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Mr. Pat O'Brien

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• (0905)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Pat O'Brien (London—Fanshawe, Lib.)): Good morning.

I would like to call to order the 35th meeting of SCONDVA, the House of Commons Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs.

Colleagues, there are two parts to our meeting. We have some witnesses, of course, and some important work there, and following that, we have three or four items of committee business to clean up towards the end of the meeting.

First, let me begin by welcoming Admiral Bruce MacLean, chief of the maritime staff, back to SCONDVA. Welcome, sir.

Vice-Admiral Bruce MacLean (Chief of Maritime Staff, Department of National Defence): Thank you.

The Chair: We also have Captain Patrick Finn, the senior member of the naval board of inquiry. Welcome to you, sir.

Captain (N) Patrick Finn (Senior Member, Naval Board of Inquiry, Department of National Defence): Thank you, sir.

The Chair: We're very pleased to have you with us and are glad that the important work of the naval board of inquiry has been completed and is, I understand, totally public at this point.

As you well know, we did a study of everything about the submarine acquisition program, but not the fire on the *Chicoutimi*. I don't need to detail it for you, but we studied the Canadianization... and everything, save the fire. When the naval board of inquiry did report, we wanted to hear from you to see whether we might want to revisit our own report in any way following the discussion of your findings. That's really why we invited you to come.

We thank you very much for being here, and we're in your hands for some opening comments, if you wish to make some.

Admiral MacLean, did you wish to make some opening comments?

Vadm Bruce MacLean: Just very briefly, Mr. O'Brien, if I could.

The Chair: Sure.

Vadm Bruce MacLean: First of all, thank you very much, Chair and members of the Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs. It is very much my pleasure to be with you again.

Today I'm accompanied by Captain Pat Finn, the senior member of the *Chicoutimi* board of inquiry, to answer your questions about

the board and the tragic accident onboard the *Chicoutimi* last October.

[Translation]

My remarks will be brief, as the details of the report were released last Thursday in Halifax, and the documents are available on the Internet. A copy of the document was also provided to your committee.

[English]

If I could, I would like to highlight the major recommendations and conclusions of our board.

First and foremost, the board concluded that this tragic accident was a consequence of a number of sequential and independent human, design, operational, and technical factors, which led to the fire and to the death of Chris Saunders.

[Translation]

No individual or organization, on board or on land, is to blame for Lieutenant Saunders' death.

[English]

On the basis of this report, it is my view, as supported by General Hillier, that although the commanding officer of the *Chicoutimi*, Commander Luc Pelletier, was responsible and accountable for water getting into the control room of his submarine, his decision to run the submarine opened up was reasonable in the circumstances. The board and my review go into some detail on why this decision was reached.

Secondly, the water in the control room of the submarine most likely permitted its entry into at least two main power cables located in the commanding officer's cabin, where each cable was joined to a connector and wrapped with a protective insulator. This started what is known as low-intensity arcing, which weakened and damaged the insulating material and the connectors further, and set the conditions for a full short-circuit later on, which released so much energy that a fire started and burned through the steel deck to the electrical space below. As you're probably well aware now, the main circuit breakers tripped, as designed, stopping any further release of electrical energy, but in only a few seconds after this short-circuit, much of the submarine was already filled with a thick and toxic smoke.

The possibility of water getting into the control room and leading to low-intensity arcing, which could start a fire prior to the breakers tripping, had never been anticipated—not in any previous hazard assessment or risk analysis conducted in the design, construction, or reactivation of this class by some of the most qualified engineering experts in the U.K. and Canada. This was therefore a completely unforeseeable and unique event, but one that obviously exposed a significant vulnerability in this submarine, and one that needed to be addressed in all boats prior to their return to sea. This work has been done; it has been completed on the *Victoria* and *Windsor*, and it will be completed on the other two submarines before they return to sea.

The navy has also concluded that prior to the submarines returning to sea, additional recommendations need to be completed immediately, specifically those pertaining to improvements to the submarine systems and procedures, which will reduce or prevent this event from occurring in our submarines again. Most importantly, however, the affected cabling insulation has been replaced by water-tight insulation wrapping, which will preclude this type of electrical fire from occurring again. Prior to returning to sea, the boats will also have more fire extinguishers, more medical equipment, and more emergency breathing masks fitted.

I indicated last week in Halifax that HMCS *Victoria* and *Windsor* would return to sea when this work was accomplished, that is, when they were ready in all respects for sea, from a technical, personnel, and matériel perspective, and when the requisite alongside training, under the guidance of the submarine sea training group, was completed.

[Translation]

The most recent recommendations derived from the report are now being implemented. The submarine training group has been on the West Coast since last week and has just completed five days of port training, on board the *Victoria*.

[English]

The Canadian Forces' leadership, the navy leadership, and the submariners are convinced that these boats are the right capability for Canada and are safe and superior submarines.

Your own report on the procurement of Canada's *Victoria* class submarines released last month and this board report will together provide two guideposts for the navy and the Canadian Forces as we put our submarines back into service.

It's very much our pleasure, Mr. O'Brien and committee members, to respond to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Admiral.

Well, let's go right to questions. We'll go with a nice, normal, seven-minute round.

Mr. O'Connor, please.

Mr. Gordon O'Connor (Carleton—Mississippi Mills, CPC): Thank you very much.

Thanks for being here, Admiral.

I haven't had the benefit of reading the report, so I'm going on the basis of what I've heard you and other people say. I just want to focus on one small area.

The boat had both hatches open, which ultimately allowed the water to flow in. Yes, there were technical problems later on, and arcing, and all of that stuff, but as I understand it—and you can correct me—it wasn't a calm sea they were in at that time, but a bit of a rough sea, and the boat kept moving back and forth. I heard that the Royal Navy wouldn't typically run with both of those hatches open in that kind of sea state. I'm not questioning the decisions of the captain, but I just want to know if that's typical of the procedures of the navy with respect to submarines. If it is, are you going to carry on in this way in the future, or have you started to change your procedures? So basically, it's the issue of leaving the hatches open.

● (0910)

VAdm Bruce MacLean: First of all, you've asked an absolutely fundamental question, one that in fact caused me to reconvene the board, which then took another several weeks to complete, because I wanted to understand exactly, or as precisely as I could, what was going on in having both of those hatches open.

However, I'd also like to clarify a couple of points, if I could, just to set the scene a little bit, because it is so vitally important to understand them. First of all, at this particular juncture, the Canadian submarines were following Royal Navy doctrine; we were using the publication called SMP 150, which is in fact the operating procedures manual used by the Royal Navy for this class of submarine. Over the last several years, it has been Canadianized to an extent, but it has been very much a piece of work developed in concert with the Royal Navy.

The most important point to understand about any hatch or hull valve in a submarine is that it is very much at the discretion of the commanding officer as to when he opens or shuts that particular valve; it must be done with his permission. This, of course, is to account for the very significant vulnerabilities associated with all valves and hatches in a submarine—but it is very much at his discretion, or the authority lies very much with the commanding officer. Indeed, no matter where we end up in this, we will always leave that to the discretion of the commanding officer.

I think we should note that during the several months we were engaged in the board, the press speculated significantly that submarines never run opened up, or if they run opened up, they do so only in certain very distinct situations. The reality is that all submarines run opened up a significant amount of the time. If you are entering and leaving harbour, you run opened up. If you're undertaking operations close to land, or even farther from land, where there happens to be a very significant density of contacts with shipping, it's quite possible that the commanding officer will choose to run opened up, because the risk of collision, in his view, potentially outweighs the risk associated with getting some water in his submarine. This of course lies at a very fundamental point of submarine operations, that it is always a matter of balancing risk.

As for the weather conditions at that particular point, the seas were running in the order of about three to four metres, enough to cover the deck, but not really enough to flow much into what we call the fin area, or the conning tower area. So that's not at all unusual for those types of conditions in the month of October off the coast of Ireland.

Just as a final point as well, we can also run opened up when we're preparing the submarine for diving, which generally takes about 15 to 20 minutes. So if it's logical and makes sense, the commanding officer will, on diving the submarine, run opened up—and on surfacing, the same thing applies, where he will run opened up.

The point I'm really trying to make here is that it is not a set piece: "thou shall not run opened up". It is very much at the commanding officer's discretion, and there may be occasions when he wishes to exercise that discretion.

If you now look at what actually happened at that particular juncture, or just prior to the event, some 23 minutes prior to the event, the commanding officer was indeed running his submarine in what we call a shut-down situation, with one hatch open and one hatch shut, which is exactly what we would have anticipated. However, he had a defect or a problem with the upper lid, and he determined that he had to fix that upper lid in order to dive his submarine; it was a compelling issue he had to deal with. He then chose a methodology of running both hatches open; because he did have a compelling reason and the authority to do something, he chose a process allowing him to do that. That, of course, was what we were specifically looking at in this second board, to really understand all the details associated with what he did; what the officers of the watch did; what the repair party did; what the submarine as a whole was doing; and to understand as precisely as possible what the weather conditions were, so we could really understand if what he did was reasonable in the circumstances.

When I look at this type of an issue, I look at four things. First is authority, or did the individual have the authority to do what he did? He clearly did, and indeed there was a compelling reason to do something to fix that particular piece.

Then, who was responsible? In that particular situation, there is no doubt that the commanding officer was absolutely responsible for taking the decision: he ordered the submarine to run opened up.

Who was accountable, and what does accountable mean? Accountability really has two elements associated with it. In the

navy, we have a very high standard in terms of accountability, but it is a range, and not a precision point. Accountability is certainly something we have to look at very carefully with the certitude of hindsight, but it is a high standard, and therefore there may be consequences.

●(0915)

Looking at those consequences drives you to the fourth piece, which is was it reasonable? Did what he did at that particular juncture in time make sense? This was a major feature of the reconvened board, so we could understand as precisely as we could this particular point. In this particular context—and certainly Captain Finn, who was a member of the board, can reinforce this point—we looked very carefully at what other Canadian COs might have done in a similar situation, so we could understand, where were the bounds of reasonableness? At the end of the day, we concluded that what the commanding officer did at that particular juncture in time was reasonable. The environment outside the submarine would not have suggested, in his mind, that he was going to have a problem. The officers of the watches were not concerned. The repair party expressed no concern when they were in the conning tower making this repair. Remember as well, they were there for 23 minutes before we had this one event. After the fire, the submarine continued to run opened up in a worsening sea for another three hours, but without any further ingress of water into the submarine.

So when we took all of that into context, we concluded that, yes, absolutely, the CO was responsible and accountable, but what he did was reasonable in the circumstances as he understood them. Therefore, I indicated to the Chief of the Defence Staff that I was not going to recommend or propose sanction.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thanks, Mr. O'Connor.

Now, Monsieur Bachand.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I salute Vice-Admiral McLean and Captain Finn.

I am one of the rare ones this morning who have their study report. As is the case for any good study by the navy, especially when it deals with technical details, this report is very lengthy. Since the beginning of the inquiry on the submarines, I have had many blames to address to the navy. I know that Vice-Admiral McLean can take a few torpedoes, because he is a man of experience. What disappointed me most in the report, and I don't know if the other members of the committee know this, is that the document is censured. There are complete passages of the document that we don't have. We are members of Parliament, and we often have the ultimate responsibility of talking to families and experts.

As an MP, I have always found it very frustrating to have to say to someone that I don't know. I have carefully reviewed the document, and there are censored passages everywhere. I have here a full page of examples. We cannot know what happened, and here, they're going to tell us what happened and that nobody is to blame. I have serious doubts, Mr. Chairman, notably about the medical aspect.

Page 16 of your document deals with the care of casualties and chronology of medical evacuation. We are told about what the submarine's Physician Assistant did. At one point it reads: "Lt(N) Saunders told the PA that at that time he was...," and the rest is blacked out. What state was Lieutenant Saunders in? We don't know. But we are told that everything was all right, that the physician and his assistant took care of everybody.

Further on, we are told about the awareness of the complexity and seriousness of inhalation injury. It is explained that the PA "recognized that at least three sailors required evacuation, made this clear to command and provided appropriate medical care..." At the end of the paragraph, it is said: "In my view...," and the rest is again blacked out. This continues on the next page: "...gave individuals on board greater confidence than was warranted...," and it's also censored. And this is only the medical aspect.

Now let's talk about technical details, the connectors. We are told that there was no problems with the connectors, but I can't believe nobody expected that, in an aggressive environment, water could get in, and that it could cause what we saw. The entire section on connectors is blacked out, Mr. Chairman.

How can the MPs determine if the submarine was seaworthy? We are told that it was. They are probably also counting on the propensity of MPs not to read the document. That's what surprised me. I will only give you a few examples. I got to page 145, where an entire section deals with insulating. We don't know what happened.

You understand, Mr. Chairman, that I expect explanations on the part of the Vice-Admiral. It makes me very angry, as an MP, not to know the truth. I might as well tell you that, since the beginning of this case, I have not trusted the navy. They intentionally delayed our study for translation reasons. We now have a report. I don't know if they have the same one as us, but ours is completely censored. We won't know what they don't want us to know, unless we force them to give us the complete report, which I would like to have.

● (0920)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Admiral MacLean.

VAdm Bruce MacLean: Thank you very much, Mr. Bachand.

What I would of course like to draw to your attention is that there are really two elements that have caused these points to have been stricken from the actual public record. One is, of course, the Access to Information Act, and the other is the Privacy Act. Those are the only reasons that these have been taken from the text.

We, the navy, have not in fact done that work. That has been done in the context of the department, in recognition of the elements associated with individual privacy, where that pertains. Certainly some of the points you raised in the document regarding Lieutenant

Saunders, I can assure you, Mr. Bachand, are related specifically to some personal details and the access to information piece, where it may affect third-party, commercial, and confidence issues associated with the Royal Navy and the BAE, who in fact provided an enormous amount of assistance to this board in undertaking their work, but also with the proviso that some of the information that would be provided was in fact of a commercial nature or indeed of an operational nature.

So what we have tried to do within the bounds of those restrictions is to provide Canadians with as complete a report as I think you've ever seen from the Canadian Forces and from this department, and to do so in a way that is timely and is as transparent as we possibly can.

The Chair: Okay.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Okay.

I will give you another example. On page 36/145, we are told that there is a sort of resin around the cables. We are told that the second, third and fourth submarines were built in the Cammell Laird shipyard, while the *Chicoutimi* was built in the Barrow-in-Furness shipyard.

One again, Mr. Chairman, we don't know why, but everything is blacked out when it comes to the cable connectors and penetrator connectors. I can't believe that it's normal and that it's a sad accident, because the water came in and spread over these cables, while it should not have fallen on them. In a submarine, if water comes in, there is no way of controlling where it falls.

What you say about confidentiality and BAE's secrets may be true, I grant you, but we, as MPs, have the right to know if the appropriate wiring was there. Unfortunately, with all I have here, I cannot tell. I have not consulted any expert yet, but I think that even an expert could not follow the thread. In fact, when we hit upon something sensitive, it's scored out in black. I repeat that I am very disappointed. According to me, things are being concealed from MPs.

● (0925)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bachand.

[English]

I don't think there's anything else to add. The admiral has explained why there were certain portions blacked out.

Now Mr. Bagnell, please, for seven minutes.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Thank you.

Thank you for coming, and I'd also like to thank your staff for the tour we had when we went to the site. I think they were very open. It was very helpful, and I have no complaints at all with the navy. I think it was very transparent, and I very much appreciate that.

Like General O'Connor, I haven't read the report either, unfortunately, but one of the issues I raised during our hearings, a number of times—and no one could give me any answers—was related to the insulation where a wire connected to the box. I don't need the answers now, but I was delighted to see that you dealt with wiring and insulation. I'm assuming that if there was a problem in that area, which I was trying to get someone to confirm during our hearings, it's all been taken care of and looked at.

VAdm Bruce MacLean: The answer to that is yes, both in the context of where this particular event took place in the commanding officer's cabin and of other areas in the submarine we looked at, particularly where these cables penetrated bulkheads 35 forward and 56 aft, to ensure again that we could not have this type of a recurrence in those areas as well.

I must tell you that when we did that risk analysis, it was considered that the likelihood of having this event at any of those other points was virtually zero. That's what the staff result was to me. Notwithstanding that, I directed them to be completed anyway, just to ensure that we could as much as possible create the conditions where we could ensure the confidence and trust of Canadians.

In other words—and I think this is an important point—this is not just a navy issue. This is an issue that of course affected the Canadian Forces, the department, and reached out into the Canadian public at large.

So there were two balancing points. On one hand, we wanted to ensure that we could preserve and ensure the trust and confidence of our military people at the submarine level, but also reaching up in the Canadian Forces because of the magnitude of this event to ensure that we could ensure that trust and confidence as well. So it was on that basis—to ensure that I could reduce this particular risk in this particular area with this particular type of bulkhead connection to zero—that we went ahead with the procedure.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Great. My question was on the thickness of the insulation, but....

When we did our tour, I was a bit shocked. We were at the base of the conning tower, and I asked the officer who was giving the tour where the fire extinguisher was that covered that area. He didn't know.

I'm assuming everyone doesn't have to know where everything is. I think there was also a question as to where the masks were for that area. So I'm just hoping that when you look at the training or do the training, you make sure that everyone on the sub that might be in a particular area at a particular time knows where the masks and the fire extinguishers would be.

I only raise this because when I asked the question the person didn't know—and maybe he didn't work in that area. I don't need an answer necessarily, but I just hope it will be taken notice of.

VAdm Bruce MacLean: I would like to respond. I'm surprised to hear that, because in order to get one of these badges, these dolphins, it's essential that all our submarine crew throughout that submarine understand their boat to the highest degree possible.

We demand that every one of our sailors, in order to become qualified on a submarine, must understand the various valve set-ups throughout that submarine, which goes well beyond any other level

of expertise that we find in the rest of the navy. The importance of each submariner understanding what to do in an emergency situation, wherever he may be in that submarine, is absolutely vital.

To understand where the emergency breathing system masks are, to understand where the extinguishers are located, to deal with a particular event is absolutely critical. It speaks to the very nature of submarine operations, and we spend an inordinate amount of time dealing with that very issue, first of all in terms of training the individual, and then training that individual as part of a local team, whether it's the electrical team or the engineering team, then finally putting that whole crew together in the same submarine at the same time, and running them through a series of boat-wide evolutions.

What is going on in HMCS *Victoria* even as we speak is day five of this type of case, where the entire boat has been working with single evolutions, one fire in one place, ultimately to several fires in several different places, and with other types of evolutions thrown in so that we can assure ourselves that they have absolutely the right training.

The other thing I would like to note is when this particular incident occurred, you had one of the most difficult situations that you could ever find in a submarine. First of all, a submarine, of course, as you can appreciate, is like this room: there is nowhere you can go. You can at least go out these doors, but you are fundamentally trapped in this room in a submarine. Whether you're on the surface or whether you're dived, you can go nowhere. You must fight that fire from within.

And the second piece to note is that in this particular case we had a fire on one deck, which spread almost immediately to a fire on a second deck. So we now had two fires burning—above and below—the most challenging situation, and all of a sudden we were without any propulsion, without any auxiliary power, with very little communication internally to the boat as well as externally to shore.

This was an unbelievable event, and this crew reacted promptly in exactly the right way and beat this fire.

● (0930)

Hon. Larry Bagnell: That's why I was surprised when I asked the question and I got that answer, so I was just bringing that to your attention.

VAdm Bruce MacLean: Thank you.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Lastly, although you had to black out certain parts of the report—and I haven't read it, so that's why I'm asking—I assume the conclusions were not blacked out, so we as parliamentarians and the Canadian people got the ultimate results of all the analysis. Some of the analysis was blacked out, but we got the results, the conclusions, and the recommendations, so we did get the important part that we needed to know.

VAdm Bruce MacLean: I believe that is correct. I will just check to ensure that's the case, but I'm very confident all the conclusions, all the recommendations that are absolutely critical to understanding this issue, are fully explained.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Okay.

VAdm Bruce MacLean: We have one word, in one of the recommendations, in paragraph 16, on page 123 of 126, and it has absolutely no bearing on the conclusions or the recommendations.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bagnell.

Mr. Blaikie, we're just at the end of round one. Did you have any questions?

Hon. Bill Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): I am only here for the presentations.

The Chair: Very good. I just wanted to give you an opportunity.

Thank you.

Second round, five minutes.

Mr. Casson, please.

Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Just to start off a bit on this information that's been erased, from what we could see by going through the document it had a lot to do with the submariner's condition—Mr. Saunders, who passed away—when he was found, some of the things that transpired when he was being taken off the submarine and lifted out.

Have you looked at what's been presented to us, and the items that have been deleted? Do you feel that anything in there that's been deleted is something this committee should be aware of so that we can make strong recommendations that some of these things that transpired do not happen again, or are you of the view that what's taken place as far as deleting information is concerned is appropriate?

VAdm Bruce MacLean: Mr. Casson, it's my view that the recommendations and conclusions and indeed the story the board tells are not affected by the blacked-out pieces.

I should also let you know something regarding privacy issues. I did have the opportunity to speak with the Saunders family about 48 hours before we released this publicly, and they in fact have a different book. Their book is not blacked out, but in fact details many of those things we have taken out for privacy concerns. So the family has a complete and full understanding as it relates to their particular family member. We believe this is very important.

In looking at the access to information issues, that's one aspect, and then the privacy aspects are quite another. We try to balance this in as fair a way as possible to ensure that Canadians understand what happened and can make sense of the conclusions and recommendations. At the same time, we want to protect the privacy concerns associated with various individuals and address the access to information issues that affect the operation of submarines or the government or the U.K.

• (0935)

Mr. Rick Casson: Could the upper lid have been fixed with the lower lid closed?

VAdm Bruce MacLean: Yes, it could.

Mr. Rick Casson: Was that an option that was explored?

VAdm Bruce MacLean: It was an option that could have been considered. I think again, when we reconvened this board, this was one of the things I wanted to understand as completely as I possibly could.

What were the options available to the commanding officer? Why did he choose the option that he in fact chose?

Remember one thing: we are doing this dissection, if you like, with the certitude of hindsight, whereas of course in the commanding officer's case, he was there on the plates trying to move his submarine forward to a particular diving position, in deteriorating weather conditions, and trying to fix the upper lid. He wouldn't have known, right from the very beginning, that he could have fixed that with the upper lid shut until he had fully understood what the situation was with that particular defect.

Mr. Rick Casson: So the submarine had not been submerged and they were preparing to submerge at that time?

VAdm Bruce MacLean: They had not submerged.

Mr. Rick Casson: Since they had left port.

VAdm Bruce MacLean: That's right.

Mr. Rick Casson: Then you said that they left the towers open for three hours after the incident. Was that to help get the smoke out of the place?

VAdm Bruce MacLean: In part. It wasn't quite as simple as that. In the first few minutes after the fire started, one of the individuals in the conning tower—and please jump in if I have this wrong, Pat—was not able to get down into the submarine because of smoke, so he went to the bridge, but the hatch was open. The commanding officer at that juncture did not know that to be the case. In fact, later when he deemed it important to clear smoke from the submarine, one of the things he wanted to do was to open that upper lid to create a vacuum so he could evacuate the smoke. He indeed ordered an additional sailor to go and do that, and when the sailor went through the conning tower he found that the hatch was open.

The point is that during that three-hour period when they were dealing with the fire and the after-effects of the fire, that submarine had both hatches open.

Mr. Rick Casson: Some of the pictures that we've seen indicate there was extreme heat. I think your report says that because some of the fixtures were melted, you could figure out what the temperatures were by seeing exactly what melted.

When a fire happens, there are three things you need: fuel, oxygen, and ignition. In order to put a fire out, you've got to take one of those away. Now, you indicated that the submarine is one big room. We were on the *Windsor*, as you know, when we went out to Halifax. Is there no way that at some point in time when you realize that it's life-threatening you can isolate those compartments and take the oxygen out of them and kill the fire that way? Is that part of the fire training that goes on or some of the rationale that has to be thought through?

VAdm Bruce MacLean: Well, the answer is kind of a combination of yes and no. The most essential thing to do in a fire in a submarine is to get it out as fast as you possibly can. First aid attack teams are the most critical piece of all. But at the same time you can do other things to deal with the emergency if you suspect, for example, it's an electrical fire. One of the things you might do is open the main power breakers. In this case, they had already been tripped, so that piece had already occurred. In fact, in this particular situation, the energy released just prior and just around the time of those breakers tripping was intense, sufficient to melt the steel deck in between the one deck down and the two deck, which I think was somewhere around 1,500 degrees Centigrade. So it is significant, but the energy associated with that was also stopped as soon as those breakers were tripped. Then you would have to deal with some of the secondary issues with vetting and improving and so on.

So yes, the answer is you do try very much to isolate the issue as best you can, but at the same time it's the fast reaction that is in all probability going to make the difference in a situation like that.

Mr. Rick Casson: It's been indicated to us that some training went on before the boat left for sea, and two additional days of training were requested. Did that request come from the crew? How did that happen, or why?

VAdm Bruce MacLean: It's not a precise science, in terms of exactly how long it's going to take the submarine crew to reach the standard as set by, in this case, the Royal Navy submarine sea training group. As I recall, in one simulated flooding evolution where you drive the submarine to the surface, they had not dealt with that to exactly the level the submarine sea training group thought was appropriate. Therefore they did that one again and took another couple of days to get that particular evolution correct. But they did reach the standard, and that's the important piece.

Again, sometimes this takes a little less than four or five days, and sometimes it takes a little bit longer. The point is that we had a process, both in Canada and in this case with the Royal Navy, before we took these submarines, to ensure that those emergency standards were met by individuals, by the various section-based teams, and most importantly by the crew as a whole.

• (0940)

Mr. Rick Casson: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Casson.

We have time for a third round, if the committee wants to do that.

Mr. Martin is next, please, for five minutes.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Thank you, Admiral, and Captain Finn, for being here today. Congratula-

tions, Captain Finn, for what must have been a very difficult job but a job well done.

Under the circumstances, the loss of Chris Saunders must have been a particularly poignant moment for you as a submariner.

I think the response from our submariners in these difficult circumstances was a testament to their excellence and their training. I also hope that comments were sent to the Royal Navy and the United States for their profound actions under very difficult circumstances to help the *Chicoutimi*, particularly reviewing what the helicopter pilot did for the U.K.—that was really very heroic on that chopper pilot's part.

I believe an assessment was done by the United Kingdom to look at the possibility of water ingress in a submarine—it was the Frazer-Nash assessment. Perhaps you could speak to us, Admiral, a little bit about that assessment, which couldn't have envisioned what actually transpired on the *Chicoutimi*, but the issue was looked at through this assessment.

VAdm Bruce MacLean: I'm going to turn this over to Pat. He is an engineer by background as well, and can probably give you the most detailed response to that question.

Capt(N) Patrick Finn: There was an assessment done by a company called Frazer-Nash, along with some Royal Navy personnel and some Canadians. They looked at all of the vulnerabilities of the submarine. It was called a safety case assessment.

If I could just perhaps take a broader view of this, the reality of submarine design is extremely complicated. When you look at all the factors you need to bring to bear—fire retardancy, noise, and redundancy—there is a very complex set of requirements to fulfil. In the context of the submarines we're talking about here, you have about 200 tonnes of reserve buoyancy, so that's about 200 cubic metres of water—maybe a quarter of the size of this room. That's how much water it takes to sink a submarine. So when you're doing an assessment of all the requirements of the submarine, this becomes a very big issue.

Fundamentally, the interior of the submarine is not waterproof. Other equipment is not waterproof. Where this incident took place—the deck below it, our switchboards were full of bare copper—by virtue of ventilation, heat, and other things, you fundamentally can't make these things waterproof. When you look at the design, they just really can't be made waterproof.

On what happened here, Frazer-Nash looked at it and talked about water coming in. They talked about personnel, in the sense that if there was ingress and someone was at the foot of the tower, or if the deck was slippery, what would come of it. They believed, as did we and the designers, that if you had a large ingress of water you would have a much greater problem if it exceeded 200 tonnes, but otherwise circuit breakers and other systems would kick in and deal with the electrical aspects of it. That was the belief, from the design, of what would happen here.

In their assessment they looked at it and did not foresee this problem whatsoever. It was fundamentally a unique set of circumstances, and very difficult for us to recreate. We got outside expertise from industry to help us look at the issue. Fundamentally, in this case there was a specific amount of water. Had there been more water, the insulation likely would have been more permeated and the circuit breakers might have tripped sooner. Had there been a little less water, it might not have had the same effect. So it was a unique set of circumstances that we would be hard-pressed to predict. Not surprisingly, the designers did not predict them whatsoever, and they were not revealed in the safety case assessment.

• (0945)

Hon. Keith Martin: Thank you.

Perhaps looking forward, Admiral MacLean, for the release of the subs, when do you anticipate this will occur?

Vadm Bruce MacLean: There are several conditions that have to be in place before we put our submarine fleet back to sea. Particularly we're talking about HMCS *Victoria* on the west coast and HMCS *Windsor* on the east coast.

First and foremost are those recommendations that, as I indicated in my opening statement, are fundamental to the safety associated with what caused this event or indeed what we want to ensure is in place before these boats go back to sea, whether we're talking about additional medical equipment, more carbon dioxide fire extinguishers, or more breathing apparatus. Particularly, of course, the right insulation in this particular area underneath the captain's cabin is essential. So that must be done, and indeed it is done now.

The second piece is that these boats are already in a standard cycle of operations and maintenance, and we don't change that. So they're currently in a maintenance cycle, and we have to ensure that all the material and technical features associated with bringing those boats back, preparing them for sea, are in fact completed. So that would be the normal business.

Then the third piece is that because these submarines have not been to sea now for about seven months, you can't take these boats and just sail them out of the harbour. They have to go through a very rigorous assessment, what we call a staff-assisted assessment, from the submarine sea training group, both alongside and then when they go to sea. For the first several of these days at sea, we carry on with the same types of evolution. You do it sort of like on dry land first, and then you do it in practice to ensure that whether we're talking about a single type of emergency or a multiple emergency, this team is cohesive, it's well worked, and they can deal with whatever kind of circumstance comes up.

We expect that the west coast submarine, HMCS *Victoria*, could be ready as early as tomorrow, but I am waiting for a report from the west coast to assure me that those particular pieces are done. Then that submarine will sail and will carry on with another several days, and on completion of that, when the sea training group is satisfied that this boat has met the required standards, we will allow her to go into a more operational pattern.

So it's a very prudent, very measured approach to putting these submarines back to sea.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Martin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Desrochers, you have five minutes.

Mr. Odina Desrochers (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, BQ): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

To my knowledge, it seems that our party is the only one that took steps to get the report my colleague has with him.

I would like to tell you about our experience.

[*English*]

Mr. Rick Casson: We have one. It was delivered yesterday.

The Chair: Maybe we can pause for a second on this point, because there have been a couple of questions.

To the clerk, did the parties request the report, or can we access the report now?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Angela Crandall): As far as I know, the report is on the website. It's a public document. No requests were made to my office, so I perhaps wrongly assumed that members' offices would provide them with copies of the report from the site.

The Chair: We all know this was made public on Friday—correct?—in Halifax. We all received our notices of meeting yesterday—or at least I did. It didn't have a written report. If I had wanted that, I could have accessed it a number of ways. I understand that some members did do that and other members didn't. We can certainly make sure that colleagues get a copy of that report, but I understand it was pretty readily available on the website—

The Clerk: As soon as it was made public.

The Chair: —as soon as it was made public on Friday.

I'm not going to take that out of your time, Monsieur Desrochers. We'll start over now and I'll give you five minutes, because that was a procedural point that I think was worth clarifying.

After everybody has looked at the report, if it is the wish of this committee to invite our witnesses back, I'm sure they would be willing. We don't want to drag this on forever and ever, but essentially, we all could have had the report for the meeting today if it had been a pressing point for us.

[Translation]

Okay. Mr. Desrochers, you have five minutes.

Mr. Odina Desrochers: I apologize to my colleagues who had already got it. I could say to my Liberal colleagues that I didn't see it on the desks in front of me.

I would like to talk about the Access to Information Act. Mr. Chairman, I sat on the Standing Committee on Public Accounts last spring, and we were often confronted with reports that had blacked out passages; pages had been blacked out on the pretext of protecting the identity of certain people.

We referred to the Access to Information Act and, in the vast majority of cases, individuals were involved, not numbers or technical elements. So I share my colleague's frustration, because I've come to the conclusion that it's not about Mr. Saunders but about the state of the submarine. We don't have all the information on the state of the submarine. The Canadian navy is trying to evade its responsibilities in this tragedy. You tell us that, in the case of this report, it's about protecting individuals, but according to the brief overview my colleague gave me, it's only about technical elements. As far as I know, technical elements are what the committee and Parliament need to correct the existing situation, and especially to make recommendations to avoid any repetition.

Some tools are missing this morning, and I would like to understand why these facts were concealed. Who made that decision? Will we ever have access to all the truth contained in this document? Will we ever have all the elements that led you to the conclusions you published last Friday?

● (0950)

[English]

VAdm Bruce MacLean: Thank you again, Monsieur Desrochers.

I certainly understand as we read through this that those particular places are not clear. Again, I can only reiterate that this was not a navy position. This was in fact a departmental position in terms of both access to information and privacy, and we went through those points very carefully to ensure that we could provide the board with absolute transparency and clarity. We want it. We very much want at this board to be on the website as soon as possible. In fact, that was accomplished. The moment I was speaking was the moment that this was on the website.

That being said, though, we also have to deal with and abide by the rules associated with the Access to Information Act and the Privacy Act. We have attempted to maintain as closely as possible that particular balance. What I can say to you, certainly standing here from the navy point of view, is that the recommendations and conclusions, and indeed our sense of the whole report, are not fettered by those particular points.

[Translation]

Mr. Odina Desrochers: Who, at the department, had the power to censure this document? Is it at the minister's discretion? The deputy minister's? We want to know.

You tell us that it's the department that decided that certain passages should not be published. Who has that power at the department?

[English]

VAdm Bruce MacLean: It is part of the responsibility of the department as a whole. I could certainly take that back with me and provide you with the exact details. I would be hesitant to give specifically that information, because I'm not as aware of it, other than the context that this is a departmental decision, with input of course from the navy. But the decision is a departmental one, not a navy one. I'll be delighted to take that back.

[Translation]

Mr. Odina Desrochers: I believe this file was distributed to several people. However, someone obviously made a decision. The decision was not made by a group of individuals. Was it the minister? I ask you the question.

Do you know how it's done in other similar cases? If we don't get an answer, Mr. Chairman, we will go to the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces to find out who decided that passages of the report would be blacked out, and that only part of the information would be made available to the members of the committee.

[English]

The Chair: That's a valid question, Monsieur Desrochers. I think Admiral MacLean has indicated that he can't give you that answer right now, but we can certainly ask through him, through the parliamentary secretary, through any number of ways. I could undertake to write to the minister. We could pass a motion. There are a number of ways we can request from DND exactly who made the decision to black out certain passages. So we can pursue that. We will pursue that. Thank you.

Next is Mr. Kahn, five minutes.

● (0955)

Mr. Wajid Khan (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Gentlemen, I want to thank you for being here today. These emergencies and tragedies happen around the world—air force, army, navy. Nevertheless, we have criticized you, and rightly so. Concern has been shown. However, I also want to compliment the navy and the crew for limiting the damage and loss of life.

There have been some issues raised with respect to the emergency equipment—foam nozzle going off, masks that did not function. The board of inquiry recommends that immediate changes be made. I'd like you to highlight any changes you mean to add to the emergency procedures or equipment on these submarines. Will it be on all of them, or one of them?

These subs were out of commission for a number of years, and the training was conducted by private contractors. Are you satisfied with the training?

It's also my understanding that the *Chicoutimi* was one of the better-prepared submarines. Could you shed some light on the state of the others? Have you already implemented the changes to the firefighting equipment and other emergency procedures? You were trained with the naval procedures. How are the Canadian procedures different, and would they have prevented this accident?

Vadm Bruce MacLean: Thank you very much, Mr. Khan.

In the context of equipment additions, as I've already indicated, there are certainly going to be some changes. Before I even start there, let me talk about the emergency breathing system.

I'm going to go back to when I was a commanding officer in an Oberon class submarine, which of course was the predecessor to this submarine. Although we would not have expected this particular fire to have started in the same way on an Oberon as it did in this particular class, what I can tell you is that if we'd had this kind of smoke situation in the Oberon class submarine, we would have been in a very difficult and more challenging situation. This boat is significantly superior to the Oberon class submarine in terms of its overall capacity and capability to deal with fires, and particularly in the sense of these emergency breathing systems.

This emergency breathing system saved this submarine crew. It worked. It did what it was designed to do. That's not say that it worked perfectly. In one case there was one piece of the mask that was defective, and that caused some smoke inhalation for one of the individuals. But fundamentally, this system proved its worth in this particular case.

Having gone through this, we now believe we should add more masks. One of the difficulties some of the individuals had is when they were plugging into the system. Some people had trouble finding a part of this system that was free and accessible, so we've increased the number of plug-in points that we will actually have. Those are two relatively straightforward but very effective ways of dealing with this in the future.

We found that there indeed was sufficient firefighting equipment to deal with both these fires, but the reserve left for the submarine crew, particularly with respect to carbon dioxide extinguishers, was less than.... We think we could do better, so in fact we're going to increase that.

The number of smoke casualties we had, nine—three of which were serious and six of which were less serious—suggested that we probably need more oxygen on board the submarine. Bearing in mind that, again, a submarine is a very small space, we believe we can put some more capability in there.

So we have learned, I think, a great deal from this particular piece. But I want to highlight again that the very nature of this submarine, in terms of its capacity from a structural perspective to deal with this fire, was really quite outstanding. Within the proximity of where this electrical event took place, within about a metre, is a high-pressure hydraulic line, roughly 3,000 pounds per square inch. You can imagine what would have happened if that line had actually broken.

In the Oberon class submarine, the connection pieces had O-rings, which are very simplistic and very easy but not very useful, not very good, if it's close to a fire. These particular submarines have a VICOLET connection, which is really a weld. It's far superior, and they experienced no problems whatsoever with these particular lines.

All that is to say that from my own experience in an Oberon class submarine compared to this submarine, this submarine is very much superior in so many different ways.

On training, the training package that was put into place before these submarines returned to Canada was very much operated with Royal Navy officers as part of the submarine sea training organization. So the people who were involved in this were very much people who were very familiar with submarine operations in general, and these particular submarines in particular.

But you do raise a point in terms of the institutional memory. There is no question that this particular aspect had not disappeared, but indeed it was more fragile, particularly more fragile as time went on. But at no stage were the Canadian authorities, who were there on the spot watching and monitoring every part of this, at all concerned. In fact, we were very impressed throughout in terms of the training that was provided by the Royal Navy.

Again, I think the proof is very much in terms of how the ship's company dealt with these particular fires on two separate decks.

• (1000)

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Khan.

Now I come over to Mr. Casson, please, for five minutes.

Mr. Rick Casson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Admiral, the *Chicoutimi* was built, we understand, at a different dock. Are there substantial differences between it and the other three as far as the basic layout and design? Have you had unique problems with it? I understand it was the most problematic—of course, I think it was in service the longest—when Britain had it. So are there any fundamental failures or deficiencies that the *Chicoutimi* had that the others didn't?

Vadm Bruce MacLean: Let me answer that, and then I'm going to turn it over to Captain Finn.

This submarine, which was the first in its class, was built in Barrow. The other three submarines, numbers two, three, and four, were built at Cammell Laird. There had been some earlier speculation that perhaps the boats that were built in Cammell Laird were built to a better or a different specification.

Certainly, as it pertains to this particular fire, particularly the cabling associated with this particular class of submarine, we wanted to understand exactly whether there were in fact any differences between the two yards. Were there substantial differences in terms of how this boat was prepared in this particular area, versus the other three?

With that, Pat, I turn it over to you.

Capt(N) Patrick Finn: The boat design, of course, was done in Barrow, where the Royal Navy were at the time, and they continued to build most of their submarines. Again, they had a lot of experience in Barrow. The issue was on the potential number of Upholders that were going to be built. The Royal Navy determined that they needed a second yard to take this on.

It's not uncommon. It's a similar approach to the one that we used when building the Canadian patrol frigates, where we split the building of them. The design was done in Saint John, and then some of the ships were actually built in Lévis, Quebec.

The layout, details, performance, and standards remained the same. In fact, we were told by people who participated that there was a fair bit of oversight because of people going from Barrow to Cammell Laird to make sure there was consistency.

There were some areas that created some differences, be it equipment, skill sets, or experience. One area that certainly drew our attention was the insulation of the bulkhead penetrators, where the fire took place. The fact that the ones that were on the three subsequent submarines had a shiny exterior is the best way to describe it. We wanted to know if that had made a difference in the performance or the outcome on this particular submarine.

As the admiral has said, this has all been re-insulated on two of the boats, and the material has been removed from all four boats. We took samples of all four boats and sent them off to one of our labs for testing. The bottom line is that the performance in each case is exactly the same.

We went back, largely through documentation, to try to find out what the difference was. We determined that at the yard in Cammell Laird they were having difficulty mixing the sublative elastomer, as it's called, which is the insulation material, and in curing it. It's mixed under a vacuum. It's quite complex. When they would apply it, it would not cure in the same way.

To bring it up to the same performance standard as the material that was installed in the then Upholder, in the *Chicoutimi*, they added an external resin on the actual elastomer. The diffusion, water penetration, insulation, and fire retardancy in both cases performed in the same way. In our estimation, in both cases it was designed to be splash-proof. In other words, you could go in there with a firehose to put out a fire, but it was certainly not designed to be waterproof.

That was one example, but as far as the layout of the submarine, the equipment, design, and performance, the two yards were otherwise operating at the same standard.

•(1005)

Mr. Rick Casson: Thank you.

On another issue, when we look around the table, the only person who wouldn't be able to wear a self-contained breathing apparatus to fight a fire would be Mr. Blaikie. It's not because of his size, it's because of his beard. Has anything been done about that? You cannot properly seal a face mask on somebody who has a beard.

We've heard some media talk on this. Are you changing that type of thing? Are you looking at all these types of details to make sure that when it does happen—and hopefully it will never happen again—these guys are really protected?

VAdm Bruce MacLean: There are a couple of points that I'd like to clarify. First of all, there were no smoke inhalation casualties caused by anyone's having a beard. These were caused because the individual wasn't able to reach his mask quickly enough. In one case, there was a problem with one of the masks. In another, a man removed his mask so he could open the upper lid for the commanding officer. No casualties were caused by beards. Indeed, there were individuals with beards whose emergency breathing systems functioned well. They are a demand system, so their performance saved lives.

That said, there is an important issue here. In 2003 the navy looked at our beard policy and confirmed that we would allow sailors to wear beards at sea, as long as we were not putting them into an area we considered hostile and dangerous. For example, when we went to the Gulf, the order was given that all beards were to be shaved off. Over the last several months, even before the *Chicoutimi* incident, I asked for this to be revisited. I want to understand in as much detail as possible the implications of wearing beards at sea. I want to learn how they affect fighting fires, the use of self-contained breathing apparatus, and exposure to hazardous materials, which require another ensemble our sailors have to wear.

From a due diligence point of view, I want to be sure that I'm not putting any of our sailors at undue risk. It seems trivial, but the idea of a beard and a sailor is as old as time. This tradition is known by our sailors and they want to follow it. Even so, I will never sacrifice safety for tradition. So bear with me till I complete my analysis. Over the next few months, I will be making my views known. This is not a submarine issue; it is a general naval issue.

•(1010)

Hon. Bill Blaikie: I'm glad to hear that beards haven't been killed yet, and that the possibility of a naval career is still ahead of me.

You were asked whether you had any consultations with the minister when you were deciding what was to be blacked out. It seemed to me you didn't really answer that question. You said it was a departmental thing, which doesn't tell us whether you talked to the minister or not. You're the admiral and the minister is the minister. Were there discussions between the two of you about what would be withheld?

VAdm Bruce MacLean: At no time did the minister and I personally talk about these matters. We were working to provide as much transparency and clarity as possible to the Canadian public, subject to those elements associated with the Privacy Act and the Access to Information Act. I'd be pleased to take this back and provide the committee with a full understanding of how the process works.

Hon. Bill Blaikie: I think I understand the privacy thing, but perhaps you could explain the access to information, because access to information is about access to information. I can understand why the Privacy Act keeps information from us, but I can't understand why the Access to Information Act keeps us from accessing information.

VAdm Bruce MacLean: In the broadest context, of course, that's what the Access to Information Act provides. Instead of providing no information, each department in fact is obliged by law to provide as much information as possible on a particular subject. In this case it might be a memo, or in this case it might be a report. But in doing so, there are some rule sets.

Some of the rule sets could involve operational implications that are affecting the security of the country. For example, if there is something in this report, a technical detail that could be construed as being important to the security of the submarine or in fact could be a vulnerability, then that probably wouldn't be released. I don't believe in this particular case that's the situation.

But there certainly are issues of proprietary and third party information, particularly as provided by the Royal Navy or, as I indicated, BAE. Some of the testimony, some of the information provided was under the strict and express view by the Ministry of Defence and the BAE that this was in fact proprietary information.

Again, I would say there certainly are passages in this text that have been excised, but we have done our very best to ensure that has been limited to the absolute minimum. When I say "we", I mean that in the broadest corporate we.

The Chair: Mr. Blaikie.

Hon. Bill Blaikie: Mr. Chairman, I think this is probably not so much a question for the admiral, but a response. I would bet that a congressional committee in the United States of America would have access to the uncensored report. It just goes to show how right from the beginning... And it's not the admiral's fault; it's the whole Canadian political culture and how members of Parliament are treated like mushrooms. We get the information that people decide we should get, and we don't get the information that other people decide we shouldn't get.

I don't see why in a mature political culture we could not have had an uncensored briefing, perhaps even a copy that we could read and turn in or whatever the procedures are, in camera, without staff, whatever, so that we could know, because some of these proprietary issues could actually go to the heart of the matter of what we were trying to look at in our earlier report as to the nature of what was purchased in the first place. These BAE...basically anything that might be of interest in that regard, we can't see. So the darkness continues.

I think the Canadian public probably has a much higher expectation of what members of Parliament ought to be able to know on their behalf.

•(1015)

The Chair: I would share that perception. It's been my experience, in 12 years here, that people think MPs have a lot more power, if you want to use that word, than we necessarily have.

Hon. Bill Blaikie: Or even access.

The Chair: In fairness, I know your comments weren't directed to Admiral MacLean. As he indicated, he has to work within the parameters that are there for him in his position, and like it or not, I guess, so do we.

I second, to some extent, your concerns about... Many times in the past, and on both sides of this table, we've talked about greater involvement of parliamentarians and greater level of expertise to be built up. I would simply ask Mr. Blaikie and my colleagues to consider that we can pass any motion or make any kind of formal statement we want out of this committee about the very points that you and other members have expressed. So I'll leave that for the committee's consideration.

I don't see any other questions.

At this point, Admiral MacLean, I'd like to understand what you said to Mr. Casson, because I don't know if I got it correctly. As to the second hatch being open while the repairs were going on, did the captain realize, or did he not, that he could have had the one hatch

closed and still done his repairs? Did he know that from the start, or did he become aware of that at some point?

VAdm Bruce MacLean: It was always in his analysis, in terms of what could have been done. What he chose to do, fundamentally, was to complete the repair as quickly as possible. That was his assessment of the situation. That's what he wanted to focus on, and therefore he took the decision to run with both hatches open.

Again, with the certitude of hindsight and with a much better understanding of what subsequently transpired, technically speaking, there was another way he could have done that. As ironic as this sounds, when the wave did in fact wash over, it so happened that the second individual of the repair team was exiting through that second hatch at exactly the point when the water came through. So even if he had done that, all else being equal, it's quite possible we might have had the same result, in any case. I wouldn't want to focus on that specific piece. He did have another way he could have dealt with this. He chose to run opened up. That was his decision. That's, of course, what we are asking our commanding officers to do.

I'm always very careful when I'm looking at what a commanding officer at sea does. I sit here; he's out there. If we fundamentally believe that what an individual is doing is reasonable, then that's fine. But if we question to the point where our commanding officers are always hesitant, or looking over their shoulders, then those aren't the kinds of commanding officers that I want. We want them to be safe. We want them to be prudent. We want them to make reasonable decisions. We have to be very careful as well. In this case the board concluded that what was done was reasonable. I have to be very careful, then, if I take a decision that is contrary to it, because it will send a very powerful signal as well.

The Chair: I understand that. I agree that the last thing we would want is paralysis by analysis of somebody in a dangerous situation like that. I'm certainly not in any way second-guessing the captain. In fact, if the inquiry has essentially supported his decision-making, then I for one accept that, and I think most Canadians will.

I just want to understand exactly what your answer was to Mr. Casson. I wonder how far he was from the nearest.... Was there any consideration given to possibly returning to port? Were the seas not sufficiently stormy that this was even considered? I just wonder how practical that was. I don't know how far out to sea he was.

•(1020)

VAdm Bruce MacLean: I think it was about 100 miles off the coast. To return to Faslane, which is the port from which he came, it would have taken about 24 hours.

The Chair: I meant, wasn't there a closer one? Couldn't he have gone to land quicker than having to go all the way back to Faslane? Could he not have gone to the closest land?

VAdm Bruce MacLean: He perhaps could have, but I think in his assessment, he wanted to investigate, he wanted to determine how difficult this was. When they did the investigation, they determined they could in fact deal with this in situ. They literally completed the repair at about the time that the wave washed over, so it was about a 23-minute job.

In all fairness to the CO, at this particular juncture I think that dealing with this particular issue right there and then was the right thing to do. I wouldn't say it was trivial, but as small an issue as it may seem, the reality is, without that particular repair being completed, that would have then ensured that the tower between the two hatches would have filled with water, which of course would not have been a good thing.

Capt(N) Patrick Finn: It's important to understand that it's a pretty common practice, and the terminology we use is "investigate and repair". When the repair team was assembled and this all started, other than the fact that they had a brass nut, they really did not know the extent of the issue. So the repair team was sent up to investigate.

At that point, they go up and the captain doesn't know if they're going to go up and come back down in a few minutes and say "Sir, in fact the thing has completely let go and the spring is gone; it's not repairable at sea." Then he is at a decision point. Does he continue to transit to Canada only on the surface? Does he have to go back to Faslane? Does he go back to a point of land?

So this was really at the early stage—to go up and investigate it. When they got there, they realized it was a relatively simply problem in what is an agricultural valve. It's literally a stem, a spring, and a lever, and they knew that they could take it apart, clean it, reassemble it, and tighten it up. Literally, they proceeded to do that.

Although he knew he had other options with the tower, he knew that he was reaching his diving point and that worse weather was setting in, and with the lower lid shut it would have affected communications. If the repair party needed spares or tools, they would have had to go through a very complex procedure of getting permission to cycle down. So this was a decision of assessing the environment, believing it prudent to run opened up—it was expedient to do so—and the repair team told us that yes, they knew they were going up to investigate, they realized the repair was fairly quick to do, and they did so.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Are there more questions? We can have a full third round, colleagues, or we can just give everybody another question. What's your pleasure? Do you want to start a full third round?

Mr. Rick Casson: Sure.

The Chair: Okay, we'll start a third round, then. It starts with Mr. Casson anyway, for five minutes. You don't have to use your time slots.

Mr. Casson.

Mr. Rick Casson: Mr. Chairman, in response to a question earlier, when I asked the admiral if the information blacked out in this report would in any way affect our ability to have a proper assessment and to do the things that are right as far as the recommendations are concerned, his indication to me, I believe, was no. However, there seems to be a lot of concern here as to what isn't there. So in order to clear that all up, can we as a committee—I'm asking you as the chairman—request an uncensored report from the department? And if that request is denied, can we not then have whoever's responsible for doing what was done appear before the committee to publicly answer those questions?

The Chair: My answer is yes and yes. We certainly can do that. Unless there's any objection, we could have a formal motion today to do that.

Mr. Rick Casson: I'd like to move that, if we can, if possible.

The Chair: It is moved by Mr. Casson that this.... Exactly what do you want to do, Rick?

Mr. Rick Casson: I'd like to request from the department a copy or copies of an uncensored report—a report in full. Further to that, if that request is denied for any reason, I would like someone, probably the minister, to appear and explain to us why that information was not made available.

The Chair: Seconded by Mr. Blaikie.

Hon. Bill Blaikie: Mr. Chairman, in seconding, could I say that perhaps we should be saying it should be given to the committee in confidence.

• (1025)

The Chair: Given to the committee—

Hon. Bill Blaikie: Mr. Casson's motion should say that an uncensored copy of the board of inquiry report be given to the committee in confidence.

Mr. Rick Casson: Absolutely.

The Chair: In confidence, yes. Sure.

Just a second now. Point of order. Go ahead.

Hon. Keith Martin: Can we do this after the witnesses go, Mr. Chairman? They're here to give their input on the schedule.

The Chair: That's a valid point. I didn't anticipate...but that's fine.

Let me say this. We have the opportunity for a third round of questions, and I know that the witnesses are certainly going to be as available to the committee as they can be within the timeframe of the committee. We can hold this in abeyance and go back to questions. We'll certainly return to Mr. Casson's motion, but we don't want to hold the witnesses for something that is not relevant to them. Is there a desire to ask more questions?

I'll take your motion and we'll deal with it a little later, Rick.

Let's go back to opportunities for further questions, if there are any, of Admiral MacLean and Captain Finn. Then we will excuse them for their other duties and we'll get back to this motion and our other committee business.

Are there any other questions?

Mr. Rick Casson: I'll pass.

The Chair: I'll just stick to our order.

Monsieur Bachand.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand: There's something I'd like to know. Will we be sitting in camera later, when the witnesses will have left?

[English]

The Chair: Yes, that's my intention. Given the nature of this discussion, I would propose that when the witnesses are finished, we would go in camera, Monsieur Bachand, for the second part.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand: I disagree. I'm tired of in camera sessions. We can't say anything any more here. I think the public should know, through the minutes of our meetings, which they have access to, that the members of the committee are not happy, and that they want the minister to come and explain the situation.

I say it publicly.

[English]

The Chair: Oh, I think you just did that. We're in open session right now. There's no intention by me, by the chairman, to hide anything. You'll recall how determined I am that the committee work in open session. The fact that the committee wants to.... I won't go in camera unless it's the consensus of the committee.

Hon. Keith Martin: Point of order.

The Chair: Point of order, yes.

Hon. Keith Martin: These issues are procedural issues that relate to the functioning of this committee. They do not have any relevance to Admiral MacLean and Captain Finn. Out of respect for our witnesses, I think we ought to finish the job we came here to do, finish the interviewing taking place right now, and then we can get to the procedural issues.

The Chair: I agree with that. I do agree with that. I think that—
[Translation]

Mr. Odina Desrochers: I raise a point of order, Mr. Chairman.

[English]

The Chair: Point of order.

[Translation]

Mr. Odina Desrochers: I want us to continue in open session. We said we would discuss committee work, but there is a risk if we go in camera, as my colleague said.

I know that the witnesses have things to say, and I want to make sure it will be public, Mr. Chairman.

[English]

The Chair: We will deal with that.

Suddenly there's some great fear the committee does not want to do its work openly, and that is not a founded fear. You know full well, colleagues, in all fairness, that I operate this committee publicly as much as possible. If there's a desire of the committee to continue the rest of the meeting in open session, that's what we'll do. There's no problem with that whatsoever.

But I do agree with Mr. Martin. This is the last time I'm going to make the request, or I'm going to excuse the witnesses. Are there other questions from any colleague about why the witnesses are here? If not, let's excuse them so they can get on with their duties, and then we'll continue with our duties.

Mr. Khan, yours is the only hand I see. I'm going to give you the last question and then release our witnesses.

Mr. Wajid Khan: It's very short and very brief.

Admiral, you said something or hinted at what was blacked out, and my understanding was—perhaps you can tell me that again—it was pertaining to an individual. It was a personal thing about one of the sailors; it was about personnel. Were any technical details pertaining to this inquiry also blacked out? What was actually blacked out?

VAdm Bruce MacLean: There are two elements, Mr. Khan. One is privacy, which deals with individuals, and there is a second piece, which is access to information, which can cover a wide range of issues that could be technical or pertain to an operational third party.

Mr. Wajid Khan: Thanks.

The Chair: Seeing no other questions for the witnesses, I want to thank you very much, Admiral MacLean and Captain Finn, for being here and shedding light on this important topic.

Let me just say on behalf of all members of the committee from all parties that given the tragic fire that did take place and the very unfortunate death of Lieutenant Saunders, from that point on, once the fire took place, it's my view, and our colleagues agree, that the crew on board the *Chicoutimi* acted with great dispatch, with great courage, and perhaps even with heroism. I hope that's pursued by naval authorities when the time is right. Unfortunately, accidents do happen, and in this case it resulted in a very tragic death, but once that accident took place, I think the people on that submarine acted in an exemplary fashion, and we hope you will convey that feeling of our committee to those people.

Thank you very much for being here.

• (1030)

VAdm Bruce MacLean: Thank you for those words, Mr. O'Brien.

Indeed, we are now looking very carefully at exactly that. You're absolutely correct that the submarine crew performed in an exemplary fashion.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now, colleagues, there's a bell ringing right now, so there's a vote. It's still just a 30-minute bell. Once we hear the two rings, we'll know it's 15 minutes, and then when it gets to three rings, we'll know it's five minutes. So let's continue.

Question?

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): I'd like to second Mr. Casson's motion.

The Chair: No, it's already been seconded by Mr. Blaikie.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: I'm sorry, I didn't hear you, Mr. Blaikie.

The Chair: Thank you very much, gentlemen.

We'll move on our with our business. I want to go to Mr. Casson's motion, seconded by Mr. Blaikie.

You know the rules. For a motion to be presented that way, I assumed there was unanimous consent. If there's not unanimous consent, then we would have to have the 48-hour notice period. Is there unanimous consent?

A voice: No.

The Chair: There's not unanimous consent.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Odina Desrochers: Continue to hide things.

[*English*]

The Chair: Let's try to get through, now. What I'm going to do, then, as chair, is I'm going to take this as verbal notice of motion from Mr. Casson and Mr. Blaikie. It needs to be written up, but we'll take this as a collegial verbal notice of motion and we'll deal with it at our Thursday meeting. I thought we could deal with it today, but I have to have unanimous consent.

A voice: No one denied it at the time.

The Chair: No, in fairness, it wasn't really on the.... We set it aside until we excused our witnesses.

Now, the Thursday meeting is tentative. With the agreement of the committee, we would have the military complaints commission gentleman who wrote to me.

Mr. Kostuck provided a letter—the clerk has it—to all members. Do we wish to have that individual? He's available Thursday.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: We'll have him on Thursday, and we'll deal with Mr. Casson's motion on Thursday.

Hon. Bill Blaikie: Before the witness or after?

Hon. Keith Martin: Mr. O'Brien?

The Chair: Just one second.

That's a good question. That's a valid point.

Do you want to do the motion before the witness or after the witness?

Hon. Bill Blaikie: It's just so we know we're through that.

The Chair: Okay, we'll start with the motion. We'll do that as our first order of business Thursday, and we can then maybe have the witness come a few minutes after the meeting starts.

You had a question, Keith?

Hon. Keith Martin: The person on Thursday, Pat, is he somebody who's complaining about—

The Chair: No, no, he got the letter, which was provided to all members. Henry Kostuck is the interim chairperson of the Military Police Complaints Commission, and he's asked to appear before the committee to more or less respond to Monsieur Marin. The committee has just told me that they wish to hear this man, so we'll bring him in on Thursday.

Cheryl.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: I just have a question. We didn't really have to have a motion for this person to appear. He's available and—

The Chair: No, we didn't need a motion.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: There wasn't a motion?

The Chair: No, we don't need a motion. I'm just asking you whether he should appear. We operate by consensus here, and it's

always worked very, very well. I just asked the committee this, rather than dictate that he's going to appear; I'm not a real big dictator, so I was asking the committee, do you want to hear him? The committee said yes, so we're going to hear him.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: If it weren't necessary to have a motion for this person to appear, why would it be necessary to have a motion for the people Mr. Casson requested appear before our committee?

The Chair: He didn't request that any people appear before the committee, but that we write and ask for the board of inquiry. To answer your question, he asked something very important, something pretty serious, asking in essence that the rules be set aside, whether we like them or not, and that we be provided with a whole report. That's serious business, and it has to be done, in my view as chairman, through a motion. He made a motion and it was duly seconded. Unanimous consent was not given under the rules, so now his motion's in order on Thursday.

• (1035)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: It was my understanding that he asked for the minister to appear.

The Chair: Yes, he did, but only if we didn't get the report. You have to be really careful on this.

Is that correct, Mr. Casson? Yes.

So I had to have a motion. It was important business that we had to do by a motion, because we were agreeing to meet someone's request.

Okay, let's get on with this. I sense that our normal cooperative spirit is being challenged mildly, and vis-à-vis other things going on. So that's the notice for Monday—not for our normal time, but for 10 to 12, when there will be a joint meeting with the ministers of defence and foreign affairs to kick off this review.

Just to give you the background on this, there was a lot of toing and froing, and the bottom line is, this is the only time when these two ministers are going to be available simultaneously in the near future. I would have preferred that it weren't a Monday morning, and so would have the chair of the foreign affairs committee, but it really is the only opportunity we are going to have in the near future to get both ministers together. So the meeting is set for Monday the 16th, as you see.

Mr. Blaikie.

Hon. Bill Blaikie: So it will be a joint meeting of the two committees?

The Chair: Right.

Hon. Bill Blaikie: I just think it is a very poor time for such a meeting, and I object strongly. It shows no regard for the people from B.C., never mind the people from Winnipeg and others, who have to get back on Monday morning, and who are going to have to....

The Chair: No, I'm not thrilled with it either, but there we are.

Hon. Bill Blaikie: I'm not sure what the....

The Chair: Well, the committee can decline, or whatever you want to do. It's just that this is not a surprise.

Hon. Bill Blaikie: I wonder what the point of the meeting will be, anyway.

The Chair: Yes, well, we decided previously that we will continue along with our business as long as we're able to.

So what do you want to do? Do you want to decline?

There's no surprise here. I brought this to the committee's attention a few times before to try to warn people that it was looking like we would have to have this on a Monday. I don't like it. Bernard Patry—

Hon. Bill Blaikie: It's very objectionable that ministers can't see committees as an important part of their schedule. Why are we always way down on their lists? It's all part of the culture I was referring to earlier.

The Chair: Yes, I agree with that to a point, Bill.

You have to be a bit careful. The work is Monday to Friday. And I agree with you. I don't necessarily fly in by 10 o'clock on a Monday, but they're available to meet with this committee and are telling us that it's the start of the work week Monday.

So I'm going to go ahead with this, unless this committee says you don't want to participate.

I'm going to change my normal schedule and be there. I hear the frustration, but there's nothing I can do about it. This wasn't just plucked out of the air, but there was a lot of toing and froing, and if we want this meeting in the near future, this is when it has to be.

Okay?

Hon. Bill Blaikie: There was no toing and froing of the committee.

The Chair: Well, I spoke vigorously on your behalf and so did the chair of the other committee, but this is what we ended up with.

Tuesday, May 17, the Minister of Veterans Affairs will present the estimates of her department, and Thursday, the 19th, just to lay this out for you, tentative as it might be, the CDS and the Vice-CDS will be here on the defence review.

So that lays out the next three meetings. Are there any questions?

Please go ahead, Keith and then Rick.

Hon. Keith Martin: Yes, I have one point regarding Rick's motion. The original wording of the motion that you had, Rick, may be more accurate, and that was to the effect that if the full report did not come through then we should ask the people who can answer the questions why those reports were blacked out. Then you'd get the accurate statements I think you're looking for, because there are issues of legality and personal privacy that the admiral alluded to.

So instead of restricting it to the minister, it may be more productive and you may get better answers by just leaving this to the people who can actually answer those questions. It's a very specific question you're asking as to why areas were blanked out. It goes to the realm of complex issues of privacy and of a legal nature that those people who are experts in that—and it may not be the minister—could answer.

I would suggest leaving that open so that you have the flexibility of getting the people you want.

• (1040)

The Chair: If he does that, will he get unanimous consent?

Mr. Rick Casson: I'll put that in. If we put that in right now, can we get unanimous consent?

Hon. Keith Martin: Yes.

Mr. Rick Casson: Can I read the motion that I have first?

The Chair: We're revisiting Mr. Casson's motion, and I'm assuming this is with the agreement of the seconder, unless he tells me otherwise.

Go ahead, Rick.

Mr. Rick Casson: This is very rough.

I would like to inform SCONDVA of my intention to bring forward on May 12 the motion requesting that a full, uncensored report on the naval inquiry into the fire on the *Chicoutimi* be supplied by DND in confidence to SCONDVA. If this report is not forthcoming, the Minister of Defence or others will be called before the committee to fully explain why information is being withheld from the committee on this issue.

The Chair: Keith?

Hon. Keith Martin: The Minister of Defence and others—the people who can answer the questions as to why—

The Chair: Departmental officials.

Hon. Keith Martin: Departmental officials—

The Chair: So if the report is not forthcoming, that the appropriate departmental officials appear, to explain the reason. Okay? Agreeable?

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: What does forthcoming mean—three months from now?

The Chair: You'll have to ask the mover.

Do you want to put a deadline on there?

Mr. Rick Casson: Yes.

The Chair: I think it would be smart. Should it say “within one week”?

Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.): May 18?

Mr. Rick Casson: You guys are very suspicious of your own people.

Hon. Keith Martin: Why don't you give them a month, so they can actually...? Nobody can just jump to it.

The Chair: Let's make it one week.

Hon. Bill Blaikie: This report was prepared without the black on. It took longer to put the black on than it did to prepare the report.

The Chair: We've got about 12 minutes to the vote. We might be able to finish this off.

I'm entertaining a motion from Mr. Casson, seconded by Mr. Blaikie, that an uncensored report be requested by this committee, in confidence, of course, and that if such a report is not provided within a week of the request being made—which will be today, if it's agreed—that the appropriate departmental officials would appear at SCONDVA to explain why such a report could not be provided.

I think that's quite a reasonable motion. I see unanimous consent, do I?

Okay. Very good. So it's carried, and we will write the letter today to the appropriate people—

Anything else? Bill?

Hon. Bill Blaikie: Just one final point, because I know we've got to run.

I feel that a copy of the report should have been sent around to the committee. After all the information that we've been sending....

We've got the very thing—the board of inquiry—that our whole last six months has been about and we don't get a copy sent around to us. It's on the website. Not all of us spend all our days with our nose glued to a video screen.

I would like to see a report.

The Chair: We'll make sure that's done.

The only thing I can tell you is if there's a meeting coming up and there's information you don't have and feel you would need, just make a quick call.

Hon. Bill Blaikie: I just assumed it would be coming.

The Chair: Well, you've been here long enough to know not to assume.

Thank you. The meeting is adjourned.

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