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Chair

Mr. Rodney Weston

Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

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• (1535)

[English]

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

For committee members' benefit, I have a piece of business that I want to raise. We were notified last week of a parliamentary delegation from Norway that will be in Ottawa next Monday. Several members of this parliamentary delegation have been following our study on closed containment aquaculture and requested to meet with the committee.

On your behalf I accepted that invitation last week, so our committee meeting next week will begin a few minutes earlier, at 3:15. The good news is that it will be in Centre Block and the meeting will last for only half an hour. The delegation has other business to take care of while they're here. They will be attending other meetings.

So next Monday, if it's the wish of the committee members to meet with this delegation from Norway, I think we'll find it very productive and certainly informative.

I have a little item of business pertaining to that. The clerk tells me that there is a motion being circulated at this point in time due to the difference in the meeting. We need a separate motion to basically pay for the coffee, tea, and juice for this meeting, as it falls outside of the parameters of a regular meeting.

The motion being circulated to committee members is that the clerk of the committee make the necessary arrangements for a reception on Monday, March 5, 2012, at 3:15 p.m., in Room 356-S, Centre Block, with a parliamentary delegation from Norway.

Could I have a mover for that motion?

It is moved by Mr. Sopuck and seconded by Mr. Toone.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Thank you, committee members.

So next Monday's meeting will be at 3:15 p.m. in Room 356-S at Centre Block.

Mr. Donnelly, you have an issue you want to raise.

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Yes, thanks, Mr. Chair.

Just before we get going, I wanted to ask you, Mr. Chair, about the meetings we've had over the past while and looking forward this

week. We've had essentially one hour, so half our committee time has been used for hearing from witnesses. I'm just wondering if there is a reason why we're only using half of our time when we could be utilizing or maximizing the full two hours of our committee.

The Chair: No, there hasn't been any specific reason.

At the last committee meeting, if you recall, there was a provision made for a motion, and that motion wasn't brought forward. Generally it is the practice that when there is a motion tabled, the members have the opportunity to bring that motion forward whenever they see fit and if they've given proper notice.

I allotted a certain amount of time for that motion. At the last meeting we had, that motion wasn't brought forward, and we were done questioning the witnesses we had. The same today: we have a witness who will be appearing before the committee today, and obviously it's open to committee members to question that witness as long as they see fit.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Okay, because the issue is that committee members on all sides want to maximize the amount of time we use in all our committees so that we can get to the report as quickly as possible. I know there are other witnesses we need to hear from, and if we could maximize the committee time as much as possible.... I know that a lot of time and energy and taxpayers' money goes into bringing witnesses together and holding these meetings. I think if we could look at it....

Today, in this committee meeting, we have one witness for one hour, and again on Wednesday we have one witness for one hour. If we could go longer than one hour, or if we could get more witnesses, I think that would be appreciated.

The Chair: Actually, Mr. Donnelly, the witness before this committee today was not scheduled for one hour. The notice of the meeting doesn't say one hour.

We schedule witnesses, and if the committee members have questions for witnesses that's the prerogative of the committee. Obviously we're scheduling witnesses based on their schedules, not only on the committee's schedule.

There's a bit of work that goes into planning this. There are days when we have more than one witness—no question. Sometimes the committee members don't feel there's enough time for an adequate number of questions when we do that.

I try to be fair to enable all committee members to get as many questions in as possible. It's been very rare that we've ever had to limit questions from committee members. The idea is to seek as much information as possible. There is no thought given to trying to suppress any questions or any members. There are only thoughts given as to how we can get the most out of the committee's time.

I certainly appreciate your concern and your interest. However, as I said, there is ample opportunity to ask questions. We do try to schedule witnesses to enable the committee to get the best advantage, but we also have to take into consideration the witnesses' schedules and what that allows.

● (1540)

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Again, if we could keep in mind to maximize the committee's time as much as possible.... Knowing that we could go two or three rounds in questions is helpful for today. That's good to know.

The Chair: Mr. Donnelly, as I know you are well aware, the clerk generally circulates and asks committee members whether they have any further questions. We go until committee members have no further questions. That's never been an issue.

I'm actually quite surprised to hear you're pleased we have ample time for questions, because there's never been any limit on questions.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Maybe I could finish by clarifying that I absolutely respect your chairing. I know you've done a great job. I'm not calling into question the chairing; it's the number of witnesses we need to get through and maximizing the committee time we have. Sometimes it's one witness, and one hour is ample. However, I know we do have a number of other witnesses we want to hear from. The second hour of today would have been good. The second hour of Wednesday would also have been good.

I know we have to accommodate schedules. I realize we had to cancel a meeting due to votes. I realize there are extenuating circumstances. But when we do have the opportunity to schedule as many witnesses as we can, we should take advantage of that.

Thank you.

The Chair: I appreciate that. Thank you very much.

Mr. MacAulay.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Cardigan, Lib.): What is the schedule, and how many more witnesses do we have on this closed containment?

I don't want to tie you up too much with questions, but I'm wondering, is this forever, or is it going to come to an end?

The Chair: We have one witness pending on Wednesday. Following that we have the delegation from Norway, on Monday. Following that we have the travel the committee has scheduled, and then we have one more group coming in following our travel.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: That ties it up, Mr. Chairman.

I must also indicate that I have a great appreciation for your ability to chair this committee.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: I appreciate that, Mr. MacAulay. You're making me blush. Thank you.

Mr. Toone.

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Chair, I'd also like to congratulate you on your choice of residence. I think Saint John is a beautiful place.

That said, I beg the committee's indulgence to support some of the people back home. I'd like to present a notice of motion: that because the evidence demonstrates that the Canadian seal hunt is conducted humanely and sustainably, the Standing Committee of Fisheries and Oceans reaffirms its support for the Canadian seal industry.

I have copies, if anybody wants one.

The Chair: Please supply it to the clerk.

Mr. Toone, the motion you've given notice of is identical to the notice of motion that was supplied by Mr. Leef on February 9, 2012. Because the motion is the same, to be frank, we cannot entertain your notice of motion.

● (1545)

Mr. Philip Toone: If you would indulge me, my understanding is that the notice of motion is receivable. If it had already been voted on, then it wouldn't be receivable. Since it hasn't been voted on, we can receive it. I'm offering 48 hours' notice, and I'd like to vote on it on Wednesday.

The Chair: Sorry, you're correct, Mr. Toone. You can indeed provide notice of motion. Because of the similarity of the motions, if Mr. Leef brings his motion forward today or before you do, he can move his first. You're providing 48 hours' notice, so he can move his beforehand. You said you'd like to have your motion voted on. The motion would be moved at that time, not voted. It would be debated at that time.

Mr. Philip Toone: Thank you.

The Chair: You've provided your notice of motion; thank you.

Sorry about the delay, Mr. Roth. Thank you for joining us today in our proceedings on closed containment aquaculture. If you hear me interjecting, Mr. Roth, please don't be offended. It's only in the interest of ensuring fairness and trying to get as many questions and answers in as possible.

Mr. Roth, whenever you're ready the floor is yours.

Dr. Myron Roth (Industry Specialist, Aquaculture and Seafood, Policy and Industry Competitiveness Branch, British Columbia Ministry of Agriculture, Government of British Columbia): Okay. Can everyone hear me?

The Chair: Yes, we can.

Dr. Myron Roth: I'd like to thank the committee for the invitation to contribute to your study of closed containment salmon aquaculture. I appreciate the opportunity and privilege to address our parliamentarians in Ottawa. I also appreciate the fact that we can do this by video conference, which has been very convenient for me.

As you know, my name is Myron Roth. I'm a fish biologist and have worked in the field of aquaculture for over 20 years. I have a B. Sc. in zoology from the University of British Columbia and a Ph.D. from the University of Sterling in Scotland, where I studied the control of sea lice on salmon farms. My areas of expertise include salmon production systems and biotechnology, fish pathology, and the development, evaluation, and regulation of veterinary drugs, vaccines, and pesticides used in aquaculture. Through my work, which has included positions with a salmon farming company in Canada and an international pharmaceutical company and the Government of British Columbia, I have direct experience working with the salmon aquaculture industries on both coasts of Canada and in Scotland, Norway, Ireland, and Chile.

Currently I'm the industry specialist for aquaculture and seafood for the British Columbia Ministry of Agriculture. In this role I provide technical expertise to B.C.'s aquaculture industry. As a subject matter expert for aquaculture working closely with the industry and the research community, I also provide technical advice to the executive in the ministry as well as other ministries within the B.C. government and external government agencies. A function of my position is identifying opportunities and constraints facing the aquaculture industry and developing solutions to address both. Closed containment aquaculture for salmon and other species is recognized as an opportunity for growth of the B.C. aquaculture industry. As such, I have spent a great deal of time over the last couple of years working on this particular file.

In the interest of time, I will briefly outline the current regulatory framework from a provincial perspective that applies to closed containment aquaculture. Before I do, I'd like to define closed containment aquaculture as we see it. Currently we use the Canadian Science Advisory Secretariat definition, which states:

Closed containment is a term used to describe a range of technologies that attempt to restrict and control interactions between farmed fish and the external aquatic environment with the goal of minimizing impacts and creating greater control over factors in aquaculture production.

In essence, what this definition says is that closed containment systems cover a range of technologies from ocean-based systems that afford partial containment to land-based recirculating aquaculture systems that potentially provide complete containment. To illustrate this, I've forwarded an illustration to the committee; hopefully you have that on file. Basically, what it shows is that there are many different types of systems within a continuum, with each providing more and more containment. While many systems fit within this broad definition, I will restrict my comments to two: ocean-based solid wall systems and land-based recirculating aquaculture systems, or what we commonly refer to as RAS, because these two systems represent the prominent contenders for advancing closed containment aquaculture in B.C. at this time.

Prior to December 2010, aquaculture operations were regulated jointly by the provincial and the federal governments here in B.C. This arrangement was facilitated by a memorandum of understanding between the two, outlining the roles and responsibilities to be undertaken by both. The province developed a regulatory framework principally under the provincial Fisheries Act and the Environmental Management Act. In brief, the province was responsible for issuing aquaculture licences, tenures for crown land,

and regulating discharges from finfish farms, both ocean-based and land-based.

As I'm sure the committee is well aware, in February 2009 the B. C. Supreme Court ruled that marine finfish aquaculture was a fishery and therefore the constitutional responsibility of the federal government. As a result, Justice Hinkson struck down parts of the provincial Fisheries Act, Farm Practices Protection (Right to Farm) Act, the aquaculture regulation pertaining to finfish aquaculture, and the entirety of the finfish aquaculture waste control regulation. This decision applied to all marine finfish aquaculture in the province but expressly did not apply to the cultivation of marine plants. Moreover, and relevant to today's discussion, the decision did not directly address freshwater aquaculture or land-based aquaculture.

● (1550)

Following this decision, the provincial government announced that it would no longer regulate the operational activities of shellfish and freshwater aquaculture. It would leave management of the entire sector, with the exception of marine plants, to Fisheries and Oceans Canada. As a result of these changes, which took effect in December 2010, the province no longer regulates finfish and shellfish aquaculture, with the exception of labour and licensing matters. It also continues to issue crown land tenures used to site aquaculture installations under the authority of the provincial Land Act. Where land-based systems are concerned, legislation administered by the B. C. Ministry of the Environment pertaining to water use—that's water licences under the Water Act and waste discharge permits under the Environmental Management Act—still apply.

In all situations, aquaculture operations still require a B.C. aquaculture licence, as the B.C. Fisheries Act requires a licence to carry on the business of aquaculture. So that's essentially a business licence.

Overall, I think the new regulatory framework is working well, although there is always room for improvement. There continues to be a good working relationship between the provincial and federal governments. This is facilitated by the new Canada-British Columbia agreement on aquaculture management, which was signed in 2010.

Ocean-based systems located on crown land require a crown land tenure issued by the province and an aquaculture licence issued by Fisheries and Oceans Canada. Additional considerations include permitting under the Navigable Waters Protection Act, and assessment under the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act. In general, operating parameters follow those used by the province prior to the Hinkson decision, as conditions attached to the aquaculture licence issued by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. That would be for ocean-based systems.

Land-based systems present a somewhat different situation, since the Pacific aquaculture regulations under the Fisheries Act put in place by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to regulate the industry apply to coastal and inland waters and fisheries waters. That appears to capture any aquaculture facilities in B.C., with the possible exception of land-based closed containment systems. For the most part, facilities are being located on private land. As such, they would not require a crown land tenure but would require an aquaculture licence issued by Fisheries and Oceans.

As it has done for ocean-based systems and all other types of aquaculture licences held under the federal Fisheries Act, Fisheries and Oceans has developed licence templates that detail the various licence conditions applied to the type of licence and the species being cultured.

Freshwater aquaculture licence conditions defer to previous provincial requirements for waste discharge. Discharge permits are issued by the provincial ministry of environment on a case-by-case basis. This has so far worked reasonably well. In situations where the facility is located on federal land, such as the Namgis facility, the province has no jurisdiction, so a different regulatory path is followed.

In these situations, Fisheries and Oceans defers to Environment Canada to set standards for effluent discharge. As I understand it, the issue is that Environment Canada considers any discharge to fish habitat a deleterious substance under section 36 of the Fisheries Act, which is not allowed unless proven to be safe. Environment Canada is therefore reluctant to issue discharge permits with specific conditions.

Recirculating aquaculture systems have been in place in B.C. for some time, as all the major salmon farming companies use this technology to grow smolts. However, another condition of the freshwater licence that applies to salmon hatcheries for marine grow-out requires the licence-holder to meet the receiving environment standards found in the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment water quality index. This means that hatcheries are required to monitor the water quality of ground and surface waters upstream and downstream from their facilities. These standards are based on common reference values and are not location-specific.

It is my understanding that in many cases baseline values are unknown and that many receiving waters may already exceed the standards before any inputs reach them. What this suggests to me is that there is an opportunity to improve the regulatory framework with respect to effluent from closed containment systems as well as at land-based freshwater aquaculture facilities. As an aside, I suspect that where effluent standards are concerned, this issue also extends to marine net pens. I know that Fisheries and Oceans is aware of these issues and is currently working to address them.

In closing, while my comments have been brief, I hope I have provided some insight into the current regulatory framework for closed containment aquaculture in B.C. and a couple of regulatory issues that represent grey areas. I am confident that ongoing work and collaboration among the various government agencies involved will resolve these issues as we move forward.

• (1555)

Nonetheless, I do wish to impress upon the committee that time is of the essence. Given the capital cost of closed containment systems, which are prohibitively high, investors need to be confident that the regulatory system in place affords a level of business certainty and security. Without strong investor confidence that projects will proceed on a timely basis, it will be difficult for the province not only to attract investment for the development of closed containment technologies but to retain investment in B.C. for the existing aquaculture infrastructure and industry.

I also feel that given the dollars involved where closed containment is concerned, the mandate to salmon farmers and all aquaculturists should be to reduce impacts rather than to use specific technologies.

I'll close with that and I'll take any questions you have.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Roth. I appreciate your comments.

We'll go to questions at this point, with Mr. Allen.

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

Mr. Roth, thank you very much for being here with us today.

I'd like to start my first question with the last sentence in your statement today. You said that the mandate to salmon farmers and all aquaculturists should be to reduce impacts rather than to use specific technologies. We've heard a lot of testimony, given the economics of going to closed containment RAS systems and the significant amount of additional biomass that would have to be in a closed containment system. Are you suggesting that maybe it should be a technology-neutral solution going forward, and we shouldn't necessarily run to closed pen aquaculture?

Dr. Myron Roth: In a manner of speaking.... What I'm getting at with that point is that what often happens is a solution is identified by various groups. So what's happening with this issue is that everyone is saying we have to go to closed containment systems. I don't know if that's necessarily the best answer. It may be a component of the answer, but it could be that we end up proverbially putting all our eggs in one basket.

What I would rather see is that the industry focus on a solution to address the issues, and the industry, through innovation, will come up with a solution to address those issues.

If you should turn around and say to the industry that everyone has to go to this kind of system, and it turns out that system doesn't work or that system isn't economically viable, then you may find you've essentially painted yourself into a corner.

As an example, there was a previous report from a committee that was chaired by Robin Austin. He was a local MLA. It advocated that everyone had to go to a certain type of solid-wall system that was floating in the ocean, like these ocean-based closed containment systems. It advocated this position and just summarily dismissed RAS systems because it made the assumption that the systems were too expensive. Had we adopted that solution, it's quite likely we wouldn't be where we are today with the development of recirculating aquaculture systems.

That's an example where you come up with one idea but that idea isn't necessarily the best. If you give the industry the opportunity to explore many ideas, you'll find that solutions will come forward. That's why the mandate should be to reduce impacts to promote sustainability rather than to promote a very specific technology.

●(1600)

Mr. Mike Allen: What would be your statement on how the industry is innovating with respect to its existing technologies today? And maybe more important, is there something the federal government could be doing to encourage it to continue innovating with what it already has?

Dr. Myron Roth: In what context of innovation do you mean?

Mr. Mike Allen: In the context of minimizing the potential environmental impact of open-net technology, for example.

Dr. Myron Roth: It's a matter of which issues you want to address. Obviously there are several issues, and nothing is perfect.

Right now, from a waste discharge perspective, the federal government has been following on work from the provincial government to characterize and reduce impact from waste discharge. This would be things like feed and feces flying out from net pens, and the same thing with escapes.

I think the federal government is working quite well with the industry. I can't think of any one particular item it would work on that would address a specific issue. I'd almost have to think of a specific issue.

Probably the best thing the federal government can do is establish metrics across the industry so we're actually improving things we can measure.

Mr. Mike Allen: Thank you.

In your statement you said we're a little more than a year into this new regulatory environment in B.C., and it seems to be working quite well. Do you foresee any problems, or have you seen problems or complications stemming from overlap or any issues with current division of regulatory responsibility?

Dr. Myron Roth: Well, it's been a lot of work. I even commend the federal government for achieving what they have over such a short period of time. I don't think there's too much overlap. The industry would say it was going too slowly and could go a lot quicker. I think that will happen in time as people sort out what key issues need to be addressed.

I don't necessarily see any real problems, as long as issues that cause conflict.... I look at some of the regulatory requirements. I raised one issue, for example, with section 36 of the Fisheries Act. If someone's trying to get a licence and wants their licence to give them some sort of standard to discharge to the environment, whether it's a land-based system or an ocean-based system, we have to address the issue where one act says one thing, or the act is interpreted differently by different ministries.

In the Namgis case in particular, this group would like some sort of document that tells them that they can discharge, and they're not in conflict with the Fisheries Act as long as they meet certain standards. But my understanding is they're not getting that because there are some different interpretations of that section of the Fisheries Act.

These issues have been going on for quite a while. Fisheries and Oceans is aware of them, and I believe they're developing legislation to address those issues.

●(1605)

Mr. Mike Allen: You said that land-based systems present a somewhat different situation since the Pacific aquaculture regulations under the federal Fisheries Act—and they apply to coastal—appear to capture any aquaculture facilities in B.C., with the possible exception of land-based closed containment. I just want a clarification on what you mean by the “possible exception”. Does that mean under the provincial side? I'm still assuming that DFO would be regulating even if it is land-based. Is that true?

Dr. Myron Roth: Yes, DFO would be regulating if it's land-based. But I have to get clarification internally on the jurisdictional authority of the Fisheries Act. Basically, if I set up a farm that's on land and has no connection to a fish-bearing water, a fishery, or any other body of water that contains fish, is that within the scope of the Fisheries Act? They're regulating land-based systems because everyone accepts that's a logical thing to do. They've made a policy where they're looking at things like the commerce of fish grown in these facilities that would appear on the market. But if you look at it legally, you have to wonder whether or not this is an appropriate use of the Fisheries Act.

We've tried to understand the Hinkson decision. As far as we can tell, it's not totally clear whether the Fisheries Act would cover a land-based facility that has no connection to a fish-bearing body of water.

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

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Donnelly.

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

Thank you, Mr. Roth, for your presentation and for being with us today at the committee.

I want to focus on the waste, disease, and parasite issue. You mentioned feed and feces impacting the receiving waters in the ocean. There's also the issue of parasites and disease. Certainly this committee has heard witnesses' testimony regarding the impact, for instance, of sea lice on wild salmon coming from finfish aquaculture.

I'm wondering if you can provide any comment about how you feel the west coast aquaculture industry is handling those issues of waste, disease, and parasites.

Dr. Myron Roth: That's a fairly big question. I'll try to keep my comments kind of short.

On the waste discharge side, right now the current requirements are part of a performance-based monitoring scheme. I don't know how familiar you are with that. I think that on the west coast we've been really quite proactive in developing that system, although that system is also used in other regions around the world. Wherever you have an activity such as aquaculture or any other man-made activity, if you have some performance measurements you can use, you can certainly manage the situation. So I think that's being done relatively well. I don't have a concern about it.

The one thing we don't know as much about is cumulative impacts. While you may be able to characterize one site, what's the impact of multiple sites?

I think the waste impacts are being managed.

On the disease side, I've worked in a lot of countries around the world, and I spent a lot of time studying sea lice before I arrived in the provincial government. Sea lice on the west coast have a very high profile, but personally I don't believe that sea lice are causing any impact.

I think we've started to hear testimony in the Cohen commission to the effect that people are starting to feel the same thing. You have lice numbers that are very low. The use of things like Slice to treat for lice is the lowest for all the salmon-farming countries in the world.

Here in B.C. the lice numbers are very low. I think if I had to characterize sea lice as a problem, I would say that if a region wanted to do the best thing possible or if you were to set a standard, you would do what they do in B.C. I've seen other regions where the lice problems have gotten out of control, and I even worked in one for many years.

On other disease fronts, it really depends on the disease in question, but I think that when the province was managing the situation there was quite an active surveillance program. I thought the farmers were really quite proactive about it. Disease incidence is very low, and any disease we've had has been from endemic pathogens already present on the west coast. So if you farm some fish in a region, they might catch something that is local, but then it's being managed.

Disease is definitely a threat, and I certainly wouldn't want to be complacent about it, but I also think that it's being risk-managed at this time.

• (1610)

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Would you say that while the ministry was responsible for overseeing finfish aquaculture in B.C. there was no issue or there were no cases of ISAV present?

Dr. Myron Roth: I don't believe there were cases of ISAV present, because the virus wasn't isolated.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Okay.

In the past Parliament, this committee had testimony from a number of scientists who offered differing perspectives. They felt that the parasite issue had been a concern over the past number of years and they cited a number of studies. It's interesting to hear your perspective.

I do want to ask about the number of licences that have been issued over the past two to three years. Has there been a significant increase in the number of licences, and is the trend going up in terms of the number of licences for new finfish net pens in British Columbia?

Dr. Myron Roth: No.

Regarding the number of licences right now on the books, are we talking about for salmon farms or for all facilities?

Mr. Fin Donnelly: No, it's just for salmon farms.

Dr. Myron Roth: For salmon farms right now there are about 120 leases on the books, but at any one time about 85 are in operation. That number has been pretty stagnant for the last several years. So any growth we have seen on the west coast has come from efficiencies in the use of the existing sites.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Can you elaborate on why there hasn't been an expansion, given that, as you say, there have been minimal to no problems? Why hasn't the industry seen growth? Is it just because of market conditions, or what would you attribute that to?

Dr. Myron Roth: It's very multifactorial, but I would say there's a public perception that aquaculture is damaging to the environment, and this has caused a lot of concern and has been raised by many groups. It has made it very difficult to attract investment and to move the file forward to establish new sites.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: You're saying that the public concerns and even some of the scientific concerns that have been raised are ill-founded. In other words, there's nothing to worry about.

Dr. Myron Roth: No, I wouldn't say it's ill-founded. That wouldn't be the choice that I would use; I would say that it has been very exaggerated and overstated.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Okay, and I would say that I think there is a concern that the public and scientists have mentioned about.... They do feel there are real concerns about the deleterious substances entering the marine ecosystem. Whether this is a real or a perceived problem, it is obviously a problem the industry has to deal with in terms of looking at expansion or looking at how it survives and thrives. I think there's an issue in terms of the marine ecosystem in using it as a receptacle for some of these wastes and some of these diseases and parasites that have been associated with aquaculture around the world, not just on the Pacific coast.

How far along was the ministry in looking at closed containment before it changed over to federal control? I would imagine that you were looking at closed containment systems or RAS for a reason.

• (1615)

Dr. Myron Roth: The ministry has actually invested into closed containment and has looked at closed containment aquaculture for quite a few years now. This was probably started—I don't have the dates in front of me, but I'm trying to think—maybe in the early nineties or before then, when money was provided by the provincial government to look at land-based facilities or to support the development of a land-based facility. The facility in Cedar had funding from the provincial government. The bag systems that were developed were largely developed through programs in collaboration with the provincial government. In fact, before the changeover we were involved with the Namgis project as well.

We've looked at several systems and we've been involved in several projects. In each case, the projects are very expensive, and the results that have come back haven't demonstrated a significant benefit, or they've failed. So it's very difficult to constantly spend a lot of money on projects unless you're seeing some sort of progress.

There were the notable projects, like the project at Cedar, which failed, and the Future SEA bags project, which had some problems. In each case, we did learn something. We learned something from the Cedar site and we learned something from the Future SEA bags.

We've been working with the Middle Bay group on the solid wall systems and we're working closely with the Namgis project. When I say we're working with them, it's part of my job to work with these people on their projects and provide technical support, but we've also provided funding in dollars in various ways.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Hayes.

Mr. Bryan Hayes (Sault Ste. Marie, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome, Dr. Roth.

I would like to add my appreciation of the chair's ability.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Bryan Hayes: I want to pick up, Dr. Roth, where Mr. Donnelly left off, in regard to your expertise in terms of sea lice. I'm very interested in your findings. You spoke about the development of "veterinary drugs, vaccines, and pesticides". In your mind, are there remedies for controlling or eliminating sea lice that do not have a negative impact on other species? Also, is it possible to eliminate sea lice altogether?

Dr. Myron Roth: If I understand your question, the first part is whether there are products available to eliminate sea lice that have no impact. Is that correct?

Mr. Bryan Hayes: It is whether there are products that have no impact on other species, such as lobster or any other species in the area.

Dr. Myron Roth: I think there are products available that, if used properly and according to the label instructions, would have no significant impact on non-target organisms.

Can the sea lice be eliminated completely? Probably they cannot. Sea lice come from a group of animals—parasitic copepods—that have been around for a long time, and there are many hundreds of different species. If you are farming fish in the ocean, I think that sea lice will always be around, but I think that sea lice could be managed.

As I said earlier, if you look at sea lice numbers on the west coast you see that the numbers are managed very well within the context of a farming activity. Treatments are minimal at best, and there's very little clinical damage to farm stock, if any. It's very rare that a veterinarian, for example, would treat fish because the fish are clinically impacted to the point that they need significant intervention. That would not be the case in other countries around the world, where people treat because if they didn't, serious harm would occur to the farm stock.

• (1620)

Mr. Bryan Hayes: You mentioned that land-based recirculating systems potentially provide complete containment. I'd like to understand your word "potentially" and why it was used.

Dr. Myron Roth: I don't think any system is 100% fool-proof. When we talk about impacts to the environment, the land-based system is first of all going to be discharging effluent that will have nutrients in it. Unless those nutrients can be completely removed from the environment and it's not completely separate.... If you have

a lot of nutrients coming out of a closed containment system and now it's going into the ground or going into the ocean, then in my view it's not 100% contained.

Also, it is possible for disease organisms to show up in closed containment systems. In fact, it is a bit of a conundrum, in that if you do get a problem it's very difficult to manage. There have been cases in the past in which closed containment systems have basically gone out of business because they didn't follow sufficient procedures to prevent the introduction of a pathogen. That being the case, the pathogen can get in and then obviously a pathogen can get out.

Having said that, I think that by and large a recirculating aquaculture system would be a closed system, whereas an ocean-based system is not a closed system.

Mr. Bryan Hayes: Thank you.

I want to understand a little more about the legislative framework and jurisdiction. You state that the province has no jurisdiction on waste discharge on federal land and that they follow a different regulatory path.

I'm trying to understand this regulatory path in terms of whether there's a consistent outcome. Is the province's regulatory path more restrictive than the federal government's regulatory path? Whose is better, or are they one and the same but a different path is followed based on a separate set of circumstances?

Dr. Myron Roth: When I say a different regulatory path, what I mean is that if the facility is on provincial land, through the provincial environmental management act that the province currently manages we can assess the situation and issue a discharge permit. If it's on federal land, such as a reserve, the province has no jurisdiction, and then it would default to the federal Fisheries Act. Because you're dealing with two different acts and two different levels of government, I consider that a different regulatory path. That's what I meant by that.

In the case of the project that I cited, they would not be able to get and we would not be able to issue a discharge permit for that facility, because it's on federal lands. They would have to go to Fisheries and Oceans to ask them to issue some sort of permit or make some sort of comment on their aquaculture licence.

Mr. Bryan Hayes: Can you make some comments in terms of current federal regulations that you think should be changed? You suggested that things aren't perfect in the regulatory system. I'm curious what adjustments should be made to improve things.

Dr. Myron Roth: One of the issues is that the deleterious substance clause of the Fisheries Act is always going to be a bit of a tricky thing to manage. That's because just about anything—the water you're drinking right now—would be considered a deleterious substance if you poured it into the ocean. If I took a bowl of shrimp and put a bunch of water in that bowl, I'd kill the shrimp, because they are marine animals, and I would have changed the salinity of the water.

Concerning the deleterious substance clause, on the one hand we become concerned about deleterious substances because we're worried about truly nasty things, but then sometimes it is extended to things such as effluents from farms, for which you probably could have a standard for releasing that fluid, but until you have that standard, the deleterious substances clause says zero: you can't do it.

That's something that needs to be resolved, for sure.

• (1625)

Mr. Bryan Hayes: I'm checking to see how much time I have left.

The Chair: You have half a minute.

Mr. Bryan Hayes: Is there one other example of something that should change in the federal legislation?

My next question would take you a half hour to answer.

Dr. Myron Roth: We have reviewed the legislation. There are probably many areas in which we could improve it. I have to say I wasn't really expecting the question at this time.

Mr. Bryan Hayes: That's fair enough. My time has run out, but for future, this is obviously something I'm interested in, and I think we all are as a committee: what federal legislation should change down the road to make things better for aquaculture.

Thank you very much, Dr. Roth. I think we have to move on to the next questioner.

Dr. Myron Roth: Okay.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. MacAulay.

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

Welcome, Doctor. Your experience in the field is well welcomed here. We've heard a lot of different testimony, and I'd like you to continue on the path you're on.

Looking into it, do you think we need a new federal aquaculture act? It's the federal government on the west coast and the provincial government on the east coast. Should it not be one government that controls aquaculture? I'd like you to express your opinion on that.

Dr. Myron Roth: Thank you for that question, because what I was going to add towards the end there—because it's a very big question—is that I think an aquaculture act would be very good, and it would be very positive for the aquaculture industry in Canada to recognize aquaculture for what it is.

Trying to shoehorn aquaculture activities within the Fisheries Act creates a lot of difficulties. The classic one, of course, is that someone is farming fish, and they're doing it under the authority of a fishing licence under the Fisheries Act.

Having said that, I think that if we have an aquaculture act, to be truly effective it would require us to address issues within the Fisheries Act, such as what I was talking about before—the deleterious substance clause—so that the two pieces of legislation aren't conflicting with one another.

As for a regulatory agency, I think it's good to have consistency, but I also think the province has a role to play, as any provincial jurisdiction has.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Thank you very much.

I'd also like you to comment on the chemical treatments used by these aquaculture sites. What effect do you see them having on the surrounding areas? You have touched on some of this, but we have heard some testimony that under the open-net concept everything is dead underneath the pen. We've heard a lot of different types of testimony. We have also heard that the pens are in the wrong place—where the fish, the salmon, migrate back and forth.

I'm thinking about the lice issue. I'd like you to comment on this. How big a problem is it? You have no doubt heard about the land being dead underneath the nets.

Also, we're talking about the open-net concept and closed containment, but we're talking about an awful lot of different dollars. We're quite a distance away from having land-based closed containment be economically feasible. I'd like you to comment on that too, if you have time.

Thank you.

Dr. Myron Roth: I'll do my best. You've asked a lot of questions there.

To characterize the ocean floor as being dead is probably inaccurate. I do think there are some localized impacts, but those impacts are probably short-lived, from most of the literature that I've seen. Slice, or emamectin benzoate, which is a compound of choice right now for treating sea lice, has been studied extensively for its impact on non-target organisms and its persistence in the environment.

Now, we can always use more information, but to the best of my knowledge, it's not really having a demonstrable impact on non-target organisms below pens or adjacent to pens. I do believe there's some information that's becoming available on the residue persistence of this compound in the sediments, and of course that will raise additional questions of what the biological relevance is of those residues. I can't really comment further because that's work that hasn't been published yet. Until it gets published, it's hard to know for sure.

I will just touch on pen location. Siting is a tricky thing, and in early days pens were sited in the wrong locations. Now we're getting a lot better at siting pens appropriately. I think we have to look at pen siting more in the context of what we're doing now.

Lastly, as far as the dollars go for closed containment, there are no doubts that closed containment is expensive. Most sites are going to come in at tens of millions of dollars to build. I was looking at some data the other day where the capital cost for one of the sites being developed that I'm aware of—and this is some of the information that I got at a meeting—was pegged at about \$23 per kilogram just to build the site. So if you extrapolated that to the west coast, for example, where we grow about 80,000 metric tonnes, and if you were to say we have to move all the sites to closed containment, that means we'd have to come up with \$2 billion just to build it.

It's very expensive. Right now the system is profitable, and it's profitable within a well-managed regime. I think there's a place for closed containment. I support closed containment, but I think it has to work alongside other modalities of farming fish.

• (1630)

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: So if I understand you correctly, you feel that we need to invest in closed containment, if nothing else, to have the technology and to keep up with Chile and other places around the world. You know what's going on around the world, and I truly believe—and I ask you, I'm not telling you—that we need to do this to have the information, but there's quite a difference between the profitability of a closed containment and an open-net concept.

Dr. Myron Roth: There are sites out there that do run a closed system profitably, but it really depends. It's very situation-specific. I think that if you tried to compete head to head with the salmon coming out of net pens, you would not be profitable. There are other situations where it may be profitable, and it may be profitable for a company to have salmon come out of a closed containment system to access a market niche.

I do think we should move forward with closed containment, because we want to keep up with the technology, but we also want to ensure that the industry is flexible. There are also other species, like sturgeon, for example. You can develop sturgeon in closed containment, and the value of the products is so great that it would be profitable. You can do it in such a way that would allow you to address conservation efforts and develop a good sector.

I think there's room for both types of systems. The bottom line is when you're developing closed containment aquaculture systems.... As I said earlier, salmon farmers use recirculating aquaculture systems for growing smolts, so they are constantly investing in the technology, and a lot that we know comes from that. The question is whether you can do it cost-effectively to grow market-size salmon, because the situation changes quite a bit when you move from a couple of hundred tonnes to several thousand tonnes. Right now in B.C. the cost of production is already very high, so if you were to move to closed containment you would exacerbate that problem.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Sopuck.

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Thank you very much.

Dr. Roth, what is your opinion regarding the effect of open net aquaculture on wild salmon stocks off the coast of B.C.?

• (1635)

Dr. Myron Roth: I don't believe that aquaculture is having a demonstrable impact on salmon stocks. The reason I say that is because when you look at salmon stock numbers they seem to fluctuate up and down as a coast-wide phenomenon. They're not directly linked to salmon farms being present or not being present.

The system is so complicated to understand in terms of what we're doing from fishing, from inputs to the environment from a lot of other industrial sources, from global warming and what we understand about the natural rhythms of salmon. To turn around and ascribe salmon aquaculture as being the driving cause for declines in salmon stocks I think is being way too simplistic.

I do think we need to be vigilant. I do think we need to study it. But I also think that salmon aquaculture and wild fish populations can coexist here on the west coast.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Thanks. I strongly agree with that.

Again, I found it ironic that recently one of our witnesses was the representative of a grocery chain and they were refusing to sell farmed salmon. To my simple mind it seems that all they're doing is increasing pressure on the wild stocks unnecessarily. I find that reprehensible, given that the conclusion they drew was based on dubious science at best. That's just a comment.

In terms of the benthic environment, Mr. MacAulay asked you some questions about that. How quickly does the benthic environment recover from being under a net pen? I know there has to be some change, but they do rotate these net pens from site to site. How long does it take for a site to return to the original condition once a net pen is removed?

Dr. Myron Roth: Well, that again is a very site-specific question. It depends on the hydrography of the site and how the site was used—whether it was a large site or a small site. It could be a couple of months; it could be many months. What is done in B.C. is that if they fallow a site they have to make sure they meet environmental standards for various measures they make of the sediments.

I can't give you a specific number, but it's one of those things where you can develop some proxy measures and basically ensure you're not exceeding certain thresholds. That's the way we deal with it in B.C. We try not to say that a site has to be fallowed for a certain period of time; we look at a performance-based metric.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: But in your view, it sounds like it's a matter of months, as opposed to years, that a site will recover.

Dr. Myron Roth: I believe so.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Okay, that's good.

Dr. Myron Roth: Again, it really depends on the site. There probably have been some sites where you can measure changes for many months. It depends on the site, and the best way to deal with it is to have a performance measure.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: One thing we discussed at length in our committee early on was the potential migration of rural jobs away from B.C. should closed containment be mandated.

Closed containment systems can largely be constructed not quite anywhere, but in a much larger geographical area. Would a mandate for closed containment have a significant impact on rural jobs in B.C. where people are currently employed in net-pen aquaculture?

Dr. Myron Roth: That's difficult to answer. You can build these sites in rural regions, but I suspect you would have to do whatever it takes to reduce your costs by locating them closer to distribution centres and places like that. In theory, I believe it would reduce local jobs, but quite frankly I think it's a bit of a moot point. I just don't think there's the capital to build these sites in rural areas at this time.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: I represent a constituency in prairie Canada where land is much cheaper than in B.C. In Manitoba, where I'm from, the electricity rates are the lowest in Canada, and as we saw last year, we have water everywhere. I would argue that closed containment aquaculture could be moved. Where I am, we're fairly close to Chicago, Minneapolis, and very large markets. If closed containment were mandated, I would see a real effect on rural jobs in coastal B.C. communities, as these facilities would be built where I described.

Can you make a quick comment on that?

● (1640)

Dr. Myron Roth: It's possible. I don't know what businesses would do if they were faced with having to invest tens of millions of dollars. As you say, they could put them in a place where the land and the services are cheap, but they would have to increase their transportation costs. Reducing transportation costs is one of the things that would demonstrably improve the performance of a recirculating aquaculture system, I think.

I just don't know. It's one of those things where you can say hypothetically this is the way it would go, but you can't predict what industry's going to do when it starts investing that level of dollars.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Thank you very much. My time is up.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Doré Lefebvre.

[Translation]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

And thank you to Mr. Roth for being with us today.

After the presentation you just made, I have many questions to ask. You mentioned repeatedly that closed containment aquaculture is rather expensive. You said that a group of people figured that the production cost of salmon in closed containment would be \$23 a kilogram. Does that cost apply just to the first year or would it stay the same in the long term, year after year. Will it go down if this kind of system becomes the standard? What was the basis of this costing exercise?

[English]

Dr. Myron Roth: The number is the cost of the capital. To operate the system and to produce the fish, you would have to add about another \$7 to \$10 per kilogram. So you have the cost of building the site, then you have the cost of operating it for the year it takes to grow those smolts. When you put it all together, you probably have an operating cost of over \$30 a kilo for the first year, including capital to build it.

I think another way of looking at it would be to look at the cost of operating the system versus the cost of operating a traditional net pen. If you got it for free the numbers we have would indicate that just to operate the system is about \$7.50 a kilo, whereas the cost to operate a net pen is around \$4.50 a kilo. So somewhere you have to make the difference of about \$3 a kilo through the fish you're selling. That doesn't take into account the capital cost to build the site, and the capital cost is going to be close to \$10 million.

Does that answer your question?

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre: Yes, but do you think the number is going to decrease if it's a new norm to have aquaculture in closed containment, or is it still going to be high?

Dr. Myron Roth: I think the number would go down with economies of scale. There's no doubt about it. But the numbers we have right now are hypothetical. They're not based on actual systems. So where they're budgeting a couple of hundred tonnes of production, to get a realistic number you would have to have a couple of thousand tonnes of production if you wanted to compare apples to apples with the current systems.

Yes, I do think the number would come down, and I do think you could amortize it over time. The problem is trying to get that initial capital to build the site. What we do know from some extensive work that was done by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans is that the profit margins are very thin and they're very susceptible to market forces out of their control. So if the interest rates change or the currency exchange rate changes, it could have a significant negative impact on the business model.

● (1645)

[Translation]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre: How much time would amortization take?

[English]

Dr. Myron Roth: I can't really answer that because it really depends on what the site costs. It could be several years, but that's true of any business. So there is no simple answer to that question.

[Translation]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre: In your introduction, you said that, for the aquaculture industry in B.C., closed containment aquaculture provided growth opportunities.

Did you notice that this was the case in recent years?

[English]

Dr. Myron Roth: Yes, there has been interest for closed containment salmon aquaculture in B.C., but it's not really taken off because of the cost. We did have some very significant interest from one of our very large salmon farming companies in the province, but because of the current economic climate right now it has put the project on hold because it just doesn't have the finances to push it through.

[Translation]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre: Suppose closed containment aquaculture becomes the standard in the industry. First of all, is that realistic? If it is, do you think the transition could be made in five or ten years, for example? Do you think this would be possible over the long term?

[English]

Dr. Myron Roth: I just don't think it would be realistic.

[Translation]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre: Thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Kamp, go ahead.

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

Thank you, Dr. Roth, for appearing today. We appreciate your testimony.

Can you tell me how your job changed in the post-Hinkson era?

Dr. Myron Roth: Actually, my job didn't change that much. We did have a group at the ministry that was managing aquaculture policy and managing the aquaculture regulations. After the Hinkson decision was made, that group was largely reallocated. Some people went to work for the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, some people went to work for other ministries, and there were some large-scale changes to the provincial government. Specifically, though, I stayed with the Ministry of Agriculture as a point person for the aquaculture file.

We do have an oceans and fisheries group that migrated over from the Ministry of Environment, but that's kind of a different story that dealt more with reorganization within the provincial government.

Mr. Randy Kamp: You're providing advice to whom?

Dr. Myron Roth: Me?

Mr. Randy Kamp: Yes.

Dr. Myron Roth: Basically, my role as the industry specialist... We didn't have an industry specialist for aquaculture for quite a long time. I was actually a policy analyst in the ministry. Largely, the reason for that was that we had a mandate to regulate the industry. Now that we don't have a mandate to regulate the industry and because we have other industry specialists for other agricultural commodities, like chicken and beef and grains and fruit crops, a decision was made to include an industry specialist for the aquaculture industry. Basically, I can provide expert advice to the industry and also provide expert advice to the executive here in the ministry.

Mr. Randy Kamp: Okay, thank you for that.

Dr. Roth, I think you make a very good point about making sure we have an understandable and proper regulatory regime for closed containment technology, especially as we're kind of in transition from the province to the federal government. I want to make sure I understand that. I know you don't have a lot of specific examples of how that needs to work.

Of course we already have land-based recirculating aquaculture in terms of the first part of the life cycle of fish. But what about the case of something like Swift Aquaculture, where they've had the complete grow-out on land in Agassiz, growing coho salmon? How has the regulation of that changed in the transition from the province to the federal government, and what would it look like in the future, do you think, if the regulatory regime were working as it should?

• (1650)

Dr. Myron Roth: I have a couple points of clarification. The Swift Aquaculture site isn't a recirculating aquaculture system, to start with. It's a flow-through system, like any other trout farm in the province. Basically, licensing of that facility didn't really change much. We issued an aquaculture licence for a site that was on private land, and discharge permits. A similar sort of licence was issued

from Fisheries and Oceans under the Fisheries Act, which has very similar conditions of licence attached to it.

It's possible that the conditions of licence may be less specific for discharge. I don't know, I haven't seen that particular licence. There's another thing that was lost, which is kind of significant and gets overlooked. I had mentioned earlier the Farm Practices Protection (Right to Farm) Act. Essentially what that did for farmers in the province was it protected them from nuisance lawsuits. We don't have similar federal legislation to do that. So if you want to develop a closed containment site in an area that could be in a rural area but it might also have a nice park nearby or it might have some very scenic properties, and you want to build a fairly large closed containment site, someone could just complain and say that it's a big cement box that's too noisy and they don't want it there. So the Farm Practices Protection Act would actually protect people from nuisance lawsuits. They no longer have that. That was lost.

Mr. Randy Kamp: Good point.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. MacAulay.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Thank you.

Doctor, if land-based closed containment becomes a reality, do you see the division in regulatory responsibilities becoming a problem?

Dr. Myron Roth: No, I don't.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Thank you. That's good enough. No, you don't.

Also, when I asked you the question about where the open-net farms were put a number of years ago, I think you indicated some of them were put in poorly chosen areas. Can you tell me if those farms are still operating? I think it's causing some difficulty for the open-net concept itself, looking at it from that angle, because we hear this report about the path the salmon take, and perhaps they're getting more blame than they deserve—or perhaps they're not getting enough.

I'd like your comment on that.

Dr. Myron Roth: When this issue came up many years ago, they did an assessment of the existing sites and they moved some sites around to try to address the issue. I think what you're talking about is a somewhat different issue, and that is siting the farms on migration routes.

It would be difficult in B.C. to move farms away from migration routes. The question is how much impact they have on fish when they migrate by. I think we have some information, but we certainly don't have enough. And if you moved them away, where are you going to move them to?

I just don't know if moving the sites around because they're on migration routes is really going to address the issue, because there are quite a few salmon on the west coast swimming around, and conceivably most places would be on a migration route.

• (1655)

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Dr. Roth. I appreciate your taking the time to appear before our committee today and provide comments and answer questions of committee members. It certainly is appreciated. Once again, I want to thank you on behalf of the entire committee for taking time out of your very busy schedule to meet with us today.

Thank you, Dr. Roth.

Dr. Myron Roth: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Mr. Leef, you provided notice of motion to this committee.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Mr. Chair...?

The Chair: Yes, sir.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: I was hoping that we might go another short round. I have one or two more clarifying questions to ask. I realize that you've closed it off, but I'd like to clarify one of the things Mr. Sopuck referenced.

I think he was talking about Overwaitea, which presented to us. He said they don't sell farmed salmon, and that's not the case. They told us that they sell farmed salmon. They buy from an eco-certified closed system. I just wanted to clarify that for the record.

The Chair: I appreciate that, Mr. Donnelly, but I'm sure we all remember their comments when they were here before the committee. I did pick up on Mr. Sopuck's comment. I guess we understand how the testimony went that day when Overwaitea was here and they talked about their decision on what product to market.

Thank you.

Mr. Leef, you provided a notice of motion to this committee. Is it your intent to bring it forward today?

Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC): It is, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Leef, please move your motion at this time.

Mr. Ryan Leef: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It might sound strikingly similar to a motion we already heard today. I figure I might as well bring it forward today, before Mr. MacAulay brings it forward on Wednesday and we have three identical motions.

My motion is that because the evidence demonstrates that the Canadian seal hunt is conducted humanely and sustainably, the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans reaffirms its support for the Canadian seal industry.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Leef. Do you want to make any opening comments?

Mr. Ryan Leef: I'll be brief with this and then open the floor if anybody has additional comments.

From a personal perspective, coming from the Yukon territory, I'm a firm supporter of traditional activities that are sustainable, humane, and support the livelihood of thousands of Canadians. I come from a geographic region that has a strong tradition and heritage in the trapping industry. I have observed some of the challenges that industry has faced over the years, and I now see that starting to press up against people who are involved in the sealing industry.

I think it's an important motion that the committee consider—particularly around the heritage, tradition, and culture it provides Canadians—that it is a sustainable harvest, it is conducted humanely, and it supports the livelihood of Canadians.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Leef.

You've heard the motion presented to the committee. You've heard Mr. Leef's opening comments.

Mr. MacAulay.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: I'd like to propose an amendment to the motion.

The Chair: Please state your amendment, Mr. MacAulay.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: I would add the following:

and that, given the current state of the Canadian sealing industry and the inability of the government to open new international markets for the industry, the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans call on the government to significantly increase its efforts to protect and promote the sealing industry on the international stage, before the industry is permanently lost.

The Chair: Do you have that in front of you, Mr. MacAulay, so I can provide it to the clerk?

Mr. Ryan Leef: It's just a minor adjustment.

Mr. Mike Allen: I can't imagine that dog's going to hunt. Nice try, though.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: You've heard the motion, and you've heard Mr. MacAulay's amendment to the motion.

Mr. Toone.

● (1700)

Mr. Philip Toone: Do we have a timeline as to when the industry will be permanently lost?

The Chair: No, there's no timeline.

Mr. Randy Kamp: We disagree with the premise of the amendment, which is that the government is not actively working on the expansion of markets. We know for a fact that this is happening, so we will not be supporting this amendment.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kamp.

Mr. MacAulay.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: I bring this amendment to the floor because I want more activity from the Government of Canada. I think after the China trip we were all disappointed. It's okay to promote and support the sealing industry, but if you do not have markets you have no industry. What we have to do is encourage the government. I would urge the government members on the committee to support this motion, because all it does is encourage the government to become more active in seeking new markets. If we cannot sell the seal pelts there will be no sealing industry.

I could not possibly see anybody interested in the sealing industry not supporting my amendment to this motion.

Mr. Randy Kamp: Well you're going to see it.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Mr. Chair, I missed that statement.

The Chair: It was inaudible.

Is there anything further on the amendment?

Mr. Donnelly.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Can we hear that one more time?

The Chair: I will read it into the record one more time.

Mr. Leef has moved that because the evidence demonstrates that the Canadian seal hunt is conducted humanely and sustainably, the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans reaffirms its support for the Canadian seal industry.

The amendment brought forward by Mr. MacAulay states: and that, given the current state of the Canadian sealing industry and the inability of the government to open new international markets for the industry, the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans call on the government to significantly increase its efforts to protect and promote the sealing industry on the international stage, before the industry is permanently lost.

That's the amendment and the motion.

Is there anything further on the amendment?

(Amendment negated)

The Chair: The amendment has been defeated.

We will now return to the original motion as stated by Mr. Leef. Is there discussion on the motion?

Mr. Kamp.

• (1705)

Mr. Randy Kamp: Mr. Leef's motion has quite succinctly stated the value of the matter, especially to northern and coastal communities.

To be frank, we brought this motion forward because we are concerned about some of the comments made by one of our committee members. We've been waiting for Mr. Cleary to be among us so that he would have a chance to weigh in on this and clarify his position. He hasn't been here, so we've had to have this debate without him. We think it's important for the parties in Parliament to be clear on where they stand. His comments raised some doubt in our mind, and a Liberal senator's comments have raised some doubts as well.

I think we've been unequivocal on our side. We felt it was necessary to have a very simple motion like this. I would still like Mr. Cleary to have an opportunity to speak to this. So I would like to propose an amendment to the motion replacing the period at the end with a comma and adding the words "and that this motion be reported to the House."

The Chair: To be clear, Mr. Kamp, you're seeking to amend the motion by only adding the words "and that this motion be reported to the House"?

Mr. Randy Kamp: Yes.

The Chair: I just want to be clear on the amendment.

Mr. Randy Kamp: For what it's worth, we normally refer to this committee as the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans, not "of". I could include that as an amendment as well.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

The amendment brought forward by Mr. Kamp amends the motion of Mr. Leef by changing the word "of" in "the Standing Committee of Fisheries and Oceans" to "on" and, at the end of the motion, replacing the period with a comma and adding "and that this motion be reported to the House."

On the amendment, we have Mr. MacAulay.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: I think what's put together is okay. It's something you cannot vote against, but it's got no guts at all. It's got nothing in it to add support and push to the government. I thought this committee would be in place in order to provide guidance to the government as to where we think they should go in the sealing industry. The fact is, we need the government to do more. It's great to say "I promote", it's great to say "I provide", but if you do not provide it's no good. That's the problem we have here.

It was said that this amendment could not be accepted because.... Sure, I won't vote against the motion, but it's worthless unless something is done. What we need to do is support the people out on the ice, the sealers, and we want the government to support the sealers. We're not doing it, and it's most unfortunate. We can play games and say we're going to do this and that, but the fact is this is a pretty serious issue. If the sealing industry collapses, it's going to affect an awful lot of fisheries on the east coast of this country.

I'm so disappointed that we have done absolutely nothing to obtain markets. I'm not blaming anybody, but what we have to do is urge the government to do these things if you want an industry. It's great to have an industry, but they have to sell the pelts. They're not doing it, and we're not asking them to do it. We're asking them for support. Sure, they support, but support without guts is no good.

• (1710)

The Chair: Anything further on the amendment?

Mr. Kamp.

Mr. Randy Kamp: Just to be clear, this is a motion about this committee reaffirming its support. This committee has always supported the sealing industry. One of our members has raised a doubt, and frankly, I wanted it to be clear, as a member of this committee, that those comments didn't reflect a position, or a changing position of this committee.

Now, if this motion passes, it will be reported to the House and it may get moved—who knows—or have a concurrence debate. If it does, we will have an opportunity to raise whatever issues, as Mr. MacAulay said, in terms of advice to the government on how the support that this committee has indicated can go forward.

It's our position, of course, as will be pointed out in that, that we will happily itemize for Mr. MacAulay and any other members of the House the steps that the government has taken to advance new markets and so on. It's obviously not completely within the control of governments to open markets, but certainly we've made good efforts there and will continue to make those.

This is about this committee going on record to continue our historical support for the seal hunt.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kamp.

Mr. Leef.

Mr. Ryan Leef: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll try not to belabour this, but I think that was well said. I can appreciate Mr. MacAulay's position. I've certainly seen the value of strongly stated support, particularly in the trapping industry in the Yukon. I've watched that go up and down for years, and when the government stands behind something, it's not meaningless. It's not as strong as you want it, but I certainly don't think it's gutless or meaningless to acknowledge strong commitment to and support for an industry.

I know this is going just quickly back to the motion that you proposed, because you raised the question of it. Personally, I just found it had a negative connotation that, in my mind, could lead dangerously close to signalling that the end of the market is near to the people who would celebrate its end. I think that's dangerous. We want to be signalling the growth or the continuation of the market, not using terms like "government's inability" and at the end, "before this industry is permanently lost". When we start putting that language into additional motions, I think that gives people who are looking forward to that day coming hope that it could. I would move away from any kind of language in any motion that signalled that.

Back to the addition, I certainly don't have any concern with the addition "and that this motion be reported to the House", because I think that adds a strong signal to what we're trying to do, which is to show that we don't see the end of this market anywhere on the horizon.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Leef.

Mr. MacAulay.

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

This has been a very cordial committee. It's worked well. I want it to stay that way. If it would ever help, I'd take the last few words out, but that would not help. The fact is that what we're saying on this amendment is that we're going to increase the efforts to protect and promote. In my opinion, anybody who knows anything about the seal hunt and the sealing industry knows that we need to protect and promote, because it's in dire straits at the moment. If you want to ask anybody who is involved in the sealing industry—and in fact if you want to ask anybody involved in the fishery itself—how important this is, they'll tell you. The sealing industry is important to a certain group of people, but the seals are overpopulated. The fact is we need the seal hunt, we need the markets, and we need the government to push.

If we do not do it, we're going to hurt the fishing industry in Atlantic Canada, for sure. This needs to happen. If we do not have markets for our pelts, there'll be no seal hunt. They just can't go out for the good of the cause if they cannot sell the pelts. All I wanted to do was to give the government a push to see if we could somehow get markets. We have people excluding us from the seal markets that are involved in the seal hunt.

Anyhow, amen.

●(1715)

The Chair: Just to be clear for committee members, the amendment has been defeated.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: I know.

The Chair: We're now debating a subamendment: "and that this motion be reported to the House", just to be clear for committee members.

Mr. Donnelly, please go ahead.

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

I wanted to provide some clarity to Mr. Kamp's remarks. I just want to say that no NDP member of this committee has questioned the support for the sealing industry at any time at this table. I just wanted to provide that clarity.

In terms of the amendment, we have no problem supporting that.

The Chair: Anything further on the amendment?

(Amendment agreed to)

The Chair: Now we will go back to the amended motion. Anything on the amended motion?

Mr. Allen, please go ahead.

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

I didn't get a chance to say how good a chair you were before. I won't say it this time, either.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Mike Allen: A fellow from New Brunswick wouldn't expect anything different anyway.

I guess after we've had our constituency week, we're all filled with good nature here. I did hear Mr. MacAulay's comments, and I think there's a recognition that, as Mr. Kamp had put out, there has been a lot going on. I'd be prepared to make an amendment to the motion to reflect some of what Mr. MacAulay has said, and if he's open to it then maybe we'll have the best of all worlds here of what gets reported back to the house.

I would propose to add to the motion, just before the part we just added, which was "and that this motion be reported to the House"—this would be after "industry".... It may be better if I read the whole thing.

The Chair: Please do.

Mr. Mike Allen: I would add to the initial motion from Mr. Leef:

That because the evidence demonstrates that the Canadian seal hunt is conducted humanely and sustainably, the committee reaffirms its support for the Canadian seal industry; and that, given the current state of the Canadian sealing industry, the committee calls on the government to continue its efforts to open new markets and to protect and promote the sealing industry on the international stage; and that this motion be reported to the House.

The Chair: Could you just repeat that last part: "continue its efforts"?

Mr. Mike Allen: Yes: "...continue its efforts to open new markets and to protect and promote the sealing industry on the international stage; and that this motion be reported to the House."

• (1720)

The Chair: All right, let's see if I get this straight.

Mr. Allen proposes the following amendment, and I'll read the entire motion as it could be amended if it's approved.

That because the evidence demonstrates that the Canadian seal hunt is conducted humanely and sustainably, the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans reaffirms its support for the Canadian seal industry; and that given the current state of the Canadian sealing industry, the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans call on the government to continue its efforts to open new markets and to protect and promote the sealing industry on the international stage; and that this motion be reported to the House.

Is that correct?

Mr. Mike Allen: Yes. It just would be “calls”, the standing committee “calls”. I guess it would be plural.

You did a good job on that, Chair.

The Chair: I appreciate that.

Mr. Mike Allen: My opinion is completely changed.

The Chair: I was using the P.E.I. language.

Okay, so you've heard the amendment read into the record. Are there any questions or concerns?

Mr. Toone.

Mr. Philip Toone: I have a few concerns.

We dropped the ball in 2006, and we recently dropped the ball in Russia. I'm not sure where the ball is rolling right now in China, but I don't think we have a government that has actually acted sufficiently. If we're going to present a motion to the House that says that we want to applaud the work this government has done regarding the seal industry, I can't agree with that, because I don't applaud what the government has done. In fact, I abhor what the government has done in the last few years. I think it's been entirely insufficient. I don't think they've supported the industry.

I don't think the government has been able to show that it's been able to support this industry. I think it's a desperate attempt at this point to try to shore up a weak position. I don't think the people back where I live would support this, and I certainly don't.

Personally, I think the original amendment is much more on point, that we need to do a lot of work, and I think that this committee should be pushing forward the work that really needs to be done in the future, and not try to—through the back door—applaud a government that has simply not done its job.

No, I can't support this motion. I can't support this amendment.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Toone.

Go ahead, Mr. MacAulay.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: I wonder if there would be any agreement to remove the word “continue” and place the word “start”.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Oh, I'm sure you'll get a lot of support for that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacAulay.

Go ahead, Mr. Kamp.

Mr. Randy Kamp: Thank you, Chair.

I doubt if there would be much support for that on this side.

With respect to my colleague Mr. Toone, I just think he's unaware of what the government has done and he ought to make himself aware. He should know we are dealing with sovereign countries that make their own decisions at the end of the day in spite of efforts. This committee had Loyola Sullivan in here many times, whose key file was this one. He outlined for us those days, which he would say were the dark days, when more was done on the international stage to promote and protect the sealing industry than ever in the years before. Were all the outcomes as we would wish? No. That's what happens when you deal with sovereign countries that have minds of their own.

So yes, this motion says let's continue those efforts, let's not give up. This is what it says to me. At times it is discouraging when we deal with countries that are going in a different direction. You know, we've studied this many times, but the government can outline for us, within the Department of Agriculture and AgriFood as well as in DFO and DFAIT, the efforts they have made on this. This supports those efforts and encourages them to continue them.

We're supportive of this amendment.

• (1725)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kamp.

Go ahead, Mr. Donnelly.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I just wanted to pick up on Mr. Kamp's comments. I wonder if he could elaborate on specifically what the government has done in the past five years for the seal industry and why that hasn't been effective.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Donnelly.

Mr. MacAulay.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: I'll pass.

The Chair: You'll pass.

Is there anything further on the amendment?

Go ahead, Mr. Kamp.

Mr. Randy Kamp: I'll just respond to Mr. Donnelly. Of course he knows those are questions he should ask the minister and his officials, and he's certainly welcome to do so. He knows that the minister has been in China on this, and Japan as well, and officials and the Prime Minister have been there. This has been raised. You know, we still like to think there are very positive signs of that being a new and emerging market for the sealing industry. But these things, especially dealing in Asia, take some time.

If he wants to propose at some point that we bring officials in and discuss this again.... We've discussed this many times. It makes us miss Mr. Blais when we're on this topic. Much has certainly been done.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kamp.

Go ahead, Mr. MacAulay.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: I'll not speak for Mr. Donnelly, but for myself. I feel the concern is that we're going backwards instead of ahead. We've lost markets instead of gaining markets.

All I wanted to do with my motion was to indicate to the government the concern the committee has, with the committee understanding fully how important the sealing industry is, as I said before, not only to the sealing industry but to every other fish in the sea.

We all know what a consumer of fish the seal is, so we have to be sure that the seal industry survives, and we need the support of the Government of Canada. What is hard to take is that the Russians will not accept our seal products and they have a seal hunt themselves. This is just totally unacceptable.

I was not trying to do anything political or anything. I was just trying to encourage the government to put more emphasis on a very important issue that sometimes, in Ottawa, does not get the proper attention. We are supposed to know what's going on in the fishing industry. It's our job to urge the government to support and promote, and there are more government members here than there are opposition members, so it can pass. But the fact is that it's difficult to support what the government is doing when we're going backwards.

I appreciate saying that the sealing industry.... I'm not indicating that it's over; I'm trying to make sure that it's never over. In fact, I fully understand the disastrous effect it will have if it is over. The fact is, the sealing industry is vital to practically all the other fish species in the sea.

If we are to continue and congratulate the government for what it has done, not to be inconsiderate, but the fact is it has not done very much. It has not done enough and this committee knows that. All I want to do is urge the government to do more. They have to get out there and find markets. There are markets for these products.

If it were other types of industries, it would get more attention. The problem is, in the nation's capital it's too hard and too difficult to get attention for the fishing industry, and it's our responsibility, as a committee, to bring that message to the government. If there is some way to bring it so that we're not insulting anybody—and I'd never wish to insult anybody—but the fact is we have to bring the message that there is not enough being done, that we're going backwards, and of how important this industry is, not only to the sealers but to the rest of the fishery. If we can do that, I believe the committee is doing its job; if not, it's not doing its job.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacAulay.

Mr. Donnelly.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I just want to respond to Mr. Kamp's comments.

You referenced what your government has done for the sealing industry and you brought it into this discussion. I know I can raise it with the minister, and I realize I can ask the minister to provide information. But you brought this up in this committee under this motion and in this discussion, and that's why I asked you specifically what you feel your government has done for the seal industry in the past five years, and why they haven't been effective at promoting the seal industry. That's why I asked you the specific question. In your response I haven't heard any specifics other than you referencing the recent trip to China that the minister has made. If that is essentially the specific answer to what the government has done in the past five years to address the seal industry, that's one of the reasons I can't support this, because it's talking about continuing to develop the markets for the seal industry, and I don't think that has been the case.

• (1730)

The Chair: Mr. Kamp.

Mr. Randy Kamp: I know we're running out of time here, but there have been a number of ministerial trips to markets such as China, and I know that Mr. Donnelly is aware of that.

It was our government that brought back in the fisheries conservation ambassador in the person of Mr. Sullivan. That was his primary job. I know Mr. Donnelly wasn't here at the time to hear the reports from Mr. Sullivan on this file and others and all of the effort.

Why are there less-than-ideal results? Well, life works like that sometimes. A big part of it—in Europe, for example—has been the people who hold philosophical views similar to those of Mr. Donnelly and some others on that side who have taken over this debate within the European Parliament. It's been very difficult to deal with that and be effective.

Frankly, it has not helped when we have our own parliamentarians, in the case of a Liberal senator and now an NDP member of Parliament, speaking out against the long-term viability of the seal hunt. That is not helping either.

I think this motion, as amended, does what Mr. MacAulay wishes it to do. It encourages the government to carry on, that we're not satisfied yet with the status quo, and I think we should pass it in this amended form.

The Chair: I'm going to call the question on the amendment.

(Amendment agreed to)

(Motion as amended agreed to)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Is there any further business?

There being none, this committee stands adjourned.

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