



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

FOPO • NUMBER 007 • 1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Thursday, October 6, 2011

Chair

Mr. Rodney Weston

Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

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• (1530)

[English]

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

Ladies and gentlemen, I'd like to welcome our guest today, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans. I thank him for taking the time out of his busy schedule to meet with our committee. I'm sure the minister and the officials accompanying him—whom I'm sure he'll introduce as we go through—are all quite familiar with how the committee operates. We have certain time constraints that we operate within. The minister has some opening comments and then we'll move into questioning.

You'll probably hear a little alarm up here, Minister. Don't be alarmed when it goes off. It's a reminder to the members more than anything else to try to stay within those time constraints. If members or the minister are in the middle of comments, I'd ask that you bring them to a conclusion shortly after that so we can get in all the questions that members might have here today.

Once again, welcome, Minister. In your comments, hopefully, you'll introduce the officials who are joining you today. We understand that you have to attend another meeting and that the officials will remain with us for the entire meeting, and will be more than happy to answer members' questions as well. Thank you very much for coming.

Minister, I'm going to turn it over to you. Please proceed.

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and the committee, for the invitation. It's good to be here.

I have with me the following officials from the department: Deputy Minister Claire Dansereau, Associate Deputy Minister David Bevan, and Siddika Mithani, the ADM of ecosystems and ocean sciences. We call her the head scientist. It sometimes embarrasses her, but it didn't today. I also have with me Canadian Coast Guard Commissioner Marc Grégoire, Chief Financial Officer Roch Huppé, Assistant Deputy Minister of ecosystems and fishery management David Balfour, and also Assistant Deputy Minister of program policy Kevin Stringer.

It is a pleasure to join you as Minister of Fisheries and Oceans. I look forward to working with the committee on an ongoing basis to protect and support our fisheries and oceans. Today's appearance is a welcome opportunity to provide an update on the current state of affairs in the Canadian fishing industry and my initial observations as a new minister to this department.

DFO's presence across Canada is extensive. We have approximately 10,700 employees, 86% of whom are located in our six regions. The department's mandate ranges from managing this country's aquatic resources and their habitat to supporting the commercial fishing and aquaculture sector. Additionally, we also manage the Canadian Coast Guard.

Let me begin by recognizing the Canadian Coast Guard and the work it does every day to keep Canadians safe. The Canadian Coast Guard is one element in a network of government agencies, volunteers, and private entities that make up Canada's search and rescue system.

Canada's search and rescue system is responsible for monitoring the longest coastline in the world. Canadian waters are often treacherous, with unpredictable and challenging weather conditions. Despite this, Canada has one of the most effective search and rescue systems in the world, which includes a network of three joint rescue coordination centres staffed jointly by the Canadian Coast Guard and the Canadian Forces.

The safety of Canadians is the coast guard's number one priority. We are always looking and working to improve Canada's search and rescue capacity, engaging officers in regular training exercises and enhancing the tools and equipment for our front line officers to do their jobs effectively.

The coast guard is currently modernizing and improving coordination with our search and rescue partners in order to better serve Canadians. For example, our government has made significant investments so that the coast guard can modernize and expand the fleet, adding new ice-breaking capability and replacing or updating many of the older boats and ships.

In keeping with our government's commitment to uphold sovereignty and security, we're also exploring law enforcement options for the coast guard. The ongoing renewal within the operations of the Canadian Coast Guard is particularly timely, as we are coming up to their fiftieth anniversary.

Over the summer I met with more than 100 industry and stakeholder groups, including representatives from various governments, NGOs, and members of the fishing community, to better understand individual, local, and regional perspectives on Canada's fisheries. It was no surprise that all coastal, stakeholder, and industry representatives expressed concern over the many challenges facing today's fishing industry. Unprecedented shifts in global economics, societal trends, consumer demand, and the environmental realities are changing the commercial fishing sector. In the past 15 years, emphasis has shifted from groundfish, such as cod, halibut, and flounder, towards shellfish. Today, most of the \$1.7 billion in landed value from the fishery comes from lobster, snow crab, shrimp, and scallops. Only 10% of the value is coming from groundfish.

Our fishery has always been heavily oriented towards exports. Today we export approximately 85% of our fish products, but the value of the exports has steadily diminished over the past five years. This stands in stark contrast to the situation of a country such as China, whose exports have been increasing during the same period.

Besides external forces that are putting increased pressures on the industry, I've heard from stakeholders and individuals that DFO's fisheries management system is outdated and complicated. This situation has created unnecessary barriers to industry growth and global competitiveness. Young people are less and less interested in the fisheries because of these and other types of barriers.

• (1535)

Fishers and industry stakeholders have also told me that DFO controls virtually all aspects of fisheries operations: where and when people can fish, and what size of boats, what kind of gear, and how many fish they can catch.

Over the years, policy decisions have often been made that favour the short term over the long term. These policies have been adopted in a patchwork manner, and differ from region to region and from fishery to fishery. Some of them limit growth, curtail efficiencies and, frankly, make very little sense. The current system is also resource intensive and expensive to administer. Canada's fisheries are at a watershed moment and must adapt to the needs of a rapidly changing industry. At Fisheries and Oceans Canada, we want to create the conditions for Canada's fishing industry to generate more value and to become a business environment that is conducive to attracting private investment.

Through the work we've been doing and continue to do with our stakeholders, the path to a more prosperous and sustainable fishery is, in the end, becoming very clear. So far, I understand that change is necessary to rebalance fisheries management policies and conservation programs to allow a better response to market forces and set the conditions for economic growth. We must continue to build on our catch certification program; maintain and grow access in international markets for Canadian fish and fish products; create a more stable operating environment where multi-year allocations for most species are the norm and processes for assigning them are predictable, consistent, and transparent. We must also provide incentives for fishers to make long-term plans and investments to improve their competitiveness and encourage sustainable harvesting policies.

Similar changes in market-based approaches to fisheries management have proven successful in other countries, and select Canadian fisheries as well. Change is always difficult, but fisheries that have already modernized have realized the benefits of flexible, market-oriented fishing seasons, improved product quality, increased economic value, a decline in instances of overfishing, and improved safety. A modern fisheries management framework would enable us to focus on maximizing value and quality rather than quantity of output, to better position the industry to make a real and lasting contribution to Canada's economic future.

I believe strongly that with some changes at DFO, Canada's fishing industry has the potential to generate much more value. Transforming Canada's fisheries will require examining all of DFO's rules, policies, and regulations. My goal is to establish a coherent management system that is designed to maximize the return on investment and protect the Canadian fishing industry in both the short and long term. Stakeholders have been clear to me that they want to focus on value; untangle, simplify, and standardize rules and processes; increase transparency for decision-making; and strengthen environmental sustainability in Canadian and international waters to ensure there is a fishery for the future.

Stability, predictability, transparency, and a level playing field are the conditions that support economic growth. We need to look at the department's entire web of rules, with an objective of freeing up fishers to run their own operations as true business enterprises.

DFO's approach to habitat management is another area in need of reform. Modernizing DFO's habitat policy will allow the department to manage the impacts of human activities on fish and fish habitat more effectively and efficiently. With a less cumbersome regulatory review process, we need a policy that focuses on the major threats to fish habitat and on priority species and priority ecosystems, and to do that efficiently and effectively.

DFO's regulatory decisions about habitat can directly affect the activities of industry, farmers, landowners, first nations, communities, and individuals, and can have real impacts on economic development and the environment. We need to put in place a system that is more transparent, that leverages existing partnerships, that is guided by national standards, and that is supported by appropriate tools and guidelines.

It's an ambitious agenda, one that we will approach with rigour. With the right changes, we can have a more modern and efficient coast guard, a fishery sector that is globally competitive and more sustainable and world class, and a habitat policy that can affect real change.

As Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, I look forward to delivering results that reflect Canadians' priorities.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, and *merci beaucoup*.

• (1540)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

We'll proceed right into questions from members, starting off today with Mrs. Davidson.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, minister, for appearing before us today, and thanks also to the people you have with you. I look forward to the discussion.

I'm new to this committee and, of course, I don't live on either coast; I live on the Great Lakes. So I'm going to ask questions based on that, because that is the particular expertise or interest I have at this time.

We know that invasive species have been an issue in different areas and that quite a bit of work has been done on those. But right now there is one specific invasive species, the Asian carp, that is creating quite a bit of consternation in my area, in Lake Huron, and I feel it's threatening the Great Lakes watershed. Because of this species, there is a threat to the multi-billion dollar sport fishing industry in the Great Lakes and the freshwater fisheries.

Could you take a couple of minutes, minister, to update the committee on what DFO is doing on an ongoing basis in response to this issue? I spoke to the previous minister, but I don't believe I've spoken to you about this since you took over this portfolio. I think we need to have some update on it.

Hon. Keith Ashfield: It's of considerable concern, the Asian carp in particular. There has been a significant amount of money invested over the course of the last few years. Originally, in 2005, there was \$4 million dedicated to help address the issue. That funding was renewed in Budget 2010 on an ongoing basis. It provides \$2 million to supplement the sea lamprey control program and \$2 million for other aquatic invasive species.

A considerable amount of collaboration and information sharing with key stakeholders has transpired over the course of time. A fair amount of money has been invested in science to better understand the risk of AIS, and that is carrying on. As well, my provincial colleagues and I, at our meeting of the Canadian Council of Fisheries and Aquaculture Ministers in September of this year, met in Iqaluit. We renewed our commitment to work collaboratively on issues related to aquatic invasive species. So there is that work, which is ongoing.

Also, work is going on with the U.S. on a continuing basis. In October 2010 Canada and the United States launched a binational risk assessment for Asian carp in the Great Lakes. It's having a significant impact on our U.S. colleagues as well, so it's important. We are working on a very difficult file, but, hopefully, we'll see some positive consequences come from that.

• (1545)

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Thank you very much, minister. I appreciate the work that's being done on it.

Can you elaborate on the binational risk assessment that is under way with the United States?

Hon. Keith Ashfield: I'll perhaps defer to one of my staff, who can give you the full details on it. High-level concerns are obviously what I deal with most of the time, but if you're looking at specific information on this, I'll defer to Dr. Mithani.

Dr. Siddika Mithani (Assistant Deputy Minister, Ecosystems and Oceans Science, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): The kind of work that is currently being done within the binational risk assessment really looks at the characterization, the biology, of the issue, in trying to identify the risk levels for the migration of the Asian carp coming across the Chicago canal, and at how we should look at prevention and mitigation strategies.

So there is a lot of biological work being done. There is monitoring being done. And there is also research being done in association with the Canadian Aquatic Invasive Species Network. They are also involved in a lot of the work being done.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Has a timeframe been established for the study in regard to the level of risk, so that we're moving beyond study into prevention and mitigation? Is there a timeframe for that?

Dr. Siddika Mithani: At this time, it's very difficult to say, because we haven't had results come through. What our research plan and our monitoring plan will be, going forward, really depends on the kind of results we have. But it's certainly being looked at on a periodic and regular basis.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: We don't know, then, whether it's something that will be in place within the next year or the next six months.

Ms. Claire Dansereau (Deputy Minister, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Excuse me, but let me add a little bit to this.

The assessment work that Siddika is talking about is one piece of the work we're doing with the Americans. We're having a high-level meeting and junior-level meetings all across the system. They are looking at investing greater amounts of money, as you know, and we're looking to see what role we could play in that.

So it's very high on our radar—not just the assessment work, but a binational relationship around this, and tracking.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Can you speak to the efforts that are happening around the Chicago area with the so-called gate?

Ms. Claire Dansereau: Unfortunately, I can't remember, because we were dealing with this last spring. But we did make sure—and certainly when I was down in Washington—with the Army Corps of Engineers that the piece of work that needed to be done to fortify was actually completed. I'm not sure of the latest developments in that file.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Could we perhaps have an update and someone come to the committee to talk about this? With the multi-billion-dollar sport fishing industry in the Great Lakes, it's of huge concern to that area. Any type of assurances you can give us that it's going to remain on the top of the radar screen would be great.

Ms. Claire Dansereau: It's definitely top of the radar screen and, yes, we'd be happy to come back with an update. We are concerned not just for the recreational fishery, obviously, but also for the ecosystem as a whole.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Absolutely.

Ms. Claire Dansereau: Our sense right now is that there is no fear of a breach, but none of us wants to be the one sitting in the chair here if something were to happen.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Davidson.

Mr. Donnelly.

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

Minister, and members of the department, thank you for attending. On behalf of the official opposition, I'd like to welcome you to the committee and thank you for appearing before us today. We have a number of questions. We'll see how many we can get in during our allotted time.

Minister, the government has announced \$57 million in cuts to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, and these cuts will undoubtedly result in job losses. There are cuts to research and science, cuts to enforcement, and the closure of two search and rescue centres. As the fishery continues to struggle in Canada, and as scientists are raising alarms about the impacts of climate change on the marine environment, how can you justify such deep cuts?

•(1550)

Hon. Keith Ashfield: Thank you for the question.

Obviously, we're going through a period of time when fiscal restraint is important. We're asking all departments in government to look internally for ways to be more efficient and effective in their operations. We don't believe that the reduction plans we're looking at will impact services to the general public. In fact, as every good business should do over time, and every year, really, we think that departments should be looking at and evaluating themselves to determine whether there are things they can do better and more cost-effectively and efficiently. We believe that's a proper thing to do, and it will be our focus over the next little while.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Thank you.

[Translation]

Rosane, the floor is all yours.

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Good afternoon, Mr. Minister. I would like to thank you for joining us today.

My question for you today has to do with one of the many consequences of climate change in the Canadian Arctic and deals with the Northwest Passage being open all year round.

Given the increasing maritime traffic and the human activity that ensues, does the government have a plan to protect the health of the Arctic Ocean and its marine ecosystems?

Thank you.

[English]

Hon. Keith Ashfield: Thank you for the question.

The north is certainly important to us as a government. We're seeing a lot more activity in the north, not only from a shipping perspective, but also in terms of exploration, and mining. There are a number of things that are happening, which have good potential not only for the north but also Canada as a whole. I was up in Iqaluit and Nunavut and Pangnirtung not too long ago and was very impressed with the activity that's taking place in the region.

I recognize the need to ensure that we have people on the ground so that we can protect our environment and the various species that we see in the fishery. There's a fishery that is starting to grow in the north, and it's one that we're very excited about. We think it has potential and we're looking forward to that happening.

Obviously, there are challenges in dealing with the north, which are very expensive and hard to deal with in many ways, but I think, as Canadians and as a country, we owe it to the north to make sure that we invest there in a prudent and wise way. Certainly, we don't want to suggest that we're not always going to be conscious of our environment. We will do that from a fisheries perspective, and I know that our government will do so, in general, as a whole.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Tremblay, it's your turn.

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Thank you.

Good afternoon, Mr. Minister.

Most people on the east coast and the shores of the St. Lawrence were outraged when the closure of the two rescue centres in St. John's and Quebec City was announced.

The rescue centre in Quebec City is the only bilingual rescue centre. How do you plan to address the concerns of people with respect to getting assistance in French, in the event of an emergency?

[English]

Hon. Keith Ashfield: Thank you for the question. I know I've answered this a number of times in the House.

Regarding the St. John's operation and the Quebec operation, the Quebec one will be consolidated into the Trenton location and one in St. John's will be consolidated into the location in Halifax.

We're very conscious of the language requirements. We actually believe that we will be increasing our capabilities in providing bilingual services under one roof, with both National Defence and Coast Guard personnel. It's not my intention to ever put any mariner at risk as a result of language, and we're being very conscious and prudent in the way we're approaching this. We're taking our time to go through the consolidation, and we're on track to have that happen by the spring of 2012.

I'm not concerned there will be any lapse in bilingual capacity, and the consolidation strongly suggests there will be an improvement in bilingual capacity in both of those operations.

I don't know if the Coast Guard would like to say anything about it.

• (1555)

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Grégoire (Commissioner, Canadian Coast Guard, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Mr. Minister, I would just like to add one thing, since you covered all the other topics. When the transition takes place, we are going to make sure that services are bilingual in both centres, in Halifax and Trenton.

Right now, I admit that there are gaps on occasion. For example, every time I went to the centre in Halifax, they had a bilingual service, but I was told that this is not always the case. In addition, the Maritime Rescue Sub-Centre in Quebec City sometimes helps the centre in Halifax.

Before the transition, we are obviously going to make sure the staff is perfectly bilingual and trained on the job in Trenton and Halifax.

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay: Still, we know of many cases that have been transferred to Quebec City because the people working there did not necessarily have the ability to provide assistance in French.

In the Maritimes, there are also different accents. In emergency situations, it is difficult for an anglophone who knows French to understand all the different accents and communicate properly in French. That is what I am worried about.

I think it is good to have a bilingual person, but the person's mother tongue should really be French, or the person should at the very least know French very well.

Mr. Marc Grégoire: I am francophone myself, and I can relate to your concerns and those of people involved in water sports on the St. Lawrence River, everywhere in Quebec and in the Maritimes. We actually also have to serve francophones who work or sail in the Atlantic waters of the Maritimes.

We have launched a staffing process. First of all, we gave all our employees in Quebec City the option of being transferred to Trenton or Halifax, if they wished. We did the same for the employees in St. John's, but let's just focus on the francophone issue.

We have also launched a staffing process in case we didn't get enough people who wanted to move. We have at least 20 francophones from the people we have pre-selected who are going to do the language tests. Our language proficiency requirement for both places is the highest level we have in the federal public service,

meaning Level C in oral proficiency. We need people who are perfectly capable of providing services in both official languages. I am well aware of the volume of French calls we are going to get, especially on the stretch from Montreal to Quebec City.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Grégoire.

Mr. Hayes.

Mr. Bryan Hayes (Sault Ste. Marie, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Minister. It is nice to see you again. And to your staff, it's nice to have an opportunity to meet you all.

I was really pleased to be appointed to this committee and, as a first-time member of Parliament, it's obviously my first time on this committee. It's really an honour to address the concerns of Canada specifically in regard to fisheries and oceans.

I am from Sault St. Marie, so my concerns are geared towards the Great Lakes. I would really like to echo Mrs. Davidson's concerns about the Asian carp, because they are particularly important to Sault St. Marie.

One of the other invasive species is the sea lamprey. It has been enormously destructive since it invaded the Great Lakes. Sea lampreys attach to fish with a sucking disc and sharp teeth. I'm sure you're aware of some statistics, Mr. Minister. During its life as a parasite, each sea lamprey can kill 40 or more pounds of fish. They prey on all species of Great Lakes fish, such as lake trout, salmon, rainbow trout, and whitefish, to name but a few. This invasive species has had a serious and negative impact on the Great Lakes fishery. For example, before sea lampreys entered the Great Lakes, Canada and the United States harvested about 15 million pounds of lake trout in Lake Huron and Lake Superior annually. By the early 1960s, this catch was only 300,000 pounds, a dramatic drop.

I am wondering if you can outline the measures that DFO has taken to combat sea lamprey in the Great Lakes.

• (1600)

Hon. Keith Ashfield: The sea lamprey issue, as I understand it, has been studied extensively and probably goes back to the fifties in agreements between Canada and the United States. I know that the sea lamprey control program is delivered by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

There have been some positive things that have happened. The trout populations have increased in Lake Superior and parts of Lake Huron, and other lakes as well. We are seeing some positive benefits from some of the things we have been doing in that area. It is important to the recreational fishery, and we understand the dollar effects of that. It's a big industry, probably amounting to \$8.5 billion.

We are making a binational effort to manage the sea lamprey, and we have seen a drastic reduction in sea lamprey over the course of the last little while—and certainly below the pre-control levels.

I don't know if one of the staff would have something to say on that. Siddika?

Dr. Siddika Mithani: Again, there is a lot of research being done. There is a lot of prevention. The investment that Canada is making in the sea lamprey program is close to \$8 million. There is extensive interaction and collaborative work being done with the U.S. on sea lamprey.

Mr. Bryan Hayes: That is very nice to hear.

Sticking with Sault St. Marie, after being elected, I had meetings with a number of folk around the community. To my understanding, DFO owns a number of marinas in Sault St. Marie and the area. In the past, it is my understanding that DFO has upgraded marinas and handed them over to municipalities and private entities. I am wondering if you might describe the process of divesting those sites, if that still in fact happens.

Hon. Keith Ashfield: Yes, divestiture is a work in progress, let's put it that way. Certainly, the way the process works, as I understand it, is that we see if there's an interest from the community, or a community of interest, to take over ownership of a marina or a wharf, whatever it may be. If there is an interest in that, DFO will upgrade the facility and turn it over to the municipality or harbour authority, whomever it may be, for about a dollar, I think it is. Then the new owners would look after that wharf or facility.

Mr. Bryan Hayes: Are there criteria? I suppose it must be looked at in terms of whether you would take over a marina, or the dollar value the federal government would look at putting into these.

Hon. Keith Ashfield: I'll defer that to somebody who has more expertise.

Mr. David Balfour (Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Ecosystems and Fisheries Management, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): We have a program to support the divestiture of non-core commercial harbours and all recreational harbours, so that the program can focus on those harbours that are critical to supporting the commercial fishing industry. It would mean that all recreational harbours that remain in the department's portfolio—and we have certainly divested quite a number of them in Ontario—are candidates and available for divestiture. The department would be quite open and willing to respond to any proposals to effect the transfer of the harbour to a municipality.

I would add that the government, in Budget 2008, invested \$45 million in a multi-year program to support and facilitate the divestiture of harbours. That funding includes \$20 million this year, the program's final year. The funding is available if there are projects that your municipality would want to bring forward.

• (1605)

Mr. Bryan Hayes: Thank you, Mr. Balfour.

Thank you, Mr. Minister, and thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hayes.

Mr. MacAulay.

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

Welcome, Mr. Minister, and your staff. I understand you have an ambitious agenda, and I wish you all the best.

In question period we had a little chat about my concern that the idea to close the Quebec City and St. John's centres might not have been a recommendation that came up from the department. Now, correct me if I'm wrong, but it would look to me as if the government had decided this would happen—which is every bit your right.

But listening to the response on French training, I understood that you have to ramp up the French training in order to meet the requirements. Or did I understand that incorrectly? I indeed could have. Also, I understand there are people within your department who are very concerned about proficiency in French. They are also concerned that Trenton and Halifax are not large enough to handle this.

I would like to know if you have a cost figure on what this transition is going to cost. You're going to have to absorb this in your department, which means there will be fewer dollars for all of this monitoring and science, and a lot of things that we need to do. I'd like you to elaborate on that.

Am I wrong to indicate that there are some great concerns in your department, or within the government, as to the proficiency levels in French and as to the accommodations?

Also, when will this happen? Is it all going to happen next spring? Will they both close at the same time?

Hon. Keith Ashfield: Thank you, Mr. MacAulay.

Certainly, I would never ever suggest that you're wrong, but in this case you're not right.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: It's happened.

Hon. Keith Ashfield: We're very serious about maintaining the security and safety of our mariners, and in no way would we ever consider anything that we thought would impact on the safety of mariners. I would never have approve of it, if it came to me and I thought otherwise.

We have a situation now, especially with today's technology and the direction that everything is moving, where we have to look at efficient ways of doing business, at continued efficiencies, at the same time as protecting safety. We think we can do this. We actually think it's going to be a better system because we'll have both groups working under one roof, and we'll be able to respond to situations that much more quickly. So we believe it's an improvement over the current system.

The language capabilities, I feel very secure about. We'll have the proper people in place to understand the languages presented to them. As the commissioner said earlier, he feels secure in that as well. We won't force it. If there's a language issue, we're not going to force it and move ahead if we don't have the capabilities there. We certainly will not do that. But we believe that we can have this in place by the spring of 2012, and feel fairly secure in the process.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Mr. Minister, you feel that you're ready to close both establishments at the same time and to move the people?

Hon. Keith Ashfield: I said that we feel secure in moving forward, as we see it now, and that it looks like we'll be able to do that and not call into question language capability or raise safety concerns. We feel we're on track to do that, and we feel fairly comfortable it can be done by the spring of 2012.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: You also might have forgotten the costs involved—or do you have those figures? What costs are involved? What would it cost your department? It's your department that's going to have to pay for this internally; these aren't new dollars.

Hon. Keith Ashfield: Obviously, it must have slipped my mind.
● (1610)

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: I understand, Mr. Minister.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Keith Ashfield: But perhaps I can defer to Mr. Grégoire on that one.

Mr. Marc Grégoire: Yes, thank you very much, Minister.

First of all, as the Minister said, it's pretty clear that we wouldn't do this if we thought it would result in a safety issue. The reason we're doing this is not only to save money but also to improve coordination in those centres. For anything you try to improve in life, there is a cost. We have to do a business case to see if it's worth investing in. In this case, there's a really good business case, because we contend that we will save approximately \$1 million in ongoing costs versus an approximate cost of \$600,000 to \$700,000 for the initial investment. That includes reallocating the space, to install new work stations at both Trenton and Halifax; to reorganize the phone lines; to train the people who will work at those sites; and some other relocation costs as well.

If you do any kind of cost-benefit analysis, you would normally want to have savings, or a positive cost-benefit outcome, over five or six or seven years for such a big move. In this case, the savings are accruing with a year.

I assure you that all of this was done within the coast guard's budget. We're not borrowing from science or anybody else in the department to do this, again because of the very small amount of investments that are needed.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Thank you very much.

I hope you're right. It's somewhat difficult to understand why you wouldn't need search and rescue in Newfoundland, but you responded to my question.

I would also like somebody to elaborate on the edge project. There is a great problem in fishing herring off the coast of Prince Edward Island. There are no catches. This was a project that I did not agree with.

How did it work? Do you feel that it had any effect on the stocks off of Prince Edward Island?

Hon. Keith Ashfield: I'll let Mr. Balfour speak specifically about the edge program, but I know there are some concerns in the herring fishery, not only around Prince Edward Island but the Bay of Fundy as well. There's a decline there as well.

I'll let Mr. Balfour speak to that.

Mr. David Balfour: As you noted, the pilot project that was carried out this spring was focused on the prospect of the herring seiners being capable of fishing fall-spawning herring in the spring. In a pilot project in the previous year, they had some success in doing so. The allocation they had for fishing in the pilot counted against their quota for fall-spawners. And if they had taken any spring-spawning herring, that would also have counted against their quota for spring herring.

It was a well-monitored project. There were observers on board the vessels; there were hail-in/hail-out requirements; and it was supervised such that if there were landings, they would also have been monitored at dockside. As you have pointed out, they were not able to encounter herring this year. In some measure, that's likely because of the inclement weather they encountered. But it was strictly and closely supervised as a project.

The results of the assessment of the project will be brought to the Small Pelagic Advisory Committee later this fall for a discussion and determination as to whether this pilot project will proceed into next year.

It was all in aid of providing an opportunity for these license holders to be able to fish quotas they've been assigned within conservation stipulations, but allowing for another opportunity to locate where concentrations of herring might be found, and in a way that would be respectful of other fishing gears and the interest of others who depend on herring.

The Chair: Your time is well over, Mr. MacAulay.

Thank you, Minister. I know your time with us went quite quickly, and I know that the members have many more questions they would like to pose. However, I know you have other engagements you have to attend. If you find an opportunity in your schedule to come back to this committee, you would certainly be welcome, I'm sure. The committee members will always welcome your time here.

Do you have any closing comments at this point in time, Minister?

•(1615)

Hon. Keith Ashfield: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Again, I thank you for the opportunity to appear before the committee to give you an idea of the direction we're looking at moving the Department of Fisheries and Oceans in, recognizing that change isn't easy but that it sometimes has to be done. Hopefully, I'll have the support of the committee.

In some instances there may be issues that you would like to study; or, if the chance were available to us, there may be issues that I would want you to take a look at as a committee as well. I'd appreciate working in cooperation with you over the course of my time as the minister of fisheries.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

As I said earlier, the officials will remain with us for the rest of our time together here today.

We'll take a short break while the minister departs.

•(1615)

(Pause)

•(1620)

The Chair: We will resume our meeting.

Once again, thank you for agreeing to stay with us for the rest of the meeting.

Monsieur Toone.

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Thank you.

Thanks for staying. I have a question regarding oil exploration in the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

Corridor Resources is planning to undertake some exploratory drilling for oil and gas at the Old Harry site in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. People in the neighbouring communities are quite concerned about the impact this drilling might have on fisheries, and tourism, and their way of life, frankly.

I'd like to know how the department is planning to fulfill its obligations regarding the protection of fish stocks, especially species at risk, within the context of oil and gas extraction in the gulf, which has a five-province regulatory structure—in fact, an unharmonized five-province regulatory structure.

Perhaps you would answer that question. Thanks.

Ms. Claire Dansereau: Certainly there are other bodies, other government agencies and organizations, that would manage the whole of the regulatory side of oil and gas exploration in the gulf and elsewhere.

Our role would be to ensure that fish and fish habitat are protected, somehow, through that exploration. It's done on a case-by-case basis. I'm not sure about the particular case you're talking about now, but in any case we would do an analysis of the impact on the habitat and the potential impacts on fish. There would likely be, if any government agency at this point felt it were a necessity, or if the law allowed for it, an environmental impact assessment done. It

depends. Each case follows similar steps, and we do the same kind of work, involving analysis on a case-by-case basis.

The Chair: Mr. Donnelly.

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

On the subject of marine protected areas, or MPAs, Canada committed during the recent Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity to the conservation of 10% of its marine areas through the establishment of “ecologically representative and well connected systems of protected areas” by 2020. But Canada is making very slow progress on this international commitment. Currently, less than 1% of Canada's oceans are protected and at this rate of MPA establishment Canada would meet its commitment by 2064.

In the House the other day, I did ask the minister this question about fulfilling the 2012 obligation, and he confirmed that it was on track. I wonder if the department could comment on Canada, as we see it, being so far behind. How are you on track in committing to this 2012 agreement?

•(1625)

Ms. Claire Dansereau: The numbers are somewhat different. If I remember correctly, the 2012 commitment is to have six marine protected areas by then, and we're on track for that. The 2020 commitment is a different set of numbers and includes much more than just our department. If you look at the map, you'll see that there are many MPAs or conservation areas being protected.

As for whether or not we're at 1% or 9%, I'm not sure. I don't know if Siddika or Kevin has more information on that, but we're certainly continuing to do the work.

Mr. Kevin Stringer (Assistant Deputy Minister, Program Policy, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): I might add that a number of international agreements speak to different types of numbers. One of them said that we were going to have 12 in place by 2012, one spoke of 10%, and one spoke of MPA networks.

What we can say is that there has been an exercise to try to bring together all of the different jurisdictions that are protecting different parts of the ocean and the Great Lakes. One of the commitments was to establish an MPA network in each country; and at the meeting of the Canadian Council of Fisheries and Aquaculture Ministers, they approved in principle the MPA network.

Through that exercise, we've identified to date 802 separate parts of the ocean that have been protected and that we believe will meet the international requirement for MPAs. So we have our MPAs, the ones that are already established and the ones in the areas of interest process that is ongoing now, which we're hoping to have done for 2012. But we also have what Environment Canada has done, what Parks Canada has done, and what other provinces have done.

In addition to that, we're also doing an exercise with our department, but also with others, to identify fishing areas that have been closed. Those areas might not meet the requirements of the international definition of an MPA. An enormous amount of work is under way to try to meet as many of our obligations as we can and to be as comprehensive as we can.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: I appreciate the answer. I just find it hard to understand—with the commitment being so far behind, the lack of resources, the cuts that are coming, plus our pulling out of PNCIMA—how it's going to be possible to make this commitment and to move in a positive direction in terms of marine protected areas.

Ms. Claire Dansereau: If I may, I'm not sure there's agreement that we're so far behind. I think in some ways it's a matter of definition, and we're certainly continuing to work on this. And we have not pulled out of PNCIMA; we have changed the scope of planning. It had been reaching a level of detail that was not even possible to do within the timeframe, nor would that have been useful to do. So it was brought back up to a higher planning level to ensure that work continued. So we have not pulled out of PNCIMA.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Donnelly.

Mr. Leef.

Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC): Thank you, senior team members, for coming. It's nice to have you here. I'll bring you out of Atlantic Canada for a little bit and take you way up north. I'd just like to get your views on the Yukon chinook salmon fishery.

I had an opportunity to meet with first nations stakeholders in the Yukon this summer. There is some serious concern there, with some calling on the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to produce a cumulative impact assessment report in conjunction with the United States. I'm just wondering if you're aware of that or if you can share any information with the committee with respect to what might be going on with the chinook salmon in the Yukon.

• (1630)

Mr. David Balfour: The reports we've had on salmon returns this year indicate that escapement targets will be met in the Yukon River systems, and there has been the opportunity for some commercial, recreational, and aboriginal subsistence fishing on those stocks.

It is a situation that is somewhat reflective of the situation throughout the range of salmon in British Columbia, where we're seeing returns within the those predicted for the cycles, albeit in some instances low compared to averages.

Mr. Ryan Leef: This is more just a bit of messaging, I guess, but beyond just being a significant food source for them, the chinook salmon are a critical cultural element to the Yukon first nations. They are a method for them to share stories and teach and to have essential family time, including protecting their language. As well, the Yukon River salmon enhance the environment and feed other species like grizzly and wolf, which are a significant species in a wild and healthy Yukon.

I'm just wondering if it is your understanding that efforts to enhance Yukon River salmon actually end up enhancing a large number of other aspects of the Yukon River region.

Ms. Claire Dansereau: I would say in general that would be true of most fish species, so I can't say in particular for that one. But as a general principle, yes.

Mr. Ryan Leef: Okay. I was just taking the opportunity to message that on behalf of Yukoners. Hopefully that's part of the planning.

Do I have a minute or so left, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Ryan Leef: Now let's go right back to Atlantic Canada, because it's important to me as well.

I was listening with interest to the call centre discussion and the fact that service delivery in both official languages is critical, but I was also wondering about the following. Obviously there must be contingencies and training plans in place with the coast guard so that it can serve people speaking any language in an emergency in the marine area. Certainly, it's not just French- and English-speaking people who require call centre service; there must be people speaking German and Japanese and Chinese who would utilize the emergency call service over time.

I'm wondering if you could give us a high level picture of what training contingency plans occur for the coast guard when there are service calls in completely foreign languages, and whether or not that puts those people speaking a completely different language in greater jeopardy than those of us who speak English or French and require help in that sort of situation?

Mr. Marc Grégoire: That's a very difficult question to answer. I'm not aware of specific cases where emergency calls were placed and we were not able to answer them because of a language other than French and English. We do have capacity elsewhere in the system so that the calls can be transferred between the joint rescue centres. They can be transferred between each other, as they are today.

We can seek the help also of the marine traffic communications system that we have. We have staff spread around the country. They can also help; our employees speak a number of languages.

I would say it's rather rare that we get such calls within Canadian waters from people not able to speak either English or French.

Mr. Ryan Leef: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Leef.

Mr. Tremblay.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay: It has been almost 20 years since commercial groundfish fishing was banned offshore Newfoundland and Labrador. Commercial stocks have not gone up and, as a result, crab and shrimp stocks are now in decline.

Why is there no support for a commission of inquiry into the management of fisheries in Newfoundland and Labrador? In addition, why is there no recovery program for fisheries?

Ms. Claire Dansereau: You have about three or four questions in there.

We always have recovery programs. We have worked for 20 years on recovering groundfish fishing. David Balfour will be able to give you more details on that.

As for a commission of inquiry, I don't have an answer because it is a question for the government as a whole. So we don't have a position on that.

You are saying that crab and shrimp stocks are in decline. But that is not entirely true. Some species have a cycle. Each fishery has its own management plan, and we would be more than happy to show you the work that is being done.

• (1635)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Toone.

Mr. Philip Toone: Thank you.

I have a question about small craft harbours.

The Government of Canada has included funding for small craft harbours in its economic action plan. Essentially, small craft harbours are as important to coastal communities as the 401 is to Toronto. Vital small craft harbours that are administered by your department need to be fully operational and safe.

Your department really needs to move faster on repairs. There are a lot of concerns in my riding and many others that the infrastructure is essentially falling apart. The longer you wait, the more these harbours are going to become damaged, ultimately leading to higher costs both for our stakeholders and costs of repair generally.

What measures are being taken by the department to meet the recommendations outlined in the fisheries and oceans committee report of 2009, especially with regard to ensuring there are sufficient funds for harbour renovations and maintenance and for increasing the budget for small craft harbours?

Ms. Claire Dansereau: Well, as you know, budget questions are not our purview. We do not set the overall budgets.

The government did respond very quickly last year to the storm damage and injected significant moneys because of the abnormal situation we found ourselves in. There were significant increases to the small craft harbour budget through the economic action plan, as well as through the storm damage plan.

With the rest of our own ongoing budget, we prioritized , according to specific criteria, when and how we make investments. For this program, as for any other program, there will always be the argument that there isn't enough money—but that is the state of affairs. The department prioritizes to make sure that the moneys go to the place where the need is the greatest.

The Chair: There are two minutes left for you, Mr. Donnelly.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Two minutes? All right.

My next question switches to the Pacific coast and addresses Canada's wild salmon policy. The wild salmon policy states that the conservation of wild salmon and the protection of their habitat is DFO's top priority.

How does the wild salmon policy inform aquaculture regulations?

Ms. Claire Dansereau: As you may know, we spent a considerable amount of time discussing those very questions—

David and I, and others—at the Cohen commission last week and the week before. We're all becoming slightly expert at wild salmon policy.

As you know, the consultations for the creation of the wild salmon policy happened between 2001 and 2005. The policy was finalized in 2005. Obviously, this was long before the federal government took over the regulatory role for aquaculture. So for us, certainly, the relationship of aquaculture to wild fish would have been more on the science side than the regulatory side. We will see what comes from the Cohen commission on that very question. We don't know where that will go.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: So there will be a strong attempt to implement the recommendations that come out of the Cohen inquiry?

Ms. Claire Dansereau: We'll have to see what they are. There are too many speculative steps for me to be able to answer that question. I don't know what the recommendations will be; I don't know anything about them, so we'll have to let the commissioner do his work.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Donnelly.

Mr. Sopuck.

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Thank you very much. I appreciate your being here.

I have a comment. From what I'm hearing, the emphasis of the department in terms of fisheries management is commercial fishing. It seems to me that is about 90% of what you do. The angling industry in Canada is worth billions; and I think as you reprofile the department, you need to really seriously consider a major ramping up of the management and enhancement of Canada's recreational fish stocks—and not just on the coast either.

I'm old enough to remember the glory days of the Fisheries Research Board and what a terrific outfit it was. Its research and enhancement efforts were directly aimed at enhancing fish populations that people actually wanted. So I think that's something you're going to have to look at.

I'm from western Canada, and I saw the effect of the habitat program when DFO moved into prairie Canada. It's simply not a pretty picture, as you well know. I've talked to enough department staff myself in my constituency to know that even they are not happy about the situation there.

I would appreciate short answers here, given how little time we have. Do you have any estimate of the effectiveness of your habitat program in inland Canada, in terms of the actual conservation of fish stocks? What has been the result for the millions spent?

•(1640)

Mr. Kevin Stringer: I think it's fair to point out that five years ago, we started to invest in more monitoring. With respect to our own policies, we weren't certain if we were able to meet our requirements. But the monitoring has been more in the area of compliance, as opposed to effectiveness, and we're starting to look at effectiveness monitoring. In fact, two years ago, we did undertake an exercise to meet with our stakeholders to ask them that very question: how did they think our habitat program and our habitat policy was working.

We had two sets of meetings. One was with industry folks, and by industry I don't mean big industry but proponents, people who were trying to do things and who ran up against our program. The other was with conservation groups. The results are mixed, I would say, in terms of the view of the effect of the policy, but the department has taken it onboard. Certainly the minister has, and the deputy spoke last week at the Cohen inquiry about our commitment to look at our policy, to look at our program along the lines the minister set out in his opening remarks.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: That's a very general answer. What I'm looking for are specifics; I think the time for generalities is over. We've had the experiment, and it's been an utter failure. For the millions spent, I think we must have some kind of result.

I'm glad you're talking to rural communities. I don't think we need to talk about industries, but about rural communities and municipalities and the very real effect on community livelihoods that DFO's habitat program has had for very little return, in terms of actual fish conservation. I've asked the staff, and they simply cannot tell me the result of all of that work.

One of the problems of course is the no-net-habitat-loss policy that you're working under. I will be recommending and pushing for—and we'll probably have further discussions about this—a change of that policy to no net loss of fish production. That would open up an opportunity for proponents to do all kinds of creative fish enhancement work that may or may not deal with the actual piece of habitat in question.

With a no net loss of habitat policy, you would agree that it's very difficult to recreate nature, isn't it? In fact it's almost impossible. But if the policy were changed to no net loss of fish production, I think that would give proponents much more flexibility. You would agree with me that the purpose of fish habitat is to produce fish, so let's go right to fish production and work on fish that people want.

In prairie Canada, we have a number of big reservoirs. The existing policy would say that fish habitat is destroyed when you flood a valley, but as you well know, there is an explosion of fish production when a prairie reservoir is created. The habitat may change, but you can get up to a ten to twentyfold increase in the production of fish. If you focus on fish production, we would all be much better off, for the money you spend.

The other point I want to make is that it's not appropriate for fisheries officers to show up at meetings, especially in farming communities, when they are armed. I know you have policies, and so on, and I don't care about those policies; it is completely inappropriate to go into a meeting of farmers and landowners and

municipal officials armed. And we're the party of guns, as you can appreciate. Most of us own more than one gun—I own 14. I want you to reconsider that, because it immediately sets up a dynamic that is not good for either your officials or the people in question.

My last comment relates to sturgeon. I think you really have to look at that species. In western Canada, a SARA listing of that species, which is abundant and not an endangered species, has the potential to put at risk \$20 billion in hydro developments.

Thank you very much.

•(1645)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sopuck. I see why you want the answer to be short.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Mr. MacAulay.

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

First of all, I'd like to ask if anybody will be allowed to fish in the protected areas?

Ms. Claire Dansereau: Each of the marine protected areas will be area specific, as we're currently designing them. So the kind of activity to be allowed there will depend on what is being protected.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Some of them will allow some fishing?

Ms. Claire Dansereau: Yes.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: There are some reductions to your funding. I'd like you to elaborate a bit on that.

What will these reductions do, as you have been asked here, to small craft harbour repairs? You agree that a harbour is like a highway, or a barn for a farmer, in that it has to be repaired all the time.

Will we receive the same amount of attention for small craft harbour repairs, or not? How much of a reduction would you expect, and do you know the figures?

Ms. Claire Dansereau: That's a very hard question to answer.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Roughly.

Ms. Claire Dansereau: Suffice it to say that the small craft harbour program and our commitment to it hasn't changed.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: So if I were to add monitoring and scientific research, no change would take place, even though we're going to have \$50 million or \$60 million less?

Ms. Claire Dansereau: As the minister said, departments should always review their budgets to look for areas they should be getting out of, or finding new ways of doing what they currently do. That's what the strategic review did, and that's what the deficit reduction action plan will do.

Completely appropriately, we have looked through the whole of the department, under both exercises, to see if there are ways of doing things differently, or if there are some areas that are no longer as relevant to Canadians and perhaps we shouldn't be doing. All of this will come out in due time.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: But basically, we expect about the same?

Ms. Claire Dansereau: We expect, from the strategic review, about \$56.8 million less in our budget. To the best of our ability, we have designed the programs to have either increased efficiency in delivery or no impact on Canadians.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Thank you very much.

I'd just like to ask you about the Pacific north coast integrated management plan, which you're well aware of. It was a plan for conservation and economic development of coastal communities and resource management. In fact, it put a number of groups together: environmental groups, first nations groups, governments, and industry.

It was allotted \$8.3 million, none of which came from the Government of Canada, as you're aware. I could ask you why the government decided to withdraw from this program: you would not know. But was it done on your department's advice? Did you advise the government to withdraw from this program when it would not cost any money? Is there any process left for this specific north coast integrated management plan to proceed? And if there is a plan, could you explain it to me?

Ms. Claire Dansereau: Certainly, and as I said earlier, Mr. Chair, we have not withdrawn from PNCIMA. We have changed PNCIMA.

In my view, PNCIMA had moved from what its original intention was, which would have been similar to what was done on the east coast under ESSIM. It should have been a high-level plan, as ESSIM was, and it became a much more detailed and site-specific management plan that would have been very prescriptive—at least in my view—rather than being a high-level plan.

What we simply did was to retract from going too far into detail, and we brought it up to the appropriate level of planning, which will require significantly less money and less time. We have not withdrawn from it. It will be ready by 2012, as we said it would be, and I look forward to the work of the groups. The groups are continuing to work together; they're just doing it at a different level.

• (1650)

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Okay, and the groups are satisfied with what the department and the government have done? That's not exactly what we're hearing.

Ms. Claire Dansereau: Some are satisfied. Some are not. Some are concerned, in that they had clearly done a lot of work and were going down a road. But it was a road that we simply couldn't support; we needed to bring it back up a few notches on the planning scale. So we did that and will continue to work with them to make

sure they continue to work with each other. We're very much involved.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: With that, are all of the groups going to remain involved? Are you aware of that or not?

Ms. Claire Dansereau: So far I have not heard. This changes every day, so you may have newer information than I have, but I have not been made aware of any group that has said it didn't want to stay involved.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacAulay. Your time is up.

Ms. Doré Lefebvre.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

A recent audit of the Canadian Coast Guard tells us that the organization is not at all prepared to respond appropriately to an environmental disaster. At the moment, the National Energy Board is still issuing exploration permits for oil and gas fields in the Arctic, even though we do not have the capability to manage potential spills that could become catastrophic.

Is the government planning to do something to solve this problem, which is rather dangerous for the short, medium and long term?

Mr. Marc Grégoire: Yes. The environment commissioner did actually make a number of recommendations to the Coast Guard in order to improve their response.

In terms of response capability, I have to tell you that we do have it at the moment and we have it everywhere in Canada. Employees are trained for environmental response across the country. We have 80 warehouses with environmental response equipment across Canada, and there are also some across the Arctic. Over the past two years, we have also sent 19 containers with environmental response equipment to various Arctic communities. We have also been training local Inuit on how to use the equipment in times of need. We also have larger pieces of equipment that can be transported by plane and used if there ever was an environmental disaster.

The commissioner especially criticized us for our performance framework and risk analyses, which we are currently working on. We have the capability to respond at the moment. A very strict regulatory regime created by Transport Canada has been implemented in Canada. Under the regime, all shipowners to the south of the 60th parallel are required to call a private environmental response organization. There are four in Canada, covering the whole country. The Canadian Coast Guard is a secondary responder. We monitor those companies' environmental interventions on behalf of the federal government. If it happens that they do not respond, all our ships are ready and equipped to respond in the places mentioned earlier.

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre: Did you say that the operational framework was a problem at the moment?

•(1655)

Mr. Marc Grégoire: The performance framework is the main problem. There is a lack of risk analyses. Our equipment is in place, but last winter, the commissioner said that we had not shown him in writing, in any our documents, that the equipment and the employees were spread across the country on a risk basis. In other words, it was a matter of knowing whether they had really been sent to the places with the highest risk. It is being done from experience and increasingly so over the years, but it hasn't been shown on paper.

He also criticized the fact that we were perhaps not doing enough exercises. We have already put in place an exercise program. Interregional exercises have started, and a few exercises have been carried out with the U.S. Coast Guard. Actually, there was one about 15 days ago around Sault Ste. Marie.

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre: Do you have any exercises north of 60?

Mr. Marc Grégoire: Yes. That is a great question. Last summer, as part of Operation Nanook 2011 run by the military, we conducted a major environmental response exercise in the Arctic. The exercise involved the Coast Guard vessels, environmental response barges, local staff and our staff from the base in Hay River.

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre: Will departmental cuts affect the exercises in the Arctic north and elsewhere in Canada?

Mr. Marc Grégoire: I haven't heard of any potential cuts in environmental response. But we are always watching our every move and we are always trying to improve our ways of doing things in order to save money.

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre: Okay.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Kamp.

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

Thank you, deputy, and officials, for meeting with us today.

As you know, I'm from British Columbia and so I've been following with interest the Cohen commission of inquiry, and I know the department has had a significant role and participation in that. I think I've heard it has provided 500,000 documents and emails. I don't know who's reading those, but that's a lot.

I know that officials, including you, deputy, have appeared before them more than once. Most recently your senior management team was there in September. The commissioner raised a number of issues with you, I know. One of them was the one that Mr. Sopuck raised as well. So let me maybe follow up with that and the whole issue of habitat and habitat policy. The minister referred to it in his comments as well.

My understanding is that the actual policy of DFO is for an overall net gain of productive capacity of fish habitat—which seems to be moving closer to what Mr. Sopuck had in mind—and that the policy anticipates achieving that by conserving existing habitat, restoring lost fish habitat, and developing new habitat, perhaps. That's the way I read the policy. It does also specify, though, that the way to reach

that conservation goal—the conservation of existing habitat—is the no net loss guiding principle, which you were asked about, I think, by the commissioner.

So could you explain to us how of all that works? Some of us are often surprised by how the habitat policy is administered. It would seem sometimes that every bit of fish habitat is considered equal and, whether it be a hydro dam or a culvert under a farmer's lane, the same approach seems to be taken to it. So I'm wondering if that direction will continue in the future, or what you have in mind in this area when the minister talked about the need to modernize this 25-year-old policy.

•(1700)

Ms. Claire Dansereau: Thank you for the question.

Yes, this was an area that was covered at the Cohen commission last week. I think we all have the same desire, and that the desire is to ensure good outcomes for fish and fish production. I have to admit—well, certainly, it's my belief—that the policy as it's currently drafted doesn't necessarily get us there in all cases. It is old, dating from 1986. It was drafted long before other pieces of legislation came into place. So I and others do believe that it certainly requires our looking at it from the point of view of the outcomes we are trying to achieve, rather than establishing a set of rules as a starting point.

If we can establish the outcomes that we're trying to achieve, then we can set up the systems by which we can measure and monitor and ensure we're actually making a difference. Right now it's hard for us to do that, as has been stated by auditors general and everybody who has an opinion on the policy.

So what that looks like at this point, we don't know. Further discussion will be required.

Mr. Randy Kamp: I think we understand that every development has some impact on the environment and, often, on fish and fish habitat. Does the policy allow for productive capacity to be enhanced or perhaps created elsewhere besides on the footprint of the proponents' development? Whether that's possible, I'm not sure.

Ms. Claire Dansereau: That is an area we are exploring. It's an approach that has in fact been utilized even under the current policy.

We need to be careful, obviously, to make sure that what we're doing is thinking about the desired outcome. If the desired outcome is a certain species of fish and an ecosystem, then there has to be some link between the habitat that would be created and that species itself.

Mr. Randy Kamp: Thank you very much for that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kamp.

We'll go to Mr. Wilks.

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Thank you very much.

I thank my colleague for letting me sit in for the last hour.

I have more of a comment than anything else. As you're probably aware, in 1964 the Columbia River Treaty was created for the Columbia and Kootenay Rivers; and in 2014, either Canada or the United States can give notice to either opt out and/or renegotiate the deal by 2024.

Fish habitat, specifically wild salmon, was greatly affected by the damming of both those rivers, specifically the Columbia River and at the Libby Dam in Kootenay.

First nations, particularly the Tla-o-qui-aht, Shuswap, and Okanagan, have had an interest in trying to reintroduce wild salmon, if they can, through the renegotiation of this deal that could come forward. And although I recognize that it's not your file—it's DFAIT's and others'—it is of historical value to the first nations to try to reintroduce salmon. I wonder if there is an opportunity for DFO to get involved in working with first nations and the Army Corps of Engineers to try to find some way to potentially reintroduce wild salmon.

Ms. Claire Dansereau: You saw me check at the table to see if anybody had an answer, and we don't have an answer.

Mr. David Wilks: I don't want to put you on the spot, but if you say yes, it's okay.

Ms. Claire Dansereau: It is an area we're looking at, even for other species, in other parts of B.C. I know that in the central Okanagan, there is some work happening there as well.

I'm not sure. I won't pretend to have an answer, but it's an interesting question. So thank you.

Mr. David Wilks: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Wilks.

I have a couple of questions and maybe even a comment before we move on. I think all members have had a chance to ask some questions.

With respect to the minister's comments about reforming habitat management within the department, I want to echo some comments from my colleagues. I don't come at it from a scientific standpoint; I come at it from a political standpoint.

Mr. Stringer, I believe your comment was that stakeholder feedback was mixed. I can assure you that the feedback I get is not mixed; there tends to be a lot of frustration with the policy and practices. From my point of view, the focus seems to be more on stopping development—that's the public's perspective—than on helping the developers comply with the policy.

I don't know if there needs to be a change of focus in how you approach this, because that's the feedback I get within my office as a local member of Parliament. I have people coming to me who are completely frustrated with it. It seems as if they hit a roadblock, more than anything else, when they deal with officials. Obviously, I get a little more of an enthusiastic response, if you like. People come into my office and talk about how enforcement officials are over-the-top in some of their practices and whatnot. I try to work with the

officials to get to where you need to be. If there were more of a focus on helping them comply with the policy, I think the policy would be much better received—and it would make my job a lot easier, as well. Maybe that's what I'm looking for more than anything else.

Also, the minister talked about \$1.7 billion of landed value from the fishery. I was surprised that only 10% came from groundfish. That point caught my attention. One of the questions I had was whether aquaculture was included in that \$1.7 billion figure.

I see Mr. Balfour shaking his head. Is it not included in that?

• (1705)

Mr. David Balfour: That's another \$1 billion.

The Chair: That's another \$1 billion.

My question was going to that. It wasn't all that many years ago that I heard a presentation on the world seafood market that noted, I believe, that 60% came from the traditional fishery. At that point in time, 40% came from aquaculture. I'm not sure if that has changed dramatically since, because I know that the trend was taking it in a different direction, and it wouldn't be very long before it would be completely reversed.

I know that you now have responsibility for aquaculture on the west coast. How has the department's focus changed to adjust to meet that change in the dynamics we're seeing in seafood production?

Ms. Claire Dansereau: There's no question that the ratio has changed. In fact, aquaculture is beyond the wild fishery at this point. We have to remember, though, that in aquaculture we're not just talking about fin fish aquaculture; there's an awful lot of shellfish and molluscs, and all those. There are really big P.E.I. mussels, for example, and others. So we were involved across the country as a department, even before we took over as the regulator in British Columbia. We have a significant role to play, not as a promoter of aquaculture—that's not our job—but in making sure that...

One of the key areas that we constantly have to focus on is the relationship between aquaculture and the wild fishery. On the east coast, you can imagine that we have to be very careful of anything we might do for fin fish aquaculture that might have an impact on lobster.

So we are involved at many different levels, and will continue to be so.

The Chair: I'm aware there's shellfish as well within the aquaculture industry. Obviously, within your landed value, shellfish plays a major role here. I'm just wondering if that's where the world trends are going for seafood production. I'm wondering what you are doing as a department to get yourself to that. Or are we staying behind? When I say “staying behind”, I mean are we as a nation continually trying to look at things the way they used to be, rather than trying to focus on where they should be or are going?

Ms. Claire Dansereau: I wouldn't say we're staying behind. We're very alive to the question, shall we say. As you know, it's also a very lucrative industry and we need to ensure that a lot of the development work happens by the industry itself. We have had some funding programs that are cost-shared to some extent—or at least help to start up certain things—but it's very important that industry take on some of these costs themselves.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to move to a three-minute round because of time constraints.

Mr. Donnelly will start off.

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

We've recently obtained some information that indicates the department wants to cut resources for monitoring and regulating fish stocks. We also understand that DFO wants to move all fisheries to a multi-year cycle, as opposed to it being re-evaluated yearly. I'm wondering if you can comment on that, if it is the case.

•(1710)

Ms. Claire Dansereau: No, that's not the case. It's not the case that we want to move all fisheries to a multi-year cycle. There's certainly room for us to move to a more multi-year system for the various fisheries in which almost no cycles happen; but there are others that require significant attention on a yearly basis, and that would certainly continue.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Are you moving any fishery that's normally evaluated on a yearly basis to a multi-year cycle?

Ms. Claire Dansereau: Yes, I think we actually announced that in the summer.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: What kind of implication or impact do you think that will have on the management of those fisheries?

Ms. Claire Dansereau: We wouldn't be considering it if we thought there would be an impact. It's our sense that there are some fisheries that don't require that level of attention on a yearly basis. If it turns out that we're wrong...but it would be hard to imagine that we would be wrong on that. There are some fisheries that will continue to require yearly attention, and they will get that.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Also, before you switch over to David, why were you doing it annually in the first place, then?

Mr. David Bevan (Associate Deputy Minister, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): We had a history of doing it annually. We've also had some bad experiences from doing it annually, in that there's noise built into science, and people have had a tendency in the past to want us to manage to the noise. So when you get a spike in an index of abundance, they say there's more fish there and they want to fish there. What we really need to do is to dampen that out and take a more cautious approach and look at and respond to the trends over time.

We saw what happened with the cod on the south coast of Newfoundland, where it went up and down, up and down, and the TAC went up and down, up and down, and we took too much risk because we responded to a high index reading and then cropped it down and then had to reduce the TAC.

So with long-lived species this allows us to have a more multi-year approach and to monitor indices, but not do a full evaluation of these species that are not going to change in one year in any dramatic way. So we will keep a tab on what's going on in that stock, but we aren't going to do a full evaluation and spend lots of money and come up with a number and then have to respond to it, when what we really need to do is to take a longer term outlook.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: I can appreciate the cycles, whether for snow crab on the east coast, salmon on the west coast, halibut, or pretty much any species you pick. But the issue I'm hearing on the ground, especially on the west coast with salmon, is that they need more resources for fish counts and enumeration. They need more resources to get that information in order to provide better accuracy in terms of the returns. That information then informs the decisions with regard to allocation. Is that going to be impacted at all by this new management?

Mr. David Bevan: Not on salmon, as our forecast isn't accurate enough to use a full multi-year approach to salmon. We have to use in-season management.

Ms. Claire Dansereau: And it's not even yearly with salmon; it's pretty much daily during the summer.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Kamp.

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

For my three minutes, I'm going to follow up on two unrelated questions. First of all, to follow up on the chair's comments, we're not managers, but legislators. Is there any interest in an aquaculture act that would separate the management, or the goals and principles and so on, and how we do aquaculture from what is in our Fisheries Act? That's one question.

Secondly, and unrelated to that, I know you've done some work on grey seals and their impact on marine resources in recent months and years. Can you update us on where you are with that and any actions the department might recommend taking on those?

Ms. Claire Dansereau: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the questions.

I'll let David answer the grey seals question, because that's a file he is managing.

On the question of an aquaculture act, I probably shouldn't say this, but I'm an agnostic. I think we need to make sure, either within the Fisheries Act or a stand-alone act, that the issues of aquaculture are addressed. And until there are changes to the Fisheries Act or there is a stand-alone aquaculture act, we will do by policy and regulation what we think needs to be done.

We listen to others who suggest that an act is required, but at this point it's hard to say whether there should be new paragraphs within the Fisheries Act, or an aquaculture act itself.

On grey seals, I'll let David speak.

• (1715)

Mr. David Bevan: On grey seals, there's obviously been a clear debate. The fishermen are strongly of the view that grey seals are a large biomass that's feeding on fish and impacting on the stocks.

We have done a lot of work on the feeding habits of grey seals and their potential impact on cod. We brought together many experts from all points of view, not just those with the view that it's a done deal that there's a relationship. We brought over 50 people together to come to a scientific consensus, which was that in the southern gulf, in particular, grey seals are the most likely cause of high levels of mortality of large cod and are impeding the recovery of southern gulf cod. That is also the subject of a discussion by the Fisheries Resource Conservation Council, which recommended to the minister that we have a targeted cull of grey seals to try to give the spawning stocks and the southern gulf cod an opportunity to rebound and to start getting the numbers so they can reach a critical mass and we can deal with the current high level of mortality. So that's a consideration for the minister at this point.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kamp.

Mr. Toone.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Philip Toone: Thank you.

I would like to go back to the rescue centre issue, more specifically to the linguistic aspect, if I may. We are anticipating the closure to take place in the spring. The jobs will be transferred to Halifax. I thought the minister said earlier that there will be a Level C language proficiency requirement for the rescue centre. In addition, there will be training for new workers in Halifax. They are going to be required to have Level C in their second language.

We understand that Level C actually corresponds to language proficiency at an administrative level. That might be good for a public servant, but it might not be enough for a crisis centre or a rescue centre.

We also understand that, in eastern Canada, the Acadian accent is sometimes really hard to understand. We are requiring Level C proficiency, so has the department done an assessment in a crisis or rescue centre? Is Level C really the proficiency level we want? Is it sufficient to meet the needs of our mariners in distress? Has the department investigated this to be sure that the training in Halifax will be sufficient to address the needs of our mariners in distress?

Mr. Marc Grégoire: Air traffic controllers across the country are considered bilingual and have a Level C; so do flight service specialists. Our communication specialists across the country, and

especially in Quebec, have a Level C. That is the operational level. It is not just an administrative level. Level B would be an administrative level. At Level C, you can be quite efficient and you can function at a technical level in the second language.

But let me go back to what I was saying earlier in English. Through our selection process, we pre-selected 83 people who met all the criteria for the search and rescue coordinator position. Of those people, we zeroed in on about 20 candidates who claimed to meet the language requirement. I was then told that most of those people, if not all, were francophone: Acadians, Quebeckers, French-speaking Canadians from somewhere else. We are going to test their language skills in the coming weeks.

Of course, if we had to offer bilingual training to an anglophone, for example, to make them bilingual, it would be impossible for us to meet our April 2012 deadline. On average, most people need more time than that to acquire a second language.

We are keen on the French capacity. So we are trying to find people who are already able to work in French. But we still have to test them in their second language, which is English in most cases and in these particular cases. Once that is done, we are going to finish selecting the candidates. We want to hire 12 people: six for Halifax and six for Trenton, so that we can have all the bilingual positions filled in both places when the transition takes place.

But that's not all. The training those people are going to receive is not second-language training. It is technical training with a series of courses that are going to be offered at the Canadian Coast Guard College in both languages to get them ready.

These are very important positions. We have to prepare the candidates to be search and rescue coordinators. We expect the training to last for several months, perhaps from November to January or so. It will be followed by on-the-job training so that we are going to be ready for the transition by the spring of 2012 for both Quebec City and St. John's, when the search and rescue centres will be consolidating, as the minister said. That is the plan right now.

As I said earlier, we have also offered the employees in the sub-centres of St. John's and Quebec the opportunity to be transferred to Halifax or St. John's. They all have till October 15 to let us know whether they wish to be transferred or not. Of course, if they accept, they won't require any training. They will be ready to go on the job the very day of the transition. We have those candidates in addition to the 20 or so people we are currently assessing.

• (1720)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Monsieur Grégoire.

Mr. MacAulay.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First of all, just to put it on your radar screen, I'd like to mention that there's a major problem in the Charlottetown Harbour with a sewage issue. It's a \$24-million issue. I don't want you to respond to it here, but please put it on your radar screen. Shellfish in that area are going through a pitiful time because they're shut off so much.

I would also like to make a small comment on the herring seiners and what will take place, understanding that the herring stocks off P. E.I., in Fisherman's Bank and these places, were rich stocks not too many years ago. I know that we have monitoring and that we analyze everything, but the herring is gone. Do you feel that the midshore seiners are going to be able to continue? If they are, the herring stocks will be gone. Could you give me just a short comment on that?

I would also like you to explain to me the rationalization program in the lobster fishery off Prince Edward Island. It's very important to make sure that continues. What is the plan? Will there be more rationalization in area 26A?

Ms. Claire Dansereau: On the issue of the seiners, as David said, it's a fishery that we monitor really carefully. As you know, there are the spring and the fall spawners. There are two different fish that are caught, and they're targeted at different sectors of the fishery.

As to what may have happened x number of years ago, it was under a different management regime. Now we are very carefully monitoring everything that's going on out there.

So we don't believe that what is happening with the seiners right now is having a negative impact on the other fishery. If we thought so, then we would obviously shut it down. That's my view. David can certainly add to the detail here.

As for your last question, it was not in fact a rationalization program; that's not how it was developed. It was a program to help with the long-term sustainability of the lobster fishery. It was a five-year program and, at this point, there is no plan to go further.

• (1725)

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: There are no dollars being allocated for—whatever term you want to use—the survival of the stock.

I understood, though, that a second round was to take place.

Ms. Claire Dansereau: The full program was a five-year program. There have been three calls for proposals, if that's what you want call them. That was the plan and that was how we put it together through that tough year which the lobster fishery went through three years ago, as we all remember. But it was only designed to be a five-year program.

It doesn't mean that we're not concerned about the long-term sustainability of lobster; it's just that this program does not carry on. The rest of the work that we do does carry on.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacAulay.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: I'm cut off.

The Chair: You're cut off.

Mr. Sopuck.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: I just have some short comments here.

In terms of aquaculture, I'm starting to learn a bit about it. I think the two greatest benefits of aquaculture, the way it is, is that it reduces pressure on the wild stocks and the fact there's no bycatch. I would recommend that the department use those two points in its communications on aquaculture because those, to me, are very significant benefits that are underappreciated.

I'll echo Fin Donnelly's comments and say that I'd like to see a lot more monitoring of fish stocks, not only on the coasts but also across the country. For example, I look at the Freshwater Institute in Manitoba. I think much of what they do could be reprofiled to focus on fish. There's a lot of generalized environmental research being done there that is interesting, but Manitobans and many people across the country are really interested in the health of fish stocks. So I'd ask you to think about that.

My last point is a bit of good news. We're all prone around this table to come at you with bad news. But on the good news front, I had the pleasure of spending a few days fishing the Miramichi this fall with a representative from the Atlantic Salmon Federation. We didn't catch too many Atlantic salmon, but we talked about them anyway, and I gather that across much of Atlantic Canada the rebound of the Atlantic salmon stocks is nothing short of remarkable. And I was very interested to hear about the relationship your department has with the Atlantic Salmon Federation and the collaborative effort and research being done.

In terms of the Atlantic salmon in particular, can you talk about what you've done over the last decade that has contributed to the rebound in the stocks over much of Atlantic Canada? It's truly a conservation success story, and I think you should start to take some credit for it.

Ms. Claire Dansereau: I'm not sure I'd want to take credit for something like that, which is so driven by nature rather than by the actions we could take.

I can say that we've made great strides and have put a lot of effort into ensuring that we have a good working relationship with the Atlantic Salmon Federation—and I include myself there—because we think they have a lot to contribute. By working together and pooling resources, we can in fact advance some of the work that needs to be done for the Atlantic salmon.

Sadly, though, I don't think we can take credit for all of that.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Well, I think you can to a certain extent, because I gather that the commercial fishery has been really reduced, if not eliminated.

Could you just elaborate on the state of negotiations with Greenland? I know they're agitating to open up that offshore fishery for Atlantic salmon again. That, I think, is a real Achilles heel for the Atlantic salmon.

But in terms of managing the commercial fishery and really reducing it, I think you can take some credit for that.

Mr. David Bevan: Certainly, the commercial fishery was ratcheted down and virtually shut down over the last number of years.

With respect to Greenland, a number of years ago there was an agreement by them to move to a subsistence fishery and not to have a commercial fishery. Some groups, the salmon conservation groups, actually paid for that to happen, which creates a desire to keep the process going. There's always an opportunity to see what you can get in negotiations by moving to claim that you're going to reopen a commercial fishery.

We don't compensate countries, obviously, for that kind of thing. What we are going to do is to continue through NASCO, the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization, to push for Greenland to live up to its international responsibilities to conserve Atlantic salmon in its home waters. Those are our salmon from Canada.

●(1730)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

On behalf of the committee, I want to say thank you very much for taking the time to be here with us today and to answer our questions. It certainly is appreciated, and I'm sure we'll have you back again as well.

Thank you very much.

Ms. Claire Dansereau: Well, on our behalf, I want to thank you for having us here and listening to us.

The Chair: Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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