were being used for assessing the state of the stocks, and so on. I won't get into that; it's another whole thing.

Eric himself put together a report and made a number of recommendations, some of which were critical recommendations, at a time when 175 inshore 65-foot vessels, or a little less, the new mobile fleets, focused and targeted on the last known spawning, the migrating stock from the outer banks and along up to the southern shore. In an area where five vessels had fished before, 175 vessels all of a sudden, from 1987 until 1992, targeted the area where the fish were spinning around and spinning off on the grounds along the southern shore. They probably cleaned up the last of that inshore migration over that period of four or five years.

Mr. Dunne made a recommendation that this activity should have been curtailed. That recommendation never went anywhere that I know of.

The Chair: Do you see what I'm getting at? There are allegations that we've heard all along here that DFO mismanaged the situation. To my mind, there's a difference between, let's say, the bureaucrats of DFO and the politicians of DFO. If the bureaucrats of DFO made certain recommendations, which were wrong, then they mismanaged. If they made certain recommendations that were right, and those recommendations weren't followed, then their political masters mismanaged. I don't think we should be blaming the wrong people, so I'm interested in your view on that.

Mr. Tom Best: When we look at the scientific stock assessment in the late 1980s up until the declaration of the moratorium, most people would suggest the moratorium was only declared when the offshore fleets were no longer viable in fishing the offshore fishing ground. DFO scientists and managers were agreeing that the stock was in much better shape for those four or five years than what inshore fish harvesters were suggesting and advising. So it is quite obvious that for those four or five years the recommended levels of quotas from within DFO in St. John's, through their scientific branch and through their managers, were much higher than where they should have been. So that was wrong advice.

The Chair: Exactly, and that's what I'm getting at.

Okay, sorry, Monsieur Blais.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Best, I'd like to start by apologizing for having missed the beginning of your presentation. I'd like you to tell us about the relationship that has developed over the years between your group of inshore fishermen, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and the scientists.

Do you get the sense they have become better listeners? Are things as they once were? Have things improved or worsened for a given group? How has your group's relationship with fishers, department officials and scientists evolved?

[*English*]

Mr. Tom Best: In my opinion, and I think in the opinion of a whole lot of people out there who have legitimate concerns to express, there aren't many opportunities. I think without question the fishermen's union in this province is recognized as the spokesperson for inshore fish harvesters and production workers, and it is the only avenue that I see today. That may be intentional or not, but you have to have input through the fishermen's union, through whatever committees and groups are formed, to have your message put through.

In our community we have always, for years and years, had a relationship with DFO that was very productive, until the mid-1980s when we started issuing warnings of stock depletion and nobody wanted to reduce the quotas. We weren't looked on with too much favour by a whole lot of people after that. Prior to that, the community of Petty Harbour historically had very positive working relationships with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. In fact, because they had a regulation in an area of water immediately adjacent to the community...it has always been supported by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. We're probably the one unique community in the province that has had a regulation in place that governs the kinds of fishing technology that can be used in a specific area of water immediately adjacent to the community. That's been on the books now for some 40 years or so.

● (1425)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raynald Blais: And with the scientists?

[*English*]

Mr. Tom Best: We have had good relationships with a good percentage of DFO scientists, and in particular with scientists working at the university. Then again, there is a whole group who don't agree with us, who obviously carry a lot of weight, and who would be listened to sooner than we would be listened to when it comes to taking direction on where fisheries management should go.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raynald Blais: You must surely be able to make a distinction between inshore and offshore stocks. I think you are in favour of resuming the inshore fishery, but to what extent? Do you have any figures on this?

[*English*]

Mr. Tom Best: I don't have any figures. I think an analysis would have to be done of the observations and the work, combined with the work of DFO along the east and northeast coasts. Rather than having us bow down and accept bycatch allowances in a particular species' fisheries, which is fishing activity for cod, we could have a legitimate indexed inshore commercial cod fishery at responsible levels for the purpose of gathering information and determining just exactly where the stock is in inshore waters. There is no question in my mind that the stock in offshore waters is in deep trouble. I am now convinced that in the last few years we have a different situation going on in the offshore areas than we have in inshore waters along the coastline.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raynald Blais: Mr. Hutchings, one of the scientists who appeared yesterday, projected between 500 and 1,000 metric tons. According to you, should this quantity even be taken into consideration or is anything under 2,500 tons of no interest? He referred to 500 to 1,000 tons maximum.

[*English*]

Mr. Tom Best: Small quotas of cod are critical or important today to any inshore fisherman fishing along the east and northeast coasts of this province, because at the local level the fishermen could probably achieve more benefits by local sale. I am not suggesting that plants are going to open their doors and start processing 1,000 or 1,500 tonnes of cod, but believe me, there are avenues to sell small quotas of cod and to generate significant income to subsidize the other activities that fishermen are carrying on.

By the way, when you mentioned Mr. Hutchings, I am glad he said that, because I was convinced that he was one who was suggesting that northern cod should be listed as an endangered species no matter where the hell it was at.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raynald Blais: Finally, do you believe that when we refer to catches by fishermen, given human nature, official numbers or amounts granted may end up multiplied by a factor of two or three?

[*English*]

Mr. Tom Best: There is no question in my mind that whatever is happening today, no matter what fishery you're involved in, there is always that risk—even in incidental bycatch, which becomes targeted cod bycatch fisheries.

There is no question in my mind that it is hard to keep tabs on the numbers. It is my understanding, from my years of going back and forth to meetings, that DFO always had a level of concern with respect to allocating quotas, for misreporting and underreporting catches. But I think what we are creating right now in the fishing industry is opening the door to all kinds of abuse, instead of having limited, responsible, directed fisheries that are monitored and controlled properly with the proper mechanisms in place.

● (1430)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raynald Blais: Thank you, Mr. Best.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Best, did I understand your evidence to be that you agreed that a fishery of 500 tonnes would be a responsible level?

Mr. Tom Best: I never put a number on it.

The Chair: No. I am asking you to put a number on it.

Mr. Tom Best: I can't put a number on it. I don't know the status of the stock along the east and northeast coasts. I fish out of one community, Petty Harbour. I know what the situation is there; it is as good or better on the water or fishing grounds as it has been since two or three years prior to the moratorium—and since the moratorium as well, because we did conduct some sentinel fisheries activities there as a cooperative for four or five years.

For the first time since two years before the declaration of the moratorium, the indicators are showing this year that the cod stock is appearing on the fishing ground at its normal time of the year, the second week of June, whereas for the last 14 years no cod had been showing up. When it was there some in abundance, and in other years when it wasn't so abundant, it wasn't showing up until the first and second weeks of July.

This is an indication to me now that we not only have a migration from the south, but also that we're seeing the start of a migration from the north. I don't know if the migration from the north along the coastline is coming out of the bays or whether we have something happening in the inside part of the offshore fishing ground that is contributing to a migration back to the inshore areas from the offshore fishing ground. But there is a signal this year that there are more fish moving back than we've seen for the last 14 years.

The Chair: Yes, but my point is that you suggested in your evidence that there should be a responsible level of inshore take. If you don't know what that responsible level is, who does, in your view?

Mr. Tom Best: I am not the one who makes those decisions. I am a person who has a view on that particular matter, and I think a couple of thousand tonnes is no problem whatsoever. That is my view on it.

I want to suggest that we have to be cautious, concerned, and responsible. So I am not suggesting that we need to have the kinds of quotas that people are saying, and that if we don't have them we don't have a fishery. The plants can't open because they need 100,000 tonnes of quota to give them any reason to open their production facilities.

What I am suggesting is that low quota levels of 5,000, 6,000, 7,000 or 8,000 pounds per licence-holder along the northeast coast would be a significant boost to those who continue to fish with small quotas for crab. I know from experience that those individuals can do as well on 7,000-, 8,000-, or 9,000-pound quotas as they could do selling to the fish plants on 30,000-pound quotas.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Stoffer.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Mr. Best, for your presentation.

Sir, you had indicated—and correct me if I'm wrong—that you were not totally up to speed or you were unaware of this Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador action team for cod recovery. Is that correct?

Mr. Tom Best: I was at a meeting, either last year or two years ago, I think, when they were talking about striking that action team. I have not been made aware of anything that's transpired with respect to that group since that date.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: So two years ago you were advised that this was going to be developed. Is that correct?

Mr. Tom Best: I think it was approximately two years ago.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: And how far is Petty Harbour from St. John's?

Mr. Tom Best: It's nine miles.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Nine miles.

I said earlier that this CAT thing is an excuse for bureaucrats to keep busy until something comes around. I find it absolutely incredible that Petty Harbour, one of the largest and most historic fishing areas—as he indicated, nine miles away from St. John's—was told about it two years ago and that's it.

It says in this CAT thing, “Includes External Advisory Committee - industry, community and other stakeholders”.

Would you consider your Petty Harbour area an interested stakeholder in the recovery of the cod?

Mr. Tom Best: I think the fishermen of my community and others have been among the most outspoken and responsible fish harvesters in this province. We like to be a part of every process that's recommending ways and means to maintain sustainable resources and sustainable communities.

I made the point earlier that there may be individuals in the community, who I'm not aware of, who are involved with the fishermen's union and are participating in that process. I know through our fishermen's cooperative that we're not aware of anything that's happening.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: And you're nine miles away.

Mr. Tom Best: That's right.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Sir, there's an old saying: if your head hurts, stop hitting it against the wall.

I just want to ask you a question. What amazes me the most is the resilience of fishermen and their families. Against all odds they continue to have hope in the system. They continue to believe that what they're doing is right and that they have a right to earn their livelihood as independent fishermen, to care for their families, and to live in their communities. I am simply amazed at the resilience of Newfoundland and Labradorians—the same as in our own province and others.

Sir, with your historical knowledge and that of your organization, do you have any faith, in any way, that DFO can rehabilitate itself and actually implement some of the management concerns you have indicated? Do you have any faith that this particular structure as we know it now can actually do it?

● (1435)

Mr. Tom Best: I've made some personal comments and expressed the view—what I think is a major view in the industry—that DFO has to cater to political influences from a whole lot of conflicting interests in the fishing industry. Therefore, in my view, it is very, very difficult for them to go in a direction that would hurt or impede one or other group in the industry. That's to the detriment of fisheries management, from my perspective.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: There was a time in the history of Newfoundland, of course, when Premier Smallwood started a resettlement program. You had indicated there was a resettlement program because of out-migration of fishermen and their families from the outports of this province. That's a pretty strong statement for someone who was born and raised in the province. I would assume that would be very hurtful for you to have to say because of the fact that this is your home. To see your five girls indicate to you that they may end up leaving or having to go somewhere else and not even entertain any aspect of the fishery as a livelihood is similar to what's happening to our small farmers on the prairies who are leaving the land and turning it over to the large corporate sector. The exact same thing is happening in the fisheries.

Do you think this is by design, or by plan, or is it just accidental that this sort of system is happening to you and your people?

Mr. Tom Best: I think the reality of today's modern technological world is such that, whether by design or by plan, it's going to happen in this province, particularly because of the fact that we have major emphasis and focus on megaprojects—oil and gas development offshore. And I think in the minds of a whole lot of politicians, the only way we should have any remnants of the inshore fishery, particularly the inshore cod fishery, is to have some sort of concentrated corporate control in very, very few villages or communities or bigger towns.

There is no question in my mind that the governments of the day —and I think it's the view of a whole lot of people in rural Newfoundland—are not focusing on the sustainability of fisheries resources, particularly cod, and certainly not the sustainability of what you would call burdensome ones, to maintain coastal fishing villages.

So you have to ask yourself the question, “What do you think I think?”

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Stoffer.

Mr. Matthews.

Mr. Bill Matthews (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Best, thank you very much for coming and for what I consider to be an excellent presentation with many recommendations, which I'm hoping will appear in the cod recovery plan. And I say this quite sincerely, because quite often as a committee we get people to come and complain, but they don't come with recommendations or a solution to resolve the problems. So I thank you for your recommendations.

In your presentation you talked about competing organizations and interests. I'm wondering if you could just explain that a bit more for me and what you meant by it. It seemed to be that the competing interests and organizations have been to the detriment of the resource.

Mr. Tom Best: Well, that was quite obvious in the mid to late 1980s, when the inshore fish harvesters of this province were adamant that there had to be quota reductions—and they were talking about quota reductions, not wiping people out—for the Canadian offshore fleets, in particular National Sea Products and Fishery Products International. That was a very difficult recommendation to come to grips with for the people who were representing both sides of the issue, and to figure out how to deal with it.

This goes on in organizations, including our own organization, I suppose, depending on what we do on a day-to-day basis. But for the most part, you have organizations that represent all kinds of fleet sectors, all kinds of production workers—inshore, offshore, and all those sorts of things—and you have fisheries associations that represent a group of people, some of whom are bandits, some of whom say they are a group of people, and a whole lot of people from within, and they never seem to agree on things that are critical and important when it comes to.... If the issue impacts them negatively, they're on the other side of the recommendation. If it impacts them positively, they support it.

It's common sense. Think about it. If you're trying to represent a whole group of different companies or individuals who are putting forward different positions on different management issues, for example, and they're all your members, unless you can get that group together and come to some kind of a compromise, nothing constructive goes forward.

● (1440)

Mr. Bill Matthews: Thank you for that answer. I think what you're saying basically is that it's very difficult as a union to represent harvesters and fish plant workers. I think that cuts straight to it, which is basically what you've said.

I hope this is not an unfair question, but do you think the relationship between DFO and the FFAW is too cozy or just a little too close, and that maybe they should rent the one space?

Mr. Tom Best: If I were president of the Fish, Food and Allied Workers Union, I would say no.

Mr. Bill Matthews: Right. But what I'm asking you now, as somebody who's trying to figure out why we're where we are.... I remember that in a meeting with Minister Dhaliwal in Ottawa a couple of years ago, I just blurted out loud and said, well, why don't you all move into the same space, because that way you'll save each other rent? It came out of me, because sizing it all up over the years, I've felt that way. It just seems that there's nothing done in fisheries management today—you know what I mean—unless it gets to naught. Maybe I'm being unfair, but I'm trying to get to the bottom of this as well as everyone else.

Mr. Tom Best: Well, just to answer you again on the issue of the union, Mr. Matthews, back in the mid-1980s, there was a debate because of these issues, and the union split down the middle. You can remember when the UFCW broke apart and the executives decided they were going with the CAW.

There was a whole continuum of inshore harvesters who had always been lobbying for their own inshore local within the framework of the fishermen's union back then. The UFCW, in an attempt to hold onto fishermen, finally granted that, but the other group were gone. And it was carried on to a vote.

The concerns and reasons at the time for wanting that inshore local were that there were a whole lot of people who believed that locals within an organization had a lot more autonomy and could work things out with another local in an organization. That's the view of some people, including myself, and they can probably put forward some constructive, responsible recommendations. But if they don't have the autonomy to work out their own recommendations because of the framework, that doesn't happen. I have my views on that; other people have their views on it.

Mr. Bill Matthews: I appreciate your answering the way you did.

I just have one final question. One of your recommendations was a reduction in the harp seal population. You've recognized that population as one of the factors that has contributed to where we are today, and obviously that it is something that has to be dealt with if we're going to recover.

Do you have any information or have you seen or read anything about the amount of fish resource that seals consume? We hear different things. I'm just wondering what your view of that is. You've been on the water; you've seen them.

Mr. Tom Best: I used to gather a lot of information at one time because I went to a lot of meetings. I've become a very frustrated person over the last number of years. As a matter of fact, I questioned whether I was even going to come to this meeting, but I did because of Loyola's interest, and things like that. He knows where we stand on issues in the community.

As a boy growing up, I spent seven or eight years in the offshore seal fishery, by the way, when the white coat hunt was on the go. It's an ambition of a lot of us to get a chance to go, and I went for seven or eight springs. So I believe in the seal fishery for the purpose of supporting people's livelihoods. I know that on our part of the coast, until ten or twelve years ago, a harp seal was never seen. But in the waters around our community all along the southern shore, and all over the place right now, you can go on any given day and there will be seven or eight harp seals mulling around in just about any cove. Obviously they're eating something. They probably came farther south searching for food.

The harp seal population obviously is predating on capelin. Capelin are critical to the recovery of the cod. The harp seal is a far more aggressive predator than cod, so it's quite obvious that if there's a small school of capelin in an area, and we have a bunch of harp seals looking for food and a bunch of juvenile cod hoping to survive by gathering some food, the harp seal is going to get the capelin first.

So there are lots of harp seals, and they are having a critical impact, in my view, particularly as it relates to the rebuilding, or allowing juvenile cod to get to the reproductive level.

● (1445)

Mr. Bill Matthews: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Mr. Murphy.

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Mr. Best, for your excellent presentation and your good recommendations. Of all the recommendations we've heard, you certainly align yourself closest with the interests of the fish, if I can put it that way.

You talked about competing interests, you testified that you and the other fishermen in the cooperative are seeing a lot more cod, and you do support a limited, directed cod fishery. But there's one other area that I'll question you on. We and every politician in Newfoundland—provincial and federal—are getting a strong lobby from everyone out there for a full fishery, that every man, woman, and child in Newfoundland on a limited basis has the right to catch fish for their own food purposes. Does your association support that?

Mr. Tom Best: A few years ago we didn't support what they called recreational food fishery that was happening in this province, because there was no monitoring, no control in place. My community became a haven for trailers and campers. We had never seen any more than two or three speed boats on the water throughout our history, out to catch cod for personal use, but there was commercial activity on the water. There was no one in the community or anywhere else, particularly retired fisher people or people connected to the fishery, who didn't have access to cod.

Right now I am convinced that we're in the same position as those people. We're no different. We're not allowed to fish commercially. I've been challenging their right to go out and catch fish for personal use all these years. I'm now convinced that they do have that right, and they should have that right. We have to figure out a way to allow it to happen so that it's not impacting in a negative way the recovery or rebuilding of a stock that I say is recovering in inshore waters. When we talk about fisheries now, I'm talking about directed fisheries for cod that would include some sort of allowance for those who find cod really important, from a personal use perspective.

I don't know what the mechanism would be. Perhaps if there's an inshore commercial indexed fishery there would be some overrun to allow people who want to access cod for their personal use to work through that particular process. There are ways and means. It's not that complicated, in my view.

Hon. Shawn Murphy: When you saw the speed boats out in your harbour, back when it was allowable, did you see any indication of violations of the principles of the policy?

Mr. Tom Best: Absolutely.

Hon. Shawn Murphy: There was no control or monitoring of the food fishery?

Mr. Tom Best: Absolutely.

Hon. Shawn Murphy: But you have to appreciate it would be a difficult process to monitor. When it was allowed, somebody from DFO told me something like 90,000 tags were issued.

Mr. Tom Best: We have lots of friends who play ball, hockey, and all those kinds of things. We've played sports throughout the years. There was a whole bunch of them who came out on my boat, and maybe they caught two or three fish using their tags. They did it in a responsible way, and they never even bothered with the rest of their tags. So there may have been a whole bunch of tags issued, but a whole bunch of them were never used as well.

So it depends on how they're used and how the fishery will be monitored. There's no question in my mind that that type of fishery, as well as any kind of indexed commercial inshore fishery, would need to have a dockside monitoring process in place—which it didn't have then.

Hon. Shawn Murphy: I just want to follow up on a few of your excellent recommendations.

The Chair: This is the last question.

Hon. Shawn Murphy: On your bycatch recommendation, I found it very interesting that the proceeds would not go the harvester, but rather to some other monitoring process. Is there a way of monitoring? For example, if a boat didn't have a monitor on board, what would prompt that person to bring the bycatch in? There would be an inclination for some captains to just dump it overboard, which would be easier than storing it on ice.

Mr. Tom Best: If it were incidental, they'd likely bring it in. I think it would reduce the targeting for bycatch in a significant way.

I wouldn't like to suggest that, based on my view here today, because that view was put forward four or five years ago. The only fishery that commercial fish harvesters along the northeast coast had, and the east coast inshore fish harvesters, was a bycatch allowance in a blackback fishery. I don't know what the intent of that really was, but I think it was a way to play down the politics of the industry and allow all of us some access on the water in an indirect way, but really directing for cod.

I don't think any of the fishermen in the back will question my.... I may get my legs cut off for some of the things I'm saying here, but that's the reality of what this is all about. I think that's totally irresponsible. Rather than that, we should have a responsible low-level—whatever it may be—commercial index fishery in the province, whereby we can do things right on the water and minimize as much of the abuse as we possibly can.

● (1450)

Hon. Shawn Murphy: Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Best, for your excellent presentation. We very much appreciate it.

We will adjourn for a few minutes to keep things on track.

I'll ask the people in the panel to come up and get organized for a 3 o'clock start.

● (1451)

(Pause)

● (1503)

The Chair: We'll reconvene the meeting. Let's get started.

We have right now—since they're there, we'll get going with them—from the Fish, Food and Allied Workers Union, David Decker, the secretary-treasurer, and Ms. Sherry Glynn.

Do you have a position, Ms. Glynn?

Ms. Sherry Glynn (Market Researcher, Fish, Food and Allied Workers, As an Individual): Market research.

The Chair: Okay.

We have, from the Fisheries Crisis Alliance, Gus Etchegary. Welcome, Gus, again.

We have, from the Gearshift/Fisheries Recovery Action Committee, Fred Winsor. Welcome, sir.

Somewhere we have the Teamsters. I'll introduce them when I call on them.

Here's the way it's going to work. Each of you will have up to 15 minutes to present. If you don't take your 15 minutes, we would of course be gratefully appreciative, but if you want your 15 minutes, by all means take them. There are four of you, so that will take a maximum of one hour; then there'll be one hour of questions and answers, when the members will direct their questions to whomever they want to direct them to.

Are there any questions on that score?

Good. Then Mr. Decker and Ms. Glynn, I would ask you to start off, please.

Mr. David Decker (Secretary-Treasurer, Fish, Food and Allied Workers Union): Good afternoon. I don't know whether you have these slides in front of you. The papers in front of you certainly would be helpful in terms of the discussion I will have.

The Chair: Mr. Decker, were they in both official languages?

Mr. David Decker: They're mostly numbers and graphs.

The Chair: Okay, but if they're not in both official languages, I'm not allowed to distribute them, so don't worry about it. Just assume we do not have them and carry on.

Mr. David Decker: It'll be a little bit more difficult for the committee to follow.

The Chair: That's true, but we're used to it, so don't worry.

Mr. David Decker: Okay.

Instead of focusing on cod alone, as I'm sure a lot of the presentations you've had have done when talking about what is happening out there, what I want to look at is, overall, the whole ecosystem and then relate it back to cod and what is happening with it. I'll focus on and go through a number of these species, but first I'll focus on capelin.

Right now you tend to focus on cod. What we tend to do, which is unfortunate, is focus on one species. From his perspective, that's not what a fisherman sees on the water; that's not how he operates out there. When he's on the water, the information he takes in is really a whole ecosystem view of what it is he sees out there, of what's happening. He doesn't look at one species in isolation from another species.

Once you start looking at it overall, what you see over the last number of years is that there are some fairly dramatic changes out there in the ecosystem, similar to what we went through in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In that time, what we experienced was a cooling of the water temperatures. You saw temperatures cooling off and you saw shrinkage of the resources.

For instance, it started collapsing in the north first. You got to a point where, in Labrador and northern Newfoundland, where the waters were pretty well, as everybody called them at that point, the desert, there was basically nothing alive. You could steam for miles around and there was nothing on the sounders.

Over the past number of years, especially over the last couple of years, what you have seen is some significant change and the reversal of that trend. The most common thing you will hear from a harvester right now is that the water is alive again.

It's unfortunate that you don't have the graph in front of you. I'll take the last couple of years in capelin and will focus on zone 3K, because you're getting into the northern portion of that zone. In 3K, in 2002, we landed about 1,500 tonnes of capelin. That's what was there. The quotas for this period of time were fairly constant. In 2003, it jumped to 4,000 tonnes of capelin landed in 3K, which is the basic division across the northeast coast from the tip of the northern peninsula right down to Cape Freels. In 2004, it jumped to 12,000 tonnes of caplin. In other words, landings were up about ten times from what we had in 2002.

For argument's sake, so you can look at a number, not only did we see a better distribution of capelin, but the size of capelin improved dramatically. In 2005 the catches were similar to what they were in 2004. In 2005, you have actually reached the point where you're capped out at the quota. The quota is keeping you at that limit; you can't rise beyond it.

What we also saw in 2005 is that the average size of capelin, which in the 1990s had gotten really tiny, down to about 60 to 70 capelin per pound, had brought them back down to about 45 per pound. So you saw a dramatic increase also in the size of capelin. That's just one species in the ecosystem; look at them.

We'll go to mackerel landings, in the same area across the northeast coast. If we go back to 2001, we have a minimal number in 3K; it was almost negligible. You might have had two or three hundred tonnes of mackerel landed. In zone 3L we had close to a couple of thousand tonnes of mackerel landed in 2001, and in 2003 there were similar amounts.

In 2004, that spiked to where we landed about 16,000 tonnes of mackerel in 3K. In 3L we landed 18,000 tonnes of mackerel. All told, in Newfoundland in 2004 we landed in excess of 80 million pounds of mackerel, whereas in the year previous there was almost nothing.

So you see these dramatic changes that are there in the ecosystem and that are happening all abroad. And they're not just with cod; they're happening out there with pelagics and groundfish.

● (1505)

And in terms of benefits to rural Newfoundland's economy, these were very, very significant in terms of both of these species, not only in terms of the harvesters but also in terms of the work put into the plants and the dollars put into rural Newfoundland. But nobody has focused on what's happening with these species because for most of it they weren't kept out and are not under moratorium. You aren't under the same critical eye that you are with cod. You don't have to go through the same process to try to deal with it. There's not the same focus on it.

So these are the kinds of things that are happening.

I'll look at lumpfish. There's no doubt, if you look at what happened in the 1990s with lumpfish, that anybody looking at lumpfish in 2002 would have declared that it was being put up. There was no doubt that everybody would have declared a moratorium. I probably would have voted for it myself at that time and said, that's it, this is commercially extinct and not a viable fishery any more, and we better close it and do something to try to save the lumpfish. That was 2002.

With four- to seven-week seasons, to the point in 2002 where we actually extended the season beyond four weeks and seven weeks—and when I say four, some parts of the island had four weeks, some parts had seven weeks, all according to the zone that the fishermen were in—we landed 1,900 and something barrels of lump roe. That's what was landed within the province. There was no panic, no moratorium called, no nothing, and we went on. The next year we landed I think it was somewhere around just under 5,000 barrels, again with a full season at our disposal, the four to seven weeks at our disposal.

In 2004, in terms of lump roe, we also had this agreement in terms of NAFTA with other countries not to oversupply the marketplace. We had a deal in place that I won't get into, which was basically to sort of restrict what we put into the marketplace to protect price. We had that deal. We didn't have to worry about it at that point because there was no way we possibly could have put into the marketplace what we had hoped we could. In fact, we thought our projections were quite safe at 10,000 barrels. When in the two years previous to that we'd produced 2,000 and 5,000, we didn't have to worry about 10,000.

Lo and behold, we started in 2004, and we had to slam the door on the season after two weeks, shut the door and slam it and get over to the DFO to say, for the love of God, close the season. We landed 16,000 barrels of lump roe in two weeks. That's what we landed.

I'll tell you, if DFO science or whatever looked at this, we would have slammed the door and, like I said, had a moratorium. Here we were up to 16,000 barrels of lump roe in two weeks, and if we had let it go to the full season, there was no doubt that we would have landed anywhere from 25,000 to 30,000 barrels of lump roe. These were absolutely record landings within the province. I mean, this was not something marginal. It just went from nothing to record landings, historic landings at times that went beyond par with the best we'd ever had in this fishery.

Again, that points to dramatic changes that were happening in the ecosystem. There is no scientist I have ever talked to or anybody I've ever talked to who could ever possibly come up with an explanation as to where this materialized from, where it came from.

And in fact, that year, in 2004 again, because this is a fishery that benefits a lot of small boat fishermen, is spread around amongst a lot of fishermen and is not concentrated in one area, it went into the pockets of a lot of fishermen around the island of Newfoundland. That fishery put $24 million into people's pockets—$24 million. That was lump roe.

In terms of other fisheries, if I take the Greenland halibut fishery in western Newfoundland, or turbot—and I'm going to relate this to a day's fishing because the quota was constant, so all that could happen is a day's fishing could go down as a result of increased catches—in 2001, we managed to get about 25 weeks of fishing in Greenland halibut at the quota that was available to us in that year.

By 2005, we're down to three weeks of fishing, three weeks on the same quota. That's what we're down to now, three weeks of fishing. We're bringing in the quota in three weeks, which used to take us 20 to 25 weeks to bring in. We're now down to three weeks.

● (1510)

The Chair: So basically what you're saying is that things are looking good. Could you relate that to the cod? You have just under five minutes.

Mr. David Decker: Fine, I will. But I was hoping people could draw their own conclusions on that.

Now, on the Atlantic halibut side—in other words, turbot—we had gone from the same sort of arrangement. We used to have about 25 weeks of fishing, and last year we were down to about eight weeks of fishing in the gulf on the Atlantic halibut. Again, it's the same quota, at 300 tonnes constant, but the number of days fishing is going down because the biomasses are increasing.

For all of these species, by the way, we don't have the same sort of biomass numbers, and we don't try to get into numbers about the total biomass. We don't try to say that we actually know most of them. We don't try to determine the actual number of fish out there. We try to set quotas. Some of them are done by actually setting a season—for lumpfish, say—and you have a certain period of time in which to fish. We don't try to count and say, “This is the number of fish”, and then, “Here's how many you can take”.

So if you go back and look at cod, cod are following the same trend. In fact, if you look at it in terms of the gulf cod over the last number of years, since 1996 we've seen an increasing trend in terms of this cod. In the last two years in particular we've seen dramatic increases, beyond anything we could possibly have expected to see in gulf cod. Over the last two years it's been absolutely dramatic in terms of the distribution of the cod and the catch rates. They're beyond anything that any of our fishermen have seen in the past. We get the same sort of thing where we've got the quotas, but relative to the amount of quota we've got, it takes less time to catch it.

In terms of cod on the northeast coast, we've seen the same thing in terms of the distribution of cod. It is expanding, and not just in the areas like Trinity Bay and Bonavista Bay, where we've seen it for a while. We're seeing it expand into the north and we're seeing it expand into the Labrador coast. It's a trend that's out there. We'll never know the number of cod out there. We're not ever going to get so accurate that we know the amount of fish out there. But it's very clear that what's happening right now with cod is that the opportunity for returns to our communities, for the amount of time and energy and everything else that we've got invested in this, is being stymied by this view that the stocks are not recovering. There's nobody focusing on lump, having hearings on lump, and asking what happened to lump. But in terms of cod fish right now, it's being stymied.

For the investment that people are putting into this, there are no results. For us, representing harvesters, we have to find a balance. We have to strike a balance in terms of saving the resource...or “rebuilding” the resource, I should say. It's not an issue of saving it any more, it's an issue of rebuilding the resource. So we need to strike a balance between rebuilding the resource and saving our communities. We do have to strike that balance. It's no good for any of us to try to, at all costs, just go out and rebuild the cod stocks or any stocks as quickly as possible. We know that's...give it up, and move away from our communities. But we have to find that balance, and strike the balance of saving our communities. And that's what we're into.

These quotas clearly could be, right now, when you look at the northeast coast, small quotas. It's not an issue of us going out and arguing for huge quotas. That's not where we're to. We've never done that. But it is something where clearly there's room for a small quota on the northeast coast that allows for some participation in the fishery. If you tie that in with DFO's old philosophy about shared stewardship, you're never going to get people buying into trying to protect the resource if at the same time you're disconnecting them from it. You know where I'm coming from.

Right now we're getting to a point where our people, our communities, feel totally disconnected from the cod stock. In terms of what happens, there's getting to be no relationship that is ever going to be of any value to the community. You put in there that disconnect and you will never have stewardship of that resource. That's what we're afraid of.

● (1515)

If you want that in terms of the long term, there are cod stocks. The growth of the cod stocks has to be tied to some benefit to the communities in the end, and people see that the future of their cod stock is tied to the future of the community. You cut that line, you cut that umbilical cord for so long, and there's going to be no relationship left. That's what you're in danger of doing right now. The frustration is growing and growing.

On the gulf stock, clearly it's ludicrous what's happening to that stock, to try to pin that quota down as low as it is, at 5,000 tonnes. It's ludicrous, and the damage it's doing to our communities is unacceptable.

The Chair: Thank you.

Fisheries Crisis Alliance, 15 minutes, Gus.

Mr. Gus Etchegary (Fisheries Crisis Alliance): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I come to you having started in this fishing business in 1947, and I was associated with one company during my whole career in the fishing industry. During that time I served as a commissioner to ICNAF and NAFO for close to 20 years. One particular year, which I'm going to hopefully refer to in the discussions, is the transitional year between ICNAF and NAFO. It is a rather important milestone in the fishery off this coast.

As I say, I was associated with a large company employing about 6,500 people, ashore and afloat, and our interest obviously was in the harvesting, the processing, and the marketing, and of course the international involvement in all three areas.

Mr. Chairman, I started in 1947. I refer you to a chart here that begins in 1962 and goes up to 1992. It's a northern cod spawning biomass, so I'm focusing here on the collapse of the fishery to begin with, and I'll make some reference to the recovery, or non-recovery, later.

In 1962, Mr. Chairman, the northern cod spawning stock, that is, seven years and older fish, amounted to 1.6 million tonnes. In addition to that, it's estimated that there was something in the order of probably 2 million tonnes of fish under seven years of age. So this was a huge resource. And it went down to 70,000 tonnes.

During the period from 1962, having gone through that period of time, I would have to say, beyond any question of a doubt, that this remarkable, dramatic decline is due to two things. One is the mismanagement of the resource from the beginning of 1949, when we joined Confederation, right up to, I guess, the present day. On the basis of what I heard this morning, I would have to say the present day. In addition to that, ICNAF and NAFO, like DFO, in my opinion, are structurally weak in managing fisheries as well. I'm going to try hopefully to give you some indication of where those weaknesses were.

● (1520)

The Chair: You had two reasons. One was mismanagement. What's the second?

Mr. Gus Etchegary: The second one was the inability of ICNAF and NAFO to control and manage the fisheries from 1949, when ICNAF was born, up to 1978, when NAFO was born—and we've had NAFO ever since.

Mr. Chairman, I've gone through numerous exercises on how best to present my point of view on this whole thing, but I've come to the conclusion that maybe there are several milestones, beginning in 1949, that perhaps focus on the failure of the system to manage the resource.

Incidentally, I said I was involved in a large fishing company. One of the earliest things I learned from probably the best fishing entrepreneur who ever walked in shoe leather, as they say, was the very close relationship between the economic well-being of the fishery—and the social well-being as well—and a high standard of fisheries management toward sustainable development.

Along the way, Mr. Chairman, the first important milestone that I determined was important in the mismanagement of the fisheries from Ottawa was the distance between the scene of action and the capital of the country: 3,000 kilometres. Having our fishery managed from that distance was a total impossibility. First of all, we brought in close to a million square miles—I'm not sure what the number was—of new fishery into Canada on that date in April 1949, elevating Canadian fisheries' exports from being fifteenth in the world to sixth. That's how important that fishery was.

It was a very complex and complicated fishery because of the involvement of foreign fishing. The involvement of foreign fishing here and the subsequent mismanagement of the fishery by ICNAF, NAFO, and DFO has not impacted, to any great extent, the other provinces on the east coast of Canada. I think when you look at the fisheries of the day, you will find that this province is the province that has really been hit. No, we're not going into the social implications of the downturn, but just let me say one thing: we've lost 12% of our population; we're going to lose another 12% before too long.

It has to do with the fact that the decision-making from Kent Street by people who might be well-meaning.... But you've got to remember the political system. I've gone through 19 ministers of fisheries and God only knows how many bureaucrats, and they've all had to learn the business. They made the decisions, so they had to learn something about it. And how could they? Some of them were fine people—I'm sure they were—and they meant well, but they didn't know a bloody thing about fisheries. As soon as they got to a point where they knew something, they were gone, and we had to go through the same process all over again and through the same errors all over again.

Secondly, it was the failure of the Trudeau government to honour a commitment that was made.

By the way, I listened to people talking about the failure of the fishery in 1989 and 1984 and 1983. We took 25 people from the east coast of Canada in October 1971—the assistant deputy minister of Quebec was one of them, and a couple of people from labour in that province and from the other provinces on the east coast. Altogether, we took 25 people who were representative of the whole spectrum of fisheries, and we took them and sat down with three ministers—Don Jamieson, Mitchell Sharp, and Jack Davis, who was minister of fisheries—for a full day, and we made a presentation.

● (1525)

I say to you that we used DFO's statistics and we showed them that we had the facts—Dr. Templeman of the day was saying the resource was on the skids, particularly the northern cod. The facts were that in the previous five years, 1965 to 1971, the catch per unit of effort of 125-foot side trawlers had gone down from a tonne an hour to 800 pounds, and that gillnet, God help us, that was introduced about seven or eight years earlier, had gone down from 400 pounds per fishing day to 50 pounds. As well, the average size of fish had gone down from an average of four pounds in 1965—I'm talking about cod—to 2.2 pounds. Dr. Templeman and the Department of Fisheries were issuing information backed up by statistics, and good statistics in those days, showing that the resource was on the skids.

When we look at that decline, it coincides with the decline of fisheries that took place from 1960 onward.

Number three on the list is the decision by the Minister of Fisheries in 1973 to disband the federal Fisheries Research Board. On the day he dissolved that board he immediately politicized fisheries from there on. From there on it went down the drain, and it kept going down the drain, for the simple reason that the federal Fisheries Research Board represented about 16 to 18 people from the industry and it was a buffer between the science and the operational people in the federal fisheries and the minister. It was a most important organization, and that is what is missing today more than anything else in fisheries.

The next one is the failure of Canada to negotiate change in ICNAF to NAFO. We had a glorious chance in 1978 to change NAFO and remove the objection procedure, put some real teeth into regulations, enforcement, and so on. We neglected to do it because of the politicians and the bureaucrats—mostly bureaucrats, by the way.

Another thing has been the endless, costly, useless conferences, reports, and committees—we heard more of it again this morning—that have been going on simply to divert attention and prevent the federal Government of Canada from taking real action to deal with the problems in the fisheries. That is what has happened.

I want to go quickly into the recovery. On a positive note, a cod fishery on St. Pierre Bank is in the process of recovery and is recovering quite well. The reason is it is out of the clutches of foreign fisheries. The yellowtail fishery on the Grand Banks has recovered to a large extent. Why? It is because it is inside and clear of foreign fisheries.

One of the big problems that has killed the chance of recovery, that no one seems to want to recognize, is the landing by Canadians and foreigners of hundreds of thousands of tonnes of small fish. I will elaborate on that in a few minutes.

I have a graph of statistics from a large foreign vessel that shows that of a cargo of 1,285,000 pounds of fish, 80% were too small to reproduce. That is common practice with both Canadian fleets today and all the foreigners who are coming through here, Mr. Chairman.

● (1530)

I will say very quickly that the politicized fishery is an important thing, and I think beyond any doubt, there has to be a change. This is a very important region. It has special problems, and one of the things that could have been done here to improve the situation is to have a permanent appointment of an assistant deputy minister for the Newfoundland region with some degree of autonomy to deal with matters as they arise, not on an ad hoc basis, as is being done at the present time. It's very important that the structure of DFO change. It has to change from what it is today.

Science—God help us. Quite apart from the problems with the seals, seismic blasting, pollution, ghost nets, immense quantities of rock that are dumped on fishing grounds, capelin that hasn't been surveyed any more than once or twice in the last seven or eight years, which is a disgrace.... We presented to your committee four years ago a very detailed science paper. That paper showed that 76% of the fishing grounds that have to be managed by DFO are under the direction of these people over here in the White Hills, and we receive 24% of the budget.

I don't know if I can stay this evening to listen to the presentation that's coming, but I want to tell you, Mr. Chairman, I would be very wary of some of the information that will come out on science—not the working science, Mr. Chairman, not the working science. I have the greatest respect in the world for the men who go to sea on research ships, the people who go to plants and work with fishermen and try to develop a cooperative spirit with fishermen and so on, but the evidence is there and has been there for quite a long time that scientists within the department—

● (1535)

The Chair: Your 15 minutes is—

Mr. Gus Etchegary: Ten seconds. Scientists within departments have produced an internal memo that says that management is fostering an attitude of scientific deception and misinformation in presenting and defending the science the department undertakes and the results it achieves. I've had personal experience, Mr. Chairman, in seeing the presentation of scientific work from excellent scientists. I concur with this gentleman here—I think he said it—that the scientists were first-class people. I'm going to tell you right here and now that by the time their reports get to the political level for decision, in many cases they're not the same reports.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Mr. Etchegary, are you referring to a specific document when you refer to that internal thing you were talking about?

Mr. Gus Etchegary: Yes.

The Chair: Can you make it available to us?

Mr. Gus Etchegary: Yes, I certainly will. Also, Mr. Chairman, anything else—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Etchegary, we'll have to wait until question time. Thank you.

Teamsters Canada, Richard Gill, please.

Mr. Richard Gill (Business Agent, Local 855, Teamsters Canada): Thank you.

Actually, Dave Benson is going to read a presentation.

The Chair: Mr. Benson.

Mr. David Benson (Fisheries Observer, Local 855, Teamsters Canada): Thank you.

I have a tremendous advantage over all of you people because I'm invisible. You can't see me. I'm a fisheries observer.

As regards northern cod, fisheries observers were present at creation. We were introduced with the 200-mile limit in 1975 and were there until the moratorium in 1992. As independent observers, we cannot disclose information on particular vessels, and we recognize the necessity of such a requirement. However, we can say we witnessed one of history's great ecological disasters, the destruction of all the northwest Atlantic cod stocks, first by international agreement and finally by large Canadian fishing companies under a policy of high volume, low value.

While our presence prevented the reckless discarding and dumping of fish, we did not initially have 100% coverage, so the practice continued, not because this wholesale high-grading was merely permitted, but because it was encouraged and even demanded by the highest levels of industry. Individual fishermen and captains often expressed appreciation that our presence allowed them to do what they thought was right, to fish responsibly, although this view was not universal.

We reported a steady decline in the size of fish. By 1988, when we received 100% coverage—thanks to Mr. Best, among other people—cod had collapsed in 2H; by 1990 off Hamilton Bank; and in 3KL by 1992. Massive assaults on offshore capelin over the same period did not help. It may be said we were ineffective. In truth, we were deployed too late, the damage already done and the situation irreversible.

And cod is not the only species we saw fished to commercial extinction. There are now either limited or no fisheries for squid, plaice, redfish, witch, haddock, hake, pollock, roundnose grenadier, and capelin. Cod has not recovered. The reasons are too obvious for us to waste the time of this committee.

What could we have done? In the offshore shrimp industry, with 100% coverage for 20 years, we've almost eliminated dumping. We could finish the job if DFO would let us. But the shrimp are getting smaller and, as with cod, becoming sexually mature younger as a response to increased fishing pressure. Hundreds of inshore vessels have been licensed to land shrimp that is of the lowest grade possible, again reflecting high volume, low value, and the irrelevance of quality in a fishing industry that is essentially a make-work project.

Are we still needed? It might as well be asked, why do we exist? To answer, we must first define ourselves. We are not dockside monitors; we are not fishery scientists in research vessels; we are not fisheries officers; we do not wear uniforms and carry guns. We wear rubber gear and carry knives, tweezers, calculators, notebooks, calipers, measuring boards, scales, and mesh measurement gauges. We are fisheries observers, deployed at sea in commercial fishing vessels to collect unbiased data about the vessels' activity, data that is processed and interpreted in a scientifically approved manner, independent of and uninfluenced by the party being observed.

Can this data not be collected and obtained by fishermen? Of course not. The fishing industry has a long and consistent history of inaccurate reporting. Even if they were so inclined, fishermen are inherently biased and could not collect objective information even if they wanted to. Observers exist because we are the most cost-effective way to obtain data on a fishery.

Can we make a difference? Yes. When deployed in time, we've been able to shut down destructive fisheries, most recently with snow crab in parts of 2J, 3K, and 3L, where a high percentage of soft-shell crab were not allowed...until an observer was deployed in the vessel. How much crab was destroyed before observers got there? We don't know, but we do know the fishermen's logbooks did not give an accurate indication of anything. Fishermen cannot afford to shut down their livelihood even when they know the long-term price of their actions.

Yes, we have shut down fisheries, but we've also been used to open new ones, 0A-B turbot and witch on Tobins Point, among others. Our presence on sealing vessels lends legitimacy to a highly controversial fishery.

● (1540)

We also make a difference in fishermen's attitudes and have seen changes in people who were clearly influenced by having us aboard. In the absence of a coast guard, we have, by virtue of our own self-interest, improved safety in the inshore fleet. We suggest that we are needed now more than ever.

It must be emphasized that the destruction of the northern cod was done by unionized fishermen paid a per diem in addition to the catch and under less pressure from the companies than today, where fishermen work for months for no pay at all to gear up their vessels and, when finally ready to sail to the fishing grounds to make some money, are instantly fired if someone comes along who will work for less. They have no representation, no protection, and no choice but to do whatever they're told.

In this context, the observer program needs to be expanded. If a sustainable fishery is the goal, then cost to government is not an issue. The entire Canadian program costs less than the budget of a very small town, in the Newfoundland region one-twentieth of 1% of the value of sea product landings, and the value of observers, while never recognized by industry, is known to us as we sail in ships to fishing grounds we pioneered. We are the scouts; we are the people who find out things. What we can do is only limited by the imagination and the will of those behind us.

What do you want to know? This not only applies to political leaders and fisheries managers and scientists but to industry, fishermen, ecologists, and environmentalists. With the new and controversial Species at Risk Act, we are the only people able to objectively record the data required. On our own initiative we began collecting deep-sea corals, critical to habitat studies, for use by Memorial University. We have measured icebergs and brought in oiled seabirds. We are a benefit to science, to a sustainable ocean, and to a responsible fishing industry. Observers must be recognized. We must have more training and support, not less, and higher qualifications, not the lowest common denominator.

The Canadian observer program is the envy of the world. Its members, particularly from the Newfoundland region, have repeatedly been invited to international conferences, most recently last year in Sydney, Australia. Other countries look to us as the model to emulate, as the epitome of what a professional, experienced observer should be. Many programs worldwide focus on one fish species at a time or on marine mammals or seabirds or turtles and have limited goals and no role in compliance monitoring. By their nature, they tend to have a high turnover of observers. We, in contrast, do everything. We are the most experienced and versatile corps of observers on the planet.

Interestingly, under the current single supplier model, we are also the most cost-effective. We would prefer to have no supplier, to be direct employees of DFO, but in the name of saving money and passing on costs to industry, the Canadian government seems determined to impose a more expensive and less efficient system, multi-supplier, where fishing companies choose among several observer suppliers, accepting—if not always—the lowest bid that will not interfere with profits, where observers essentially work at the pleasure of industry. Observer suppliers want to maintain their contracts, and what industry calls “problem observers” are removed from vessels when their data contradicts what industry wants. All this takes place in a program...and programs for compliance are not a major role of the observer.

Through our international contacts we already know what such a model looks like: Alaska, where NOAA Fisheries is trying to dig itself out of an expensive, inefficient bureaucratic mess that its own representative admits is out of control. There are no savings, since NOAA must brief and debrief observers, oversee and audit suppliers, attempt to maintain standards, and provide training. It is in effect more expensive. To suggest otherwise is disingenuous to the point of being a demonstrable lie.

Why would Ottawa lavish money on other, more expensive, less effective fisheries management tools such as offshore patrol and air surveillance while dismantling the inexpensive observer program in the name of cost? While fishing industry bureaucrats and their lobbyists and shipowners complain about the cost of observers, most fishermen do not. They want to know where our data goes and how it is used. They would like to have access to it. They would like to be involved and have more input, but they do not complain about cost.

● (1545)

Why then is the federal government setting us on a path towards inefficiency and ineffectiveness where no longer will Canada be the best in the world, but like Alaska a model everyone else is desperate to avoid? With many and various models of programs available to choose from, why would Canada pick the worst? Is the debate placating the fishing industry, or are we learning from NAFO? Is gutting the Canadian program the price Ottawa is prepared to pay for the EU to agree to reform?

Recently the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans has talked of an ecosystem approach to fisheries management. While we might look askance at such lofty pretension, we would say that if this is indeed the goal, then observers are more necessary than ever. But we would rather agree with the more realistic analysis of Ian Cartwright in the July 2003 edition of *Maritime Studies*: “It is simply not possible to manage marine fish. At best, we can attempt to manage the behaviour of fishermen.” In that case, the use of observers is critical.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Is that the end of the presentation, Mr. Benson? Very good—under time. Thanks very much.

Gearshift/Fisheries Recovery Action Committee, Fred Winsor.

Dr. Fred Winsor (Gearshift/Fisheries Recovery Action Committee): My name is Fred Winsor. I have a PhD in northwest Atlantic fisheries history and I represent Gearshift, who are a national coalition for sustainable fisheries across Canada. We're connected with the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition, which is a global coalition of over 1,100 scientists and 30-odd environmental groups around the world committed to creating healthy oceans.

When I look at the history of the Newfoundland fishery, something I've studied for the last 20 years professionally or as a discipline, what really jumps out from that over-500-year history—and hearing Tom Best here talking about Petty Harbour.... We've had a European fishery in Petty Harbour since 1502, so they have a very long tradition; it's as old as St. John's or any of these other places. It really dates back almost to the end of the Middle Ages.

What jumps out at you when you look at that 500-year history of the fishery is the technological changes that have occurred over the past 60 years. they're absolutely off the map in comparison with anything that occurred previously. I'll challenge anybody on that, any time anybody wants to talk to me about it—no problem. It really does jump out, when you study the five centuries.

What was central, coming out of that, was the rise of the otter trawl—bottom trawling—not only in Newfoundland and Labrador but globally, right around the planet. We had this boom in otter trawl fishing, and it affected every fishing community. I would say every fishing community on the planet has been affected by that technology.

It's proven itself to be quite a destructive technology over the years. Just to give you some idea of the magnitude of the destruction—I don't think people have realized it—I have taken a couple of numbers that were fairly accessible to me.

In 1973 the Canadian government froze the number of otter trawl licences for offshore vessels greater than 100 feet in Canada at 199. That number never changed from 1973 until the cod moratorium in 1992.

In trying to get a handle on the distances an otter trawl vessel would tow in a year, you would look at one of those vessels making about 20 trips a year. The observers can tell me if I'm right or wrong here, but I was an observer myself in the eighties, so I have a pretty good idea of what I'm talking about here. You'd make about 20 trips a year and make about 50 sets on a trip, and each set you would usually tow a net at about four knots for about two and a half hours, so you would tow it for 10 nautical miles for one set.

If you make 50 sets—you can do the math—then multiply it by 20 trips a year, you're up to around 10,000 miles a year that they would tow across the bottom on the ocean floor. When you multiply that by the 199 vessels, you're up to 2 million miles a year, which is what we towed.

This is just the Canadian wetfish trawler fleet. We're not talking about the small draggers under 65 feet or the ones between 65 feet and 100 feet. We're not even talking about the foreign fleet, which was quite massive. This is just a convenient and easy number to get at.

If you extrapolate it over a 20-year period, you're looking at 40 million miles that we towed drag nets across the bottom. This is a very low-ball figure, but we're looking at 40 million miles.

In terms of habitat destruction.... These nets, when you tow them across the bottom, plow the bottom. They don't ride over the top; they plow the bottom. They tear up all the flora and fauna on the ocean floor. There was a belief in the seventies that you were helping the bottom: you were going to make it more fertile by plowing it all up.

● (1550)

So we had this situation for a long, long time. We're going back 60 years altogether. I'm just trying to get a bit of a handle on the magnitude, and hopefully it's something I can expand on later.

We had that situation, and we still have that situation now, because as we speak, we have 350 midwater shrimp trawlers licensed to fish off Newfoundland. Those folks do exactly the same thing. I don't know what the numbers are in terms of how much area they're towing now.

If you're fishing midwater, and I'm sure the observers can back me on this, you will be towing on the bottom at some times. You are towing on the bottom sometimes—quite a bit of the time, actually. So we're still not away from that.

The Chair: Don't get derailed from your presentation by side comments. We want to hear what you have to say.

Dr. Fred Winsor: Yes, okay. Very good.

I think the thing we need to realize is that DFO fisheries policy does not consider habitat protection in fishing. Fishing is essentially excluded from the habitat protection section of the Fisheries Act, section 35. The only protection for habitat under the Fisheries Act comes under section 7 of the act, which is the discretion of the minister to do whatever he wants in terms of issuing licences.

If you want evidence of that, there was a court case. The decision came out in August 2004, in the Federal Court of Canada, between the Ecology Action Centre, one of the members of Gearshift, and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. In that court case, officials from DFO actually say that they don't consider habitat when determining any kind of fishing plan. It's not a consideration. Their policy is that they don't consider habitat and habitat protection.

It comes back to another policy of DFO, and I'll just quote directly from Geoff Regan. It's a policy that he inherited. He didn't create it, but he inherited it, and it's a very old policy, but it's Canada's position. It says:

> ...no specific gear type is inherently destructive. From experience, we know that all gear types can have negative impacts, depending on how they are used....

In fact, we wrote to Geoff Regan and we're still waiting for an answer, and we asked him: What are the negative impacts of using a hook, of using plain hook and line over the side? Because we don't know. We can't find any. In terms of the 500-year history of the fishery, there don't seem to be any. It seems to be quite a sustainable technology, the baited hook. However, according to DFO and DFO policy, “no specific gear type is inherently destructive”.

If you want to look at the best scientific information around the world, I've got a copy of a document here, which I should have had up on the table. Anyway, it's called *Shifting Gears*. It was put out by the Marine Conservation Biological Institute in Redmond, Washington. It evaluated all seven or eight different major gear types being used around the planet. They rated bottom trawling as the worst, the singularly most destructive technology available. At the same time, Canada still adheres to this position, that no gear type is inherently destructive, and I think this is a major policy issue that needs to be dealt with. The federal government needs to deal with this question of technology, what kinds, in terms of assessing them, and then we can decide what's happening with them.

I think it is a policy that was generated probably in the 1950s, by the look of it, and it's just kept hanging on over the years. It's been challenged a number of times. Many of us you've heard today and over the last few days can say to you that it's very difficult getting policies changed inside of DFO—very, very difficult. Often it means going to court, and in the court case that I cited there, the Ecology Action Centre lost the decision. So you take them to court, they come out, and the judge rules on the other side. So that wasn't an effective route.

● (1555)

The Chair: Dr. Winsor, would you be kind enough to focus the remainder of your five minutes on cod?

Dr. Fred Winsor: Yes.

If you're going to manage cod you have to manage it on an ecosystem basis, and if you're managing it on the ecosystem basis, then habitat is an integral part of that whole system, that whole structure, and the very direct connection between habitat and cod survival recovery and renewability. So it's a very direct connection.

In terms of what's happened with the ocean, we can't find any cold-water coral beds on the inside of the Grand Banks any more. I've talked to lots of fishermen who've told me that 30 or 40 years ago they hauled up cold-water coral the first 10 or 15 times they dragged across that part of the floor, but at this point it's been completely levelled off. We know there is a direct connection between coral and cod breeding grounds.

All of this is documented material, but now we're at the point where we're at the other end of it. We know we've destroyed all this habitat, but we don't really know what was there initially. We don't have a baseline to start from, so we have some major problems. In terms of cod recovery offshore, one of the major factors contributing to its slow recovery is there's no ground out there for cod to recover on. If you're looking at the major cause of it, we would say it's habitat destruction more than any of the other pieces of information. That's one of the first places we would start.

I should point out that our neighbour to the south, the United States, have decided on it, and their strategy for fisheries recovery is to have large closed areas. Just recently, in June, they closed all of the west coast of the United States, out to 200 miles, to bottom dragging. Similarly, in Alaska they've set aside a marine reserve of 350,000 square miles to allow fish stocks to recover.

I've included a list of recommendations. First, manage the ecosystem, not individual stocks. Protect habitats. Healthy oceans produce healthy fisheries. Create marine reserves to protect representative habitats and diversity. For centuries here there were very few areas offshore where you could actually fish. The water was too deep; you just couldn't fish there, so we used to have reserves anyway offshore.

Support community-based management structures for inshore fishing. You're looking for what to do offshore in terms of recovery, so establish an integrated, regional fishery management council to facilitate ocean habitat and fishery recovery strategy for the offshore. We need to have an independent committee or body that's directly charged with doing that. It needs to be an integrated one, with representatives from all the various sectors of the fishing society, various government departments, and that kind of thing, as opposed to leaving it with bureaucrats at DFO, which is a prescription for disaster.

Manage for and minimize bycatch and discards. Invest in monitoring enforcement and data acquisition. Support benign fishing technologies that have minimal impact on ocean habitats, and support the capacity of fish stocks to renew themselves at healthy levels. Phase out fishing gear that causes the worst damage to ocean habitat and fish stocks.

We need to amend section 7 of the Fisheries Act, and we need to revisit fishing technology policies. I just want to talk a little bit about section 7 of the Fisheries Act. This is the section that allows the minister to issue fishing licences at his own discretion. This has really undermined any efforts at local fisheries management over the years. You have a group set up trying to do historical adjacency and local fisheries management up in Ottawa.

● (1600)

You set up a group to try to do historical adjacency and local fisheries management up in Ottawa. Then a lobbyist comes in, and often there's a new minister who's not that familiar with the situation—and you yourself said it—who tries to manage all of these fisheries across Canada. He gets lobbied to issue a licence, and the next thing you know some guy has a dragging licence and he's out destroying what all these other folks have been trying to maintain in their own backyards. It comes in the back door.

In terms of that power of the minister, we need to figure out some way to have checks and balances on it. Maybe it would go through a regional council, and the final appeal would be to the minister, or something like that, as opposed to just having these lobbyists in Ottawa, and if you go to Ottawa you just pay your money and get in to see the minister—that sort of thing.

That's all I have to say. Thank you.

The Chair: I would hate to think that's actually how it works.

Dr. Fred Winsor: That is how it works, sir. I've seen that.

The Chair: I'm still naive.

I now have to call you to order because your 15 minutes are up.

Does the quote you have from the minister pertain to his comments on bottom trawling?

Dr. Fred Winsor: This was a speech he made to the United Nations General Assembly in November 2004.

The Chair: What was the subject matter?

Dr. Fred Winsor: It was on banning deep-sea dragging.

The Chair: And the justification was it isn't inherently bad.

● (1605)

Dr. Fred Winsor: Right.

The Chair: Got it. Thank you.

Folks, now we'll go to questions. I'll ask that each member either direct questions to a specific member of the panel, or if they're directed to everybody, please say so and then I can focus where the response should come from.

Mr. Hearn.

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Maybe rather than have questions, we should just have a wide-open debate with just the witnesses as participants. It would probably be interesting and rewarding.

I'm going to throw out four questions, one to each group. I'll start with the observers. You mentioned two things, I guess. You mentioned unbiased data from independent observers, and then you mentioned playing around with the single supplier model. I know what it is, and I also totally agree and have said so publicly that perhaps you should be working directly with DFO. For the sake of the record and for those who may not be aware of what we're talking about here—the single supplier and what is happening around that—would you, in a minute, respond to that?

To the FFAW, David, you mentioned the other species, and in all of the examples you gave I believe the increase has been almost instantaneous. It hasn't been gradual. It's been in this last year or so that we've seen a rapid increase in all these stocks. This year, if you travelled from St. Anthony to Cape Race, fishermen will tell you they're seeing, in a phrase that was used to us, more fish than when Cabot was here.

The scientists are saying that local bay stocks are growing. However, if we depend on science for what we have—and I think perhaps we do have some good science, but we'll talk about that later—and if we're depending on a sort of year-by-year growth, then I can see them thinking there's just a minuscule increase in the bay stocks.

However, if the same thing is happening to cod as is happening with lump and capelin and whatever else for some reason, it might be water temperature or whatever, there is this major influx in the bay stocks or the inshore stocks generally, and they might be a lot healthier than we think. The problem is, we don't know, and I haven't found anybody who can tell us how much fish there is in this inshore stock. I'd like your comments on that.

Mr. Winsor, when you're talking about gear technology—and I've read that quote, by the way, from the minister and have raised it—if you go to hook and line, if we get away from what you and a lot of people refer to as destructive gear technology, what effect will it have on our rural communities, and how would you phase in or phase out that effect?

To Mr. Etchegary—this is sort of a combination of all my questions, perhaps—we've heard some pretty good stuff over the last four days. I think there's a lot more science out there than we think there is. However, you ask yourself, if that is the case, why do we have a cod recovery team that has spent two years trying to put together information and is going to spend another six months or so preparing the information to give the ministers, information that all of you, collectively, and all of us, have given the ministers along the way? What is happening?

If the knowledge is there and the recommendations are there and have been there, why has nothing been done on some of the crucial components affecting the lack of growth in our stock? We'll talk about northern cod—that's what we're here for—but it could be anything. Who is blocking the suggestions and information and input from getting to the decision-makers, or are the decision-makers themselves just disregarding the information put forth?

The Chair: Okay, there are four questions. We'll start with the observers.

Mr. Benson.

Mr. David Benson: The single supplier has been on the go since about 1981. Essentially, a company or a number of companies bid on the contract to supply observers, and one company wins the contract, say, in the Newfoundland region, and one in the gulf, Scotia, Fundy, B.C., and so on. Each region has an exclusive single supplier. Even though it's been steadily denigrated, it still more or less works.

The plan now is to go to a multi-supplier model, where as many companies as can get in on the action will bid with individual fishing companies to cover a particularly fishery. The offshore shrimp fleet would have company X and the mobile inshore trawler fleet would have company Y and the inshore crab fleet would have company Z, or that sort of thing. The observers become commodities. They can't really function because if they bring in any kind of report that the company feels is negative or somehow has a negative impact upon them, they simply won't have that company any more; they'll go to the next one.

Money is not really an issue. There are certain companies that would probably pay observers an awful lot of money to stay in the bunk and do nothing. So it's not simply a cost-based thing. What they found in areas where they have had multi-suppliers is that the quality of data goes down, and the observer companies are depending upon the fishing industry to maintain their contracts. The observers can be a little timid about reporting anything.

We wonder where this is coming from, so what we would like you guys to do is to tell the minister and the other people: contact David Bevan, contact Brian Donahue, contact Paul Steele, or contact the DFO senior managers from here to B.C., and ask them what they think of this multi-supplier model. Then ask NOAA Fisheries in the U.S., and ask Vicki Cornish,, the former head of the observer program, or Teresa Turk in Washington, D.C. Ask Lieutenant Commander Chris Woodley of the U.S. Coast Guard in charge of Alaska district about safety compliance in fishing vessels in relationship to a multi-supplier model.

The evidence everywhere is that the multi-supplier model doesn't work. The integrity of the program is lost. The fishing industry essentially does what it wants, and the whole point of the program just completely fails.

● (1610)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Decker.

Mr. David Decker: I have to say one thing. I'm not supposed to respond to that, but it's unfortunate, in terms of anybody making their position legitimate on multi-supplier model. I have never seen such an attack, in trying to make that position, on fishermen before in my life—never.

I would like a copy of the report, in terms of what he puts in, and we will respond to that. I have never before in my life seen such an attack on fishermen. Anyway, I'll just leave it at that.

The issue of multi-supplier is totally different from the other issues you're putting forward.

On the issue of cod recovery, it was unfortunate, because no matter how much the fishermen try to make the case, the official one that's put forward by DFO is the one that keeps getting used all the time. We can't help it in terms of everybody falling into it. You just fell into it yourself when you asked a question to Gus. You said, what's the reason for the lack of growth? So in terms of your statement and your question, you accept the fact that there is a lack growth—right?—you yourself, without even thinking about it.

● (1615)

Mr. Loyola Hearn: We all accept that in the offshore, though, don't we?

Mr. David Decker: Yes, but the problem overall, to answer your question, is that there's a time lag. That's what led us to the problem in the first place with the collapse of the fish. There's a time lag between what happens on the water and what fishermen see because they are out there on a daily basis, in terms of collecting this, so things happen much faster in terms of their ability to analyze the changes that are happening than what happens to somebody who's in a lab who collects data and waits for that data to compile over the years, and needs years of data to see the changes over time to start finally figuring out that there is a change happening. That's the difference, and that's what happens.

In my view, when things are stable, then you will find scientists and fishermen in whatever industry more consistent in terms of the view of a stock, but when you get into a time of either change at a rapid decline or rapid increase, you will find that the two will diverge greatly in terms of where they are.

To illustrate a point on the other side, in 1992 I came on with the organization. I was fishing before 1991. The last year I fished was 1990. In 1991 I went with the organization. In 1992, my first great argument came with science when the quota for northern gulf cod got set at 35,000 tonnes. Our debate was that this was absolutely ludicrous. You were going to collapse the stock. This is outlandish. There is nothing in terms of what harvesters see or anybody sees to support this quota. It can't be sustained.

We lost the argument; we didn't know what we were talking about. That year, the reality was that we led demonstrations. We blocked the Trans-Canada Highway. We did all this. It's a matter of documentation. We didn't just sit by. We tried to do everything we could to stop this. We could not succeed in getting it stopped.

By mid-1993, the quota was again set in the spring at 35,000 tonnes; it was slashed to 18,000 tonnes in mid-year, and in 1994 we entered a closure. That's how dramatic it was in terms of the timing when that happened.

So in 1993 they set the quota at 35,000 tonnes. If you look at it now, after the fact—we're talking 10 years to 12 years later in the fishery—when you look at science documentation now, they're saying, “Yes, but by the end of 1993 there was only somewhere between 9,000 tonnes and 10,000 tonnes of mature biomass left in the gulf.” That's their view 12 years later. That wasn't their view in 1993. It's vastly different.

You will see the same thing right now, if I demonstrate. For years we have been saying, and again it's a matter of record, that the mortality rate of the gulf cod was ludicrous. It was crazy. It was totally out of whack in what we were seeing. We have been arguing that point since 1998 or 1999.

The Chair: Mr. Decker, I have to request—

Mr. David Decker: Yes, but it's important.

The Chair: Everything is important.

Mr. David Decker: I will sum up very quickly, then.

They were saying about 35% or 40% of the cod were dying every year from natural mortality. This year they finally went back and reviewed it and said “No, no, okay, geez, it was wrong.” They went back to 1997 and revised the figure from 35% down to 25%, and their figure in 2000 from 35% down to 18%—finally, in retrospect.

In retrospect, they never came out and told you that they finally accepted that fishermen were right. They just changed their numbers, and things go on.

The Chair: Mr. Decker, does the union accept that, present day, the offshore cod is still collapsed?

Mr. David Decker: We accept that the offshore cod is still in trouble. There are signs starting to happen out there in the offshore, and there are signs happening in terms of Labrador. For the inshore, what's happening is fairly dramatic.

The Chair: I know. And offshore?

Mr. David Decker: The offshore is still in trouble, but there are still signs of that recovery happening.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Winsor, what effect is there on rural communities from hook and line?

Dr. Fred Winsor: What effect? It would have a mixed effect. If you have a hook and line fishery and you have fish in your harbour or your fishing ground, then it will provide you with several weeks of fishing, for sure.

The big advantage of going with hook and line, of course, is that you're limited by depth of water; you're not going to be fishing in really deep water. So all the deep-water areas around those communities will then be essentially marine protected areas, because they're just outside the range.

You would be providing at least several weeks' fishing for people who may, in many cases, have no opportunity to fish. Also, you would get a chance to have some sort of gauge, especially if all the fish is being monitored when it comes in. If it goes through a monitoring system and a sampling system, you'd have a pretty good idea what kinds of fish are coming in and whether there are any tags on them.

The whole tagging system with fish is.... We have a sentinel fishery, but the sentinel fishery is with gillnets, so every fish you catch is essentially dead. You can't tag those. You need a tagging program such that you find out where they're going and what the migratory pattern is at the same time. That would provide a good solid base of fishing activity and income for people. It probably wouldn't get any frozen fish plants up and running.

The saltfish business in Newfoundland has always had such a bad name, but it's very productive. Price-wise, money-wise, it's a good business to be in. So we could be into saltfish and could be having a good fishery inshore.

● (1620)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Etchegary, who's blocking the info to the decision-makers?

Mr. Gus Etchegary: I'm going to refer to the offshore. You're speaking about the offshore fishery, I presume. The fact is the government of our country is not facing up to the problem that is clearly evident, Mr. Chairman. It's been there since the moratorium and before that. There's no doubt about that. There's absolutely no question that foreign vessels fishing outside 200 miles are catching fish that are well beyond the quotas. There are bycatches that DFO is either not willing to monitor when these vessels come to port....

I don't know whether they have these statistics or not, but just to give you an example, here's a ship's manifest signed by the skipper of a Russian vessel called the *Tynda*, and that vessel had 1,285,000 pounds of fish, including turbot, American plaice, grenadier, red hake, redfish, cod, haddock, catfish, and more American plaice. They also had 100,000 pounds of fishmeal, and there is no fish shown on the manifest from where this 100,000 pounds of fishmeal came. Fishmeal production on a factory trawler is at the most 12% to 13% of the round fish, at the most. In addition to that, it had one tonne, actually 990 kilograms, of cod livers. I checked independently with a Dalhousie fisheries man, the chair actually; I checked with a DFO cod scientist, one of the best down here, and with MUN separately to get the equivalent of cod or the amount of cod that would produce this, whether it was 10% or 15% or whatever. That came out to be 3%. In other words, the cod livers, 990 kilograms, represented 3% of the cod that it came from, and it's not there.

So the fact of the matter is that it's blatant misreporting. Ottawa knows this. Nobody can deny it. If they miss it, if DFO misses it, it's deliberate.

And another thing, the ports policy of this country is aiding and abetting foreign overfishing and blatant misreporting. We have our five major ports that provide all the goods and services these vessels need from 4,000 to 10,000 miles away from home, anything they need. They change clothes, get repairs, no matter what it is, they have that service provided for them, and DFO knows that this is happening, and simply refuses to.... You see, NAFO, the power of NAFO—

● (1625)

The Chair: Can you draw it to a close, please.

Mr. Gus Etchegary: Yes, sure. It's a very complex industry, Mr. Chairman, but the fact of the matter is that NAFO is incapable of managing the fisheries out here. Whether it's custodial management or something else, I don't know, but I can tell you that at the present time it's totally out of control. And since the collapse of the U.S.S.R. all of those nations that were within the grip of the U.S.S.R. at one time are now members of the European Community, so that Brussels has complete control now over NAFO, and any decisions made within that organization, I'll guarantee you, are not to the benefit of the Canadian fishermen.

The Chair: So what you're saying is that no info, or very little info, is being blocked from the decision-makers. They're purposely ignoring it.

Mr. Gus Etchegary: They are ignoring it, Mr. Chairman, and the country is not doing anything.

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Blais.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raynald Blais: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My first question is for Mr. Winsor.

I'd like you to tell us a little bit more about the minister's discretionary power; that was part of your final recommendations. I too believe this discretionary power to be excessive. It could lead to political decisions being made. That is probably, in fact, one of the reasons why we are here today. In your opinion, how should things be? Do you believe that this discretionary power should only apply to a percentage of the resource, as is the case in some countries? I'm referring to cod, of course.

[*English*]

Dr. Fred Winsor: My own take is that we need to have regional fishery councils. I don't think you can manage the fishery from Ottawa. It is simply too complex. You don't have people there who have their ear to the ground and know what is actually happening. But if we had a series of regional councils in the Maritimes and in Newfoundland working with more manageable units, then they could really have the power to make the decisions. If there is an appeal then you use the minister, you would appeal to the minister, because of course the minister would have the final say, being the elected representative and the head. But you could have regional fishery councils to do the actual management.

We had the Fisheries Resource Conservation Council, which was in an advisory position. But the problem with the council was the senior-level bureaucrats with DFO simply ignored the recommendations. They made lots of recommendations in the 1990s. If you go back and read the annual reports, there were some excellent recommendations. They recommended in 1996 to have 25% of the Grand Banks closed to allow fish to recover. It was totally ignored. But it was simply an advisory committee, and they could decide to take or not take the advice. You need to have regional councils with some power that can actually make decisions. It has to be much more of a decentralized, power-sharing situation.

I know some of the senior officials with DFO in Ottawa and even some of the ones here, and sharing is not something they're very good at. That is going to be a major challenge—it's been a major challenge that many people have tried to deal with over generations—but I think we need to go in that direction.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raynald Blais: I would like to know what Mr. Decker has to say about the minister's discretionary power.

● (1630)

[*English*]

Mr. David Decker: I think that if you're going to have any hope to rebuild the stocks and the long-term future of our communities here, there's going to have to be some letting go.

Back to the issue that has been talked about with DFO—that so far has been lip service—which is shared stewardship, that's where you have to foster things: you have to put things back to the community level. We do have good examples of where it works, although they are small. For instance, in terms of lobsters out in the Eastport Peninsula on the west coast of Newfoundland, where fishermen want some sense that they have some ability to shape their future in terms of getting control, they have taken huge decisions that have an immediate impact on themselves in the short term, but they made those decisions for the long term. They've created some sense that there was some control over their future and a connection with the resource. It's happened. For instance, the west coast of Newfoundland is the only place in the province where they have a maximum size on lobster. It wasn't done by DFO, it wasn't done by Ottawa. The fishermen put the rule in themselves. They reduced the trap limits themselves; they cut out fishing on Sundays; they introduced the V-notching program, which right now is throughout Newfoundland. These were concrete decisions made by the fishermen themselves to protect the resource for the long term. I think that's where we have to go in terms of fostering that, and the minister has to let go in terms of some of that from his officials and spend more time focusing on development of this shared search of models in terms of inclusiveness.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raynald Blais: Mr. Decker, we met members of your organization last Tuesday, in Bonavista. I'd like to know your opinion on a possible recovery or reopening of the inshore fishery, as had been mentioned by Mr. Hutchings, a scientist. He was referring to 500 or 1,000 tons maximum. I don't get the impression this amount would allow for boats bringing in 3,000 to 5,000 pounds as suggested. Some people were mentioning 3,000 pounds per boat, others 4,000, 5,000, 8,000. That is inconsistent with the 500 to 1,000-ton figure. Would you be in favour of Mr. Hutchings' proposal?

[*English*]

Mr. David Decker: And his proposition was for a specific number that he...?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raynald Blais: Five hundred tons, perhaps 1,000 tons, maximum.

[*English*]

Mr. David Decker: In terms of where we see things, we'd certainly see something beyond that level. I think scientists themselves have thrown out numbers that are larger than that for the inshore stock. But in terms of really focusing on a number right now, I think the important thing, as I said, is the shared stewardship. When you sit down with a group of harvesters and debate this, nobody is going to propose a huge number starting off. Our view has always been that you start with a lower number and you watch the reaction of the stock to it.

One thing that we absolutely do not know, and we admit nobody knows, is the size of that biomass. Whether it's science, whether it's fishermen, nobody knows the size of that biomass. We can argue about the levels and the numbers, but we really don't know. All you can do is set your number and watch very carefully how the stock reacts. In terms of getting people back on the water, you would get a buy-in.

You can't get a plan devised in Ottawa that says this is the way it's going be and then force it down, force it down, force it down. You'd need the Mexican army to enforce it. The only way to develop a recovery plan is to develop that recovery plan on the ground and get the buy-in from the people in the communities who are connected to it. In terms of the enforcement and in terms of management, if you get that, then you are leading because you've got the buy-in from the people. You start there and you come up with the plan.

What we've always dealt with in Ottawa is this top-down—trying to force these ideas down that come from above—as opposed to going in and developing it with the people, getting the buy-in from the people, and having it come from the ground up.

● (1635)

The Chair: Thank you, Monsieur Blais.

Mr. Stoffer.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Thanks to all of you for your presentations.

Dr. Winsor, would it be at all possible to get a copy of the speech —we have our own, but for the committee—and also a copy of the court case, where the DFO officials...? Were those officials from Ottawa, when they made that comment?

Dr. Fred Winsor: Actually, the official who made that comment was from Halifax. He had been a fisheries manager in Halifax for seven years.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: What was the name of that person?

Dr. Fred Winsor: Oh, that escapes me right now. It's on the record.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Okay. And he says they don't use habitat as part of their consideration.

Dr. Fred Winsor: Exactly, yes.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Okay.

This is for the representatives of the FFAW and the observers.

Recently, DFO allowed a blackback flounder fishery, where they were allowed to have 2,000 pounds of cod as the bycatch. Correct me if I'm wrong, but would you generally use a six-and-a-half-inch mesh or a five-and-a-half-inch mesh to catch blackback? If you're targeting blackback, what mesh would you have—the six-and-a-half or five-and-a-half?

Mr. David Decker: I have fished blackback. I fished blackback on the Northern Peninsula. As I said, I was a fisherman. If I had to use six-and-a-half-inch mesh on the Northern Peninsula to get blackback, I wouldn't be in the blackback fishery. It's just as simple as that. There would be none. I would have to use—I participated in the blackback fishery back in the early eighties—a five-and-a-half-inch mesh up there to fish blackback.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: I just wanted to let you know, sir, that other fishermen from the FFAW who I spoke to said they would use the six-and-a-half-inch mesh.

Mr. David Decker: Yes, in different—

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Now my question will go to the observers. If you are observing this blackback fishery—which you have done, because the guy said they had observers on board—are you given regulations about what gear type or anything they're allowed to use?

Mr. Reuben Beazley (Fisheries Observer, Teamsters Canada): Absolutely. That's all contained within the licence conditions.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: My notes say they were allowed to use a five-and-a-half-inch mesh.

Mr. Reuben Beazley: Yes, sir, they were allowed to use a five-and-a-half-inch mesh. I think the largest they could use was seven-inch or seven-and-a-half-inch mesh. Also, they were allowed to use floats on the headlines. In years past, for blackback we would not use floats on the headline.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: DFO allowed them to do this, right? If DFO allowed them to use the smaller mesh size, then you obviously were there to observe that they'd follow whatever they had been allowed to do. Is that correct?

Mr. Reuben Beazley: That is correct, sir.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: We hear consistently from DFO that there is no commercial fishery allowed on the inshore cod stocks, for conservation purposes.

Mr. Reuben Beazley: True.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: If conservation is the reason you're not allowing a limited commercial fishery on the inshore, then why would DFO—which, by the way, tells NAFO that they must abide by the bycatch limit of 5%—allow inshore fishermen up to a 700% bycatch? If we're telling the rest of the world they're exceeding their bycatch limits and we internally are allowing a tremendous bycatch....

I'm not condemning the fishermen for going out to fish and make their livelihood. I'm certainly not doing that, but I'm getting at DFO's inconsistency in policies. If this was a blackback fishery, then you should be targeting the blackback and not targeting cod. In my opinion, this is a backdoor way of allowing a small cod fishery for the fishermen. If I'm wrong, I'll apologize, but the statistics show that —even the guys themselves have said—they got their cod in two days.

So they call it a blackback fishery, but the fishermen themselves know it was a cod fishery.

Mr. Reuben Beazley: I think you pretty much hit the nail on the head there.

To be fair, at least 10% or 15% of the fishermen I was out with did try to catch blackback in that fishery and maximized their cod bycatch by doing so. Other fishermen, fishing within the parameters of their licence quite legally, did not have as much success in catching blackbacks but did manage to catch their cod within, as you say, sometimes a short period of time.

Other times the catch rates were not quite as good around all of the areas I was personally working in. Individual fishermen did well, and some others not quite so well. There was a very big variance within the fishery.

● (1640)

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Again, I'm not going after the fishermen.

Mr. Reuben Beazley: No, no.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: If they're allowed to use a certain fishing gear type—

Mr. Reuben Beazley: Quite legally.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: —then that's fine.

Mr. David Decker: I would like to speak to that, because I understand that the role of the observer is to observe, not to make a pronouncement on what DFO policy should be or anything like that.

The issue in trying to deal with this is certainly more complicated. When you're trying to manage any kind of fishery, unless we shut down everything the issue is how to stick within the rules of bycatch.

Throughout Newfoundland we have this huge problem. Unless we shut down, as the cod comes back—whether you're going to fish blackback or lumpfish or mackerel or herring or halibut or turbot—you can't fish these. Quite frankly, if you want to maintain it within the 5% bycatch, come out and close every fishery we have; it's as simple as that. Close it all down, because you cannot prosecute any of these fisheries, and that's it.

Whether you say it's 5% or 10%, you cannot prosecute any of these fisheries right now in Newfoundland and Labrador without going over these bycatches. There's always a challenge in how we deal with this and try to allow some semblance of some fisheries to move forward, when at the same time you don't have a directed fishery.

The move back from six-and-a-half-inch mesh to five-and-a-half was clearly meant because in fishing blackback and other stuff you have bycatches. The year previous, when we had a blackback fishery and forced people to use six-and-a-half-inch mesh, any bycatch of cod was forced to be the larger cod. A lot of people looked at that as being negative, forcing the bycatch to be the largest females, the largest cod and the best for spawning.

Clearly you can catch blackback in a five-and-a-half-inch mesh, and the size of cod you catch then are going to be, on average, the smaller ones and not the real breeders. There is the view among harvesters—whether anybody accepts it or not—that you should be really focusing, as we did with lobster on the west coast, on protecting the largest breeders.

So there was a conscious decision made to go from six-and-a-half-inch back to five-and-a-half-inch mesh. We were part of it and part of lobbying for it, because we did not want to see so much targeting of these larger cod. We make no apologies, whether it concerns blackback or halibut or herring or mackerel, for trying to get these fish to go, because without these fisheries our communities are dead.

And yes, as the cod gets thicker and more plentiful—as it is doing, and as you've heard, I'm sure, in all your hearings—it will get more difficult and more challenging for us to carry on other fisheries.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Matthews.

Mr. Bill Matthews: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank our presenters for coming. I listened very closely to your presentations. I didn't want to wade in on the blackback fishery, but I almost feel compelled to make a comment on it. It generated a lot of public comment this summer in this province, and the public commentary was pretty consistent that it was a backdoor way of allowing people to catch cod. Of course, I just listened to that from a distance, but when I went out earlier this week with my colleagues for a couple of days, the people who participated in the fishery were pretty well unanimous on how they felt about it, the people who were catching two blackback and 600 pounds of cod. You know what I mean? This was not just one person, but it was almost unanimous, to be very honest with you. That's all I want to say about it, but it was really revealing when I went out and listened to the people who participated in it.

I just want to ask you a very quick question. You mentioned something about floats on the headropes or the headlines. What was the implication of that?

Mr. Reuben Beazley: In the licence condition—which is a document that you gentlemen can obtain, I'm sure—are the type of gear, the mesh size, and the rest of it involved in the fishery. There have been different gear types and methods tried over the years to minimize bycatch, for example, or to maximize blackback catches, and floats are not normally part of a blackback net.

Mr. Bill Matthews: So are you telling me that the float minimized the catch of blackback?

Mr. Reuben Beazley: No, sir.

I have to watch what I'm doing here....

Mr. Bill Matthews: I don't want to get you in trouble. Let's leave it there. I won't draw an unfair conclusion.

● (1645)

Mr. David Decker: I have just one thing on that, Bill. There's one way around that, and it is to come out and have a small-scale fishery. One way or another, somehow have a small-scale fishery that, in terms of science, is clearly within the inshore. Somehow there needs to be some separation between the offshore component and the inshore component. Clearly science itself recognizes that the offshore component and inshore component are separate; that's clearly recognized by science. So have a small-scale fishery that goes forward and plan it as best as possible.

Either way we do it, there's a challenge to try to get this done—to prosecute all these other fisheries at a time when there are low levels of cod—but setting a small quota would clearly allow us to better manage what we're doing. Right now it's pretty complicated and pretty difficult and pretty challenging.

Mr. Bill Matthews: I appreciate that, and I'm really in sync with you on that, but what's frustrating for people like us, who are going around hearing testimony here, testimony there, and witnesses here, witnesses there, is that the same people who basically allowed this to happen—I mean, with 600 pounds of cod and two blackback, they couldn't know how many were going in, don't get me wrong on that—will also tell us at the end of all of this that we can't have an unlimited cod fishery. That is my point. I'm agreeing with you, I really am, but it just gets frustrating when you try to get your head around this stuff.

I want to thank you, by the way, for your overview on the ecosystem, because it was very interesting when you talked about what happened to lump roe and all the other species, saying that the increase has been rather quick. It twigged my memory of a Mr. Blackwood, who presented to us in Port Blandford. He talked about all of the turbot that had shown up in their bay. I'm sure my colleagues can remember his remarks. He talked about the amount of turbot that was in the bay when they started the fishery, and the amount of turbot that was in the bay when they finished their fishery. It was somewhat peculiar to them that this had happened. So I listened very closely to your ecosystem take. It seems like things are really changing out there; it really does.

I want to go to Mr. Winsor. You talked about destructive technology, and so on, Mr. Winsor. Again, most of the people we heard out in Bonavista and Port Blandford wanted, or almost unanimously wanted, a hook-and-line fishery, but another thing that came back almost unanimously was that when we raised the issue of gear types, almost every one of them said that it was about responsible fishing. It's not the gear type; it's the person who's using the gear type, because they went on to say that hook and line could be destructive as well, if you flicked the small fish on the side of the boat, and I guess you'd kill it. So it's called a responsible kind of fishing, and so on.

I think one of the few people who talked in favour of gillnets was a gentleman who said that he had to sail from his home port seven miles, I thought he said, because of the depths of the water, which almost compelled him to use gillnets. It was not that he really wanted to use them. I'm sure that if he had a choice, he'd probably have used....

I'm just saying what they said. So how do you respond to that? Because you were asked about the impact on our communities. What do you think about responsible fishing, as opposed to blaming it on one gear type or another?

Dr. Fred Winsor: The gear-type argument is the correct argument. The research that's been done.... I'm a person who operates by going with absolutely the best research possible. Somebody said you may kill a small fish if you flick it off the hook when you're hauling trawl. That may well be the case, but it's the magnitude of some of these technologies, the two million miles a year of plowing the bottom, and the collateral damage you have when you fish, the bycatch and the destruction to habitat. You get very little bycatch from a hook-and-line fishery. You may catch other species, but it's pretty minimal. Usually the ones you catch you can actually keep, so you're not going to be destroying a lot of fish that have no commercial value. It's a pretty minimal kind of situation.

Mr. Bill Matthews: I respect that, sir.

Dr. Fred Winsor: In New Zealand they refer to gillnets as the walls of death.

Mr. Bill Matthews: Thank you very much.

I want to swing off to Mr. Etchegary, because when he spoke he made a couple of comments about the mismanagement of the resource. He talked about NAFO as being structurally weak in managing the fisheries. Then he on to say something about after what he'd heard this morning, he put DFO in the same category—something along that line. I'd like to ask what you meant by that, what you heard this morning.

● (1650)

Mr. Gus Etchegary: In all honesty, I've been around for a long time. I have to make some comments, incidentally, on this bottom trawling, because some things have to be said.

Mr. Bill Matthews: I wanted to ask you that next.

Mr. Gus Etchegary: I have to say that in all the years that I've been involved, I've listened and have been in on a lot of conversations at a lot of levels, but it's the epitome of bureaucracy that we heard this morning.

The Chair: When?

Mr. Gus Etchegary: The two people who were here this morning, the Bobbsey Twins on the action committee. I mean, this is ridiculous. We have now reached the bottom of the barrel. Good God in heaven, we've had nothing but a succession of these conferences and reports going on and on. All it does, Mr. Chairman, is substitute this kind of nonsense for action. That's all it is. And I swear to you that the policy of your minister at the present time is to reach beyond the date of the election, and that's it: get beyond the date of this election and we're doing fine; we've sidestepped a lot of stuff.

In the meantime, we'll lose another 12% of our population, and we'll eventually depopulate this island. Mr. Regan, incidentally, has been told that. I swear to you, sir, I don't have any vested interest in the fishery at all at this time other than the fact that I hate like hell to see it going the way it is. I can tell you one thing for certain—and put it down in your little black book. If he persists on this road to reform in NAFO, it will be the end of the fishery in this province. Oh, there'll be remnants of it, some might be out with a few hooks, but other than that there'll be nothing left.

Mr. Bill Matthews: Thank you, Gus. Why don't you tell us how you really feel about that?

Getting back to the other issue that I made a note to ask you about, the suggestions we've heard about doing away with deep-sea trawlers and bottom trawling, with your history particularly—most of us here know your history—I'd be interested in getting your take, your feelings on that.

Mr. Gus Etchegary: Mr. Chairman, in my earlier days I spent a hell of a lot of time in places like Norway and Iceland, and I know their management systems like the back of my hand. Incidentally, I have a copy here of the Norwegian fishing management policy. I would really suggest to the members of this committee that you get a copy. I would be glad to deliver it to you to have a read. It deals with some of the specific questions that were brought up here.

One of your members—Mr. Keddy, I think—brought up the subject of dealing with small fish and discards. This is an excellent piece of work that the Norwegians have done in that respect.

The Chair: Mr. Etchegary, please provide us with a copy.

Mr. Gus Etchegary: Yes, I'd certainly be glad to do it, sir.

You know, I have the greatest respect in the world for people who are trying to do something to improve things. I have to tell you that in the last 50 years there has been an improvement, an enormous improvement, in terms of the impact of bottom trawls on the ocean floor. Incidentally, not just one research job has been done with respect to bottom trawling; there have been at least thirty. Included in that was a $5-million research project by DFO on the Grand Banks here, on a triangulation, that yielded one hell of a lot of information. I have a copy of that as well, which I'll be glad to provide to you.

But I have to ask, what is going to happen to our fisheries if we dictate that it's going to be strictly a hook-and-line fishery? How do you catch redfish? How do you catch four different species of flounder? How do you do that? How do you catch shrimp, with a hook and line? How do you do it?

So I'll leave it at that. I'm all for it, and I think there should be more and more work done, but some of these people in the—

The Chair: You're all for what, Mr. Etchegary, bottom trawling?

Mr. Gus Etchegary: No, I'm all for progress in respect to any kind of fishing that will make it more efficient and easier for the participants in the fishery. But you've got to be practical, Mr. Chairman, you've got to be practical. Otherwise, we all will be on UI.

● (1655)

The Chair: What was your direct answer to Mr. Matthews on bottom trawling?

Mr. Gus Etchegary: What I'm saying to him is simply this. Bottom trawling in two of the foremost fishery managers in the world, Iceland and Norway...and these are the two top countries in the world in respect to fisheries management. Nobody can deny that. Anybody who really studies their systems will know that all Canada has to do is simply say we're going to adopt one or the other and we'll be at least a hundred miles ahead of where we are. But the fact of the matter is that in both of those countries, 85% of the fish caught in those countries for the last 70 years or longer was caught through bottom trawling, and their fisheries are healthy and sustainable.

In terms of income per capita for these people, Iceland is fifth in the world. There is the United States, Germany, I think Switzerland, and a couple of other countries. Norway is sixth in the world in per capita income. Just imagine, a country of 228,000 people is fifth in the world on the basis of their fishery, 85% of which is bottom-trawled. I can guarantee you that the relationship between the working scientists and the fishermen in Iceland—and in Norway, but I'm recounting Iceland in particular—is not in question. There's daily contact between those people. They know what the hell they're doing. It is very important.

Everything should be examined, no matter what it is. All ideas and opinions should be examined. That's one of the reasons that I for one call for the appointment here of an assistant deputy minister of fisheries. I certainly believe a lot of Canada's problems in fisheries would be resolved if the Government of Canada restored the federal fisheries research board. The Minister of Fisheries would still have the final say, but he would have the benefit of a very experienced group of people, experienced in fisheries from one end of the spectrum to the other, that he would respect and would have to respect.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Lady and gentlemen, thank you very much for participating in this two-hour panel. It was very interesting.

Did you want to say a final word, Mr. Decker? And I do mean final word, because we now get the chance to talk to DFO.

Mr. David Decker: There's a very important issue here, really, in terms of next year. We're not just talking long term. It will immediately cost 4,000 jobs in Newfoundland in the fishery. We just met with our counterparts in Quebec and New Brunswick and it's very clear that they're in the same trouble. So in the Atlantic provinces there are going to be 6,000 to 10,000 jobs at stake next spring.

I wonder if we could have five minutes to discuss that.

The Chair: Is it about cod?

Mr. David Decker: It's about shrimp.

The Chair: I'm sorry, I can't give you any time because it's a very focused study that we have.

Mr. David Decker: It's 10,000 jobs and are you saying we can't have five minutes?

The Chair: There's no such thing as five minutes on 10,000 jobs.

Mr. Loyola Hearn: I am wondering if we could have unanimous consent simply to hear it, so we would have a sort of pre-warning, because I haven't heard the gist of this. It's relatively new, I would think. I'm wondering—

The Chair: I'm in the hands of the committee. Is there unanimous consent to give the union five minutes to talk about shrimp when we're studying cod?

Mr. Scott Simms: A point of order. Could we take five minutes after adjournment?

The Chair: After adjournment. Do you mean after DFO?

Mr. Scott Simms: Sure. Why not? If you want to go now, that's fine.

Can we adjourn, do the five minutes and then go back?

The Chair: Do I hear any no's? Okay, five minutes.

An hon. member: No questions.

The Chair: No questions, a five-minute presentation. Go.

Mr. David Decker: Okay, thanks.

Since 1997 we've started up—somebody said it's a make-work project, but, really, we have 4,000 jobs here in Newfoundland because of it. It's the inshore shrimp fishery. We have 13 shrimp plants. We have about 1,700 workers in these plants. We have 1,500 to 2,000 fishermen in the boats and we have a huge, huge investment in this fishery. There are 350 enterprises alone, and the value of these enterprises is averaging around three-quarters of a million dollars.

They've had a long-term shrimp fishery on the west coast of the province that goes back 30 years. In Quebec it goes back 30 years and in New Brunswick it goes back 30 years. You have Shippegan in terms of New Brunswick, and you're talking about Matane and the Gaspé Peninsula in Quebec. All of these fisheries, all of these fishermen, and all of these plant workers are in desperate trouble and are going down the tubes next year if something is not done.

We have been fighting a tariff barrier for the last several years. There's been virtually no action on it. The thing that is killing our industry is a tariff barrier put on by the European Union of 20% on product that's processed here in Newfoundland. What we're saying right now is it's time to stop talking in terms of the European Union and tariff barriers. The issue is, what can the Government of Canada do about it?

Clearly, the Government of Canada does have something in its power to do about it, yes, in terms of getting on with it, lobbying more and doing whatever you have to do to get that dealt with. But in the meantime, Canada has the ability to put a condition on the offshore trawlers that compete with us for the cooked and peeled market, because 20% or more of what comes off the offshore trawlers goes into the cooked and peeled market. It's divided between the inshore and the offshore. All the inshore is cooked and peeled, Quebec, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland. But the offshore trawlers are between the industrial shrimp, which goes into cooked and peeled, and the rest.

What happens is that fish is landed in Canada, and if it's taken by a plant in Canada and processed in a plant and goes to the European Union, a 20% tariff goes on. If you take that product and ship it right into Iceland or into Norway, it goes in with no tariff. That competes head on with us and makes us totally uncompetitive.

Something Gus alluded to also is the foreigners that land 47,000 tonnes of shrimp in Canada in four transshipments to the European Union through these countries where, again, it's processed and gets in under the tariff barrier. Assisting in our own destruction is basically what we're doing.

We're saying that the Government of Canada has to up the ante. It needs to put a conditional licence on our offshore trawlers that says that any industrial product must be processed in Canada. That would level the playing field and that product would be forced to go through the same barrier. Or put an export tax on that product that again would level the playing field by making it the same price as it would have through the European Union.

There also needs to be some sort of transshipment tax or something on the foreigners in terms of landing here. The foreign product is landed here because they can't afford to take it back to their own countries; it would make it uncompetitive. Rather than assisting in our own destruction, we could put a transshipment tax or something on it that would level the playing field.

I am telling you this will become a major issue here. We met with our counterparts two days ago in Quebec and New Brunswick. We have a coalition with them. We're talking to Nova Scotia in the next couple of days with a view to Nova Scotia joining that coalition and we're going to fight this tooth and nail. We are not going to die. We're not going to die without a fuss, I tell you clearly.

There are 10,000 jobs at stake here in eastern Canada dependent on this. That's why I asked for this five minutes. I appreciate it, but I want the message to get through loud and clear. Something has to be done, and it's time for action now.

● (1700)

The Chair: Thank you, sir. That was under five minutes.

We did study this issue as a committee a few years back. I can't really recall when.

Mr. Loyola Hearn: It was in October 2001. I remember because on the first day I went on the committee it was the first issue I raised because we had plants closed at the time. The committee immediately did a study. We made recommendations. The minister responded. They didn't lower the tariff. They raised the exemption levels from 3,000 to 7,000, or whatever, which was a blip. Pettigrew was the minister at the time, and there was pressure on him for a number of weeks. But for the last two or three years there hasn't been a word said about it.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Bill Matthews: Mr. Chair, I have a quick question for Mr. Decker.

How long has the 20% tariff you're talking about been in existence?

● (1705)

Mr. David Decker: As long as I can remember it's been there.

Mr. Gus Etchegary: It's been 25 years.

Mr. David Decker: But we've managed to get exemptions on those. We've managed to get it up to 7,000 tonnes. But it's at the point right now where we've seen costs rising in the industry and prices falling. We've all agreed that all the enterprises are on the verge of collapse. In Matane last week, the fishermen up there occupied two DFO vessels—took control of them for a while. There was demonstrating in the streets up there in Matane. This is coming home to roost. We can't wait. There was a little reprieve there in terms of that, but we're about to fall off the edge of the cliff.

Mr. Loyola Hearn: Keep everybody quiet for a while.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much.

I want to thank our witnesses.

We'll have a very brief suspension while we ask the Department of Fisheries and Oceans officials to come forward.

● (1706)

(Pause)

● (1714)

The Chair: I call this meeting back to order.

I'd like to welcome as a witness the director general of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. In that capacity he knows the drill, which is very simple. He will give a 15-minute presentation, and then we'll go to questions and answers.

I'd like you to introduce, if you would, Wayne, please, the people you have with you. Your time will not start until after the introductions are over. And give us their titles, too, please, for the record.

Mr. Wayne Follet (Regional Director General, Newfoundland and Labrador Region, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good afternoon. As we committed to, we did come back this afternoon.

We have with us Henry Lear. Henry is with the science branch in Ottawa.

Henry, do you have a title?

● (1715)

Mr. Henry Lear (Program Advisor, Environmental Science, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Yes, I'm program advisor with environmental science in the science branch in Ottawa.

Mr. Wayne Follet: And to my immediate left is William Bruce. Willie is the regional director of fisheries management, Newfoundland and Labrador region, Fisheries and Oceans. On my immediate right is Dr. George Lilly, who is a research scientist with Fisheries and Oceans, St. John's, particularly with cod. On my far right is Dr. Garry Stenson. Garry is the research scientist and section head, marine mammals.

Mr. Chairman, I have circulated a presentation. I realize it is 5 o'clock on a Friday and I have 15 minutes, and you've seen some of us here a number of times throughout the week. In the interest of translation, we have prepared this well in advance, so my intention is to hit the treetops on the way through, and just introduce the subject matter. I'll rest in those areas that I feel need emphasis, and there will be ample time afterward to drill more deeply with me and the staff should questions be necessary, which I'm expecting they will be.

The historical context is much the same as we saw before. We had a three-million-tonne biomass of cod in the early 1960s, and the foreign fleets knocked it down in the 1960s and 1970s to about half a million tonnes. After the extension of jurisdiction, the stock increased to just over a million tonnes, and there was much enthusiasm and euphoria attached to that, I might add. In the late 1980s and 1990s the stock collapsed to an extremely low level, and for the most part it remains there today.

A moratorium was declared in July 1992. However, for a four-year span—1988 to 2002—we did have a small inshore fishery, which we terminated in 2003 when it became evident the fishery was impeding rebuilding.

The reasons for a collapse have been well articulated throughout the week, and our reasons are very similar to the others that have been presented to the panel, notably, foreign overfishing, destructive domestic fishing practices, high-grading and discarding, in particular at sea, fishing on spawning concentrations, harsh environmental conditions in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and overestimation of biomass, primarily due to the fact that scientists were using catch estimates that were in error because of the misreporting and discarding that was occurring. As well, the TACs were set retrospectively too high, not only in relation to science but also in relation to the managerial and political forces that were in play at the time. Of course, the predator-prey relationships, the capelin fishery, and the growth in the seal herds added a factor.

The relative weights of these factors are unknown to this day, and we feel there was a convergence of ecological pressures resulting in an ecosystem regime shift, which is quite evident in the past ten years or so with the emergence of large concentrations of shrimp, crab, and other species.

So what have we done in science? Every year we do our annual research surveys: 160 sea-days, over 1,100 fishing sets over a 10-week period, and a multi-species survey that covers most of the area of 2J3KL. In 1990 there was a major program by the federal government: $150 million to rebuild fish stocks, $33 million of which was allocated to this region for a northern cod science program, which lasted from 1991 to 1994-95. Since 1994 we've had an inshore sentinel program, where we invest in the collection of fisheries data by inshore fishermen, and the budget has oscillated over the period but has ranged from $1.7 million to $2.4 million.

● (1720)

I referenced the fact that we did reinstitute the closure of the cod stocks in 2003, in particular 2J3KL. At that time there was a $5-million Atlantic seal research program announced by our minister, and part of that was to study the impact of seals on fish stocks in the northwest Atlantic. Since 2003, within DFO, we've had a fisheries science collaborative program, and in this region we have $700,000 per year. There's an international governance program, which is part of a broader suite of investments that our minister has made in relation to combating the foreign overfishing issue. There is a specific amount there for science, $11 million, and in this particular fishery here in this region, we have $1.9 million of that.

We've heard a lot about collaboration with fishermen and communication, and we thought it was worthwhile to remind the committee that the regional advisory process, which is an annual process, or bi-annual process in the case of some stocks, where we do the stock assessments in relation to cod and other species, is open and transparent. We do involve stakeholders, fishermen and other stakeholders, in that assessment process, so it's out in the open and is transparent.

I've touched on the sentinel fisheries and the fisheries collaborative research program where we promote collaborative research with our industry partners. As well, we've had industry participation in our research trips so they can observe first-hand what we do at sea. We've had joint industry-DFO-specific projects, notably a project like the yellowtail research with FPI, where we actually engaged a company in the research activity. I would add that throughout the system we have programs that involve logbooks that come from fishermen, a data collection system that involves input from fishermen, so there is ample opportunity, albeit we can improve, for fishermen to have input into science assessments.

On the fisheries management side, what have we done? In 1993 the minister introduced the Fisheries Resource Conservation Council, the FRCC, to provide annual TAC advice, as well as other management advice in relation to groundfish stocks, including cod. We've had a moratorium on northern cod since 1992, with the exception of the limited fishery. On the management side, we've moved to a series of integrated fisheries management plans. In those we have what we call conservation harvesting plans, and we have conservation protocols as they relate to small fish. We've introduced a dockside monitoring program with the help of our fishers, observer coverage, bycatch management, closed areas in 2J3KL that are closed to gillnet fishing as well as otter trawl fishing. In the otter trawls, we have no more rigid grade systems where we can minimize bycatch of finfish in fisheries like the shrimp fishery, gear limits, and gillnet tagging.

The capelin fishery always comes to the fore when we talk about cod. Indeed, there was a large capelin fishery in the late eighties. In 1991 the offshore fishery was closed, and probably in effect maybe it closed itself. The TAC in 1991 was 85,000 tonnes in the 2J3KL area for the inshore capelin fishery and this year that TAC is now 21,000 tonnes through a series of reductions. I think it was a couple of years ago when the minister announced a 40% reduction in the TAC in the interest of cod rebuilding.

As most members would be very aware, we've had a comprehensive strategy over the last two years to combat foreign overfishing. The amounts aren't necessarily cumulative because some are annual, some are over five years, but we're talking in excess of a $100-million investment to combat foreign overfishing, with area surveillance, additional fisheries officers and patrols in this region, additional vessel time, an additional patrol vessel, and money for science, advocacy, policy, and international governance.

● (1725)

As for factors affecting recovery—why the stocks haven't recovered—we've categorized them under three main headings. One is reproductive capacity of the resource. There are fewer fish overall. Do we have a critical mass in the offshore to stimulate a regrowth of the stock?

There are fewer older fish and a high proportion of first-time spawners. Later, maybe Dr. Lilly and others can go into some of the specifics around that.

There's mortality, both natural and from fishing. We've talked about the fact that we had a brief period with a small inshore fishery. In our view, the fishery had an impact on those stocks that were rebuilding in the inshore, which I'll get to later in the slide—not the only impact, but it was a material impact—and we feel that through our studies with seals we have identified a meaningful impact from seal predation on cod stocks.

Concerning fish condition and individual growth, harsh environmental conditions have certainly played a role and made the rebuilding of the cod stocks more difficult. What is the current status? If you take 2J3JKL cod as an aggregate, overall it's extremely low and remains extremely low. In the offshore, an index of spawner bottom mass in the offshore is currently at 1% of the level it was at during the 1980s. Recruitment in the offshore has been low and total mortality has been high since at least the mid-1990s, and we note that few fish survive beyond age five.

In our stock assessment report this year, scientists divided the inshore into three areas: a northern area that is in 2J, primarily off Labrador as well as in northern 3K; a central core area in southern 3K and northern 3L, where most of the resident fish reside; as well as the southern area, southern 3L, which we feel at present is largely dependent on cod that overwinter in the inshore and offshore areas of 3Ps and move into 3L in the summertime. We see those fish present there in the summer as a consequence.

The spawner biomass has fluctuated. It went up and came down again at the same time as the small inshore fisheries, also partly because of poor recruitment, but it's shown some signs of rebuilding one more time. And in the inshore centre area, the estimated quantity of age four biomass at the beginning of 2005 is about 20,000 tonnes.

On page 11, we've characterized a dichotomy of views. We feel, based on the work we've done in the department as well as through the cod recovery teams, that we have agreement with stakeholders in relation to offshore northern cod, that the stock in the offshore is quite low. We feel also that scientists and stakeholders agree there are significant inshore aggregations, particularly in the central core area of which I have already spoken. Where we differ, probably, is in terms of the magnitude of the inshore aggregation and in respect of the relative risk of opening a small-scale fishery.

I talked this morning, and I won't repeat myself, in terms of.... As we think of an inshore fishery, we have to think about objectives; we have to think of targets and the rate of long-term recovery. There is always a trade-off between the short-term opportunity and the potential for vaster, long-term recovery in the stock. As well, there is probably a debate to be held on issues related to the inshore concentrations, in that some feel they are the significant remnants of the stock and wonder whether they will be necessary in the future to repopulate the entire stock.

Secondly, if we have a fishery in the inshore and were to see some recovery in the offshore, and that offshore fish migrated inshore and became intersected with an inshore fishery, then there is a risk to the offshore rebuilding associated with the intersection.

● (1730)

We don't have those answers, but we certainly feel those are the types of questions all of us need to ponder.

In terms of the tables, you've seen the history of the northern cod. I won't belabour that part.

The historic catches since the moratorium, as shown on page 13, illustrate the level of the small-scale inshore fishery, as well as our recreational fishery and the sentinel fishery.

I would note the potential of recreational fishery is shown in 2001 there, when we caught, I think, in excess of 1,000 tonnes in the recreational fishery at that time.

The next slide is a repeat, but in this one we've overlaid the age-three-plus biomass, just to illustrate that the biomass had shown positive signs, but did show a significant downward trend during the reopened fisheries, and, as Dr. Lilly has reminded me a number of times, also because of poor recruitment in the stock—and since the fisheries have been closed, we've seen an upswing in the biomass, as well as improvement in the recruitment to the stock.

So where should we go from here? The path forward for us.... We talked at length this morning about the cod action team, the cod recovery strategy, and we feel implementation of that strategy will form a key part of our framework for moving forward. We have to wait and see the decision in relation to the potential SARA listings, in particular in relation to northern cod, which we should know in April 2006.

We have the oceans action plan, which we feel will take us in a number of directions as it relates to ecosystem management and marine protected areas. In this particular region there is a significant initiative in relation to Placentia Bay and the Grand Banks. We've already done a substantial amount of work—biophysical as well as socio-economic benchmarking—in those areas, and we're doing additional work now on the Grand Banks, moving towards the establishment of a local ocean management area on the Grand Banks and Placentia Bay. It is one of five key LOMAs for the Department of Fisheries and Oceans across the country.

I've already spoken to international governance and initiatives to combat foreign overfishing. We feel this is particularly important in the case of northern cod. We know that the foreign fishery contributed to the collapse of the stock. We're not as concerned right now, in terms of the rebuilding, particularly given the absence of significant concentrations of cod in 3L outside 200, as well as the distribution and fishing practices of the fleet out there. They don't represent a particularly significant threat to recovery at the moment, but should the stocks begin to recover, the path we've set in terms of ensuring compliance in the NRA, as well as controlling the fleets, will be important.

Northern cod occupies a rather unique place in NAFO in that Canada gets to set annually the TAC for northern cod, unlike other stocks managed by NAFO. The NAFO fisheries commission, with the help of the NAFO scientific council, sets TACs. In this case there was an agreement, which was due to expire this year, but in Estonia this year we achieved a consensus in NAFO to extend it indefinitely. Canada gets to set the TAC, a fishing limit in Canada for northern cod, and the NAFO partners will get 5%.

In effect we set the TAC. We take 95% and they get 5%, but the decision in terms of the fishing limit is established by Canada, with the help of the NAFO scientific council—so it is a unique place in NAFO, should we ever get to a point where we will establish a TAC.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

● (1735)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Here's how we're going to do this. You're our last panel. We did that specifically so that we could hear all the witnesses, so that if there were any questions of DFO officials, we'd be able to at least pretend to be intelligently asking them.

I'm going to be very strict on time, because everybody's going to get to ask as many questions as desired. We're going to go until either we fatigue ourselves or until you fatigue, or until all questions are exhausted, so please be very careful with your questions, and be pointed, if you can be. I will be very strict on time. If the answer is too long or if the question is too long, you lose your slot, and then you'll come back when you have a chance.

Away we go with Mr. Hearn, I guess. I will let them split it any way they want.

Mr. Loyola Hearn: Does the timeframe allow for just one question each?

The Chair: No, ten minutes. It is the same thing we've been doing —back and forth until we have no further questions.

Mr. Loyola Hearn: Okay. So we can stay as long as we want?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Loyola Hearn: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

And, certainly, thank you again to the panel and Mr. Follet—twice in one day. It is a lot to take, and you had the courage to bring the others with you. We thank you for coming.

From our hearings, throughout Bonavista and Clarenville, here today and yesterday, fishermen in particular have unanimously said there are more fish than we have ever seen. Some said there are more fish than when Cabot came. I guess that is why they are asking for an inshore quota. However, almost everyone added that if they thought it would damage the stock, they would have no problem with that.

Their frustration and our frustration is that no one can tell us how big the biomass is. We just heard from the members of the FFAW. They were saying that these past two years, and this year in particular, we have seen massive growth—well beyond what was expected—in lump, mackerel, capelin, and I think they mentioned other species.

Is it possible that over the past year or two years, whether it be water conditions or whatever, that we have seen a more rapid growth in the inshore stocks than we think? It has spread beyond the bays; it is along the strait shores in certain areas. It's the same as we used to see when we had the migration from offshore, but certainly we know it is not of the same magnitude.

Do we know how much is there? The old saying is that a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. In this case, perhaps two in the water is better than one on the table. Everyone agrees with that if we are in danger of hurting that stock again.

However, because of the desperation and the downturn in the crab fishery, if that stock has risen to a point where it can be sustained, not only without inhibiting the stock but without inhibiting the growth of the stock, then perhaps we can have the best of both worlds.

The frustration is that nobody seems to be able to tell us whether or not we have sufficient stock to be able to do something with it.

Mr. Wayne Follet: Mr. Chair, I would just like to comment, and then I am going to ask Dr. Lilly to talk a little more about the science.

I have two observations to make. Certainly we feel the frustrations. We live it in our daily lives, so we understand the frustration. We had the same frustrations in 1998; we saw the same signs in 1998. Certainly, the information I presented this afternoon confirms that the biomass had grown significantly by 1998. We went down the path of a small-scale commercial fishery only to see that inshore component go into decline, to a point where it was worrisome and the minister took a decision to stop the fishery.

The caution I would put there is to say—and Dr. Lilly will expand on what we are seeing or could expect to see from a science perspective—that I personally believe maybe there is a growth. We're saying that. The fishermen are saying that. I think the growth is there because we stopped the small-scale inshore fishery. Had we kept the small-scale inshore fishery in place, maybe we wouldn't be here with the frustrations and with those appeals to have another reopening.

I had this discussion with some industry people and with the union not too long ago. I reminded them that maybe the reason they were telling me there are more fish and they are more widely distributed—and we confirmed that, at least anecdotally, with our fisheries officers and so on—is that maybe there is a correlation between the fact that we haven't had an inshore fishery for the last few years and the growth in stock.

I'll just leave it there, and I won't go back—not yet at least—to talk about our objectives, because at the heart of this thing I believe is the question of risk management. You have spoken to that, and I think there are questions about our rebuilding targets, our rebuilding objectives, and about our aspirations for the northern cod stocks.

Once we get a grip on those questions, I think we'll have a better answer in terms of having an inshore fishery.

George, do you want to talk about what we're seeing?

● (1740)

Mr. George Lilly (Fisheries Ecologist, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Yes. In terms of whether there's been higher growth in the last year or two years compared to what it had been for a few years, that's always possible. Waters have been warmer for the last five years or so. In addition to that there are reports of more capelin around. Those two things would tend to improve growth, but whether they're sufficient to make a huge difference, one doesn't really know. Perhaps recruitment, young fish coming into the stocks, is a bit better than we had estimated; we don't know.

What we are doing now, of course, is sampling, primarily through the sentinel fishery; we will be getting catch rates through the sentinel fishery throughout the whole range of the stock area. On top of that, from that we obtain samples that will give us information on how rapidly the cod have grown and what their condition is, how fat they are, and so on. We will probably look at all that information next winter. The normal time for us to do a stock assessment would be February or March for this particular stock. The fishermen are making observations on the water now. We won't be in a position to do an analysis to get an idea of what you would infer from a scientific point of view for a few months yet.

One of the things that tends to limit the amount of information you have is whether or not you have a fishery. For the five years there was a fishery ongoing we were able to do a lot of sampling and tagging programs and so on. We were able to get a tremendous amount of information about what was happening within the stock over that time period.

Now as we get down to much smaller catches, these bycatch levels and so on, we can still do our monitoring through the sentinel surveys and the various sampling we do of that, plus the sampling we do from the small bycatches that are occurring, but we are somewhat limited because we don't have a fishery ongoing. That's in no way advocating having a fishery solely to learn more about the science of the fish, but as we get further and further from a fairly significant fishery, our ability to assess how much fish is out there gradually diminishes. What we will have is primarily the information coming from the sentinel fishery. That will be the main source by far of our understanding of the level of how much fish is out there and just the extent to which that changes, and as I say, we will get and learn a lot more about that by next winter.

I would, if I may, reiterate what Mr. Follet has said. I attended many FRCC meetings back around 1998-99. Fisher-harvesters at that time were saying they'd never seen so many fish; you could walk across the harbours and the bays on the backs of the fish, and yes, the fishery was opened. With the taking of only 20,000 tonnes over five years, we dropped that stock by 50% or more.

So yes, it's possible the stock is coming back. We projected two years ago that it was coming back. In more recent estimates we say yes, there's an upturn, but as to whether there's this huge body of fish out there, the evidence we have now would suggest not.

The Chair: One minute.

● (1745)

Mr. Loyola Hearn: I have a quick question on the offshore. You mentioned on page 8, I think it is, the amount of money put into the offshore over the last few years. I would suggest you could look at a lot of people around the table and say thank you for that, because three years ago we had a similar set of hearings that drew a lot of attention to foreign overfishing and funds have been put into it. We have more presence, and undoubtedly that's had some effect.

However, there are two things. One, you mentioned Canada gets 95%, the others 5%. That's strictly on paper, and as you know, the reality of that could be the reverse; it usually happens. The other concern is that we have not seen, as far as I know, one foreign vessel charged with overfishing, so they still go ahead and do what they have done. Our presence might have deterred them a little bit, kept them out of certain areas, but I haven't seen anything yet that convinces me we have stopped overfishing or misreporting or illegal use of gear. When are we going to take some concrete action so we can stop the major problem we have out there?

Mr. Wayne Follet: Concrete action. As I've outlined here, we've made a major investment and we have doubled if not tripled our enforcement presence in the NRA.

If I can take you through a little bit of history—

The Chair: No, that's too long. We're pretty well cognizant of the history of NAFO.

Mr. Wayne Follet: In terms of concrete action, I think we have made tremendous progress. We measure compliance in the NRA. What we've seen in the last two years is a significant improvement in compliance, measured by the number of citations as well as measured by our estimate of the quantity of moratorium species that's taken by the foreign fleet. It's still far too high, but we have seen significant improvement over the last couple of years.

We are aware of situations where vessels have been called back to home ports...and other contracting parties. We are aware of cases—Russia, for example—where licences have been lifted from vessels. We have a program with Spain now where our inspectors are invited. Most recently we had a vessel we thought we had concerns with, and the Spanish government invited us over to participate. The report I got back from our inspectors showed a measurable difference in terms of the quality of the inspection and our participation in it. We had to wait to see the outcome, but through our diplomatic interventions, through the channels we've opened up with the European Union, we do feel we are making progress.

In terms of what it will mean downstream, this year at NAFO we've embarked on a process of reform. We have the working group on reform, where we will talk about and actually recommend to the general council for next September changes to the NAFO convention, in particular looking at the dispute settlement procedure, post-objection behaviour, and streamlining of the organization. This was co-sponsored by the European Union and us. I attended the meeting in Estonia and participated in the drafting of that particular piece of work. Through our STACTIC group in NAFO, which is basically our regulatory enforcement body, they've agreed to set aside their agenda for this year to concentrate solely on issues like guidelines for sanctions for all contracting parties. We believe that's a major step forward. It was co-sponsored by the European Union, and scientific advice was respected at NAFO.

Do we still have problems in the NRA? I would note that at the end of August this year Spain closed their turbot fishery—this is the first time in memory that's happened—because of the fear they would overfish the Greenland halibut quota within the Greenland halibut rebuilding plan. They've committed to a capacity reduction program; they've taken out eight vessels. The signs we're getting back in terms of the cooperative approach for the European Union, in terms of the actions they've taken.... This September closure cost them as much political pressure on their side as it would on our side, as a direct effort to control. We believe with that closure they will still overshoot the quota, but by a relatively small percentage in comparison to the past, and with any luck we'll bring it in on quota this year.

Those are things I couldn't sit here and talk about two, three years ago. I believe it's as a consequence of the diplomatic interventions, the fact that the Prime Minister and others have made it a priority issue, and because we have invested heavily in the department in the ability to have bilateral discussions and because of our enforcement efforts. Our ability now to expose and understand what's happening on the Grand Banks has had a dramatic impact in terms of the behaviour of contracting parties and in terms of the response we're getting.

Is it a solution? Time will tell.

● (1750)

I don't think it will ever satisfy the desire to see an elimination of NAFO or the foreign fishery in the NRA, but we do believe that compliance is on a positive trend and that with the NAFO reform package, we can continue to make progress.

That's where we are in terms of concrete action.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Follet.

Monsieur Blais.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raynald Blais: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Follet, gentlemen, welcome. I almost feel like starting by saying that I am still waiting for an answer to a question I asked you this morning. In fact, that may be exactly what I'll do. My first question has to do with the possibility of a recovery or reopening of the inshore fishery. I asked you the question this morning, and you indicated to me that you'd be ready to answer around 5 p.m.. And here we are.

Mr. Wayne Follet: Thank you very much, sir. I am now prepared to answer your question.

[*English*]

I think we've already addressed the question in part, in the sense of the intervention by Mr. Hearn.

From a purely strict scientific perspective, can we fish 1,000 tonnes in the inshore area? I think the answer is yes, in the sense that with the stock that's there now, 1,000 tonnes is probably sustainable.

Dr. Lilly can comment on that, but again it goes back to the question of risk management, our objective for recovery, and should we decide to have a mortality on that stock, in what form the mortality will come. Will it come through recreational fishery, bycatch fishery, or a directed fishery?

The last scientific stock status report did indicate—and I'm always in peril of having scientists sitting next to me. My understanding of the stock status report was that if we were to see average or above average recruitment in the stock, you could probably fish up to 2,500 tonnes; however, the risk to rebuilding would be significantly increased.

I don't know if you want to add to that, George.

Mr. George Lilly: I guess the only point of clarification on that is that in the stock status report—the science advisory report, as it's now called—to which Mr. Follet was referring, those numbers, with respect to 2,500 tonnes, are for this central area. There are some fish, as was pointed out earlier, that would also come around from the south coast. Presumably, if one were going to establish a fishery in the central part, then one might be inclined to establish a fishery in the southern part as well, in which case you'd have something there as well. So whatever you were establishing—2,500 tonnes, which would be perhaps pushing things—whatever that number was, you would add something for the southern part as well.

● (1755)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raynald Blais: I'd imagine you are referring to the document we have which was prepared by the Canadian Science Advisory Secretariat. In this document, there are a variety of scenarios, from 2005-2006 until 2008, referring to 0, 2,500 and 5,000 tons perhaps. We're referring to the same document.

I'd also like you to expand on the basis for scientific information regarding this inshore zone. From what I gather, there isn't a great deal of information at all. That would therefore mean that we may once again be basing our decisions on insufficient scientific data.

Do you believe the inshore information we currently have is adequate enough for us to be making good decisions?

[*English*]

Mr. George Lilly: In terms of what information we actually have, in an earlier comment I alluded to the fact that we don't have as much available to us now, and haven't for the last two years, because there is no direct fishery going on. But in the five years the fishery was occurring, we had quite a lot of information coming in on the actual landings—the catches themselves. We aged them, to get a catch age, and you could reconstruct the stock based on that alone.

We also had information from tagging. Large numbers of fish were tagged, and some of those were caught by fish harvesters and returned to DFO. From those we came up with an idea of the exploitation rate—what proportion of the fish was being harvested. Since we also knew the catch, we could come up with a biomass estimate from that.

In addition to that, Dr. George Rose, who's at Memorial University, conducted hydro-acoustic studies in the winter at Smith Sound, which has by far the largest overwintering population currently extant along the east and northeast coasts.

All of these three sources of information were almost entirely independent. There was almost no overlap between the different sources of information coming in here, and they came in with very close numbers. It's not as though one was saying there were 25,000 tonnes out there and another one was saying there were 100,000 tonnes. These were all within pretty much the same range.

Since that time, without a fishery, we've discontinued putting on tags. There's no point in tagging fish if nobody is out there to catch them, so that source of information is gone from us. Also, Dr. Rose is no longer conducting his hydro-acoustic studies in Smith Sound. We're basically left with information coming from fishermen. That information is from the sentinel survey itself. This is a survey funded by DFO of fish harvesters working on a very limited effort, but broadly spread throughout the area. From that we get the catch rates, the sampling, and so on.

We also have some catch coming in from bycatch fisheries. With that we are able to update our sequential population analysis. What you see in these tables is information from the sequential population analysis, which is then projected forward for a few years.

So to answer your question, we still have sufficient information to update our sequential population analysis and then project it forward, but we have less information available to us than we did during the period of the fishery from 1998 to 2002.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Stoffer.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Thank you very much.

Thank you, gentlemen, for coming today.

Minister Regan said a while ago about the inshore fishery, I guess responding to some concerns of some fishermen requesting a small, limited commercial fishery on the inshore, “We will not have a commercial fishery without there being a food or recreational fishery”. What do you think he meant by that? Am I correct in assuming he would not allow a commercial inshore fishery unless there was a food or recreational one at the same time? Am I correct in that assumption?

● (1800)

Mr. Wayne Follet: I'm not familiar with the quote, so I really can't comment on what the minister meant.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: That's fair enough.

Sir, what is the normal bycatch limit allowable for cod on an inshore shrimp fishery? Would it be 6%?

Mr. Wayne Follet: I stand to be corrected, but I believe it's 5%.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: What is normally allowed for flounder, flatfish, and blackback?

Mr. Wayne Follet: In our blackback fishery this year it was up to 300 pounds per day, or 10%.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Who authorized the blackback fishery this year? Did the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans himself allow that, or can that be done on a local decision?

Mr. Wayne Follet: I think it was a regional decision, within the broad framework of the groundfish act.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Normally you catch blackback with a ground net—a net that goes down to the bottom, scoops them up, and brings them up. Is that correct?

Mr. Wayne Follet: It's done with a gillnet.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: The gillnet goes down horizontally, right?

Mr. Wayne Follet: Correct.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Then why would someone allow these nets to be fished with floats, which means they'd go vertically? Why would that be allowed? If you're not allowing a small commercial inshore fishery because of conservation measures, and you catch blackback with nets that go horizontally, why would DFO allow a smaller mesh size for one and then allow floats on the nets that make them go vertical?

I'm just questioning why those types.... Correct me if I'm wrong, but the summation is that you're allowing a limited commercial fishery through the back door and calling it a blackback fishery. When we hear there are 600 pounds of cod coming in and two blackback, and approximately 1,000 tonnes of cod were taken in this blackback fishery, resulting in about a 700% bycatch....

The Chair: Let's get specific, then, Mr. Stoffer. Why were floats allowed? That's your question—why floats were allowed in this case.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Yes, why were floats allowed?

Mr. Wayne Follet: I'm not entirely sure what constitutes a float, in the sense that all gillnets have floats. In order to keep them vertical in the water, they have weights on the bottom and floats on the top. In order for a gillnet to function, you have to have floats on a gillnet. Now, whether or not particular floats were allowed to be used in this particular fishery, or there was a modification of the floats we could have to increase the avoidance of cod bycatch—I don't know if Willie can speak to this—I'm not aware, to that degree, of the technical nature of it. To my knowledge, all gillnets have floats.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: So if what you said was correct, that you allow a 10% or 300-pound bycatch of cod on the blackback, and we heard testimony from fishermen who said they caught two blackback and 600 pounds of cod.... And they caught this cod in a hurry; they caught it as they've never caught it before. It was fast, and if you talk to anyone, they know very well this was a cod fishery, not a blackback fishery. So if this decision—

The Chair: Do you have any comment on that?

Mr. Wayne Follet: Yes, I can make a comment. I don't fundamentally disagree with the information that's being brought forward.

Going into this particular year, we had concerns about the blackback fishery; however, in the area of the closure of northern cod, we know there are legitimate blackback fishermen. The representations we had were that we needed to have a protocol to allow legitimate blackback fishermen to fish blackback, knowing there was a probability of cod bycatch.

We had concerns, so we took measures this year. For example, the limit on the number of nets that could be used was reduced from 30 to 15. We asked for dockside monitoring of all catches. We used at-sea observers. The limit was 300 pounds per day, whereas previously it was 300 pounds per trip. All of these measures were intended to avoid a cod bycatch.

As you've outlined, as the fishery progressed—I guess within a week—it became quite evident that it was subject to abuse. As you've pointed out, the evidence will show that over a period of 13 days there were 1,063 tonnes of cod taken, against a blackback catch of 150 tonnes. So there was an inverse relationship between the bycatch and the directed fishery.

● (1805)

The Chair: How is that an abuse?

Mr. Wayne Follet: Well, it is to the extent that the evidence, I believe, will show that fishermen actually set nets, possibly, in areas where there were no blackback but there were cod. For the legitimate blackback fishermen who fish certain depths of water in certain areas, it is possible to prosecute a blackback fishery.

With the information coming in, as quickly as we could we took action to close that particular fishery. As you can appreciate, it was started and it was closed within 13 days, and the gear was out of the water within 13 days. To compile all the information as quickly as that—it took a bit of time.... At the end of 13 days, because of the high catches of cod, we terminated the fishery.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Matthews.

Mr. Bill Matthews: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

That's one question I was going to zero in on, but Mr. Stoffer, as usual, took away the blackback questions. But there are a couple of things here.

Thank you for coming, by the way, gentlemen; we appreciate it.

There are a couple of things. There are big concerns about NAFO, Wayne. I listened to what you said about it. You say there's been a big improvement over the last few years. One thing I thought you said is you were not as concerned about foreign fishing and the impacts on recovery as you were a few years ago. In one way, I can understand that, but then when I hear the arguments about whether or not there should be an inshore fishery and other things, and the impacts a bycatch has had on a possible recovery, I have some difficulty accepting that. We know there's cod being caught outside of 200 miles, cod that shouldn't be caught outside of 200.

I'd like you to explain that a bit further, because it rather threw me. In the situation we're in, why wouldn't we be just as concerned that foreign fishing would catch any cod, if we really believe the impact...? We're here now talking about the impact 1,000 metric tonnes of cod would have on the recovery, and you shut down a fishery in 13 days because there was too much cod being caught.

Do you know what I'm saying? I would just like you to explain that a bit further.

Mr. Wayne Follet: Sure, and I appreciate the question because I think it needs explanation. If I said we don't have concerns, I think I misspoke....

Mr. Bill Matthews: "Not as concerned", I think you said you were.

Mr. Wayne Follet: Well, not as concerned, and I guess what I meant by that is that we have a very good system of intelligence that allows us to know, we feel, with some confidence, what's being caught outside 200 miles. We've made a number of compliance presentations at NAFO and in Canada detailing the amount of moratorium species that have been caught outside 200 miles. I think it peaked two or three years ago.

In those analyses we've prepared, there is a significant cod catch. However, the cod catch is from the 3N0 stock. But for the nose of the bank in 3L, our observations show that very little cod is being taken by the foreign fishery. I shouldn't say very little, but relatively smaller quantities, because at one time we were up as high, I believe, as 4,000 metric tonnes in 3N0, whereas in 3L, in relation to the northern cod, our observations were in the range of 100 tonnes—and maybe in a given year it could've gone as high as 200 tonnes.

So any fish is important to the recovery, but in terms of the size of the northern cod area and that quantity of fish, it's not helpful for recovery if the foreigners take one fish, but in relative terms I don't think we can sit here at the moment and say that the foreign fishery has been the cause of the lack of recovery in the stock. I think that's what I was trying to say, but I'll go on record as saying that any bycatch outside 200 miles is as important as bycatch inside 200 miles; it's just that in relative terms, our observations tell us that these are relatively small quantities in relation to the northern cod. In relation to 3N0 cod, it is of great concern to us, and in relation to American plaice and other species—and some would tell me that's because there are very few northern cod out there.

● (1810)

Mr. Bill Matthews: Sure.

The other thing you mentioned along that same line was that there will be some agreement or extension of an agreement this year, or something, with I think a 95%-5% split.

Mr. Wayne Follet: Right.

Mr. Bill Matthews: If we get to a point where we have a total overcatch—is that what you said?

Mr. Wayne Follet: Yes, well—

Mr. Bill Matthews: My question on that is, where are they going to catch the 5%?

Mr. Wayne Follet: Outside, in the NRA—if at some point in the future we ended up with a quota on northern cod. Now, when we had these small inshore quotas, there was no quota in the NRA. It was Canada only.

Mr. Bill Matthews: Sure, I understand.

Mr. Wayne Follet: So the only directed fisheries of northern cod since the 1992 moratorium have been in Canadian waters.

Mr. Bill Matthews: I have two concerns about that. One, I would want to know that they were coming inside to catch the 5%, but then having said that, I'd take some comfort if they did, because we'd probably know that they only caught 5%. So it's a paradox there, really.

Mr. Wayne Follet: It's an interesting concept.

Mr. Bill Matthews: Yes.

I want to ask a question about seals.

I believe, Mr. Stenson, you're in that area. I've asked the question a couple of times, and I really haven't gotten an answer. I'm led to believe that a seal would consume approximately one metric tonne of fish resource a year. I've read that somewhere along the line, so I'm just wondering, what's your estimate on what an adult seal would eat in fish resource here, not necessarily cod but in total fish resource?

Mr. Garry Stenson (Section Head, Marine Mammals Section, Newfoundland and Labrador Region, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): A seal that would weigh about 100 kilos on average would probably eat about the same as any other mammal, including us, at about 100 kilos, and that works out to be about one metric tonne a year.

Now, for harp seals, we're dealing with a migratory species, so about 50% of that occurs in the Arctic area and about 40% of it in what we call southern areas, which would be from about the border of 2J and south.

Mr. Bill Matthews: Sure. So for 6 million seals, that's a significant amount of fisheries resource that they consume in a year. It's a significant amount, right?

Mr. Garry Stenson: It's a large area that they're—

Mr. Bill Matthews: No, that's beside the point. They eat that much fish, don't they?

Mr. Garry Stenson: Yes.

● (1815)

Mr. Bill Matthews: Okay.

How am I doing for time, Mr. Chairman?

The Chair: Three and a half minutes.

Mr. Bill Matthews: I'll give them to Mr. Simms.

Mr. Scott Simms: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Gentlemen, thank you very much.

Dr. Lilly, I'll start by addressing this issue with a little bit of anecdotal evidence that came from Bonavista. I said this yesterday, and I'll quote again this gentleman who told me that if we have to rely on the inshore stock to repopulate what is offshore, we'll never, ever have a fishery again. Yesterday I brought that same quote to Dr. Hutchings, and his comment was, well, if that's the case, then in our lifetime we won't see a healthy population based on what is inshore.

It is my understanding, and through stock assessments I've seen, that.... Are you relying on this, a healthy inshore stock, to help repopulate what is offshore? I'm trying to draw the connection, and I've yet to do it, between these two stocks.

Mr. George Lilly: I don't think science is relying on anything to do anything.

Mr. Scott Simms: That's a whole different issue.

Mr. George Lilly: Yes.

One would hope that the offshore were capable of sustaining, or re-sustaining, and growing on its own. Certainly it hasn't been for upwards of ten years. That seems to be largely because of very low recruitment and extremely high mortality, for whatever reason.

Given that, is there a possibility of fish coming into that offshore 2J and 3KL from somewhere else? There doesn't seem to be much of a possibility from the north, because there are so few fish in the north. From the south? Perhaps, but 3N and O stocks aren't doing all that well. The only area where there are any dense aggregations of fish—I'm not necessarily saying large quantities of fish, but dense aggregations—is along the northeast and particularly east coasts of Newfoundland.

Is it possible for those to move offshore? Some of the genetic studies have suggested that there's sufficient difference genetically between the inshore fish and the offshore fish that it's unlikely that those inshore fish would move offshore. However, we know from so many observations that animals change their distribution. They don't necessarily stay where they are. So it's always possible that they could move to the offshore.

Mr. Scott Simms: Notwithstanding that change, then...and that's a big chance. It's a little out there.

So what you're saying to us is that the idea of not having a limited commercial fishery or a recreational fishery on the northeast coast is primarily to repopulate what is inshore. Is that correct?

Mr. George Lilly: I wouldn't have thought so, and I hope you haven't deduced that from anything the science has written. Science has said there are a couple of concerns in terms of recovering the offshore if there is a harvest in the inshore. And bear in mind that science takes no issue with this, either one way or another. That's a societal concern. Science just tries to inform the issue.

The major concern is actually with respect to an inshore fishery capturing migrants from the offshore. We really don't know at this point whether or not the fish in the offshore are coming inshore in the summertime to feed on capelin, as they historically did, because we wouldn't distinguish them. I don't think there are many fishermen who would actually distinguish an offshore cod from an inshore cod, but you certainly wouldn't be able to do so in catches.

That being the case, as the population in the offshore does start to grow, and let's hope it does, then some of those individuals will come inshore. If you have an inshore fishery—and that's anytime from, say, June through to sometime in the autumn—then some portion of those are going to be caught up in an inshore fishery. Then whether or not that's going to have a big impact on growth in the offshore depends to a large extent on just how big that inshore fishery is.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Simms. You can come back to it in your next round.

If I may, what is the spawning time of a northern cod in terms of the calendar year?

Mr. George Lilly: I think we'd prefer to talk about it historically, because it's hard to know just what's going on now.

It varied very much from north to south, so in the north up off Hamilton Banks and Labrador it would have been as early as April, even really late March, but through the first half of April or so. And bear in mind, in any given spot or geographic area it would tend to be protracted over time. But it would tend to be in April toward the north and then progressively later as you came south, so that by the time you go onto the northern part of the Grand Bank it would be in June, for the most part.

The Chair: And when is it over? In June?

Mr. George Lilly: I think you would still find some spawning fish in July, most years.

The Chair: Okay, but by the end of July it's all done, more or less.

Mr. George Lilly: Yes, more or less. There can always be some stragglers. Also, there's a theory that in cold years spawning is going to be delayed, so you can always get spawners later.

The Chair: But in general, by the end of July it's pretty well all done everywhere.

Mr. George Lilly: Yes.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Kamp.

Mr. Randy Kamp: Thanks, Mr. Chair, and thank you, gentlemen.

Mr. Follet, in your presentation I think you referred to the need at some time in the future to make a decision on rebuilding targets. I think you indicated that we haven't figured that out yet. The way I see it, that's part of perhaps a larger philosophical question, like what we want from this stock. Before we know that, I guess we can't decide for sure what the numbers should be. In other words, do we want northern cod to be what it once was and provide significant employment in the processing industry. Is that a valid and reasonable target? Is it a target just for it to provide that minimal additional resource for the fishermen who are largely fishing other species now?

Obviously the rebuilding target is a pretty significant one. How are we going to figure that out, how are you going to figure that out, or who's going to figure that out? We can't just say forever that we don't know the answer to this, but it seems to me a pretty significant question. We're never going to know we got there if we don't know where we're going. What's the process, and what's your view on these things?

● (1820)

Mr. Wayne Follet: We've had discussion around that already in the cod recovery consultations, and we've heard from stakeholders the concern about long-term recovery. Recovery for whom? We already have a fair amount of feedback in that regard. I think what we need is some kind of formal process where we not only establish targets but we do a formal risk assessment in terms of some of the issues we've talked about already, in terms of interceptory fisheries, in terms of whether or not the inshore will repopulate the offshore, and in fact, if we set the inshore aside and at some point in time agree to manage it as a discrete unit, and we set aside the offshore issues, what do we think that inshore aggregation is capable of in terms of an aggregation and we fish it with some trajectory for growth?

These are difficult questions. These are societal, I would call them, in the sense that if we decided that the object was sustainability on these inshore aggregations, then we're saying basically we'll keep things where they are and we'll run the risk in terms of the offshore component.

These are decisions my minister will have to take, and has already taken. But I think the process should be one of a formal risk assessment involving people like yourselves, and more particularly the people in the communities. How do you get there? I'm not quite sure, in the sense that you'll never achieve consensus—I think not—but we need to inform the debate with the information we have and we need to develop a formal risk assessment process around those questions.

And there are other questions that come into play—that is, should we decide after the formal risk assessment that we want to prosecute the fishery on the inshore stock now or two years out, or whenever we meet that target that we all agree will be a reasonable one, then there are allocation questions in there as well as distribution questions. Does that mean that if we accept that the inshore aggregation is in a central area of Newfoundland, do we have a fishery in the southern area on the migratory fish out of 3Ps, or do we have a fishery on the remnant stocks that are in the north, or do we just allocate that? These are very contentious allocation discussions.

But the first is to have this formal risk assessment process where we establish a target and we agree in terms of the level of risk we're prepared to take. I think that's the only way to approach it. It has to be an informed discussion based on science, because at the end of the day, conjecture and need can't drive the decision. It has to be driven based on scientific knowledge.

The Chair: Mr. Blais.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raynald Blais: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Lilly, just now you mentioned the genetic differences between stocks. I would like to know more about these genetic differences.

Let us inquire a bit further and ask whether golf cod fish has any genetic differences with northern cod?

● (1825)

[*English*]

Mr. George Lilly: I will preface my remarks by saying I am not a geneticist. We've had two different studies but using the very similar technique of genetic structure within the northern cod stock during the 1990s and into the very early 2000s. They both came up with very similar results. To summarize, these would be that the further apart two samples are geographically, the more distinct the animals are. That's hardly surprising.

What they have found is that in the offshore, if you take a group of samples from a long way toward the north and some more from down on the Grand Banks, shall we say, you'll find that they are different. But it's hard to say how many different groupings are out there because there are so few fish now that you can't actually identify a series of different populations or aggregations at this point.

So they've taken samples, grouped them and done tests, and they've found differences. But I think basically they can say it looks like there are probably two or three different groupings, but just how many we don't really know at this point.

They have also done tests to see if the inshore is different from the offshore. For most of the pairwise comparisons between a sample in the inshore and a sample in the offshore, they are distinct, not greatly distinct but statistically different. There was at least one and perhaps two of these pairwise comparisons that did not show a difference. For different populations in different bays, there was much less evidence of differences among fish within the different bays. That's the overall genetic structure.

In terms of whether the Gulf of St. Lawrence cod is different from northern cod, I'm not sure. I'm sure that test has been done with this type of sampling, but I'm not sure of the results. However, from so many other sources of information we can see that the stocks are different. They overlap in the Strait of Belle Isle.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raynald Blais: Could you explain to me the difference between in-shore and off-shore stocks? You mentioned genetic differences, but what are they?

[*English*]

Mr. George Lilly: No, these are tests done using little parts of a genome, certain aspects of the genome. They find that the genetic structure is slightly different from one geographic area to another. Beyond that, I wouldn't even try to attempt to describe it. I couldn't do a proper job of it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raynald Blais: All right, but this does not take into account obvious factors such as the type of food, the size, and so forth. This only deals with very tiny differences as compared to those that count when we must decide whether or not to impose quotas, for instance. Am I right?

[*English*]

Mr. George Lilly: Genetics is one of many different sources of information that you would use to distinguish among different cod stocks. If you like, I can go through various other characteristics that exist between inshore and offshore populations to show that we're not going on the genetics alone, not by any means. There's a whole series of other characteristics that are in agreement in most cases with the hypothesis that populations in the inshore are at least behaviorally, structurally, different from populations in the offshore. I can go through those, if you wish.

The Chair: Do you really need that?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raynald Blais: Yes.

[*English*]

The Chair: You have 20 seconds then.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raynald Blais: I have one turn left.

[*English*]

Mr. George Lilly: It's historic and more recent. Some historic information is just to say those populations did exist. We know, for instance, that there were inshore fisheries in Trinity and Bonavista Bay, historically in the early spring before fish even moved in from the offshore, suggesting that fish were always there in the wintertime. We've always known that the fish matured in the inshore and spawned in the inshore. We've always seen them there. There are several other pieces of information historically.

More recently, the most compelling information is the fact that we see these fish in the wintertime. They are in Smith Sound. There has been a lot of work done in Smith Sound, and there have been lots of other observations in various other areas along the coast, including several instances around 1998-2000, where the fish would come into very shallow water—sometimes in association with ice, sometimes in association with the seals around them—but certainly these fish are there in the wintertime. On top of that, we've done a lot of tagging, and with the tagging we've seen that the fish move out of these deep water areas, move along the coast on feeding migrations in the spring and summer, and return in the wintertime to the deep water inlets.

We have had, over a 10-year period, one recovery of a tagged fish in the offshore. Bear in mind, of course, that there's very little fishery in the offshore; nevertheless, only one fish has been taken in the offshore.

So there's the behavioural pattern that is consistent from year to year, of the fish moving from one area in the wintertime...moving out and moving back to that area in the wintertime.

● (1830)

The Chair: Colleagues, I would like to remind you it is 6:30 p.m. As I say at my public forums, we're going to go until the time is over, so if anyone feels the need to use the washroom, or so on, please get up, go right ahead, come on back, and we'll just keep on going.

Mr. Stoffer.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This is not to be rude, but I would just like to let you know that I do have to leave after my questions, unfortunately.

Dr. Lilly, Professor Hutchings said that the cod from Labrador to the south bank is at 1% of its historic level. That's the 2J3KL, the northern cod. Do you agree with that summation? Do scientists within the department agree with that?

Mr. George Lilly: I'll have to ask one more question. Do you mean relative to what time period, to the eighties or to some time back in far history?

Mr. Peter Stoffer: I assume it was the eighties.

Mr. George Lilly: I would assume he's talking perhaps about the sixties.

The Chair: Perhaps Mr. Lear might be able to answer that. He wrote a paper on a 500-year perspective on the fishery.

Mr. Henry Lear: When Dr. Hutchings did his study he didn't take into account the fish that were in the inshore. So he ended up with a number that, for the most part, might even be an underestimate.

I would guess, and this is purely a personal opinion, they were maybe at 2%. Whatever the number is, 1% or 2%, it's a very small portion of what was out there in the early 1960s.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Has there been any research to compare other fish species on the planet that have gone down that low and that might have ever recovered? Like 1% or 2% of its biomass, of historic levels...and then actually recovering from that? Have there been any other fish species on the planet that have done that?

Mr. Henry Lear: I can take that question, I think.

Before I came here I anticipated the question, and I'm prepared. There are two big stocks.The Norwegian spring-spawning herring, the Atlanto-Scandian herring, was one of the largest herring stocks in the North Atlantic.

In 1950 you would have had 14 million tonnes. From 1950 to 1957 it fluctuated between 10 million and 14 million tonnes. And it collapsed in about the 1960s. It went down to about two million tonnes. Now, it wasn't down to 2%, but it was a long way down. It collapsed because of poor recoupment, because of environmental conditions, and also because of overfishing. It was almost the same thing as northern cod.

It showed some signs of recovery in the seventies, and again it collapsed. They kept the fishing mortality at a very low level, and eventually it started to increase in the 1990s and they got a series of several year classes, and now it's up to about nine million tonnes again. They've had a couple of poor year classes, down to about six million.

That stock was down, and that took place over a period of about 25 years, from the time it collapsed first until it really showed any signs of significant recovery.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Thank you very much, sir. So there are examples there. Thank you.

Mr. Henry Lear: There are examples. There was another example. The Georges Bank haddock did the same thing. It's up.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Thank you.

My last question is for Dr. Stenson.

Sir, I noticed you have a report of the Eminent Panel on Seal Management. As you know, the minister is going to have to make a decision fairly soon on the quota or the TAC for seals. I would assume he's going to do it over another three-year period, as the previous ministers have done. We heard from the provincial representative. Mr. Rideout said they would accept and support, if markets were available, an increase to that TAC for seals.

Is it your opinion, or can you offer an opinion, that if markets are there for an increase of the seal quota, you would recommend to the minister that an increased quota can exist without harming the so-called seal population? I'm not asking you to put a number on it, but could there be an increase to the seal TAC for the next three years or the next year?

● (1835)

Mr. Garry Stenson: Can you ask that question in another month? We're in the process right now of working out the impact of various levels of quotas. It's one of the tasks we're in the process of doing.

There is going to be a seal forum here in St. John's on November 7 and 8, at which time all of the interested parties will come together to talk about the new management plan. They're looking at either a three- or a five-year management plan, I believe. Hopefully by that point we'll have the impact of various levels, so we'll be able to say, "If you want to take so much, this is what the impact will be". Until those models are done—and my colleague in Quebec region right now is running those models—I couldn't tell you.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Fair enough.

Thank you all very much for coming today, and I thank Newfoundland for the hospitality.

The Chair: Thank you, Peter, and good luck on your way home. We'll see you next week.

We now go to Mr. Simms, who can finish off what he started.

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Stoffer, your presence was greatly appreciated. As we say, God love you.

I have a question about the impending decision in April—is that correct?—for SARA.

Mr. Wayne Follet: Yes.

Mr. Scott Simms: There were interesting words yesterday, and there was a different take on this. I'm certainly dreading the day when COSEWIC or SARA would regard this as an endangered species.

I'd like to get your reaction to that, first of all.

Secondly, Dr. Hutchings said there was some flexibility within this to allow some sort of limited fishery still on the northeast coast.

By the reaction of Dr. Lilly, it seems I've already had the answer to that before I even get it out.

If there is flexibility, great. But if there is not, is it a possibility—it may be remote, but is there a possibility—that the offshore stock could be classified as an endangered species, whereas the inshore stock is not? Does the legislation allow for that flexibility?

Mr. Wayne Follet: In the terms of your question, there's nothing in the legislation to prevent the listing of any aggregation, if science defined a particular aggregation and there were a recommendation to list that aggregation. In the department right now, though, we're dealing with the recommendations from COSEWIC in relation to the Newfoundland and Labrador stock, which includes 2JH and 2J3KLNO. I stand to be corrected from legal services, but my understanding now is we have two options: we can either send it back to COSEWIC for clarification—and we could put questions back in that regard—or we can accept to list or not to list the stocks, as I understand the process.

If the question went back, in relation to whether we could just list the offshore in 2J3KL, I think it would become a science question concerning delineation of a distinct stock in the offshore.

Mr. Scott Simms: The impression I got from Dr. Lilly is there is a distinctive component to each. That would bolster the argument that there could be a difference.

Mr. George Lilly: Well, yes, I suppose, but on the other hand, COSEWIC has clearly demonstrated that they're quite capable of putting together even what we call management units into these larger units. So one would first of all have to deconstruct what they've put together, in terms of a Newfoundland and Labrador population, which, of course, is something that's not used within the DFO management framework or the science framework supporting that management. Then you would have to deconstruct this 2J3KL stock, which has existed as a unit ever since these stocks were first delimited—back in the fifties, I guess.

So it would have to be a process. I don't know how the process would work, but yes, I guess you'd have to send it back to COSEWIC for consideration.

● (1840)

Mr. Scott Simms: The minister has to do that, I gather.

Mr. George Lilly: Yes.

Mr. Wayne Follet: Our minister would be the competent minister in this regard, and the Minister of the Environment would be the minister responsible for the act. The two ministers, through cabinet, would have to make a decision to do that.

The Chair: It would be, then, another nine months of discussions under that act, would it not, if cabinet made that request?

Mr. Wayne Follet: Yes. I think that would be at a minimum.

The Chair: Mr. Lear, you said that you anticipated the question. Let's ask the question directly. Have your studies indicated any species at 2% of its historic size that has rebounded?

Mr. Henry Lear: No, I have not seen one as low as 2%.

The Chair: What does that tell you? You've studied 500 years of history of the region; have you formed an opinion?

Mr. Henry Lear: I think it's possible they can come back. There would have to be some recolonization, probably from the southern area—say the south coast of 3Ps stock, which is in pretty good shape.

There has been a distribution shift southward because of the cooling trend. If there should be a warming trend northwards, then those fish could repopulate the north again. At one time, northern cod were very abundant as far north as Cape Chidley, almost up to Baffin Island. They retreated from there back in the 1960s. Several years before the collapse, the distribution was moving southwards.

When we tagged out there in 1978, we could tag on the northern Hamilton Bank, Belle Isle Bank, Funk Island Bank, and right to the north cape of the Grand Bank. There were large concentrations on every bank.

In 1983, the last time we tagged on these offshore spawning concentrations, we had difficulty finding any fish north of the central part of Funk Island Bank. There were no fish on Hamilton Bank. There were very few on Belle Isle Bank at that time. The trend toward the southward distribution was beginning even then. The tag returns from these, even the ones we tagged in earlier years on Hamilton Bank, were showing up in subsequent years further south.

I don't give up hope that there can be a recolonization. If there is a change in the environmental conditions, there will be a rebuilding. In the case of the Norwegian herring and in the case of Georges Bank haddock, they tried to keep the fish mortality as low as possible. These stocks were very low. Then, very gradually, in the 1990s the spawning stock increased, and then they were lucky—the favourable environmental conditions, which always play a great part in recruitment, were there, and they got enormous year classes.

They have a year class on Georges Bank haddock right now that's far greater than anything there in the 1960s—one year class of 179 million fish. They expect that within several years the stock will be rebuilt to 250,000 tonnes, which several years ago was totally off the map. No one even anticipated anything like that.

Now, they have the year classes, but that doesn't mean the stock has been rebuilt. You have to protect it with year classes until they spawn, until they themselves reproduce, and then you can say your stock is rebuilt.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Hearn is next.

Mr. Loyola Hearn: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Are all of you at the management level? Okay, some of you are not?

The Chair: Who is at the management level?

Mr. Wayne Follet: It depends on what management level. Obviously Willie and I are senior managers in the region. Garry would be a middle manager, if we could call it that.

Mr. Garry Stenson: I have a small research team.

● (1845)

Mr. Loyola Hearn: I ask that because management versus union in relation to your employment status....

Mr. Wayne Follet: I think it would be me and Willie.

Mr. Loyola Hearn: Okay.

The question we're pursuing is, why hasn't the northern cod come back after 13 years—mainly we're talking offshore, but all together—and what can we do to try to get it back, if not to where it was, certainly to where it is needed?

In today's fishery, it's a bit different from years ago. We now depend on other species, and if we had the northern cod the way it was, it might interfere with some of the other species, as you mentioned. But regardless of that, the question is that it disappeared; why hasn't it come back, and what can we do about it?

You're the people, I guess, whose mandate from your minister is to tell him the answers to those questions. We haven't decided yet what we're going to tell him. It depends on all the evidence we hear. But what are you telling him?

Mr. Wayne Follet: I think this morning, in our joint presentation on the cod recovery strategy, we did indicate that at this point we're completing our analysis and we will be providing a suite of recommendations to the minister—to both levels of government, really—in terms of what we feel are some of the things we could collectively do to aid recovery.

I don't think when our report is complete we will suggest that recovery is in our hands, because as Henry has laid out for us, the pace of recovery is really probably more dependent on the ecosystem, environmental conditions, and Mother Nature. But we believe there are actions we can take as managers and that the broader community can take to aid recovery. So we will deal with a suite of measures in relation to, should we fish? Should we have a risk assessment process to finally wrestle to the ground the question of whether we should fish on that core inshore aggregation?

We hope to have recommendations about seals. I've noted already that we've come a long way in capelin and the whole predator-prey thing. We will have recommendations in terms of hopefully plugging some of the gaps on the science, and a suite of other things. It's all-encompassing, really. Those are the types of recommendations we will be making to the minister.

At the moment, with regard to northern cod, we tend to focus on one issue, which is, do we have a fishery or don't we have a fishery? I think in the last couple of years we've been, as a department, behind the minister in not having a fishery. Until we know more, until we have that full suite of measures and we have more confidence in where we're headed with this thing, we basically support holding the line on an inshore fishery at this point in time, and in my presentation I did show how the previous inshore fishery had once again depressed the cod that are there.

Mr. Loyola Hearn: We base a lot of that on science, and Dr. Lilly has said right now we're basically depending on the sentinel fishery to provide a lot of that.

We heard from fishermen that the sentinel fishery has been reduced. In fact, we had some examples of people who had participated and were told, because of budget cuts, they were not participating. So that limits the area over which the science is coming from.

On top of that, this year, as we saw, Dr. George Rose—whom you've referred to, and I think his work on inshore cod is well known—was not provided with the time on the *Teleost*, or whichever boat, that he had ordinarily. I was told by department officials that was the case because they had so much trouble with boats this year that the department could not complete its own assessments and therefore could not provide the time to Dr. Rose. So if we're seeing limits when we really need the science, if we're seeing cutbacks in the only inshore science that we have, the sentinel fishery, if we're seeing science like Dr. Rose's eliminated, how, then, are we going to be able to make the right decisions? Or should we, as somebody suggested today, have regional councils that would include people like Dr. Lilly, for instance, and Dr. Rose, but also the fishermen right in the boats, so this science can come together much more quickly and we won't have this year or two-year delay in trying to piece together our assessment of what's happening?

● (1850)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Follet.

Mr. Wayne Follet: I take the question to be one of whether there is a better model than we're currently using to manage these stocks. I think it's worthy of consideration, if we want to explore what a regional council model will look like.

I think at the end of the day we will come back to pass these departments to do the science. I mean, our capacity is directly related to our intellectual capital in the department, to people like Dr. Lilly or Dr. Stenson, or whoever the case may be, as well as our physical capital.

Mr. Loyola Hearn: Could I ask, because I don't want to leave an impression, Mr. Chair—

The Chair: You're already talking on someone else's time.

Mr. Loyola Hearn: They can have mine next time.

But it's no reflection whatsoever, I think it's only fair to say, on... All we've heard is good stuff on what you have and what you do.

Mr. Wayne Follet: I understand. In terms of whether there are alternative models for management of the fishery, I'm sure there are and I'm sure we could explore those other models. Right now I haven't had that analysis. I can't comment in terms of a concept of a regional council as to whether it would be preferable to the approach we have now. But certainly we should all be open to exploring those other models.

With regard to the science, I think I made reference this morning to the fact that the challenge is always priority, because as you've alluded to, we have in this region some very important fisheries besides cod. Cod, at the moment on the northeast coast, is non-existent in the fishery context. But we still have a fishery that's worth a billion dollars, and we had a landed value of $600 million to fishermen in 2004 that came from these other stocks.

The challenge I have within my appropriation, which comes from Parliament through the department to my office and down to the director of science, is that we always have to be as nimble as we possibly can to make those dollars go as far as we can. Through collaborative efforts and partnering, we've been able I think to expand the envelope. More particularly, we have to make decisions, and some of those decisions relate to fisheries like crab, fisheries like shrimp, that are extremely important. There are lots of people in the province who are concerned about crab, because it is the backbone of the Newfoundland fishery right now. So when we look at the suite of stocks that we have to do science on, we try to make the decisions with the capital we have and with the operating budgets we have, to cover the full suite.

Have we afforded cod adequate priority in that? I think if we were focused on cod only, the answer would be no. But if we focus on the broader suite of challenges we have, then I could make the case that we probably have.

So the quest for knowledge is insatiable, in the sense that I think we've heard a lot of good information from Dr. Lilly, and certainly we could use more.

The Chair: Thank you.

On a point of clarification on your previous answer, you keep reminding us about the limited fishery. How many tonnes was that? I think you said something like 25,000 over five years. Am I right?

Mr. Wayne Follet: That was 20,000 over five years.

The Chair: That's 20,000 over five years. Is that right?

Mr. Wayne Follet: Yes, 20,000 over five years.

The Chair: All right. So that's 4,000 tonnes a year. That, you felt, affected the recovery, and that's why you keep reminding us about it.

Mr. Wayne Follet: At that point in time—

The Chair: At that level it is 4,000 tonnes a year, and no one here has been talking about 4,000 tonnes a year. None of our witnesses mentioned 4,000 tonnes, so why do you keep reminding us about 4,000?

● (1855)

Mr. Wayne Follet: I keep reminding you of the fishery of the past, in terms of when we went down the road of entertaining a commercial fishery and where we got to with that.

I think I've also answered a question from Mr. Blais in terms of whether we could have 1,000 tonnes. I think the answer was yes, if you accept all of the other risk factors that go with that, and I'm not going to bore you with those again.

The Chair: And then there are the allocation problems that you were telling us about.

Mr. Wayne Follet: Absolutely, there are allocation questions in that.

The Chair: Okay.

Monsieur Blais.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raynald Blais: Let me carry on along the same line as Mr. Hearn. Anyway, I wanted to get into the subject of scientific research and the budgets that are involved. This is a part of the budget that you are in charge of.

Your answers leave me with the impression that we are going to have more and more lean years of available funds for scientific research on cod.

I would like to know what kind of money is involved. Besides, I would like to have some details about the amounts allocated over the past few years—if these amounts can still be found—to scientific research on cod.

[*English*]

Mr. Wayne Follet: I anticipated this question, believe it or not. I'm going to give you an answer that is not evasive.

We have very complicated financial systems in our department, but they're more geared along—

The Chair: I think we know that.

Mr. Wayne Follet: They're more geared along sector lines and program lines. They're not geared at all toward species.

I've asked the same question of my officials, in terms of how much money we've spent on cod over the last 10 years. The answer is, I don't know. The best I can do is say that over the last number of years—I could use a period of 10 years—the overall science budget for our region has been in the range of $26 million to $28 million. But the precise amount we've spent in each year on cod science I am not able to produce, because it doesn't exist in my accounting system.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raynald Blais: Nonetheless, without having figures that are accurate to the nearest dollar, I gather from your answers that priority is given to funds meant for scientific research. If this is so, it might mean that less funds are being allocated for scientific research on cod.

Am I wrong, or am I right?

[*English*]

Mr. Wayne Follet: It's difficult to answer the question when I've already answered that I don't know how much we spend on cod.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raynald Blais: We can always find out.

[*English*]

Mr. Wayne Follet: I do know that I've already spoken in my presentation to the fact that over the years we've had different programs. In particular, in the 1990-1995 period we had a special northern cod science program of $33 million, which expired. So I think if you were benchmarking against a time when we had our core resources supplemented by special programming for cod science compared to what we have today, you could deduce that we don't have the same level of resourcing in cod science today as we had in the 1990s. I think that would be a fair comment. But beyond that it would be speculative on my part to try to give you any kind of proportionate expenditure on cod science today compared to previous years.

In trying to answer your question, I think it's fair to say that we don't have any extras at the moment, with the possible exception that we have just received a new investment under the international governance envelope of $11 million for science, and this year it will ramp up. This year we have $1.9 million. We're in the process now of finalizing projects around that, not particularly cod assessment projects per se but more the broader question as it relates to habitat and ecosystem types of science.

It's very difficult to make the relationship between science activity in cod and money in cod.

● (1900)

The Chair: The little cuckoo clock chairman reminds everybody it's 7 o'clock.

Mr. Matthews, or are you going to go, Mr. Simms?

Mr. Scott Simms: No, I just have a brief comment to say that I have to hit the highway. I have a five-hour drive ahead of me, but I'd like to thank our witnesses for coming. Thank you very much, and also to my colleagues, thanks for coming to Newfoundland. I hope you enjoyed yourselves.

The Chair: Thanks for chairing some of the meetings.

Mr. Scott Simms: It was my pleasure, actually, and thank you again, Mr. Chair. You did a fantastic job as usual.

The Chair: What a lovey-dovey committee.

Mr. Scott Simms: It's a pure love-in every week.

The Chair: Have a safe journey.

Mr. Matthews, please.

Mr. Bill Matthews: It's no trouble to tell that it's getting late on Friday.

My next question is a short one. It's about mortality rates, and I was going to say that if some of us don't go home, the mortality rate of the committee is going to increase.

I'm wondering, when you do stock assessments, or you're trying to determine an allocation, there is a mortality rate estimate I think that you go to. Is that the same thing for every cod stock, or does it vary, depending?

Mr. George Lilly: Are you referring to the mortality rate that's actually used within the sequential population analysis?

Mr. Bill Matthews: I don't know if I can answer that or not. What I'm saying is if you're going to try to set a TAC in the gulf or 3Ps somewhere, you estimate mortality rate, I think. Is that fair?

Mr. George Lilly: Yes, you would have had some mortality rate estimate that you plugged into your model that lets you look at what's happened in the past, and then in most cases you would use that same mortality rate when you're doing your projections, looking forward one, two, three years, whatever it's going to be.

For most cod stocks, historically, what people have used is an instantaneous rate of 0.2, which is about 18% or so. We have continued to use that in most of the sequential population analyses—actually all of them—up to 1992-93 for northern cod, but now for the more recent inshore ones, we've been using quite a bit higher ones, based on evidence from the tagging analysis, actually, that the mortality of adult cod in the inshore seemed to be unusually high. In the more recent model we used a natural mortality rate of 0.4, which is double what one would normally use.

In other stock assessments in Atlantic Canada, we find they've been using 0.4 for several of those stocks and have ramped it up and ramped it down. The northern gulf one has been interesting. They had it high for a while, and then in the most recent assessments... actually, it remains high from 1986 onwards, and then in more recent years it drops back down to a more normal level.

It's difficult to come up with what the mortality rate actually is in a population that is being fished. For northern cod, when we say that the instantaneous mortality in the offshore is very high, that's not actually what we're using in any models because we're not actually modelling the offshore at all. We are actually estimating mortality rates from the rate at which fish disappear in the surveys; so going from age four one year to age five the next year to age six the next year, we ask, how fast are those fish dying? We assume that for the most part it's a natural mortality rate because there's no directed fishing on it. In fact what we're calling it is just total mortality rate. That total mortality rate, in the offshore, is not being used in any model, but it's extraordinarily high. That's the same thing as saying that fish are just disappearing.

● (1905)

Mr. Bill Matthews: Thank you. I have a quick comment.

Mr. Lear, I listened very closely to what you said about the movement of cod from north to further south. Coming from the great historic town of Grand Bank like Wayne, we're a deep-sea fishing community. Talking to captains and skippers who log, they said that over a number of years they detected a change—and I said this in Bonavista or Port Blandford—in the migratory pattern. I think that's basically what you say. They were saying the same thing, except they went on to say that it probably kept on going and then out over the edge and someone else took it home, which I suppose in theory probably was the case. I wonder how you react to that.

Our own domestic overfishing, I suppose, or not the best practices—which we all recognize, those of us who are honest anyway, that we contributed to where we are today—plus environmental changes and a shifting from north to south probably explain to a large degree why a lot of us are saying there's no cod in the northern offshore component. Do you think that makes any sense, or that it's moved somewhere else perhaps, or what's left of it has moved somewhere else?

Mr. Henry Lear: I'll respond to your question. Essentially what the dragger skippers were observing offshore, we were observing the same thing in the tagging and in the surveys. The northern cod did move south and over the Grand Bank. They did move during the 1980s. They were all over the eastern edge of the Grand Bank, the tail of the bank. For a couple of years, there was very extensive overfishing especially by the German fleet. They really fished those concentrations hard, and it probably did have a significant effect on the collapse. There were several other countries that fished them very hard also during those years when they were outside the nose of the bank, outside the 200-mile limit, after they moved south, after the distribution moved southwards. It's one of the factors why they declined, in my opinion.

Mr. Bill Matthews: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Kamp.

Mr. Randy Kamp: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Just one final, quick question, I think. Why did it take more than 10 years to come up with the idea of developing a recovery strategy?

Mr. Wayne Follet: It's a very good question. I like it from two standpoints. First, you said it was “final”—

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Randy Kamp: I thought you'd like that.

Mr. Wayne Follet: —and secondly, I think it's a very relevant question.

An hon. member: He's speaking for himself.

Mr. Wayne Follet: With the attrition rate, you never know.

Mr. Randy Kamp: We're fading fast here.

The Chair: There's still 1% or 2% of the committee, though.

Mr. Wayne Follet: What's a quorum, Mr. Chair?

I guess there is no easy answer, but the short answer I will give you is, I think it was widely recognized in the 1990s, in the early 1990s in particular, the situation with northern cod. Initially, I recall when Minister Crosbie closed the fishery, it was for a two-year period, and I think it became evident as time went on that two years was going to turn into what we now know would be twenty. So it took some time for us to internalize that situation.

In the meanwhile, on stocks like 3Ps we did see a recovery, and we were able initially to go back to a very high TAC, I think as high as 25,000 or 30,000 tonnes, albeit we quickly ramped it back to 15,000 tonnes, where it is today. So in some of these other stocks we were seeing recovery.

Then of course, as the evidence has already shown, in 1998 we began to see what we thought might have been some recovery in northern cod, and we went to a cod fishery.... Dr. Lilly is reminding me that it was actually 29,000 tonnes. In 1998, we went to a TAC of 4,000 tonnes; in 1999, we went to 9,000 tonnes; down to 7,000 tonnes in 2000; and 5,600 tonnes in 2001. I don't have the number, but there was a similar number in 2002.

I think what precipitated the cod recovery strategy is that when we went back to closures in the northern gulf and in the northern cod, I think the reality hit home to the department—but more particularly I think to the community—that we were in for the long haul on these stocks. As we discussed this morning, that led to quite a political debate, quite a political discussion, which then led to respective ministers coming to a conclusion that we had to develop a cod recovery strategy.

That's the way I see how things progressed.

● (1910)

The Chair: Which then took two years.

Mr. Wayne Follet: Which has taken two years, yes, absolutely.

In the meantime, in the department, I would say that managers like ourselves were quite busy with other issues related to the emergence of the new fishery. We saw the emergence of quite a replacement fishery for northern cod in the crab and the shrimp fisheries, albeit a lot less labour intensive and possibly with different participants, but certainly very important from an economic perspective. For those people fortunate enough to find their place in the new fishery, what we do know today is that maybe there are half the fishermen, but on an enterprise basis they are earning incomes two to three times what they experienced when we had the cod fishery.

So that's the history I've experienced, and it's the reason why we're here today.

Mr. Randy Kamp: My final comment with respect to the cod action team would be that it appears to me that people either have never heard of it or have heard of it and have very little faith in it—just so you're aware of that.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Blais.

Mr. Raynald Blais: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I have a few more questions for you. But I, too, am nearly exhausted. My exhaustion will have the effect of reusing the number of questions or topics that I would like to raise with you. And so, this will probably be my last turn at the table.

To carry on along the same line, I was expecting your answer with regard to budgets. Let me go even further and ask you the following question: if you wanted to make a recommendation that would be included in our book of recommendations regarding the topic at hand, would you know of any figures or programs that could help us make a recommendation to the minister and department that they should pay specific attention to scientific research on cod? If this is so, could you send us those figures?

I am just like a seal I too never let go of my prey.

[*English*]

Mr. Wayne Follet: In this case, I almost feel like a prey that would like to be eaten.

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

Mr. Wayne Follet: Mr. Chair, can I caucus with my science friends?

You put me in a difficult spot, because as I've stated a number of times today, we all need more and better science, and there's quite an appetite for that. We have a dedicated cadre of scientists in our department in the region who would like to do more, but as an official, I'm not sure I can make a recommendation today in terms of quantification of what that should be. I think I've spoken to the issue of priorities a number of times. There is no question that additional funds for science on cod would improve our scientific understanding of the complexities of northern cod and the challenges we've all talked about today.

● (1915)

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Blais.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raynald Blais: With regard to your strategy for replenishing the cod stocks—perhaps I missed it when you mentioned it—I would simply like to understand the connection between the Oceans Management Strategy and the replenishing of cod stocks in the context of the steps you are about to take?

In your paper, you mentioned the implementation of a strategy for replenishing the cod stocks, the decision to include cod under annex 2 of the Endangered Species Act and, you also have the Oceans Management Strategy. I would just like to know how this works.

This is my last question.

Mr. Wayne Follet: Thank you.

[*English*]

First of all, the cod recovery strategy is a separate piece of work outside the oceans action plan, but there are linkages between the oceans action plan and the cod recovery strategy, once it's in play, or between the oceans action plan and cod recovery.

The oceans action plan drives us toward ecosystem management. It drives us toward improved understanding of the habitat where cod reside. It moves us toward new management techniques, whether they be marine protected areas or LOMAs, local ocean management areas. It moves us toward greater integration in terms of management of the ocean. All of that involves underpinning in science research. I think the science research we do in terms of the ocean and in terms of habitat, and as we further understand where cod resides, is complementary to the pure science on cod, in the sense that it will take us in new directions in terms of management approaches and will build our scientific understanding of the ocean. And in the areas where cod reside or should reside, there are definite linkages between the two strategies.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Matthews.

Mr. Bill Matthews: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'm going to conclude by thanking our witnesses for coming.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, my committee colleagues, and the support staff for coming to the province and spending this week.

I'm going to go home.

The Chair: Okay, but not before I ask my last few questions.

Mr. Bill Matthews: Oh, so you want me to witness that.

The Chair: In our briefing notes we have the following statement on why the cod fishery collapsed: “In regard to the DFO's assessments, several reasons are usually given to explain their past unreliability. These were summed up by the Senate Committee on Fisheries in 1995 as follows.” And the first reason given is the flawed models used by scientists to predict the supply of stocks.

Are those models different now than they were then?

Mr. George Lilly: As for the basic models in terms of the sequential population analysis, no; these are the same models that are used throughout the world.

The Chair: Here's another reason identified: “The assumption that all stocks would be exploited at a fishing mortality level of approximately 20% of the fishable biomass (the FO.1 reference point)...”.

Is that still the criteria?

Mr. George Lilly: No.

The Chair: Then what is?

Mr. George Lilly: It varies with stock.

● (1920)

The Chair: It varies with stock, so it's not across the board 20% fishable biomass.

All right, it's twenty after seven. On behalf of every member of the committee, I would like to thank, first of all, our staff, everybody involved in putting this trip together—the technicians, clerk, researcher, interpreters, and anybody else I've missed. A trip like this does not come together without a lot of work, and I want to thank, on behalf of the committee, everybody for that.

I want to thank our hosts from Newfoundland, all of them, from both parties, and I want to thank the people of Newfoundland for the hospitality they have shown us.

Finally, I want to thank the Department of Fisheries and Oceans officials who have stayed until twenty after seven today without a break to try to answer some of our questions.

We will be working on a report. We will try to be quick about our report so that it can be considered quickly by everybody, including the minister, etc.

Once again, thank you to all.

I adjourn the meeting to the call of the chair.

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

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

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