



House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

FOPO • NUMBER 024 • 2nd SESSION • 40th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Thursday, May 7, 2009

—
Chair

Mr. Rodney Weston

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• (1120)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Rodney Weston (Saint John, CPC)): Order. We are now in public session.

Mr. Byrne.

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I had requested consideration of a motion that the following be reported to the House at the earliest opportunity:

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans recommends that the government restore full funding to the Canadian Centre for Fisheries Innovation to enable this organization and its partners to pursue its mission to make available to the fishing industry the largest and best-equipped body of experts in fisheries-related science and technology in the country for the benefit of the industry's long-term competitiveness and sustainability.

We heard from witnesses from the Canadian Centre for Fisheries Innovation. As well, we did gratefully receive input from the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency. We have collected a significant amount of data evidence on this particular subject, not only through the conduct of collection of evidence through the Atlantic lobster study tour through Atlantic Canada but as well through the witnesses we heard here in Ottawa.

I'm of the belief that we've collected enough data now, enough evidence to form conclusions and to vote on this particular motion as it stands.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Byrne.

Mr. Van Kesteren.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC): I spoke to Mr. Byrne about this the day before yesterday.

I wonder if you would consider an amendment to the motion to make it a little bit more plausible, at least for this side. I have that amendment, if I could put it into the record:

That the following be reported to the House at the earliest opportunity:

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans recommends that the government reconsider its decision to discontinue funding to the Canadian Centre for Fisheries Innovation, recognizing its mission to make available to the fishing industry the largest and best-equipped body of experts in fisheries-related science and technology in the country for the benefit of the industry's long-term competitiveness and sustainability.

It's very hard for us on this side, obviously, to accept the motion as it now stands, but I think this is a motion that I, at least, could live with.

The Chair: Mr. Van Kesteren proposes an amendment to the motion as made by Mr. Byrne.

Do you have a copy of the text, Mr. Van Kesteren?

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: Yes, I do.

The Chair: Mr. Van Kesteren would so move the following amendment:

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans recommends that the government reconsider its decision to discontinue funding to the Canadian Centre for Fisheries Innovation, recognizing its mission to make available to the fishing industry the largest and best-equipped body of experts in fisheries-related science and technology in the country for the benefit of the industry's long-term competitiveness and sustainability.

On the amendment, Mr. Stoffer.

• (1125)

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Chairman, I thank my honourable colleague, Mr. Van Kesteren, very much for that. I appreciate the sentiment of what he's trying to do. In many cases I would agree with that amendment. The one word, though, that is challenging for me is the word "reconsider".

We heard from the gentleman from ACOA when I asked him point-blank if there has been any reconsideration, if they will rethink it. When I asked him if the decision was final he said yes, even though when I asked him to take the decision back to government, he said that he would. He told us that the decision was more or less a *fait accompli* and that was it, and I firmly believe that if we ask the government to reconsider, they'll say, "Well, that's nice, but no, we've already done it".

As much as I'd like to agree with my colleague on the amendment, I would have to say no. It's the word "reconsider" that I would find most difficult to agree with.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Stoffer.

Mr. MacAulay.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Cardigan, Lib.): Thank you very much.

I, too, have great respect for my colleague, but "reconsider" is a problem, because I know it's the job of this committee to evaluate and to recommend to the minister, and it would be pretty obvious to me that without a strong recommendation from this committee to restore, it will not be restored.

Peter is right. ACOA has indicated that they're not going to be involved. It looks like the government will not be involved unless this committee's recommendation—and perhaps even with this committee's recommendation—is to restore. If they're wondering about re-evaluating or evaluating the situation, it's been evaluated to death, and the CCFI is about to go under.

Without a strong recommendation from this committee to restore it, without a push from this committee, we will lose this very valuable resource for the industry at a time when the industry desperately needs this research and innovation.

The Chair: Mr. Van Kesteren.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate what my colleagues are saying. I would just emphasize that regardless of the motion, the decision is still the government's, so I think it has a little more force if we come across as a committee. This is something I know I can live with and I think my colleagues can live with. I feel that the other one is.... Regardless of how we feel, the minister still has to make his decision. I understand what you're saying, but we're still in the same boat.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Andrews.

Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I was going to reiterate the same comments Mr. Stoffer made. The question was asked of Mr. Comerford: is the door closed? His answer was "I guess my answer to that would be yes" and he said that Minister MacKay and Mr. Ashfield have written and said there is no more funding coming. I understand that our Conservative colleagues might be in a bit of a tough spot in this particular circumstance, but this strong wording is needed.

If it gives you any leverage, when the guys from CCFI were here, they told us that they had written support from all parties. They've had written support from the NDP members and the New Brunswick members. I think what we need to do is add our names to that particular list. I understand that it may put you in a bit of a pinch, but one of your colleagues has already come on board with it, so we just need a few more.

This is an important motion to move forward with. Again, it's all about the "reconsider" part. We need to make sure this funding is restored to get them through this year.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Weston.

[*Translation*]

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am not worrying as much about the success or failure of this particular motion as I am worrying about the survival and development of the fishing industry.

[*English*]

I think the problem with my colleague Mr. Byrne's motion is that it presents the government with an offer it must refuse. The government and ACOA are not going to restore full funding, but if

we provided more flexibility in our motion, we could achieve our goals.

It's clear that none of us is very satisfied with the notice that was given and things like that, so I'm on board with much of what's behind your motion, Mr. Byrne. I do think, though, that if we provide more flexibility, if there are different ways in which the government can, for instance, provide six months' funding with conditions or 12 months' funding with conditions, or things like that, we're more likely to succeed in what all of us desire to achieve here. But this is going to fail. If we allow the motion as you've drafted it to proceed, it will go nowhere.

• (1130)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Byrne.

Hon. Gerry Byrne: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think that our colleague Mr. Weston's comments pretty well sum it all up, that the government has found a position that it's not going to bend on. I don't know if he's speaking for the government itself or using his own perception of what the government's actions will be.

I think the words of Mr. Weston pretty well reinforce the essential nature of the original motion. I'll paraphrase Mr. Weston: the government is going to do nothing with this. What would give us any confidence that the government would do anything with a milder, more tepid, more flexible motion? It would do less than nothing. That would be my response.

This committee has reviewed this. What the amendment suggests is that the government should review this. Now, the government has already reviewed this and rejected it.

The committee has reviewed this. We'll find out where the committee stands on this, whether or not yet another governmental review is required or whether or not the committee itself.... We have conducted a fairly exhaustive, intensive study on the CCFI, having heard from witnesses and stakeholders in the field through our Atlantic lobster study, having heard directly from CCFI, having heard directly from the government itself, the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency. We've conducted the review.

Now I think it's important for us as a committee to actually have confidence in our own capacity to make specific recommendations to the government, not simply to defer that responsibility back to the government and abdicate the responsibility to provide counsel to the government. That's what the function of a standing committee is. When we review a bill, we don't review a bill with the intent of recommending changes to the bill. We change the bill. That's what we do. We change the bill and then send it back to the House.

With this particular motion, having conducted a due diligence study of the issue, we are recommending a specific course of action to the government, not recommending that they study it further. We have a level of competence here to be able to make this decision and to make a specific recommendation based on what we heard as evidence.

That is why I will not be supporting the amendment. I genuinely, sincerely appreciate your intent and the spirit of it. If we didn't have such exhaustive information before us, if I did not feel truly competent enough to make a specific recommendation, I'd be inclined to follow your advice and ask the government to reconsider here. But we have the data, we have the evidence we need. There are no holes to fill here.

We are in a position where we as a standing committee can make a specific recommendation to the government with confidence and with competence. So I would ask that the amendment be defeated and the original motion be brought forward and accepted, and that this be reported to the House on that basis.

The Chair: Mr. Allen.

Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

With all due respect to Gerry, I'm going to disagree, which he probably won't be surprised about.

Having said that, I guess, based on this whole thing and the evidence we heard, the only open question to me is, is it not a government decision to do this? Obviously it is. They've done the analysis.

It would seem that the R and D activities are picking up. The questions that are still open to me are how was this communicated and what was the definition of "sustainability plan" going forward? Everybody has a different definition of sustainability plan. To some, sustainability plan means you get your own money from private sources. Other people say "I'm going to develop a sustainability plan that's going to constantly rely on government funding". Personally, I don't think that's what we should be doing.

For me to say "restore full funding", to commit to a program over five years—and I'm assuming that's what that means. But Mr. Andrews said "get them through the years", so I'm not sure what it means: five years, one year? What are we saying here?

I'm just not prepared to commit to that at this point in time. I think "reconsider the decision" is something to say. Maybe it gives the government an opportunity to go back to them and say, "Look, let's make this clear: sustainability means this. We're going to do the funding for this for this long for you to understand and come up with that sustainability plan, and then we're going to be done".

Right now, I can't support "restore full funding" because I don't know what it means.

• (1135)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Stoffer.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: I'm always surprised and pleased when governments look for partners to reduce the costs to taxpayers. CCFI was asked by ACOA over the years, when they were getting \$2 million a year in funding, to look for other partners through either industry or other things. Here you have the four Atlantic premiers agreeing to put \$400,000 of provincial money into this, plus whatever industry money can follow. Given more time, it is quite

possible CCFI could be self-financing in some way through other agencies, industry, or whatever. But they're not there yet.

For the government to not seek partnership with the CCFI and basically say "We're done now, you're on your own, good luck and goodbye" is a mistake. They should be looking for partnership and for the one-third, one-third, and one-third in investments. They do it with infrastructure and other things. I think this is an opportunity for the federal government to work with provincial governments and eventually wean them off the road they're on.

I believe my colleague Mr. Weston indicated that might be quite possible in six months or a year. I don't think we're asking for five-year funding in this regard, because things can change right away. We just need something they can get now to keep the doors open; otherwise the doors will close—that's the danger. If we don't do the ACOA and DFO funding, ACOA funding will cease, DFO funding will cease, and provincial funding will cease. So all those additional funds going to CCFI will cease, because everything's based on the funding from ACOA.

So I hope my colleagues on all sides will be able to move as strong an amendment as possible to advise the government that we're not amused—as the Queen would say—and see what we can do to move this forward.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Blais.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): I feel that our job is precisely to take a stand on issues which may be controversial or contentious but are of concern to our fishing industry. I first wanted to hear ACOA's views to better understand what is happening and be in a position to make a better decision.

We indeed heard the people from ACOA. I do not want to get back to Peter's comments, but I also noted, when questioning these people, that the decision seemed to be final. I think this is the basic argument underlying the initial proposal.

We may have considered amending the initial proposal had the ACOA people shown that they were ready to reconsider the decision or to take other considerations into account. However, this was not the answer that I and others got. I think it was important to give the ACOA people a chance to make their views known before voting on the motion. Now, it is done. We heard them and we can pass judgment.

I thought you had an interesting way of putting things, Mr. Van Kesteren. It was very interesting but given ACOA's position, I feel that we would just be gaining some time without dealing with anything whatsoever.

In my opinion—and you already know that since I said it repeatedly—not enough research and development is being done, and I would like our committee to eventually consider that. There are many things we know about the moon, but we know precious little about our oceans. I find this absurd and abnormal. Climate change is affecting us increasingly almost on a daily basis. We do not know what is going to happen to our marine resources, what to expect or what to be concerned about.

I feel that R&D and knowledge would allow us to make better decisions and have a better vision of the development of marine resources and the industry. Unfortunately, there is an obvious tendency to set aside many issues. I am not only talking about Quebec issues but there are some very recent examples in Quebec of this kind of attitude, which I think is improper.

I thought it would be important to hear part of the initial proposal, which is ACOA's version. I heard it and I am now ready to take a stand. We will see how the government will react to our action. Obviously, we cannot expect the motion to carry unanimously. This is better and will always be.

By the way, I wanted to thank you all for your cooperation regarding my motion on the seal hunt. Getting back to this issue, I think we should take a firm stand given the attitude we have to deal with. I asked questions in my own way. These were the best question I could ask. ACOA's representative likely gave us his best answer but it was not enough. It was not satisfactory because I could not see any glimmer of hope. There was no light at the end of the tunnel that would have helped us get across. This is why I shall vote against the amendment and for the initial motion.

•(1140)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Monsieur Blais.

Mr. Kamp.

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

I think we just want to make it clear what we are suggesting here. You can talk about speaking for the government, of course, and I think we all recognize that none of us on either side of this table are doing that. We are trying to determine what action this committee will take on this particular issue. We've seen the motion and we are sympathetic to the intention behind it. We've said that.

We acknowledge the fact that we heard from Mr. Bonnell and that we heard from ACOA. ACOA I think made some comments that we shouldn't ignore. One thing they did say was that as their mandate has currently evolved over the years, this kind of funding no longer fits within it.

We think it's prudent for us to ask the government to reconsider its decision, because it's going to have to go back. It's not like here's the mandate and it fits within it, but they decided not to fund it because they didn't get enough points on the system. It's not like an infrastructure application. It's not like that.

ACOA has told us that it no longer fits within their mandate. Really, we're asking them, the government, to find another way around that. We haven't put "ACOA" in this motion for that reason.

There might be another way around that. That's why this wording has been chosen.

I should also point out that Mr. Bonnell in an article from yesterday in the *Telegraph-Journal* acknowledged that ACOA has been a great supporter of the centre over the years, and that he respects the funding decision that ACOA has made in this case. I'm not sure why he said that, but he's on the record as having that position.

If the opposition members would be more comfortable with putting a timeline in place that reconsidered the decision within 30 days or so, I think Mr. Weston or one of my colleagues would be happy to move a subamendment to change this amendment.

•(1145)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Weston, please.

Mr. John Weston: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

That wasn't a paraphrase, but a caricature of what I said. Ultimately and ironically, I'm trying to achieve the same goal as my colleagues opposite. I see that there could be some value in CCFI, and certainly we're all unified in our desire to make the fisheries industry a healthier one.

Mr. Byrne talked about our competency as this committee. Our competency from the several hours of review can't measure up against the decades of experience that ACOA has had with CCFI and the factors that have caused ACOA's mandate to be changed. By going beyond our competency and to use the words in the resolution as it stands, I'm saying that you're going from a win to a lose. You're going to lose my vote, which may not be consequential, but more importantly, we will lose the opportunity to revisit this by taking away any flexibility from the import of the resolution that passes from us to the minister and to ACOA.

What I'm saying to Mr. Byrne and to Mr. Stoffer and to my other colleagues is that if we're going to get a win on this, if what you want to achieve is really the survival of CCFI, if the flourishing of the fisheries industry is what you really want to achieve, then be more flexible and give the government an option, other than something called "full funding", which sounds like you're asking for it just to remake this decision that it's already made. That's what I'm saying.

We're not the Queen. We cannot mandate, even though we would like to mandate, but we can certainly send a powerful unanimous decision if we get the resolution right.

I'll be voting in favour of the amendment, and I'll signal right now that I'll be voting against the resolution if it is unamended.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Van Kesteren.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

John, you've just stated what I've always wanted to say, and you did it probably a whole lot better than I would have, except for this. Committees are interesting places. I think we've all served on committees that are very functional, and we've served on committees that are very dysfunctional. I tend to think this is a very functional committee. I say that because, other than Blaine and myself, most of you are so close to what you're representing here that you have the best interests of the fishermen and those involved in the industry at heart. I want to be part of a committee that is functional; I want to be part of a committee that works.

I know this amendment will definitely shoot a shot over the bow for the government. I know the government is definitely going to come back and ask us what we're doing. At that point, we can say, "You really need to have a second look at this." That would be the response of this motion. The motion as it stands, I agree wholeheartedly with my colleague—John, you are absolutely right—that it is just going to close doors.

I'm suggesting that as a committee we can do something. The best way we can do what we want to accomplish is through the amended motion. I will be voting, obviously, for my motion and I would encourage and ask that my colleagues really consider this, because I believe this is something that is good for this committee and subsequently for the fishing industry.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. MacAulay.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I've been around here for a few years, and I always felt that I had to represent the people I represent, or the industry or whatever. I've served in different positions in government and opposition, and I can assure you, if you check the record, you'll find I did not always toe the line with what the government wanted. Perhaps I was wrong, but my understanding is that I represent the people who elected me, and it paid off in a number of issues. Sometimes with a lot of pressure you can convince government that in fact this is the right way.

In listening to this committee, I conclude we all want the same thing. Perhaps I was naive, but I lacked fear of probably anybody around here. I felt I could say what I liked, when I liked, for the betterment of the industry, and I did in my career. The fact is that we need to send the message to government—we're not sending it to ACOA, we're sending it to government—that they need to put this funding in place. If they don't put it in place, we don't have this institution.

That's simply what we're doing. If we water it down or make it milder, then it's not going to make an issue. In my opinion, it's a large issue at a very difficult time in the fishery. I'm not going to try to discipline anybody in politics, but the fact is, you'll be rewarded politically for doing the right thing. It would look to me that doing the right thing is giving this every push you can in order to convince the government that this centre needs to proceed.

• (1150)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Byrne.

Hon. Gerry Byrne: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I was somewhat caught off guard by what our colleague Mr. Weston had to say. I'm not sure if this is what Mr. Weston had in mind, but it sounded as though if we give a specific recommendation to the government it will not be heard, because it's a specific call for action and this government does not respond to what may be perceived as a threat, but if we water this down and suggest that they only review it, then the government might consider it.

I wasn't quite following exactly what Mr. Weston had in mind, but if he wants to clarify it for me, that would be great.

I'd like to say something in response to the comment that we should listen more to ACOA instead of to our own intellect and our own experience and wisdom as parliamentarians, because ACOA, as a government department involved in this, has decades of experience and we only have a limited amount of experience with this. The Minister Of Fisheries and Oceans just made a decision contrary to the advice of her department. The department has 140 years of experience managing fish stocks in Atlantic Canada. The department recommended a reduction in crab quotas in the southern gulf. The minister, however, did not accept that advice, and the minister decided what was right for the industry. She has to take responsibility for that.

So the minister herself, when it comes to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, doesn't follow the advice of her department, which has decades of experience in managing the issues it has the constitutional jurisdiction and competency to review.

My concept and my perceptions of what we, as a committee, do are very different from how other members of the committee view their roles and positions. As a parliamentarian, I feel very comfortable reporting to Parliament, to the House of Commons, that we feel very strongly that the government should embark upon a specific course of action. It's not a threat. It's not an ultimatum. It's a specific recommendation of a course of action brought forward after due process and study by a standing committee of the House, consistent with 146 years of practice of this House. And it violates no standing orders or past precedent of what a standing committee does.

I'm going to read one last thing. It was stated that the amendment didn't include the word "ACOA" so that it wouldn't be provocative. The original motion didn't include the word "ACOA"; it called on the government. My motion did not include the word "ACOA"; it called on the government.

This is what Carey Bonnell, the executive director of the Canadian Centre for Fisheries Innovation, sent to me a little while ago:

I've received several calls from DFO officials wondering when we are planning to get the lobster committee up and running to move forward with the Lobster Development Agency.

I reminded these same government officials that we are about to close our doors due to a lack of federal funding, and that calls may have to be addressed elsewhere to initiate the lobster round table process and the lobster development committee.

DFO officials are asking when the Canadian Centre for Fisheries Innovation is going to get moving on the recommendation of the Atlantic lobster round table to get the Atlantic lobster development committee started so that they can get the Atlantic lobster development agency initiative started.

That being said, it sounds to me as though DFO is behind the CCFI. My original motion calls on government to restore the funding.

Let's have the vote.

• (1155)

The Chair: Mr. Stoffer.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Thank you.

The parliamentary secretary indicated Mr. Bonnell's release in the newspaper. Anyone who knows Mr. Bonnell knows that he never burns any bridges; he's a person who accepts decisions whether he likes them or not, because he knows he has to work with any government and any politician at any time in any industry. This is what makes him so good at his job: his practicality in dealing with government officials, bureaucrats, people in the industry, and, most importantly, fishermen.

I want to reassure my colleague Mr. Van Kesteren. I've been on the committee since 1997; we've had our differences on committees before, but this and the veterans committee are the two best committees in the House. Regardless of what comes out of this and what Mr. Weston reports in the House, this committee will still operate as one of the best committees on the planet.

We may have our slight differences on the way things are worded, but anyone who's ever negotiated collective agreements knows that one word can change the entire phrase in a collective agreement. An example is changing the word "may" to "shall", or using the word "reconsider".

I remind you that the report says that we "recommend". It doesn't say we absolutely strongly will shoot the hell out of you and burn your house down if you don't do it; it just says we "recommend". The government still has the option to say "Thank you very much for your recommendation, but go pound sand". They will do it politely, of course. They still have the option to say no, which they may end up doing.

We have to show that at least we listened to the evidence. The evidence made it quite clear to us that the CCFI is an important industry, and we would like to recommend—not "reconsider", because you already know what the decisions have been before—that they get going and restore the funding to it.

Basically I would say to Mr. Van Kesteren that I'm honoured to have you on the committee, sir, as well as Mr. Kamp, and we'll continue to work together. Don't worry about shots over the bow. If you want to see a shot over the bow, get EI going and you'll go crazy on that. The EI committee's gone crazy.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Weston.

[*Translation*]

Mr. John Weston: I am going to try once more. I do not know whether Mr. Byrne is not hearing me or if he is choosing not to.

[*English*]

Let me try again.

You know, before my colleague Mr. Stoffer was in a wheelchair, he used to be a rugby player—

Mr. Peter Stoffer: I still am.

Mr. John Weston:—and there's a big difference between rugby and football, as I'm sure he'll agree. In football, you hit straight-on because every inch counts. In rugby, when you tackle, you grab the opposing player and let him or her take their own weight down.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: You haven't played me, have you?

Mr. John Weston: What I'm trying to do is get you to win, Mr. Byrne, not to lose, so I'm going to move a subamendment. It's going to be a tight timeframe. My colleagues may dislike me for doing this, but I'm going to propose we add the words "within 15 days" before the words "reconsider its decision to discontinue funding". If I could get the consensus of this committee to add that, it adds a sense of urgency. In that way we'll get a decision and we'll continue to provide ACOA and the government with an array of options that might result in keeping CCFI alive, whereas the very narrow "restore full funding" is yes or no, black and white. It's going to end up in a decision you won't like and none of us endorse.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead on the subamendment, Mr. Allen.

Mr. Mike Allen: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

What I was going to say applies either to the subamendment or to the amendment. It doesn't matter.

The argument doesn't appear to be about substance any more. This centre has not had A-base funding in quite a number of years. In fact, the latest funding came out of ICF, which is a temporary fund that has basically been sunsetted now. From that standpoint, I think we have to recognize that ACOA's gone to other priorities, so ACOA's off the table. I recognize that "the government" was put in here as a more general comment, and that's fine, but again I come back to the fact that this is called multi-year. What the hell does that mean?

I want to pick up on one of Peter's comments. We should be able to word this to say how we do a partnership going forward. Maybe the federal government doesn't have to be involved, and in the long run I don't think it should be involved. As we get out of this economic situation over the next year or two years, the private partners should come back in if it's that good. They should be doing this. If they think this matching service is worthwhile, then the private sector should be coming in.

I understand the challenges we're facing over the next year or two years, which is why we're putting the stimulus into the economy. To say "restore full funding"....

Somehow, some way, we have to come up with the words to say we want to go back and look at this in terms of doing it from a partnership standpoint going forward. I won't support it the way it's worded right now, because I think it lacks good business sense, quite frankly. We're not talking about substance any more; we're talking about emotion in politics.

• (1200)

The Chair: Mr. Byrne.

Hon. Gerry Byrne: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate the rugby versus football analogy, because at least you're letting me know that the objective here is to pull me down by my own weight—unless, of course, you're a football player.

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Gerry Byrne: Point well taken, because it actually segues to my next point. Having been a parliamentarian for 14 years and having suffered through six general elections and won each and every one of them, I guess I don't tackle easy. As substantial as my weight may be, maybe there's a reason why I've been able to suffer through six general elections and come out on top.

I've seen over the course of a number of years that “may” versus “shall” is an important distinction. Words do mean things in this business. Words do mean things in this place. The specificity of language, the text of language, is the construct of law. Law is interpreted by the specific meaning of words. The context of each and every individual word is uniquely important.

That's why, with all due respect, we can talk about how we'll delay a review for 15 days, then see what the review will produce, and then hold the position of the committee, the evidence that it's collected, and the discussions and rationales of the department itself, as opposed to our own collective wisdom. I don't operate in that way. I didn't come to this place as a parliamentarian to be a surrogate partial focus group voice for a government department.

I came to this place to study, to determine merit, to act, and to act with specificity. I understand, appreciate, and respect the desire to not actually engage in that particular duty, but that's the duty I feel I have after spending weeks and weeks studying this and after hearing so much testimony from stakeholders whose livelihoods are dependent upon this. My paycheque doesn't necessarily come from this decision. My paycheque comes from a whole bunch of decisions like this. And my paycheque is owed to the people who are depending on me to make good choices on their behalf when it comes to their incomes.

The Canadian Centre for Fisheries Innovation has been proven to be a very effective tool in making sure that the industry itself can make good use of its natural resources, that it can harvest the resources in a sustainable fashion, and that it can find markets for that product that are timely and that maximize the value of their hard work.

I won't be voting for this subamendment, nor will I be voting for the amendment, but I will be voting for the main motion on that particular principle, which is that we have decided as a committee to study this issue and we've decided to judge it. Because that was the intent: to put forward recommendations. In the context of our larger Atlantic lobster study, is it the expectation of anyone around this table that we'll not provide one recommendation to the government that will ask for the government to review specifically...? It's not. It's definitely not. We will be providing recommendations to the government to act.

Mr. Chair, I think I still have the floor. Thank you.

We'll be providing specific recommendations to the government. That's what we do as a committee. Nobody should feel alienated or

threatened by that or feel as though your loyalty to place, to Parliament, or to party has been sidelined by that. That's what we do. I don't really understand why it is that in order to get a unanimous report here back to the House we have to surrender that principle.

• (1205)

If people don't want to vote for this, don't vote for it, and if people want to vote for it, vote for it, but let's have this as a committee. If for the necessity of a unanimous position we have to do things we don't agree with, not even on the margins.... But this is a fundamental principle here. I studied this and many of my colleagues studied this, and we recommend that the government reinstate the full funding. I don't think it's really any more complicated or simpler than that. It is what it is.

I'm going to stand by the motion that repeats and reiterates everything we heard in testimony before us as a committee. It's consistent with the testimony we heard from the executive director of the Canadian Centre for Fisheries Innovation. Since we heard directly from one of the senior officials from within the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency that this is a final decision, delaying it by 15 days for the department to review is simply doing what we know will happen anyway. I think Mr. Weston may have actually stated it most clearly: this is not going to be funded.

We need to make sure there is no ambiguity or confusion whatsoever—that the majority view of the representatives, the parliamentarians, and members of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans of where we stand on this issue is made absolutely crystal clear. I think that's very appropriate.

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans is now asking the Canadian Centre for Fisheries Innovation to fulfill things they're asking for that the Atlantic lobster round table asked for, and they're wondering when they're going to proceed with the Atlantic lobster development committee so the Atlantic lobster development initiative, an agency, can get up and running. The answer is that it can't, because it has no capacity to organize these kinds of things. So the motion itself calls on the government, and whether that is the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, ACOA, Industry Canada, or Agriculture Canada's seafood and marine products directorate—there are a lot of different institutions that could potentially provide funding for this organization, but they're just not doing it. This motion pretty well says exactly what we need to do.

With that said, I hope we can move forward.

• (1210)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Stoffer.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: In all fairness to Mr. Weston, I don't think that was his intent. Mr. Allen brought up a good point, that full funding could mean one year, five years, or anything. Would the committee agree to look at throwing out the two amendments we already have and putting in a new one that says the government would restore full funding for one year to the CCFI, from May 1, 2009, to May 1, 2010? That way you wouldn't get into the five- or ten-year program. It would give it one more year.

We all know they weren't advised properly or formally that they were no longer going to be a player. They heard it through the back door.

We also know that Minister Shea's department—although I haven't heard her say anything on it yet—was going to give x number of dollars, and indicated support for it. I would ask my parliamentary secretary colleague whether the minister has spoken publicly on this decision regarding the government funding. Was she opposed to it or in favour of it? Did she have any say in the matter?

I don't know, but if we change it, Mr. Byrne, and you looked at it....

I'm looking for a compromise here to change the term and restore full funding for one year. That would give it an entire year to do what Mr. Allen said before about industry and maybe other government departments picking up more—that kind of thing. So I'm just asking if there's a consensus to change the words to “full funding for one year”? I'm throwing that out for debate to see if we can get a consensus.

The Chair: I have a couple of points on Mr. Stoffer's comments.

Technically, you can't move that, because we already have a subamendment on the floor, and technically we should only be debating the subamendment, which is to add the wording “within 15 days”.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: That's understandable, but if the subamendment is withdrawn, and the other amendment is withdrawn, which can be done, and then we put the words “for one year” in, would that be acceptable to the committee? I just throw that out for debate.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Stoffer.

We'll go to Mr. Allen on the subamendment.

Mr. Mike Allen: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's very much in line with what Peter said. I was going to say, through you to Mr. Byrne, that because it was funded under ICF, that's not to me full funding. That's not A-base funding. It's not. That's program funding, which could be ended at any time. As you know, those programs have sunsetted.

So my question to Gerry, through you, Mr. Chair, is to define what you mean by full funding. What does that mean? There's been one definition, and Mr. Andrews gave us another definition. You were sort of on the one-year track. What does that mean? Because, to your point, we came here to make concrete recommendations to government. Full funding is not concrete to me. From a business perspective, it's not concrete. What does that mean? I'd like you to define that for me, because that question still has not been answered.

The Chair: We'll have Mr. Andrews.

Mr. Scott Andrews: To the subamendment and the 15 days and the crisis.... No, I'm not going to use that word, because we're not there yet, but we're teetering on a crisis in the fishing industry.

Mr. Allen, to your point a little earlier about getting industry to foot the full bill for this, I think we have to be realistic, looking at the fishing industry right now. Even though the industry partners in CCFI have come a long way in the last number of years in funding this organization and in being in partnership with this organization,

with the lobster industry the way it is now, finding industries to come on board at this particular moment in time and expecting them to carry more weight with the CCFI I don't think is very practical.

You look at the crab industry in Newfoundland right now. We have three processors that are saying that they're not buying crab anymore. We are teetering on some major, major problems within the fishery industry in general. And for an institute that has worked with industry, timing is very important. We should not turn our backs on that. When we want to look at timing, a year's full funding, two years, three years, well, maybe we could have that debate.

The second part of my point is, being new to politics, I don't think it's very responsible for any of us to be misleading and to build false hope. I think by changing this to talk about reconsidering, we're building false hope out there. For some reason, if we reconsider, your government will actually do something to change it. That's what I'm seeing here today. You seem intent on putting in the word “reconsider”. Unless you guys know something we don't, come clean. Come clean with us right now. To say that you don't know anything.... You've spoken to your colleagues on this. Well, it seems to me that we may be trying to mislead or to bring false hope.

Well, listen then, if you don't know any more than we know, why are we reconsidering? We know that the department has said no, so we know that reconsidering isn't going to do anything. Let's move forward and put this motion forward and let whichever department of government step up to the plate and participate with CCFI.

• (1215)

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Byrne.

Hon. Gerry Byrne: Speaking to the subamendment, if someone were to put into the subamendment that it should be for only one year of funding, I'd say that one year was insufficient, because we have an industry in absolute crisis. So that subamendment would not be appropriate, if it were put forward. It wouldn't be appropriate because we have an industry in crisis right now, and we have an organization that's being called upon by the industry to show leadership. One year of funding would actually result in the organization spending most of that year trying to create the circumstances for funding after that year.

We need to have that organization's energy and focus devoted strictly and solely to the crisis in the lobster industry, and the fishing industry generally. We have a shutdown of crab throughout Newfoundland now. We have a billion-dollar industry in Newfoundland that has shut down.

If anyone doesn't think we have a billion-dollar lobster industry shut down, let me read this to you from seafood.com, the most authoritative source on the seafood industry in the world. This is from Seafood.com News, by Jack MacAndrew, dated May 6, 2009:

Canadian lobster season in chaos as buyers cannot handle landings

For as long as any fishermen can remember, they set as many traps as they were allowed; caught as many lobsters as they could; dumped his catch on the wharf for as much as they could get for them; and then went on about their business.

The rest of the processing, marketing and other aspects of the lobster industry was somebody else's business.

That routine came to a sudden end yesterday, just five landing days into the spring lobster season.

Some buyers on the wharves of PEI and other ports in New Brunswick and the Magdalen Islands weren't buying at all. Others told their fishermen that processors had set a 500 pound daily limit per boat on their purchases.

Processors said they had to do something to stop the glut of lobsters at their doors, the result of daily bumper catches of 2000 and better pounds by fishermen in the first days of the season. And there's more bad news for fishermen on the way, what some are calling their own ' perfect storm. '

The shore price for their catch hasn't yet been set, but it is due tomorrow (Thursday), with expectations of \$CDN 2.75 (\$US \$2.33) a pound for the smaller size canners, which make up the bulk (about 75 per cent) of the catch; and \$CDN3.50 (\$US 2.97) for markets.

Fishermen say that 500 pounds of lobster at those prices is ruinous, and doesn't come close to covering expenses, especially when so much of the catch is in the smaller size canners, useful only for processing.

It doesn't take 300 traps, the number set by Department of Fisheries regulation in the areas fishing the spring season, to land 500 pounds.

I could go on, but I think I've made the point here.

This is an industry in absolute crisis. The decision can't be made to allow the government to just review it. The decision can't be made to allow the government 15, 30, or 45 days to review it, and then say no. The decision has to be made by this committee—if we are advocates for fishermen and the fishing industry—to make a specific recommendation to the government that this must occur now, and that full funding should be brought in.

Mr. Allen, as to your point on what is full funding, it's the funding that was applied for by the CCFI.

● (1220)

The Chair: Thank you.

The question on the subamendment is whether to add “within 15 days” to the amendment.

(Subamendment negated)

The Chair: I'll read the amended motion:

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans recommends that the government reconsider its decision to discontinue funding to the Canadian Centre for Fisheries Innovation regarding its mission to make available to the fishing industry the largest and best-equipped body of experts in fisheries-related science and technology in the country for the benefit of industry's long-term competitiveness and sustainability.

Mr. John Weston: Point of order. It's “recognizing”, not “regarding”.

The Chair: Did I say “regarding”? I apologize. Yes, you're correct. I apologize. It must have been when I was bringing my glasses to my face. I apologize.

(Amendment negated)

The Chair: Now, on to the motion by Gerry Byrne:

That the following be reported to the House at the earliest opportunity: Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans recommends that the government restore full funding to the Canadian Centre for Fisheries Innovation to enable this organization and its partners to pursue its mission to make available to the fishing industry the largest and best-equipped body of experts in fisheries-related science and technology in the country for the benefit of the industry's long-term competitiveness and sustainability.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: All right.

Mr. Byrne, you have a second motion.

Hon. Gerry Byrne: I respectfully withdraw the motion, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Byrne.

Now we'll go in camera for consideration of the draft report.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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

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