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Chair

Mr. Rodney Weston

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• (0855)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Rodney Weston (Saint John, CPC)): I call this meeting to order.

I'd like to thank the minister for coming today to meet with the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans.

I know I don't have to go through the procedures with you. You've been here several times in the past. You'll probably hear that famous beep of noise from up front here when the time expires for members, so perhaps you could begin to bring your comments or remarks to a conclusion at that point in time.

To begin, I would ask that you introduce the guests that you have with you here this morning. If you have an opening statement, you could proceed right into that at this point in time.

The floor is yours.

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Good morning to everyone. I just want to pass my appreciation on to the committee members for all the work they do in the name of fisheries.

With me this morning is Claire Dansereau, Deputy Minister of Fisheries and Oceans; David Bevan, the associate deputy minister; and Kevin Stringer, the assistant deputy minister of programs.

I'll get right into my opening comments. I want to thank you for the opportunity to be here today and say a few words about my department's aquaculture initiatives.

I know that several of you have recently returned from a tour of aquaculture facilities in western Canada and the U.S., so I don't need to tell you how important the industry is becoming. Already, aquaculture production accounts for at least 6,000 full-time direct jobs in Canada and close to 10,000 spinoff or support jobs. It provides more than \$1 billion annually to our GDP and accounts for almost 30% of our country's total yearly seafood production and fish landings.

Aquaculture operations now exist in every province in Canada and Yukon, and produce an annual harvest of almost 145,000 tonnes per year.

In some of our coastal communities, I can frankly say that aquaculture has rescued local economies and given them new opportunities. Take the town of Belleoram, on the south coast of Newfoundland, as an example. Belleoram and its fishing industry

date back to the late 18th century, but the town had fallen on hard times in recent years. Unemployment was soaring, social problems were on the rise, and it looked as if the town was in danger of disappearing. Now, thanks to a hugely successful aquaculture project, there's close to full employment again in that town. Businesses have reopened and the community is thriving.

On the west coast, there's a striking success story involving the first nations community of Ahousaht on Vancouver Island, where aquaculture has also provided a dramatic boost to what had been a struggling economy.

These two examples point out one of the main strengths of the aquaculture industry: developments occur primarily in coastal and rural communities where other economic opportunities can be transient. Many of the jobs created by aquaculture are full-time and permanent. They can give a community back its strength while at the same time showing respect for the environment. Even in the uncertain financial times we have endured over the past few years, the aquaculture industry continues to offer exciting new opportunities for Canadians, providing permanent jobs, economic growth, and stability.

Maintaining this momentum depends on two key ingredients: partnership and market access. It is our job, as the Government of Canada, to create the conditions for industry to succeed and thrive, but it is the industry itself that has to seize upon this opportunity. In today's economic climate, strong partnerships among governments and stakeholders are needed more than ever, especially when we consider the shared responsibilities of aquaculture management.

The Government of Canada is committed to working with the provinces and territories, first nations, industry, and the science and conservation communities to build a sustainable and prosperous industry for the future.

We saw a perfect example of this kind of partnership last month at the meeting in St. John's of the Canadian Council of Fisheries and Aquaculture Ministers. The council gave its formal approval to the national aquaculture strategic action plan initiative—NASAPI, as we call it. As a result, for the first time ever, we have seen an agreement in place that has been endorsed by the federal government, provinces, territories, and industry. That level of consensus does not happen easily or often.

NASAPI was launched to develop targeted action plans to encourage sustainable aquaculture development in all regions of the country. Each action plan will set precise and realistic objectives to be achieved within a five-year timeframe.

As minister, I understand the importance of innovation in aquaculture. Developing new practices and technologies reduces costs, improves protection of the environment, and generates greater market value for products.

NASAPI will help achieve these goals, and we will measure and report on our progress regularly. We will also update and renew these plans to ensure that they remain responsive to the needs of Canadians and the aquaculture industry.

Over the past two years, Fisheries and Oceans Canada has also been actively involved in examining closed-containment technologies that might be applied to the salmon aquaculture industry.

My department is contributing financial support toward the further development of closed-containment technologies and has recently completed a financial feasibility study of various systems.

• (0900)

The study concluded that certain closed-containment technologies are technically feasible, but are currently challenging from a financial perspective. The results of the study are available on my department's website. Work is continuing on that file.

Another example of our commitment to aquaculture can be found in our response to last year's decision by the British Columbia Supreme Court. In February 2009 the court ruled that aquaculture is a fishery and therefore falls within the jurisdiction of the federal government. Given that decision, and with the cooperation of the Province of British Columbia, we've moved quickly to ensure that the industry had the structure that it needs in place to allow it to continue to grow and prosper.

We saw the opportunity to take action and move forward with a new federal management regime. As a result, before December 18 this year we'll be ready to officially implement new regulations under the federal Fisheries Act for aquaculture in B.C. In fact, I expect to visit British Columbia within the coming weeks to sign a memorandum of understanding with the province.

I think committee members will agree that it is an incredible accomplishment. We have gone from a standing start to a full implementation of a completely new program in just over 20 months. We want the aquaculture industry to succeed over the long term and we want it to maintain its distinguished international reputation.

I can also point with pride to two DFO programs aimed at fostering innovation and market access by companies involved in aquaculture: the program for aquaculture innovation and market access, which we call AIMAP; and the aquaculture collaborative research and development program, or ACRDP.

In the first two years of AIMAP, we have funded 60 projects with a DFO contribution of \$8 million. For example, we provided \$1.2 million to Canaqua Seafood Ltd. of Advocate Harbour, Nova Scotia, toward its work in tank farming Atlantic halibut.

In western Canada, we invested more than \$630,000 in six aquaculture projects in British Columbia to help companies develop and adapt technologies that will benefit our fisheries. Our direct spending under AIMAP leveraged an additional \$22 million in

investment from other partners. We are currently in the process of announcing the projects approved in year three of the program.

In the first three years, ACRDP funded 154 projects valued at \$14 million. The result is better fish protection, optimal fish health, and protection of the environment.

I know there are Canadians who have raised concerns about the growth of aquaculture in Canada and its potential impact on the environment, and on wild species. Let me assure committee members that my department takes these concerns very seriously. That's why our scientists continue to play an integral role in the risk assessment process, both through our own research and through rigorous reviews of work done outside the department.

In fact, DFO has conducted shellfish aquaculture research since the 1960s, and salmon and trout aquaculture research since the 1970s. This research provides us with confidence that the environmental effects of aquaculture are well understood and properly managed.

In addition, in the vast majority of cases, proposed aquaculture operations undergo a thorough environmental assessment before facilities can be approved. These measures might include choosing appropriate locations for sites to avoid important or sensitive habitats, incorporating periods of inactivity into site production schedules, or adjusting production levels based on environmental monitoring performance.

Fisheries and Oceans Canada and other federal, provincial, and territorial government departments also monitor aquaculture operations to ensure they continue to meet regulations.

I'm confident that committee members share a desire for the nation's aquaculture sector to be self-sufficient, competitive, and prosperous. We have established a solid basis for the future, and I look forward to helping chart the future for this dynamic industry. Its future can be virtually limitless. Currently, our aquaculture industry ranks 16th in the world in terms of production. There's no reason why we can't exceed many of our competitors.

We have a tremendous opportunity to build an industry that will survive and thrive for decades to come, and to do so in a way that's environmentally sustainable.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will be pleased to answer any of your questions.

• (0905)

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Minister.

Ms. Murray.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Minister, for being here at our committee and for taking the time to update us on the aquaculture work.

I have a couple of sets of questions, but I'd like to start with a concern from my province of British Columbia.

We know that the decision to stop the Taseko Prosperity mine involved a number of cabinet ministers, including this minister. We also know that the cabinet decision to block Taseko Mines' Prosperity project required four ministers to sign off on it for it to be considered a cabinet decision.

The minister is aware, from other conversations, that there are strong indications, from highly abnormal share trading and plunging prices associated at the time that cabinet was making its decision, that there may have been a cabinet leak. So I have a few questions about that.

Minister, what date did you sign off on the Taseko Mines decision? Who in your office knew about this decision? Has your office handed over any and all information about the deal to the RCMP and the PCO?

There was another project that was approved, the Mount Milligan project, that also affected inland fisheries. Are you confident that there was no leak involving this project?

Hon. Gail Shea: Well, honourable member, I thought we were here to talk about aquaculture this morning, but I can tell you that the government rejected this project based on the environmental assessment. The environmental assessment showed that the project would do irreparable harm to the environment.

I can't speak about cabinet operations, because that is confidential information.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Can you get back to this committee on it?

My understanding was that there would be a broader discussion about fisheries concerns, not solely focused on aquaculture.

I understand if you don't have these answers at your fingertips, but we would appreciate information around who knew about the decision and whether—

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): A point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Cannon, state your point of order.

Mr. Ron Cannan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My honourable colleague across the way was a provincial cabinet minister, and understands that once you sign an oath to public duty, there's a confidentiality requirement. So she's stepping outside that boundary.

As the minister said, she can't divulge information on cabinet discussions. There's no way that she can provide this information, unless you're going to ask her to, you know, perjure.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Joyce Murray: That's not a point of order, and I hope the chair will—

The Chair: Ms. Murray, I'll decide if it's a point of order, thank you.

Ms. Joyce Murray: I can make whatever requests I want.

The Chair: On your point of order, Mr. Cannan, first, it is not a point of order.

Secondly, the minister can provide any information that she feels she can provide outside of the cabinet confidentiality, and I know the minister is aware of that.

Thank you.

● (0910)

Ms. Joyce Murray: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Yes, having been a cabinet minister, I'm aware that the content of a cabinet decision will be confidential, but is the minister suggesting that the date of cabinet decisions is confidential? That's not my understanding.

So I'm asking who knew about the decision, when the decision was signed off by the minister's office, and whether information has been handed over to the RCMP.

If those facts aren't available to the minister, I would welcome the answer in written form at the time the minister's able to access that information.

Will that be forthcoming?

Hon. Gail Shea: No, it won't. My response to your question will be what it was. I can't speak about cabinet confidentiality. Cabinet operations are confidential.

We made a decision, based on the environmental assessment, that it would cause irreparable harm to the environment.

Those are my comments on that question.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Thank you.

Well, I know the minister doesn't intend to hide behind cabinet confidentiality, and I will encourage the minister to check that information and provide it.

I do have a concern about some information in the 2009-10 estimates. It's a very general question.

I appreciate the focus on aquaculture development and the view that the future is limitless, and so on. I understand the importance of aquaculture to jobs. Of course, it's also a great concern that there may be interactions between aquaculture and the wild salmon in British Columbia, where many of the stocks have been declining over the years.

Minister, we're all aware of the importance of habitat management, management of the ocean, protected areas, and science for having a healthy foundation so that we can have industrial fisheries and aquaculture sustainably. So I note the huge reductions in the budget for ocean management and healthy and productive aquatic ecosystems.

I'm wondering if the minister can explain why there's almost a 50% reduction in spending between 2008-09 and 2009-10 in the area of healthy and productive aquaculture ecosystems. Are the ecosystems and their sustainability not a priority for this minister?

Hon. Gail Shea: Honourable member, of course we understand the importance of healthy oceans. That's why we have five large ocean management areas that are at various stages of development. We have developed about 15 marine protected areas.

The funding for these could be in various places in the budget, so I can't speak specifically to the line that you're speaking to, but we have created those marine protected areas and we've undertaken extensive consultation.

As you know, right now there are consultations happening on a large new ocean management area off the coast of British Columbia, because we do take the health of the oceans very seriously.

Ms. Joyce Murray: So there's no specific rationale for decreasing the spending on oceans management, habitat management, and science from \$231 million down to \$140 million.

How many jobs were lost from the major decimation of the program for healthy and productive ecosystems?

Hon. Gail Shea: I'm going to ask the deputy to respond to that specifically.

Ms. Claire Dansereau (Deputy Minister, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Thank you, Minister.

There have been no jobs lost as a result of the re-coding of how we indicate that we spend the money. So it's not a question of reduction in work. It's not a question of reduction in priority. It's more a matter of how the money is distributed across the priorities within a coding system. So there will be concurrent increases in other areas showing that the money has been transferred from one to the other, primarily to the coast guard.

We changed the way we code our moneys. The coast guard receives money on a regular basis. We pay them to help us in the science. They are the platform from which we do the science. So a decision was made to allocate moneys to them at the start of the year, and rather than code it to science, we coded it to the coast guard.

We would be happy, though, to come back to talk about our supplementary estimates and the budget process.

•(0915)

Ms. Joyce Murray: Thank you.

I'm particularly concerned about the cuts to science, which have also been experienced by scientists from British Columbia who have spoken to me. One of the key things constituents and people concerned about the fisheries in British Columbia are asking for is a restoration of funding for science.

We know there's an inadequacy in the science, both for issues like sea lice impacts on wild salmon and in terms of the salmon more broadly. Scientists will say there's a "black box" in terms of what's going on with the fish. It's a huge concern to see that science budget cut in these estimates.

Lastly, I do have some questions. We've been dealing with the snow crab decision, to reduce the snow crab allowable catch. The minister took a decision in 2009 that had a major risk of steepening the decline in the biomass of snow crab.

Could the minister tell the committee what advice she took that led to the maintaining of the allowable catch even though the scientists had warned there was almost a 50% chance of a significant steepening in the biomass decline, which did come out? Who influenced the minister's decision on this matter in deciding against the scientific advice?

Hon. Gail Shea: Thank you.

Honourable member, first of all let me clarify something. As the deputy commented, there have been no cuts to science. I want to make sure that's on the record. As a matter of fact, we've increased our science. We do more partnering with universities; we have MOUs with other countries where we cooperate on science so we maximize the return for our science investment.

What the deputy did say is that as opposed to some of the funds being on a DFO science line in the budget, they are now on the coast guard line because they actually provide the platform for us to do science. There have been no cuts in science. I want to make that clear. We are doing a lot of things in cooperation with other organizations that allow us to have more science for the investment.

With respect to the snow crab decision back in 2009, I did not exceed the science advice on the snow crab TAC. As you are aware, there's an advisory process, which the industry is very much involved in, when the science is done on snow crab. The department provides me, for my final decision, a range of TAC that could be approved with a number of decisions. They make a recommendation.

While I did not take the recommendation, I met several times with the industry, who did not agree with our science. They were looking for status quo, for a rollover of the TAC from the previous year. They were well aware of the risks involved in this. As a matter of fact, if you'd like, I could produce the notice to fishers that spelled out the risk with rolling over the TAC. They were made well aware of it.

I consulted with our science folks who assured me that rolling over the TAC would not do irreparable harm to the stock. It was a one-year rollover only, because TACs are set on an annual basis. As a result of that, the TAC did take a big drop the next year, but I don't think it was any surprise to the fishers.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

If you would like to provide that document to the committee clerk, I'd appreciate that. Thank you.

Monsieur Blais.

[Translation]

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

Ladies and gentlemen, good morning and welcome.

Minister, I've already said this publicly—and I am repeating it again today—that you've made some good decisions in recent months about the seal file. Your stay in China was very much appreciated, as is your commitment to this file.

However, it is unfortunate to see that, in another matter concerning a species of seal, the grey seal, the story is completely different. I don't know how many years I've had occasion to talk to you about this. I have had occasion to speak to you about grey seals a number of times, and you had made some commitments. Even your predecessor, Loyola Hearn, did the same thing.

However, this is December 2010—it will soon be 2011—and nothing specific has been announced. The only decision that was announced was in June 2009, when you said in a press release that there had been "direction by the minister to the department to ensure the targeted removal of grey seals." That was in June 2009. You added in that same press release that it was by taking those steps at that time that you would be able to achieve results. That was in June 2009; this is December 2010; it will soon be 2011; and absolutely nothing has been done about the grey seals. You know perfectly well that grey seals are still living off resources, all kinds of resources, not just what's left of the cod, but also crab and lobster. The testimony has been eloquent on that point.

I don't want to accuse you of poor management, but I'm obliged to do so in this case. I would like to hear what you have to say about this file in particular.

• (0920)

[English]

Hon. Gail Shea: Thank you, honourable member.

I know this is something that you're very concerned about and it's something I'm very concerned about, too. The explosion in the numbers of grey seals, I am well aware, is an issue that has to be addressed. We have done a lot of work on the seal file. Of course, what we do has to be supported by science. So there was a lot of work done on the science of the grey seal file, particularly in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. We can now say with certainty that the seal population is affecting the rebuilding of cod.

With respect to other species and the effect of grey seals on lobster and crab, we can't say with certainty yet, but the science is ongoing. We did some work on coming up with an acceptable method to decrease the number of seals in the Gulf of Lawrence, but I have to say, thank you for your patience, because it's something that we're still working on.

We've put a lot of effort into trying to open new markets and develop new products. I know that you're thinking that grey seals don't provide a lot of usable products, but we would like to get to a place where we can have full utilization of the animal, and work is ongoing in that field. Work is also ongoing on opening markets for those potential products, and for those products that are also available now. So we expect to hear from the Chinese very soon on this. The Chinese have come to Canada and inspected our plants, including their equivalent of our CFIA. We're expecting to hear back from the Chinese very soon.

But I do understand this is a big issue. It's an issue of biodiversity and it's upsetting our whole ecosystem. I'm confident that we will have something in place. I'm hoping of having something in place for the next—

[Translation]

Mr. Raynald Blais: Unfortunately, minister, I must admit to you, very realistically, that my patience has turned into impatience. It's as simple as that. People are impatient; I'm impatient, and one species is currently taking advantage of this: the grey seal. We need another targeted harvesting plan, a serious decision. This is a necessary decision and one for preservation of the resource as well. That's why, if the department and you continue to do what you're doing, it will be easy to accuse you of poor management in this matter. It makes no sense for us to be still waiting and for you to ask us once again to be patient in this file.

Furthermore, with regard to wharves, small craft harbours, we know very well that the 2010-2011 budget, the one that expires on March 31, will no longer contain the \$200 million over two years. So we will unfortunately be going back to the square one, where we were two years ago. We know that those amounts made it possible, even with this effort, to meet perhaps one-third of needs. So two-thirds of needs have not yet been met.

What are you considering doing? Have you made a request to Cabinet to improve the 2011-2012 and subsequent budgets? Is there a plan for the wharves across Quebec and Canada to make them safe and, at the same time, to discharge your responsibilities as minister and as a department?

• (0925)

[English]

Hon. Gail Shea: Thank you, honourable member.

You're quite right; we doubled our investment in small craft harbours over the last two years, which has allowed us to address a lot of the harbours that had health and safety concerns and were most in need. We do understand that there are still a number of harbours out there that need to have work done to them to ensure they are safe for fishers.

This has probably been the biggest investment in small craft harbours in history. I'm just glad that we had the budget passed so we could do that work on small craft harbours. These harbours are always, of course, a budget item or line item in our budget. We'd always like to have more money, but we have made considerable progress with the harbours around the country for our fishing industry.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Donnelly.

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, thank you for appearing before us today to provide some answers to our questions on the fisheries and oceans file.

Minister, in your opening remarks you mentioned the potential impact on the environment and wild species from aquaculture. You also mentioned that you saw no reason why Canada couldn't exceed many of its global competitors.

On those two points, I'd like to add that I think there has been proof on both coasts of the impact of aquaculture on the ocean ecosystem, and specifically on wild salmon. Certainly on the west coast, which I am most familiar with, the scientific research has shown there have been impacts on the wild salmon from farm sea lice.

While the farms do provide jobs on both coasts, there is also a real danger of losing jobs in other industries from this impact. I'm glad to hear the department has looked at moving to closed containment, but I'm just wondering if you can comment about when you see the industry moving to closed containment.

Hon. Gail Shea: As I said in my remarks, our research has shown that closed containment can work on a small scale, but it's not viable for large-scale operations.

If I might just go back to your comments about the impacts of sea lice on the wild fishery, I've heard it said over and over again that this was the case and that it was the cause of the demise of the Fraser River sockeye. But this year we have had record runs in the Fraser River, which begs even more questions about the impacts, because obviously sea lice on farmed salmon did not factor this year. So I think there's a lot more science to be done.

You asked about how we figure we can expand in Canada. In talking about expansion, I would note we have a lot more farmed species besides fin fish. We have a lot of different species that are farmed, so there are a lot of opportunities in a lot of different areas.

But I think what we have to get to is sustainable development and ensuring that it's sustainable.

● (0930)

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Thank you, Minister.

I have just a follow-up comment. I've talked to many of the farmers, including some of the biggest aquaculture farms on the west coast, and they're very concerned about expanding. They haven't been able to expand, and in seven years there have been no new licences. And the impact on their industry has been the real or perceived problem with sea lice, or what the public views as environmental concerns. That's one of the things that really does limit this industry in Canada.

Looking at things like closed containment could provide a win-win situation for the environment, for the public, for the industry, and for the government.

I just want to move on to the Fisheries Act. There's been talk of a new fisheries act being introduced this year. I wonder if you could give us a comment on the Fisheries Act and if in fact a new act is coming this year. And if so, are you able to provide a list of all those you've consulted regarding this new act?

Hon. Gail Shea: We do intend to reintroduce legislation. As you know, we've already had a couple of runs at it, and I would hope that the folks around this table would really work for the industry and not play political games, because I think this is too important.

There have already been extensive consultations done the last two times around, so we do have a lot of information. I do intend to bring the act forward, and I just hope that everyone will take it seriously, because this is a lot of time and effort on everybody's part and it

affects our industry, our economy. So I hope we will have your support on this.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Because I have limited time, I'm just going to have to go right to my last question before I that beep, and that is on lighthouses.

Minister, before your Conservative government took power, you committed to maintaining staffed lighthouses. I wonder if that commitment still exists today.

Hon. Gail Shea: Well, what have said...of course, we're in tough economic times, and that's no secret. We have asked the Senate committee on fisheries to go out and talk to folks in the regions, talk to people who either work at lighthouses or might use the service, because DFO's responsibility is to ensure that we have working lights for mariners. When we talked about de-staffing lighthouses, there was a public outcry that this was going to jeopardize marine safety. Well, before we make any decisions, I want to ensure that we're not jeopardizing marine safety in any way.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Finally—I'm going to hear that beep anytime now—according to a recent audit, if an oil spill happened in Canadian waters today, the coast guard would not be able to contain or clean that up. This audit revealed that there was a lack of training, outdated equipment, and a lack of proper management systems.

I just wonder if the government is prepared to commit the necessary resources for the coast guard to protect our oceans and coastline from a catastrophic oil spill.

Hon. Gail Shea: One of the things I can tell you that we have done already is invest heavily in the renewal of our fleet, which is very important.

I do want to say as well that when it comes to oil spills, if it's an offshore oil spill—I don't know if members are aware of this—when a company drills for oil offshore, they are required to have their oil spill response plan and they're required to have the capacity to carry that out.

If a tanker is in Canadian waters, they are responsible to have their oil spill response plan, and they're required to have the capacity to carry that out.

The coast guard works as a monitor in these situations, but the coast guard also must have its own oil spill response capacity because the coast guard is responsible for any spill that might happen where we can't find the origin of the spill, and things of that nature.

The audit did reveal that we have some work to do as far as developing a national program for oil spill response, because really what happens now is that it's more regional. So a lot of the recommendations are administrative, within the department. The coast guard has not fallen down on responding to oil spills. On any spills that have happened—they respond to about 1,300 on an annual basis—they have done quite successfully.

● (0935)

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Kamp.

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

Thank you, Minister and officials, for being here and, Minister, for your willingness to take questions on a variety of topics in addition to aquaculture.

Let me start with one that's more an east coast issue, and then I'll transition into some west coast questions.

In recent years I guess, but certainly in recent months, tuna has been kind of a focus of attention in the fisheries world, at least Atlantic bluefin tuna has been. I know Canada is involved in that fishery. I understand that last year at CITES, it was a focus of their attention, and there was an attempt made to list bluefin tuna. As I understand it, Canada didn't support that initiative. So I was wondering if you could tell us Canada's position with respect to CITES.

But then more recently, ICCAT, the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas, had its meetings, which finished not many days ago. I wonder if you could update us on what the developments were at that meeting and on Canada's position in terms of whether we were disappointed with the results. Could you also tell us how the industry is doing in Canada?

Hon. Gail Shea: Thank you for those questions.

First, let me go back to the CITES recommendation that bluefin tuna be listed as an endangered species. If bluefin tuna had been listed on CITES, a ban on trade in bluefin tuna among countries would have been put in place. It would not stop domestic fishing. So any country that consumes all of its tuna would have had no restriction on the bluefin tuna fishery. That would mean that the countries that are the violators, which are currently involved in overfishing bluefin tuna, would have kept right on fishing bluefin tuna, and Canada would have been penalized, because we export all of our tunas. So that would have done nothing to solve the problem.

What we said was that we want to manage bluefin tuna through a regional fisheries management organization, which is ICCAT. So this year we went to ICCAT, and Canada has taken a decrease in the total allowable catch for the last three years because we're good, responsible managers of this fishery. In this year, we've seen some success in the rebuilding of the stock. Science is showing us that the stock is rebuilding, so we want to be cautious, and we want to ensure that we allow it to rebuild.

This year's meetings led to a small reduction of the Canadian total allowable catch of about 11 tonnes, which is very small. We certainly can live with that. In Canada we have the best-managed bluefin fishery in the world. We fish with a hook and line. Every tuna is tagged and accounted for, so we're doing our part to rebuild the stock. Of course, through ICCAT, we must ensure that the rest of the world does its part as well.

We were disappointed that some of the management measures we put forward for stronger reporting did not get adopted, but we're going to continue to work on that.

Mr. Randy Kamp: So there are two populations—I'm not sure what the right technical word is there—both the western and the

eastern. Western Atlantic tuna, I guess, is what Canada primarily fishes and there's also eastern.

Do we have any concerns about the effects of the spill in the Gulf of Mexico on the future of western Atlantic tuna?

● (0940)

Hon. Gail Shea: We have some concerns, but we won't see the results of that for a number of years. Given the preliminary information we have, we don't think the tuna population will be affected. The Gulf of Mexico is the spawning ground for tuna, so it will be a number of years before we see what the results of that will be.

Mr. Randy Kamp: Okay, thank you.

Let me return to the subject matter of your comments, which is aquaculture in B.C.

I guess we understand that the courts made a decision that gave us the responsibility for the management of aquaculture, which had previously been the province's. Is the department enthusiastically accepting this responsibility? Is it going to be business as usual as it transfers from B.C. to the federal government, or will it be managed in a different way?

Hon. Gail Shea: Well, you know, this was the decision of the courts, so we'll comply with the decision of the courts.

It's been a challenge for our staff over the last 20 months, because, as I said in my opening remarks, we went from standing still to developing a whole new program. By December 18 it has to come into place. You know, some of the biggest differences that we see is that our regulations will streamline the industry more when it comes to service to clients.

So before, the clients would have to go to the federal government for some approvals, for some licenses, and they had to go to the provincial government for others. Such as they would have to come to the federal government for a predator license to take care of predators. So we'll streamline all that into one.

Our regulations require more public reporting, which is going to be more work for the industry, but it will be more transparent to everyone, and we will have stronger enforcement and better compliance. So we'll put more resources into the inspecting of fish farms and things of that nature to ensure that they're compliant with the regulations.

I'm just going to ask Kevin Stringer if he might just elaborate on the public reporting requirements.

Mr. Kevin Stringer (Assistant Deputy Minister, Program Policy, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Sure.

As the minister says, we're ready. We take responsibility for the licensing and for the federal regime on December 18. We will have a regulation in place. We will have licences provided, and the licence conditions—which have been circulated broadly to industry but also to other interested parties—speak to the reporting requirements. They speak to what will probably be a major difference in the new regime, as the minister said, which is that there are enhanced reporting requirements on industry, and some of the things that were done by policy previously will now be done by condition of licence.

So we will have regular reporting on fish health, sea lice and other diseases, and on escapes and environmental conditions. Each of the facilities will be required to have a fish health plan and an environmental management plan, and they'll be required to report regularly to DFO on those things.

There are a few pieces that are proprietary information, and we've sorted out with industry what needs to be proprietary. But there will be significantly enhanced reporting on those things, and they will be on DFO's website on a regular basis on those issues. As the minister says, that's a fundamental difference in terms of what the system will look like going forward.

Mr. Randy Kamp: Thank you.

I have just one final topic that's important to those of us on the west coast.

For a number of years, there has been an allocation arrangement for halibut between the recreational sector and the commercial sector, the famous “88/12”, as we refer to it: 88% going to the commercial sector and 12% to the recreational sector. That was a decision that preceded you and your government.

That worked for a while, but my understanding is that there is now pressure on that 12% as being no longer adequate for the recreational sector in recent years. So I'm just wondering what you're doing to somehow resolve this issue.

• (0945)

Hon. Gail Shea: I'll respond.

Thank you. This has been a challenging issue for us, and we've put a lot of effort into trying to find a solution to the 88/12.

I just want to say there are a couple of factors here. One of the factors here is that there is no limit to the recreational sector—how many people buy a licence, how many people go fishing—so you never know how many fish need to be there to satisfy the recreational sector.

The other thing is that there is no guarantee in the total allowable catch of halibut in any given year. The 12% therefore translates into a different amount of fish every year. So it has been very challenging.

I'm going to ask the deputy to respond to this, because she has been working on this file with the stakeholders in British Columbia.

Ms. Claire Dansereau: Thank you, Minister.

It is true that it's a very interesting and tricky question for us to address, because the needs on both sides of the equation are real. As of course the needs for the fish are real. So we have put in place a small working group with a facilitator made up of the recreational

fishers and the commercial side to work through. What we have instructed is that there are no limits to the things that they can consider in terms of sharing the allocation and that we will do the policy analysis behind what is suggested.

So that work is ongoing. It's not going as quickly as we might like. The questions are difficult; sometimes we have to step aside because the fishing season is very active and people are on the water.

But there was a meeting very recently and there is another one coming up between the two groups to see if we can reach some kind of consensus for a recommendation to the minister.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now move to a two-minute round.

Mr. Andrews.

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

During our study on the snow crab, when we were in Cape Breton we heard testimony about the area 23 and area 24 crab management plan. I'm going to ask a couple of questions regarding that today.

We heard that once the TAC went to 9,700 tonnes there would be a 50-50 sharing arrangement. On a typical request, we saw that the department recommended that previous ministerial decisions on access be maintained. So why did the 50-50 sharing arrangement not come into play on the previous ministerial decisions on the TAC once it hit 9,700 tonnes? Why did your department change its mind on that, Minister?

Hon. Gail Shea: Thank you, honourable member.

There are different interpretations of the report. I do believe that the process is fair and that it distributes quota equally among all licences.

One of the things we have to do is manage that fishery sustainably. I know that a number of years ago a lot of new access was given to the fishery. If you look at it overall—probably in your province as well as mine—there's overcapacity everywhere in the fishery. It's very difficult to manage, because in times of low TAC nobody has a viable enterprise. Then everybody wants rationalization because there's not enough fish to go around.

That being said, we made the decision. There's stability for everyone, because everyone knows this is going forward. So we felt that it was done equitably.

The Chair: Your time has expired, Mr. Andrews, unfortunately.

Monsieur Lévesque.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Two minutes isn't a long time, minister.

I'm asking the question with some reservation because I believe it concerns you.

As you know, an offshore drilling agreement was reached last year. It's an agreement with the James Bay Cree on offshore rights in Hudson Bay and James Bay. Those people held a referendum. The agreement was supported.

We are waiting for legislation to cover this agreement between the federal government, the Government of Quebec and the James Bay Cree. I don't know when we can expect to receive a bill.

In view of the short period of time allotted to me, I'm going back to my colleague Mr. Donnelly's remarks on the act.

Minister, I would remind you that, in the Throne Speech, the government committed to tabling a bill to modernize the fisheries management system, which is obsolete. It is still obsolete.

We strongly encouraged the government to move forward on this matter. That may be the only time we've done that, but, in any case, we did it.

I would like to know whether we can expect a bill to be tabled by the end of the current session.

• (0950)

[English]

Hon. Gail Shea: Thank you, honourable member. I can assure you there will be a bill. I don't have a definite date on that right now. I look forward to your support on it. Thank you very much.

On your other question, about the offshore rights with the Cree, I believe it might be an Indian and Northern Affairs issue, but we will check into that.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: I'm done. I bet I don't have much time left.

[English]

The Chair: You have five seconds.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: It isn't just in the parliamentary committees that there's injustice; there's tax injustice as well.

Minister, thank you and your assistants for being here.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Monsieur Lévesque.

Mr. Donnelly.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I have two questions, Minister.

In your remarks earlier you mentioned marine protected areas. Is DFO on track with its commitment to implement the promised number of MPAs by 2012?

My second question goes back to the halibut allocation between the commercial and sport fishers. You gave some background that was very helpful. I'm just wondering if you can provide specifics. What is being done at the table to resolve the issue between the two sectors and get to a fairer process and a fairer allocation of halibut?

Hon. Gail Shea: On the MPAs, we're working very hard. With MPAs, establishing one is a long process because there's so much consultation and because there are so many stakeholders in our oceans and we have to make sure that the concerns of all are addressed. We are doing all we can, working very closely with all the stakeholders to establish more. We're on track to 2012.

I'm going to ask the deputy too; she probably has more specifics on the halibut issue, if she wants to elaborate.

Ms. Claire Dansereau: Thanks, Minister.

I can't actually speak to the options that they're discussing because they haven't landed on any of the options yet. They really are working hard together, the people themselves who are affected by any changes in this, and I'd rather not upset the apple cart of their hard work.

First of all, they had to begin to develop a relationship, which was no easy feat because of some of the historical animosity, I guess, and some distrust. So we're working hard at building that, but also we're doing some real analytical work behind some potential options around...I wouldn't say a more fair sharing approach, because the sharing approach had been deemed fair at one point. It just doesn't work now, or it doesn't work for some now. It would be in everybody's best interests to find a solution that we can all live with from this point on.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Weston.

[Translation]

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

Minister, welcome and thank you for being with us today.

[English]

You're a first-term member of Parliament and minister, and you climbed quickly the ladder of familiarity with a very demanding portfolio.

As you know, our committee has been focused on aquaculture recently, and you mentioned a study that we're working on. The whole area is bound by two competing concerns: economic development—and you referred to that—and environmental sustainability. Our government's commitment to that has been already alluded to by Ms. Murray in terms of the upholding of the environmental assessment in the Taseko file.

I wonder, given that this is something of concern particularly to British Columbians, if you could elaborate. You have said that there is interest in closed containment, and I would say that our committee members are united in interest in that. Can you tell us a little more about what the government is doing to explore closed containment as an option?

●(0955)

Hon. Gail Shea: We have completed a couple of studies on closed containment. The results of one of them can be found on our website. We have also, under the AIMAP program, funded several research projects on closed containment. What we're finding is that, technically, closed containment can be done. It does exist in many areas in smaller-scale operations. So if you have a much higher-value fish, it can be viable with a smaller-scale operation. I think that by continuing to invest in research....

We've come a long way in the last 10 years in our research on closed containment and our research in general on aquaculture. We can make better decisions, and I believe the industry is constantly improving.

Mr. John Weston: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

On behalf of the committee, I want to say thank you for taking the time this morning to appear before us and answer many of our questions here today. I know you have other engagements here.

We're going to take a short recess while the minister departs. The staff will be with us for the remainder of the meeting to answer any further questions.

● _____ (Pause) _____

●

●(1000)

The Chair: I'll ask committee members to please take their seats so that we can resume.

We're going to go back to an original round of questioning.

Ms. Dansereau, I'd like to thank you and the other officials for taking the time today to appear with us and to stay for the remainder of the meeting. Hopefully we can get committee members under control here rather quickly and we'll begin with further questioning.

I believe, Ms. Murray, you have the floor.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Thank you.

Thanks for being here to answer other questions.

This is a question about the Cohen commission. I appreciate that the department and the minister set that up to inquire into the decline of salmon. Everyone was, of course, delighted at the one-year unexpected increase in sockeye salmon. There are theories about how that might be a one-time event. Trends are very worrisome in general, particularly with the southern stocks.

Are you satisfied that this inquiry is going to achieve your objectives? What are your objectives for the inquiry? Does it look like it's on track? The avalanche of legal documents is of concern to people. The focus on the department is a concern. The relative absence of testimony from scientists and participants from various fisheries communities, and so on, is a concern.

Is there something that needs to be done to refocus the Cohen commission, in your view, or do you view it to be on track to meeting the objectives, and what are your objectives?

●(1005)

Ms. Claire Dansereau: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

If I may, the department did not set up the Cohen inquiry. It was a decision of the Government of Canada and the Prime Minister to establish, and to have Justice Cohen lead the inquiry into this very important issue. It's not a question of whether or not we are satisfied that it's achieving its objectives because we didn't establish the objectives.

I am actually—I'm on record as saying this many times—pleased with the work that it is doing, that it has been charged with doing. As everybody knows, managing the salmon fishery on the west coast of British Columbia is complex. The science is complex. There are many points of view. So to have a year and a half or two years of specific focus on that question can only be of assistance to everybody that has an interest in this fishery. I have no views on how it is conducting itself.

I know they have a series of scientists being called into the future. I think that the list of people that will be testifying is either on their website now, or will be. It is up to Justice Cohen to continue to do his work and the work of the commission. We have testified, many of us have been called to testify, and will continue to do so.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Thank you.

It sounds like you have no concerns about this process. Do you have concerns about the adequacy of science with respect to sockeye salmon? Is it adequately funded, adequately focused? Do we have the answers that science should be able to provide us?

Ms. Claire Dansereau: Certainly I believe that we have been funding it adequately thus far. Having once, way back in my life, been a scientist, I know there's no end of work that science can do if there's more money. There can always be further questions to be addressed.

I believe that having a commission, such as the Cohen commission, with a single focus on that one species will add to the scientific knowledge that we have and will bring out more science. As the minister said, through our science investments, we leverage other science with universities and our partnerships, etc., and we will continue to do that.

I suspect that, according to some, there would never be enough money; there will never be enough science. I do believe that what we have so far has been adequate.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Okay. Well, that's certainly not a view that I often hear. If your view is that we have enough science, and so we have enough information, then surely we must know why our stocks have been declining so terribly over such a long period. I mean, somebody's just not doing the right thing. If we know what the problem is, we should know what to be doing about it. I hope, for the sake of future generations, you're right, but I don't agree.

I'm going to turn the rest of my time over to my colleague.

Ms. Claire Dansereau: I'd like to clarify, Mr. Chair.

I didn't say we have all the answers—I certainly didn't—and I don't think any scientist would say if we had the money we would have the answer.

Do we know what the actual problem is? No, I don't think so. Would necessarily having more money today allow us to even find that answer? I'm not sure it would.

Science moves in increments and science builds on itself. One day we will understand the dynamics better. We understand them more now than we did 50 years ago, and maybe 50 years from now we'll understand it more. I'm not sure that a large infusion of money at any one time will give you the specific answer if you don't actually know what the questions are.

People are working very hard, in very many areas around the world, to address that very question, and we will continue to do so.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Andrews.

Mr. Scott Andrews: Thank you.

Getting back to area 23 and area 24 crab management, the minister in her testimony admitted there was some conflict, some confusion on the particular allocation formula. That is confirmed by departmental memos.

There was a recommendation that came from your RDG Faith Scattolon, to you, deputy minister, which recommends that it reconvene the independent panel and get a clarification on the sharing arrangement.

Why wasn't the panel ever reconvened? If clarification was needed, as the minister suggested this morning, why wasn't that done?

• (1010)

Ms. Claire Dansereau: Mr. Chair, if I may, I don't remember that particular memo, but I do remember having many conversations with Faith on this issue. It was very clear that we were dealing with at the time was a difference of opinion.

I don't think the minister said "confusion", but there was certainly a difference of opinion on the interpretation of what 50-50 meant. The department took the view, and the minister agreed, that 50-50 meant an equitable share, not an equal share for each individual. That would not have been equitable.

So the decision that was made was done through very significant deliberation and analysis.

Mr. Scott Andrews: The recommendation was made that you reconvene the independent panel. How come you didn't reconvene the independent panel to get clarification?

Ms. Claire Dansereau: I'm sorry, I'd have to look back into what the answer was to that question.

I presume—and I shouldn't presume on record—that....

I won't presume on record.

Mr. Scott Andrews: I'll go on to a couple of other questions.

With respect to the fisheries ambassador, Mr. Sullivan, why was his appointment only extended for one year?

Ms. Claire Dansereau: I'm sorry, we in the department are not responsible for establishing his appointment. It's a GIC appointment.

Mr. Scott Andrews: Will you have any input on a new fisheries ambassador, when the time comes?

Ms. Claire Dansereau: I have no idea. That's speculation.

Mr. Scott Andrews: For my final question, as you're aware, there's an MOU being produced by the province and the fishing industry in Newfoundland and Labrador. The federal government is not a partner, not a player, at this particular point of the process.

Have you guys made any representation to this process? How are you going to see this process through? What's your department's role when this memorandum of understanding becomes public? The federal government has a huge role in the fishing industry, but you're not part of this process.

Ms. Claire Dansereau: Mr. Chair, thank you for the question.

When the process began in Newfoundland and Labrador, we were not invited to be party to the process. Much of the work had already started when we were approached.

We are observers, we are clearly very much involved in some of the discussions that helped develop that MOU, but we are at this point not official partners.

Mr. Scott Andrews: So your officials were involved with the discussions? Who was involved with the discussions?

Ms. Claire Dansereau: The officials in the regions work very closely; the provincial officials and the federal officials and the industry talk all the time, as you know.

So we would provide advice or information, but we are not party at this point to the MOU. Whether or not we ever will be, we don't know; we have not been formally asked.

Mr. Scott Andrews: Will you be providing a response to the MOU when it comes out? Obviously it's going to have impact on regulation changes, so will you be responding to the MOU? Are you disappointed you're not involved with the process?

It's quite frustrating that the major player in the fishing industry is not a part of this process.

Ms. Claire Dansereau: Whether or not we will respond will depend on what the MOU finally looks like. If there are elements of the MOU that can only be implemented by the federal government, obviously we will have to give consideration to what those are and make a determination as to whether we can respond.

Again, it's somewhat speculative. We'll see what happens when the MOU is finalized.

Mr. Scott Andrews: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Blais.

[Translation]

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

I would simply like to know what has happened to the fisheries ambassador. Has he disappeared in the fog?

Ms. Claire Dansereau: No, not at all. He is very active. He even took part in the Canadian delegation to Paris and in the talks on ICCAT. He made presentations everywhere. He's very active internationally. He is working on a number of files. I don't have a list of them. I didn't know that I would be asked that question.

Mr. Raynald Blais: For how long has he been appointed, Ms. Dansereau?

Ms. Claire Dansereau: This time, it was for one year. That will be in the spring, I believe. I don't remember the exact dates.

Mr. Raynald Blais: I would like to discuss the wharf at Carleton-sur-Mer.

I've previously had the opportunity to discuss this with you a number of times, and I very recently tabled a petition in the House of Commons. That petition had been signed by several thousands of people from the Gaspé region. When that many people sign a petition, it is indicative of the interest in this issue, and especially of its importance.

The answer I received from the department leaves me flabbergasted. It states:

In the circumstances and considering the various uses of the harbour, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans is working with Transport Canada to identify economically viable future alternatives for all port infrastructure in Carleton in a manner mutually respectful of each department's respective mandate.

Surely you can clarify those last words.

That suggests that all the discussions between Transport Canada and Fisheries and Oceans Canada concerning an eventual and full return of the wharf to DFO have been entirely forgotten. If they're talking about the respective mandates of each department, they're considering that Transport Canada will have one part of the wharf and that Fisheries and Oceans Canada will have another part.

Is my interpretation correct or does yours differ?

• (1015)

Ms. Claire Dansereau: I can discuss that small boat harbour in a general way but not specifically. Each of us clearly has our own mandate and we must respect each other's. You will understand that, if we have to share responsibilities, the question of accountability will arise. Who will be accountable for the safety of the place, among other things?

I know we usually do our best to work together to serve clients well. I would have to do a little research. I don't really remember the details. I'm really sorry about that. We came here to discuss aquaculture and a few other issues. That's entirely my fault. I should have inquired into issues such as that.

Mr. Raynald Blais: It's never your fault, but it's still your responsibility.

Ms. Claire Dansereau: It's still my fault.

Mr. Raynald Blais: I'm nevertheless waiting for that answer. I'll get it soon, I hope. I would like to have some details on the response to the petition. That really leaves me wondering.

Furthermore, I know you were at Daniel Pauly's conference. It was very interesting. It was held very early in the morning. A few committee members were there as well, and that's so much the better. The fact remains that Mr. Pauly's remarks do raise some questions.

In his view, by continuing to do what we're doing with regard to the resource, we're heading straight toward a wall, and it's going to hurt. In fact, it already hurts.

Did it make you feel a sense of urgency?

Ms. Claire Dansereau: Unfortunately, I was unable to attend the entire presentation because I had to go to another meeting. I wanted to hear at least part of that conference.

I have had occasion to meet Mr. Pauly and the entire team at the University of British Columbia. That was about a month ago. He is a researcher at a fisheries research centre. I thought the work of those people was very interesting. So I asked—and I'm still asking—that our management table work with that research centre.

I think it's very important to consider more than one scientific viewpoint. Researchers have quite clear viewpoints. Our responsibility is to listen to our scientists, but to listen to others as well and to bring them together.

With regard to your question as to whether that made me feel a sense of urgency, I would answer that the urgent nature of the decisions we must take is always a concern for me. It's always present. I know that global fisheries management is a very important issue. So we're doing our best to bring together a variety of scientific viewpoints.

Mr. Raynald Blais: Pardon me for interrupting you, but time is passing very quickly. With regard to the global aspect of fisheries, there is a sword of Damocles over our heads in that there are ongoing international negotiations. Some are even underway in Europe right now.

We are wondering what will happen to the wharf grants—which we consider as such—the employment subsidies, with regard to unemployment insurance and so on, grants to assist businesses and fishing boats to modernize? They may become prohibited grants. They're in the red zone. That's at the international level, and that's even affecting the future of the fisheries. If those grants are eliminated, what do we do? The fishermen will wind up alone? The fishing industry will wind up alone?

Does that concern you as well?

• (1020)

Ms. Claire Dansereau: I know the negotiations are ongoing. I'm not at all an expert on the negotiations as a whole. It would be a good idea to bring in someone from the Department of Foreign Affairs to discuss the talks as a whole to see whether they are ongoing. The ones you refer to are called the Doha Round. There is very little discussion underway right now, I believe, on those questions.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Donnelly.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The minister referenced in her remarks with regard to staffed lighthouses that essentially they're waiting for the Senate committee's work to conclude on this. Is that essentially the department's view, that once this work is concluded and there is, I'm assuming, a recommendation or a series of recommendations, action will be taken at that point, or no action will be taken?

Can you just clarify the work plan there?

Ms. Claire Dansereau: Yes, Mr. Chair.

The normal procedure is that the Senate committee is looking at the question, as your committee does, and will provide a report. We will then be in a position to respond to that report, as with any standing committee report, when we see what they come up with or find out.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Okay.

Going back to the Fisheries Act for a second, the minister referenced a new act coming out at some point. She mentioned, I believe, that it would be based on previous acts and the consultation around those two previous acts, I think. Both of those were not successfully implemented.

So if they weren't successful and there has been no new consultation, is this act a different act? Will it contain anything different from what was previously submitted? And if it is a new act and there are new elements to it, has it received as wide a consultation process as the previous act did?

I will just add that, when there was consultation, I understand the stakeholders were not happy with the act. So I'm a little confused as to why the act, if it's unchanged, is coming back or being reintroduced, and why there's an expectation of our support, as the minister has asked a number of us if we would support it. I can't see why we would support something that's unchanged and that wasn't successful in the past, and why it would be successful now.

Ms. Claire Dansereau: I was not at the department at the time, but my understanding is that the previous act died on the order paper. It was never debated and never defeated. So if the act were reintroduced, the consultation that went into, certainly, the last version of it would be deemed to be the consultation required—at least to get it to the first stages. That's not to say there wouldn't be additional consultations once it were in the public.

So it's really not the case that the act or the consultation was not sufficient, it's just that the House schedule being what it was, the act did not make its way through the system.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Well, I can say that from our party's perspective, it was not going to receive support because of the concerns from many of the stakeholders across the country.

So can you clarify whether the new act is going to be the same or going to be changed?

Ms. Claire Dansereau: I can't clarify that at the moment, but I can say that there would be, if there were an introduction, room for consultation.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Moving to MPAs, the minister mentioned in her remarks that it is a long process to establish a marine protected area, which I fully appreciate. That was getting to my question on fulfilling the 2012 commitment. It seems that the government is far

behind in achieving that full commitment, given the length of time it takes to achieve sign-off for an MPA.

I'm wondering if you could clarify how it is you feel that the department is on track, given that we're not even halfway to our commitment.

• (1025)

Ms. Claire Dansereau: A very significant portion of the work is on developing the areas of interest. There are two rounds of consultation. One has to do with establishing areas of interest from which we can select a marine protected area. There's consultation at each stage, and significant progress has been made on quite a number of areas of interest. So the final stages for those will be much more quickly done.

So I'm fairly confident—I can't say I am 100% confident, but I am fairly confident—that we will be able to meet our targets.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: I'm out of time.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Donnelly.

Mr. Cannan.

Mr. Ron Cannan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to our witnesses.

I want to start with the Justice Cohen inquiry, the timeline. What's your understanding of it? Is it on schedule? What's the anticipated final report date?

Ms. Claire Dansereau: It depends on the definition of "schedule". As I think everyone knows, Justice Cohen asked for an extension of time for his interim report, which was due out in August, according to the first terms of reference. He asked for and received permission to extend that to October, which he did, and came in on time.

So I don't know; it's between the commission and others whether or not there would be an extension on the second phase. I don't know if he has asked for one, and I don't know if it would be granted if he were to ask.

Mr. Ron Cannan: Thank you.

Going back to the issue of lighthouses, safety is paramount, as Minister Shea and all of us around the room realize. I come from the interior of British Columbia, so it's not a big safety issue in my constituency, but it is an issue for the economics of our province and our country.

In flying over with the committee a few weeks ago, having the opportunity to see first-hand some of the challenges, I can see the importance, after talking with a helicopter pilot, of using the lighthouse for both visual and audio warnings.

From an economic perspective, we're hearing from the coastal communities that if there's an oil spill, for example, it takes human resources to be able to respond quickly. That would be a possible role they would play.

It would come into a bigger picture. We heard from some of the witnesses when we visited the aquaculture sites. It concerns me, the amount of dollars that are being funneled in by our friends from the south. Americans are funding these organizations under the guise of environmental protection, but it seems to be stymying economic opportunities.

Do you look at the lighthouse issue from an economic perspective as well as a safety perspective?

Ms. Claire Dansereau: Thank you for the question.

The issue of other “activities”, if I can use that word, that a lighthouse keeper might do, rather than just the lighthouse itself... because there's a distinction, certainly in the minds of some, between the purpose of the light versus the purpose of the lighthouse keeper.

As the minister said, there's never been any question of reducing the number of lights or the safety to mariners. The question of what other activities the lighthouse keepers may have is precisely the question that the minister asked the Senate committee to look at, and that's what it is investigating at the moment.

So I don't know the answer, and I'm not sure if this is answering your question on whether or not we consider economic development as part of our thinking. It would not be something that we would consider. It's not our mandate. That's not what we're funded for. We are, however, interested in knowing what are....

There was such a general outcry of concern around the other activities that a lighthouse keeper may engage in that it was important for us to determine what those are, and, if they are important functions, where they should be housed. Is it necessary that they be with us, and with lighthouse keepers, or could they be somewhere else?

•(1030)

Mr. Ron Cannan: Thank you.

With regard to aquaculture, we had a tour of an experimental closed containment facility in Middle Bay. It's been under way for a number of years. They hope to have the fish and the water up and running this spring as, hopefully, a viable test site. I was wondering, from the department's perspective, if that's the one you're looking at as a model, procedurally, for economic viability.

I have a supplemental question on the December 18 implementation. As it is under federal jurisdiction, as the B.C. Supreme Court has ruled, you are taking over responsibility. What's the application process for new aquaculture licences? Are we entertaining applications, or are we on hold?

Ms. Claire Dansereau: If you don't mind, I'll answer the last part of the question first.

As you know, the province will continue to play a significant role in new licences, because they have to lease the land—

Mr. Ron Cannan: Crown land, right?

Ms. Claire Dansereau: —the crown land—below the water. That would always be the first step in an application. If they can't get a lease for that, we wouldn't engage in the conversation.

Are we ready to accept a whole series of new applications? We haven't heard of many. People have not been approaching us on

them. We will definitely be ready to take on our responsibilities for managing what's there and for analyzing any new applications that come in.

I'll ask Kevin to address the question of which sites have been considered for the closed containment work. I'm not sure if the one you mentioned was one we actually looked at, and I'm not sure if Kevin would know either.

Mr. Kevin Stringer: We're aware of all of the ones that are taking place. We're following them very closely. There have been a number of meetings on closed containment that we've chaired and that we've participated in with stakeholders. We're contributing financially to some of the demonstration projects and some of the research on closed containment. I'm not certain about that specific one. I know that we know about virtually all of them that are taking place. We are making financial contributions to projects.

The minister mentioned, as well, the research we've done. We had an expert process on technical feasibility about a year ago. We pulled all the stakeholders together. We've also recently released a financial analysis of economic feasibility, which speaks to some of the financial challenges related to closed containment. We're involved in all parts of the file and are following it very closely.

Mr. Ron Cannan: I know that the individuals involved were very appreciative of the federal government's support and of the sustainable development technology credits that have been applied to date. We'll watch that with great interest.

Kevin, while I have your attention at the moment, the issue we're also studying in aquaculture is the issue of sea lice. When we went to visit with the Washington fisheries department, we talked about SLICE. When we had your colleague here earlier this year, we talked about SLICE and the fact that the Americans use it down in Washington. The Washington officials said that they don't use SLICE.

I'm just wondering if you're familiar with the contradiction. Have you had a chance to look into the difference in the trains of thought here?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: I would say a couple of things with respect to that.

One is that we recently became aware that you had heard that. We are trying to check that out to see what does, in fact, happen in Washington State and whether they simply don't use it or are not allowed to use it. Our understanding is that it is...but we are checking that out, since we've heard that you did hear that.

The second thing I would say is that what happens in Canada is subject to a process led by PMRA. They do an environmental risk assessment. They check against our standards, and they approve only products and processes that we believe, according to our standards, are acceptable.

We are checking out what we heard about Washington State.

Mr. Ron Cannan: It is very interesting. I found that the issue didn't seem to be maybe as severe as some of the environmentalists made it out to be, but it wasn't quite as good as the industry made it out to be. Somewhere in the middle is always the balanced approach. I would appreciate that information as it comes forth, as well.

The last question has to do with coastal safety. It was brought to my attention, by a few of my colleagues from the coastal communities, that search and rescue is looking at changing their fleet. In Campbell River and Prince Rupert, there are two 71-foot search and rescue ships, and there's a tender for a 47-foot fleet to replace them. The issue is that one size doesn't fit all. I was just wondering if that's a done deal or if they're still open to negotiations to keep the 71-foot fleet in place.

● (1035)

Ms. Claire Dansereau: All the analysis shows that the 47-foot vehicle is much better suited to the conditions. It's much more agile. We could have the coast guard here to answer this in more detail, but it is truly a better craft for the area. It can actually do an Eskimo roll. It's much better suited for the waters in which it will be functioning.

Mr. Ron Cannan: I'm not an expert on it, but I know there are individuals in the audience who live on the west coast and live and breathe this. They'll say you can only go out for a day with its fuel supply and you have to turn around. It's limited by different weather conditions. I think they need to have a second look and consult with the people who live and breathe in the marine...on the west coast.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Claire Dansereau: We can certainly provide a technical briefing on it for you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move to a two-minute round.

Ms. Murray.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Thank you.

Ms. Dansereau, I'd like to request written substantiation to the committee of your claim that the funding support for healthy and productive aquatic ecosystems has been maintained. Your documents say that the funding was 50% higher in 2008-09 than in 2009-10, so maybe you can provide that analysis to support your contention.

Second is on aquaculture and wild salmon. I appreciate Ron for bringing the Washington trip back to memory. When we asked why they were not doing much in the way of salmon aquaculture, they said it was because their focus was on restoring the wild salmon stocks, and those two things were not consistent with each other.

When I read the minister's remarks they are all about industrial aquaculture, and that the government's job is to create conditions for industry to thrive, etc. Yes, but in my view that is conditional on the health, strength, and restoration of the wild fisheries. We just don't see that being a priority. It's barely nodded to in here.

Having been a minister at a time when some members in the province were hiding behind DFO's research and absence thereof year after year, that was impeding decisions around the wild fishery and salmon aquaculture. The research was absolutely not adequate. There was not enough being done. It was not reaching conclusions. I don't see anything different in the department's approach or the minister's approach today.

Can you assure us that wild salmon fish stocks are a priority? How can you demonstrate that, given the minister's comments and the

lack of funding increases to support that science and wild salmon stock recovery?

Ms. Claire Dansereau: For the department and the minister, the wild salmon fishery and all of the wild fisheries are of paramount importance. There has never been a reduction in our sense of priority around those fisheries. We are equally interested in them, whether it's the recreational fishery or the stocks themselves.

The minister's speaking points were addressing the issue of aquaculture itself, but she is equally concerned about the wild stocks and will continue to be so. Everything we are trying to do through taking over some of the responsibilities for aquaculture is to better integrate the science on both sides and the management on both sides to make sure there's a true linkage between what is happening on the farming side and what is happening on the wild side. It is an absolute, fundamental priority of the department and of the minister to make sure that the two can coexist.

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Lévesque, go ahead, please.

● (1040)

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I believe someone's really trying to push me toward the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

Ms. Dansereau, I'd like to go back to the grey seals. This morning, the minister told us that they are still dealing with scientific research and that they don't know how many years more they will be doing that.

Wouldn't it be possible to have a transitional measure, for example, by waiting until the scientific research is done so the grey seal population can stop growing as it is doing? They've nearly reached Abitibi.

I would also like to address another topic: aquaculture. We know what happened in British Columbia. Could the same thing happen in Quebec?

Ms. Claire Dansereau: Do you mean the same thing from a regulatory standpoint, with regard to the transfer of responsibilities?

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: Yes.

Ms. Claire Dansereau: On the grey seal issue, you heard the minister. This is a major priority for her, and we are continuing to do our job in that regard. We even convened a major scientific symposium where researchers from across Canada met to discuss the question and to look at the impact of grey seals on biodiversity. The report from that symposium will be published very soon, I believe. A number of researchers are involved in this discussion and are thus conducting a major debate among themselves to be sure they come up with the right answer. We're continuing to do our job on that issue.

As for aquaculture, we do not intend to extend our responsibilities. What happened in British Columbia was the result of cases in the courts, and we have no other cases in the courts at this time. We believe our shared jurisdiction systems are well established.

One question, among others, arose in British Columbia: would the system we had for sharing jurisdictions really be based on actual and territorial jurisdictions, and the court said no. So we changed our way of doing things, but it is not clear that the same is true in Quebec or elsewhere. We are quite satisfied with the way sharing is being done right now, and I believe Quebec is as well.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Donnelly.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In her remarks, the minister referenced the 2010 Fraser River sockeye return and the abundance that happened. I know that the 2009 run was a complete collapse. It was predicted there would be over 10 million returning, and around one million returned, so it was a 90% reduction, essentially a collapse. We have the Cohen inquiry studying that issue, and it will hopefully put some recommendations forward to avoid that in future.

Then we turned around in 2010 and had quite a spectacular return. The department still predicted about 10 million or 11 million would return, and there were almost 30 million. At one time it was said that over 30 million returned, and I think that was then adjusted to under 30 million. Essentially there doesn't seem to have been any idea from the department about what kind of returns would be coming back in those two years alone. We look at 2009, and the prediction was 10 million or 11 million; we look at 2010, and the prediction was roughly 10 million or 11 million in that area. Both are wildly off.

How is it that the department is able to say with any degree of confidence that you're on top of this situation and say that the wild fishery is being managed well, or that you're confident of the returns and the management systems in place?

Ms. Claire Dansereau: Thank you for the question. It's one that the Cohen inquiry is looking at, so I will not try to guess where they will go with this.

The scientists themselves are the first to say that what they can do is provide, based on certain facts they have, a range. They're never comfortable giving a pinpoint estimate, but given all of this they're often pushed into giving the pinpoint estimate, and that's when we're generally wrong. When we give a range, that tends to be generally correct. We tend to fall within the range, but it's a broad range, and it's not a range that people find very interesting, because it's too big. But it is based on the science as we know it, and it's based on us recognizing that we don't necessarily know what happens or where they go when they go out to the depths of the ocean.

We can predict what happens based on what goes out and on the conditions when they're coming back in but not on what happens when they're in the ocean.

• (1045)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Donnelly. Your time has expired.

Mr. Weston.

Mr. John Weston: First, in your considerations of aquaculture, Madame Dansereau, please don't forget that Agro Marine has a very lively operation in China. In terms of the impact on Canadian jobs and the technology being demonstrated there, I hope you will take that into account.

Second, in terms of supertankers on the west coast, I understand there are some 3,000 a year on the west coast and six times that number on the east coast. It's an issue that concerns British Columbians and all Canadians. There is something called the Pacific north coast integrated management area process, and I ask you this: If this isn't a DFO responsibility—and I understand DFO is not funding it—then don't we expose ourselves to the possibility that U.S.-based interests could be funding that process? And those could have an interest in stopping tankers going off our west coast because of the advantage that would be gained by Americans if all the supertanker process were there instead of in Canada.

Ms. Claire Dansereau: Thank you for the question.

I'm not one to use acronyms, but in this case you're talking about PNCIMA. I actually know this process more by its acronym, which is rare for me.

The PNCIMA process is an ongoing one. It's not a decision-making process, but really an information-sharing process, and it will not play a role in deciding whether or not tankers make their way through. There's a regulatory system in place, and those particular questions are strictly in the purview of Transport Canada and its minister.

So I would not be nervous that the PNCIMA process would result in those kinds prescriptive decisions.

Mr. John Weston: But we're hearing that Tides Canada is funded, potentially, by U.S. interests.

Will that not influence Canadian decision-makers?

Ms. Claire Dansereau: My understanding is there's some funding for participation in various meetings. The approval of some of the projects is done by consensus of a broad range of stakeholders. So it's run much more by stakeholders, who include all of our partners and client groups.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Dansereau, on behalf of the committee, I'd like to say thank you to you and the other officials for appearing here this morning and answering our many wide-ranging questions. Thank you once again.

This meeting stands adjourned.

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