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Chair

Mr. Rodney Weston

Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

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● (1540)

[*English*]

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

I'd like to thank our witnesses, our guests, for appearing before our committee today to help us with our study on invasive species in the Great Lakes system.

Before we begin, I have a few housekeeping items. I believe our clerk has already informed you that we generally allow about 10 minutes for presentations. Following presentations, we move into a question and answer period. I apologize in advance if I cut you off or ask you to wrap up quickly. It is done in the interest of fairness and to ensure that everyone gets a chance to ask questions of you, since our members are all constrained by time. I look forward to the exchange today.

Mr. Purdy, I believe, is going to lead off with a presentation, and then we'll have Mr. Meisenheimer.

Mr. Purdy, perhaps you could introduce your associates who are with you here today. Please proceed at any time.

Mr. Tim Purdy (Vice-President, Purdy Fisheries Limited): I'm very fortunate. I brought my kids here today: my daughter, Leigha Purdy, and my son, Josiah Purdy, the next generation of our fishery, I hope.

I'm a little nervous. I'm sorry. I'll probably just read this.

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak here this afternoon. My name is Tim Purdy. I'm a fourth-generation commercial fisherman. My main concern here today is to fix things so that this young lady and this young man here beside me, the fifth generation, will have the opportunity to fish if he or she so chooses.

My family started fishing in Sarnia Bay in 1900. With a pair of hoop nets and a dream to feed his family, my great-grandfather started commercial fishing. In the 1920s they moved to Blackwell Side Road and fished with flat-bottom boats using the very labour-intensive pond nets.

In 1950 my grandfather moved the business to its current location on St. Clair River, at the mouth of Lake Huron. Currently we operate two types of fishing that makes us a very unique fishery on the Great Lakes. We fish trap nets for approximately nine months of the year, and we also gill net for about ten months of the year. Having two types of fishery allows us to cater to a very special market. With the live entrapment gear of trap nets we can target specific species of fish and keep the quality very high, and this allows us the advantage of marketing the very best fish. The gill nets are primarily fished during the cold water months. Again, being able to fish almost all winter long gives us an advantage over some of the other fisheries out there.

Over the last 112 years of fishing, our family has had to face many hardships in the industry, and most of them are due to invasive species.

In the early 1950s the sea lamprey moved into the Great Lakes and by 1960 pretty much wiped out the lake herring and lake trout populations. This was the main catch back then of the fishing fleet. The fishermen were forced to fish for other species, and in doing so, had to educate the public on what fish was good to eat. The industry started fishing sturgeon, pickerel, and perch.

In the mid-1950s the alewife showed up, and this started another obstacle for the fishermen. Where they would prove to be a food source for the salmon, they were very detrimental to the pickerel and perch stocks. Just in the last six years, with the alewife almost totally gone in Lake Huron, we've seen our pickerel and perch stocks rebound, and they are very healthy.

In 1970 we had to deal with mercury poison, and that closed a big part of our fishery for a lot of the 1970s. I know this is not an outside species that came into the lake, but I mention it to show you how we've made many changes in our fishery to adapt. By the late seventies, we were able to fish pickerel again, but again it took us some time to educate the public.

In the early 1980s our biggest problem was the sport fishery. The local club was formed and a hatchery was started. We had to once again educate the public that we were here to fish a sustainable resource. It was the perception that we caught everything and killed everything.

We took many sport fishermen, Ministry of National Resources employees, as well as many politicians on our boats and showed them and educated them that we can exist together. Today some of our best allies come from our local Bluewater Anglers club. We have a mutual respect for our local club members and we have learned we can both co-exist. In many cases, when a fight comes, we're on the same side when something's wrong and it's going to hurt our fishery.

By the late 1980s and the early nineties the zebra mussel was on the scene. I for one didn't think it was going to have a big impact on our fishery, and was I wrong. In over 100 years of fishing I don't think that one species or organism has had a bigger effect on our industry than the zebra mussel. They have cleaned up the lake by filtering the lake.

The whitefish, which is our biggest catch on Lake Huron, used to eat plankton. With the zebra mussel coming on the scene and filtering the water, the plankton the whitefish ate disappeared. The fish stock went through a big change and the species had to adapt to a new food source. They now eat zebra mussels. It's the most available food source for them. Basically, they're on the bottom of the lake from one end of the lake to the other.

The zebra mussels have also affected the water clarity in the lake. Thirty years ago, on a good day, you could see bottom in 10 feet of water. This spring, you could see bottom in over 75 feet of water. This is nice if you are a sport diver, but it's not nice if you are trying to operate a commercial fishery for whitefish and pickerel. Pickerel like the cloudy water. Over the last 20 years, we have had to make big changes to our pickerel fishery.

In 2005, viral hemorrhagic septicemia, also known as VHS, was found in Lake St. Clair and in Lake Huron in 2006.

I talked earlier about our uniqueness as a fishery. At one time we had a very large live fishery. In the spring, once the fishery in Lake Erie opened up for pickerel in May, we would start to sell live fish to keep our fish off the dead market. In 2007, due to this disease, VHS, we lost all our live fishery. A lot of those fish were sold into the States to rod and gun clubs, as well as pay to fish ponds. We were the only fishery on the Great Lakes that was set up to sell live pickerel, live catfish, and the truly unique live sturgeon.

I have shared a few of the circumstances that have affected my family over the last century. In telling you all these problems, I'm afraid the biggest and baddest is yet to come. I feel that we had a chance 10 years ago to stop the next predator that will come into our lake system. Unfortunately, it was up against a very powerful lobby group in the shipping industry.

If that river in Chicago was filled in and the Asian carp were stopped where they were 10 years ago, we would have high hopes for the future for sport and commercial fishing on the Great Lakes. I know I'm speaking rather blunt, but it's hard not to be totally frustrated when people know there is a problem coming and they decide to have a study. Then we must have another study to make sure the answers from the first study were right. Ten years later, we hear stories about the electric barrier, and do we really know how effective it is? The people doing these studies are working on options, but are they really worried if their freighter can't access the Mississippi River from the north?

I'm sitting before you here today as a very frustrated man who operates a family commercial fishery, and I have serious concerns about whether my daughter or my son will have a future in fishing. The time to act has past, so any more delays, from my viewpoint, are very hard to handle.

In closing, I would like to take this opportunity to personally invite every one of you to come to Sarnia. I would like to show you around our fishery, and perhaps get you on a fish boat, where you can see a live commercial fishery. Come sit at our dockside eatery, share a secret family recipe, eat some pickerel, and enjoy some Lake Huron whitefish. We can discuss how to keep our waterways safe from these monsters that are coming. Please come and see this beautiful sustainable fishery. If we can keep those Asian carp and snakehead out, it will be a fishery that will be around for many more generations to come.

Thank you.

● (1545)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Purdy.

Mr. Meisenheimer.

Mr. Peter Meisenheimer (Executive Director, Ontario Commercial Fisheries' Association): Thank you very much.

I'm going to take a slightly different tack here. For one, I apologize for not having prepared notes. I am actually interrupting a family vacation right at the moment. I was able to persuade my wife that I could come here, but not that I could actually take the time to write a brief.

[*Translation*]

The clerk tells me that I should speak more slowly.

[*English*]

The fishery in Ontario isn't well known. We're a bit of a well-kept secret. We are a very old industry, nonetheless. In fact, we pre-date European settlement by quite a bit. If you read the accounts of Jesuit priests who were travelling up the St. Lawrence and through Lake Ontario with the very earliest explorers, one of the things they made note of, with some astonishment, was the extremely well-developed commercial fishery that was in place. The Onondaga have an eel clan as part of their community structure. This is a reflection of the importance of the commercial fishery in their culture and their economy. They traded for goods as far away as hundreds, and in some cases thousands, of kilometres to the south and west.

The first documented case of commercial fishing in the colonial period on the Great Lakes was in the 1790s on Burlington Bay on Lake Ontario. It was a very small-scale enterprise, but by the 1830s the commercial fishery was present on all of the Great Lakes, to one degree or another, and by the 1850s it was very well established, if limited in scale by the lack of transportation infrastructure. It was not possible to ship large volumes of fish great distances, so it was primarily focused on local markets. Nonetheless, by the time of Confederation, we were established as a recognizable industry everywhere on the Great Lakes.

Currently we are a small part of the economic scene in Ontario, and we are small by the standards of some of the coastal fisheries. In a typical year we have a landed value of between $30 million and $40 million. The high-water mark was in the late 1990s, at least in recent history, when we came in at just under $50 million, and the low-water mark would have been around 2004, when we were in the low twenties.

Nonetheless, our industry has managed to parlay that into a very important value-added industry in some places. In the Lake Erie Basin, in particular, there are very well-developed secondary and tertiary processing industries that produce products for export to the United States, Japan, Europe, China, and, in fact, in one instance, to Ethiopia, which I find astonishing but it is nonetheless true.

The local economies of some of the communities there have also prospered by marketing the fact of commercial fishing, the historical and cultural fact of commercial fishing, as a draw. Much as people go to Peggy's Cove because it is a fishing community of historical and scenic note, and they buy a fishing-related souvenir and take in the ambiance and perhaps eat a lobster, they go to Port Dover, for example, on Long Point Bay in Lake Erie to eat perch and pickerel, and previously to eat other things that are no longer there. Nonetheless, it has a long history as a tourism destination, precisely because it's a fishing village. It has a commercial fishing museum. It has a monument to commercial fishermen. It has several white-cloth establishments that specialize in serving up the local fare, and they serve many thousands of plates to day trippers from the greater Toronto area who come year round. It's an important part of their economy.

Wheatley, Ontario, has signs as you enter and at its harbour proclaiming it to be the world's greatest freshwater commercial fishing port, which is historically the foundation of that community. It is still a point of pride that it is one of the busiest commercial freshwater ports anywhere.

● (1550)

Nonetheless, we have some experience, in spite of our smallness, with exotics, which sets us apart from some of the other fisheries around the country. Tim has alluded to some of our experience.

Sea lamprey are the poster child. I will take this opportunity to make the point that they are, as no doubt you've been told by others, the single actively managed exotic in the Great Lakes, the only species at the moment that is the focus of a program to control them. I will here make a plea to you to do more of that.

By most objective assessments we have underfunded that effort by millions of dollars annually for quite some time. My best estimate, based on some of the work I do with the Great Lakes Fishery Commission, is that the current program needs about another $3 million from the Canadian side per year to do the job it sets out to do. It is, if nothing else, a really important signal that the issue of exotic species is taken seriously if we can find that money and fund that work and carry it forward, as a prelude perhaps to dealing with some of the other challenges that are emerging on our doorstep as we talk about this.

Alewife, as Tim mentioned, is a bit of an ironic case. It's been a huge problem. It not only eats the eggs and larvae of native species, but it also contains an enzyme called thiaminase, which destroys vitamin B complex vitamins in native fish that have no resistance to it. Lake trout, for example, that eat alewife are unable to reproduce. Their eggs are not viable. Those lake trout that manage to avoid eating the alewife and are able to spawn see their eggs and larvae eaten by the alewife. So it's a double hit.

The ironic part of this is that the alewife are now being knocked out by another invader. Quagga and zebra mussels compete with alewife directly. They're both filter feeders. As the quagga mussel has become established in the deep water and filters the water of Lake Huron, alewife have disappeared. They're virtually absent now. Lake trout are starting to come back. Lake herring are starting to come back.

There are other species that people think of as belonging in the Great Lakes that are nonetheless invaders. Smelt is thought by most people to be part of the Great Lakes ecosystem. It was deliberately introduced into the Lake Michigan watershed by sporting interests, and it spread down the tributary system into Lake Michigan. By the mid-part of the 20th century, it was present in the entire Great Lakes. It is also of note that in addition to being an important food species for a number of important predator species, it is also a predator on eggs and larvae of native fish. It also contains thiaminase. It is also part of the commercial fishery. There's a quota of 15 million pounds per annum for this fish on Lake Erie. Alas, in common with many of the invasives, it's not terribly valuable. It's currently purchased at 23¢ a pound at the dock. With fuel prices being what they are, it's not a very attractive undertaking for people who have small to medium quotas. It's only very heavily concentrated quota holders who are pursuing that. At its busiest in recent years, not quite half of the allocation has been caught. Most of it now goes unprocessed to China.

We've talked about mussels. Tim touched on viral hemorrhagic septicemia. It's a virus that was carried by shipping into the Great Lakes and caused, and continues to cause, considerable disruption. There are more that may come.

The one that everybody is talking about is Asian carp. I have the pleasure of serving as the vice-chair of the Canadian Committee of Advisors to the Great Lakes Fishery Commission, where exotic species is the dominant theme on an ongoing basis. I can tell you that every meeting of the advisors and of the commission at large is dominated by discussion of these things.

● (1555)

Lake Erie is clearly the most suitable habitat for these things, if they get into the Great Lakes. Lake Erie is also home to 85% of the landed value of the commercial fishery in Ontario. Yellow perch and walleye at the dock are worth over $2 a pound. The last I spoke to commercial operations in the Mississippi that fish for these things, they were getting 14¢ a pound. If these things come, and they have the effect we believe they will have, that will effectively be the end of economic viability for our fishery. It at least has that potential and needs to be taken very seriously as a result.

We're very pleased with what has been going on officially in Ontario on this threat. Those of you who are familiar with commercial fishing know that fishermen and the fish cops frequently, if not generally, don't see eye to eye. It's rare that you'll hear someone from the commercial fishing industry saying good things about them. But they've been great in Ontario on the Asian carp piece. They have been proactive. They have been activists.

The MNR people identified that it was necessary to go to Canada Border Services and speak to the agents at the borders. They have worked with the Ministry of Transportation in Ontario to bring their roadside inspectors up to speed on what to look for in shipping these things. They are, to my mind, the reason we have had a number of interceptions at the border, some very high-profile charges laid, and some very substantial fines levied.

The sad part of this story, and this is the second piece of advice or request I will bring to the table here today, concerns the failure of our friends south of the border to apply their own laws. The Lacey Act in the United States of America is very clear that interstate transport of these things while alive is illegal and punishable by significant penalties. Every single one of these things that arrived at Sarnia or Windsor alive was brought there in violation of United States law. And not a single charge has ever been laid under the Lacey Act for these things.

There is a significant failure within the United States to apply their own laws to protect the Great Lakes from these things getting here. I believe the Government of Canada should have something very clear to say about that in defence of our fishery.

I can leave it there. If you have any questions, I'd be happy to take them.

● (1600)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Meisenheimer.

We're going to move into questions at this point with Ms. Davidson.

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

And thank you to our witnesses this afternoon. It's certainly a pleasure to have you all here.

Josiah and Leigha, welcome to you as well. We certainly appreciate the fact that you're here supporting your dad and taking an interest in the family business. It's been a long-standing business in my riding, and it's extremely important to the economy of our area. So we appreciate the fact that you're here.

Peter, as I said earlier, I got your name from my colleague, Dave Van Kesteren, who certainly is well aware of the business you're in. He is the MP in the Wheatley area. He is certainly well aware of the largest freshwater fishing port.

When we listen to what's been happening, Tim, over the last number of years, the 50 or 60 years this has been going on, and we hear about the challenges you've been having, I think it's an eye-opener for all of us. Those of us who live on the Great Lakes hear these stories, but we don't always hear the specifics, and we don't always know the exact extent to which people and businesses are affected. So it's good that you're here telling us about this.

You went through the different types of fish—the lake herring and the lake trout, then the sturgeon, pickerel, and perch, and then to the whitefish being gone. Are the whitefish still gone? Are they coming back at all?

Mr. Tim Purdy: The whitefish in Lake Huron are very strong right now.

The lake herring disappeared, and they're slowly coming back. They came back strong enough in northern Lake Huron that they were reintroduced to the quota system. We were put back on a quota for the herring. When they show up strong enough to be put back on the quota system, that's a good indicator that they're rebounding.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: It was pretty amazing, when you were telling us about the clarity of the water. You talked about 75-foot depths and being able to see the bottom.

I like to fish too. I know what kind of habitat the pickerel like. Certainly I've done a fair amount of salmon fishing on Lake Huron as well.

We had Jake Van Rooyen here last week, I believe it was. He told us about the smaller fish that were being caught. But I noticed, when I was home on the weekend, that they caught the biggest salmon they've caught in 10 years. I don't know if that trend is continuing this week in the derby. Are we foreseeing a rebound in that event?

Mr. Tim Purdy: I heard yesterday, on the way up, that they've also caught two very large walleye, the largest they've caught in a number of years also.

Personally, I think as long as the alewife are gone, the salmon fishery are going to stay small fish. What we've noticed with the lake trout is that with the alewife gone, the lake trout have changed their diets. Now they're eating minnows, smelt, small whitefish. We see them eating a lot of silver bass, a lot of small perch.

So the lake trout have changed their diets totally, and I think that is probably what will happen with the salmon. At one point the alewife was their predominant food source. I think over time, once they change their diets and they get used to it, they'll come back. I think they'll get big again.

I know when the whitefish changed their diets from the plankton that they used to eat—it's called diporeia—and switched to zebra mussels, we noticed a lot of small fish for about six to eight years. All we could catch were the small ones.

We were complaining to the Ministry of Natural Resources about this. We were concerned about this. Our size limit for trap-net whitefish was 17 inches. Back in the nineties, a 17- or 18-inch whitefish would be about a four-year-old fish. Four or five years ago, it was a seven- or eight-year-old fish. When they switched their diets, they grew a lot slower.

● (1605)

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: So we've seen a change in the pattern of what you can catch and how they grow, and we've seen a change in the different invasive species that have been there over the past 50, 60 years.

What do you think the impact of the Asian carp would be? Is there a chance that they would be able to handle that in some way, shape, or form over a matter of years? Or is this something that would be totally devastating?

Mr. Tim Purdy: I don't think anybody really knows that, Pat, but I think if you look where the Asian carp have been and how they've moved through water systems, once they go through there's nothing left behind them. I think what happens is that once they get into the Great Lakes and they start to reproduce, everything they like is there. Peter can probably answer a little bit better about the different types of food sources they like, but everything they like is there abundantly.

I personally think they will explode in the Great Lakes. You might have certain pockets of fisheries that will survive in certain areas, but I think you'd just be lucky if you had one, you know....

I honestly think that once they get into the Great Lakes and they start to reproduce, we're in big trouble, and I think it will go very quickly.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Can you add to that, Peter, and maybe talk about Lake Erie, which you said would be a prime spot for them?

Mr. Peter Meisenheimer: Sure. The reality of these fish is I think amply illustrated by what's happened in the Mississippi drainage. As I understand it, nine of ten fish found in stretches where they are found are Asian carp, and the native species that used to be there are gone. They don't exist anymore.

Their limiting factors are three, essentially. One is the availability of a food source. They're filter feeders. They require planktonic food. They effectively feed the same way that a great blue whale does. They swim around with their mouths wide open and they eat things. They eat anything that gets in their mouths. They eat vegetable matter, so small algae, they eat plankton, they eat larval fish, they eat floating eggs—they eat all of it.

In that respect they may find themselves in competition with the zebra and quagga mussels in some of the Great Lakes. But in places like Saginaw Bay, which is one of the major producers of walleye and perch—and historically, when there were a lot of herring, herring as well in Lake Huron. But the western basin of Lake Erie, which is the nursery, the factory of fish in Lake Erie, would be perfect for them in that regard. There is lots of all of that, in particular in Lake Erie. But you can think of similar habitats all over the Great Lakes where they would do well.

The second limiting factor is temperature. These things, if they get into Canadian waters, could exist all the way to 60 degrees north. They're an Asian species that have adapted to temperate and subtropical conditions. There is an assumption on the part of a lot of people that they require warm water. They do not.

In the third instance, they need rivers of indeterminate length but sufficient continuous flow over a sufficient distance to keep their eggs suspended. So depending on the temperature, that can be 80 kilometres to 120 kilometres, which is what I'm told, although the evidence from Asia suggests that they exist in systems where they don't have that, so clearly that's not a hard and fast rule. We don't know what they'd actually require.

One of the reasons Lake Erie is one of the really serious areas of concern is that all of that exists in the western basin of Lake Erie, without a doubt. The Maumee River, and potentially the St. Clair River and Detroit River systems, all have sufficient length, they have sufficient productivity, the temperatures are optimal, and they will do well there and they will knock out our fishery if they get in.

● (1610)

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Thank you very much.

I think my time is up.

Mr. Peter Meisenheimer: May I address the issue around salmon as well, just briefly?

The Chair: We have to move on, Mr. Meisenheimer.

Mr. Chisholm, please.

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Thank you very much.

I'm sure we'll get a question to you, Mr. Meisenheimer, that'll give you a chance to speak.

I want to first of all address the Purdys and say that clearly what you've shown us is the fact that you're of pretty tough stock. You've been in business in Sarnia Bay for over a hundred years, and through an industry that has met some challenging times. I commend you for that, and I hope your kids are paying attention because they have big shoes to fill.

My exposure to the fishing industry is on the east coast in Nova Scotia, and I have the pleasure of representing a community that has been in the fishing business for 500 years. So I have some sense of those familiar lines and the kind of strength and character that's developed from that. I know I certainly want to make sure we come up and visit the Purdys and learn a lot more about what you're doing up there.

I want to ask you, with the challenges that you've been dealing with, which have been significant.... We listened Monday to representatives from the Georgian Bay fishery and talked about sea lamprey, and so on, and some of the studies, some of the science, and some of the efforts that have been put into trying to deal with these invasive species. I wonder if you could talk a little bit about your experience in dealing with the science and the scientists at DFO, and the people who have been trying to work with you to come up with mitigating strategies.

Mr. Peter Meisenheimer: There are many studies that are ongoing with regard to all of these things. We're actively engaged in collaborating right at the moment with the sea lamprey office out of Sault Ste. Marie, where they're using commercial fishers on Lake Erie, for starters—they're going to be doing it on others—to provide them with baseline information on the state of the sea lamprey population. They have some indications from their own studies that these things are more abundant and more widespread than they were aware. One sentinel group that is out on the lake on an ongoing basis is the commercial fishery. So our guys are actively engaged on that very basic level.

As well, as an industry we're part of the Canadian Capture Fisheries Research Network—I'm the vice-chair. We collaborate with academics all over the country around these sorts of things. I have been engaged with the risk assessment process that's ongoing around Asian carp, which is being led by Becky Cudmore and Nick Mandrak. I don't know if they've spoken. They're the folks at the Canada Centre for Inland Waters in Burlington, who are leading the international risk assessment process with the U.S. So I've attended those and participated in the scoping and data collection for those as well.

We have a number of concerns. It's really difficult, when you're talking about any element of the ecosystem, to tease apart the components and study them in isolation. For example, on Lake Erie right now, all of a sudden we've got all of these lamprey that we don't think should be there. The lake has been treated twice, back to back, and all the streams at once, and they should be gone. So the question is, where are they coming from? Clearly, they're spawning somewhere that we didn't know about.

One of the questions we have, and one of the questions we put to them as well was.... They've been rehabilitating the sturgeon spawning habitat in the Detroit River fairly aggressively for the last number of years. Are they sure they aren't building lamprey spawning habitat? The answer was they designed it with the intent to eliminate that possibility, but clearly something's going on, right? That's a habitat issue.

● (1615)

Mr. Robert Chisholm: If I may, let me follow this up a little bit.

The government is proposing changes to the Fisheries Act as it relates to the definition of fish habitat, and it's also cutting back on DFO. We have some concerns, particularly because some of the definitions in there will be very specific in terms of whether it's deemed to be harmful. You've got to identify the fish, and we see the ecosystem as being very complicated. So we're concerned.

Would either of you comment on those changes and what you understand those changes to be, and whether you agree that there is reason for us to be somewhat worried about what these changes are proposing to do?

Mr. Peter Meisenheimer: I'll give you an example of a couple of issues that we're really concerned about in Ontario. They intersect with the exotic species and endangered species. It's all a great big ball of string.

We've had serious problems with the enforcement of habitat regulations and environmental assessments regarding the hydroelectric developments and, more recently, regarding proposals for what I would characterize as intensive industrial-scale wind farms offshore. If all these proposals had been approved, we would have had hundreds of wind turbines erected in the Western Basin of Lake Erie, which is the nursery for the most significant fishery in the province.

Under the provincial legislation, it appeared that the onus was on us to prove that there was a problem. The one hammer we had was enormously effective, from both a public relations and a political perspective. This was the fish habitat regs, and we wielded that hammer with enthusiasm. In the end, with the exception of a very small number of turbines around Kingston, this was put on the back burner. But we have concerns. We don't know what the changes are going to look like, ultimately, and in a situation like that we are worried. We don't like it.

The hydroelectric agenda in Ontario is quite aggressive. My family is an Ontario Hydro family, I am a Hydro brat, and it pains me to say this, but OPG, the successor to Ontario Hydro, Ontario Power Generation, is not an environmentally friendly organization. I don't care how they spin it, I don't care how they draw it, turbines kill fish, dams block passage, impoundment is bad for the landscape. The idea that this is green energy is a laugh. Nonetheless, they are very large, very powerful, and very difficult to fight. We would be loath to lose what hammers we have for dealing with those folks in those kinds of settings. So, yes, we're watching it very closely.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Leef.

Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Purdy, it's great to see your family here. It's the first time I've seen committee witnesses bring family, and I think it's very important for us, and for Canadians, to see who these issues impact. So thank you for that, and welcome.

Mr. Meisenheimer, I was going to follow up on the shift in habitat. If a shift were made where we take biologists, scientific resources, and enforcement resources, as you mentioned, more talking to the U. S. issue—and I'll talk about Canadian perspectives and enforcement in a minute. If we're moving scientific and biology energies and efforts and human and financial resources in the direction of major projects, instead of having them spread so thin across every single project regardless, do you think that would be a more efficient use of the human and financial resources that we have at our disposal?

● (1620)

Mr. Peter Meisenheimer: Maybe. On the other hand, the problem we have in Lake Erie with the sea lamprey is that we have no idea where these things are coming from. It's difficult for me to see how focusing on major projects would attend to that. Clearly, there's some habitat for these things that's been developed somewhere. It could be a side-effect from a construction project that opened habitat up. It could be related to the zebra mussel. It could be any number of different things. But we need some front-line, scientific effort to sort this out, because if it continues as it's going, and if it's mirrored in other lakes, we have a real problem.

As it stands right now, my understanding is that the Canadian contribution to lamprey control through the Great Lakes Fishery Commission is around $8.5 million a year. Is that about right? I think they've asked for $11.5 million, or something like that.

Mr. Ryan Leef: That was the additional $3 million you needed specifically for lamprey control.

Mr. Peter Meisenheimer: That's right, but I'm saying in a situation like that, focusing on the big-picture stuff, focusing on the major projects is going to miss what's going on.

You can take a look at the sorts of things that have happened to a lot of species in the Great Lakes. For instance, Atlantic salmon used to be native to Lake Ontario. It's an interesting question: what actually happened to Atlantic salmon? One of the things that's become very clear, looking at the retrospective progress of their demise, is that there wasn't any one thing; there were a bunch of little things. It was the construction of one dam after another dam after another dam, and one pond being dynamited in a river. All of these things added up to a critical mass of changes to the system that was lethal.

From our perspective, as an industry, we look at walleye production in southern Lake Huron and Lake Erie. It's the sum total of production from a bunch of different places, some of them fairly small, some of them quite significant.

My concern is what you could get into. To be honest with you, I don't know enough about where this is going to land. Certainly, the Fisheries Act is something that could stand some fixing. I'm not going to ever suggest otherwise. But when you start messing with the habitat regulations, that's my concern. Fish that aren't produced in large batches in one place, that are dispersed across a lot of watersheds and a lot of little reefs for their production, risk falling through the cracks of a program that's focused on just the big stuff. That's my real concern.

Mr. Ryan Leef: Thank you.

Mr. Purdy, how many other operations exist in the Sarnia area?

Mr. Tim Purdy: We're the only commercial plant in the Sarnia area. Depending on the wintertime ice floes and stuff like that, if there's a lot of west wind and southwest wind and the ice is bad in February, we could have five or six boats fishing out of Sarnia. If the wind is really bad out of the north and all the ice ends up in Sarnia, we all end up fishing out of Goderich. So it depends on the ice.

Right now we're the only trap-net fishery on the south end of Lake Huron, and then there's one trap-net fishery on the north end, up in Georgian Bay. For gillnet fishermen, I think there are about eight different licences for that area.

Mr. Ryan Leef: How many people would you employ in that area?

Mr. Tim Purdy: With the economy and the way it is, we've changed our focus. Back in the 1990s, when you could get an extra 60¢ on the dollar, we shipped almost everything to the States, and that's where we made some money, with the exchange rate. Once the exchange rate changed, we had to change our focus on how we sold our fish. We added two restaurants. We have a dockside eatery in Sarnia and we also have one in Grand Bend. Instead of selling our fish to somebody else and letting them make the money, we try to add value and take care of our own product.

With our two restaurants, we have nine fish boats. We don't operate all nine at once, but we'd be around 45 employees.

● (1625)

Mr. Ryan Leef: So it would be a noticeable impact in that region, then, for your business.

Is there an additional association, or are you facing this issue for the Sarnia area on your own, as a family run business?

Mr. Tim Purdy: We're part of the Ontario Commercial Fisheries Association, so as part of the whole association we deal with it together.

Mr. Ryan Leef: Are these common concerns being held by the association?

Mr. Tim Purdy: Very much so. Very scared. The further north you go on Lake Huron...the lamprey has a bigger effect the further north you go. We still see the lamprey effect in southern Lake Huron. In the wintertime we can get three or four lamprey per day attached to the fish, where if you go up to northern Lake Huron, guys who fish off Manitoulin Island will see 70 or 80 a day. Up off the St. Marys River, Sault Ste. Marie, that's a big breeding ground up there.

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

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Leef.

Mr. MacAulay.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Cardigan, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Purdy, welcome, and Mr. Meisenheimer. It's good to see you again, Peter.

First, Tim, it's impressive for you to bring Leigha and Josiah here. This business is not always the easiest on family, and you've shown that you're not only a good businessman but you're a family man. That's nice to see; I couldn't emphasize that enough.

You mentioned that the live fish sales—this is not on the invasive species issue—have changed a lot over the years and that you basically have lost that market. What happened?

Mr. Tim Purdy: When the VHS came in, they took away our live industry, because we were not allowed to transport water or fish from one body to another body. It hurt us. It basically took our whole live fishery away. It really hurt the bait industry, because they were catching bait from one lake and moving it to the other.

Peter could tell you about the lines, where they went. I think a lot of it was the 401.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: But that is, of course, what invasive species do. They don't want you transporting water and fish from one area to another—

Mr. Tim Purdy: Exactly; that's what it was.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: —and it's hard to disagree with that, but it does hurt.

Mr. Tim Purdy: They said the fish can carry it; the water can carry it; it can be on a duck's feather.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: That's right, and it can be.

You also mentioned the Asian carp and the snakehead and what a devastating effect these would have on your fishery. You mentioned the electric barriers and the dam, also indicating, I believe, that a little funding now could save a disaster down the road. I'd like you first of all to indicate your view on the electric barrier, plus the dam, and then on the need for the funding.

Mr. Tim Purdy: I'm skeptical on the dam. I've never personally seen it. I've read reports on it; I have talked to people who have worked on it. I guess I'm not sure how effective it is. I hear people who work on it and assure me that it's effective and that no Asian carp can get by, but their livelihood is not relying on that; their livelihood is working on that dam. My livelihood is hopefully being protected by those Asian carps not getting through. I guess that's the —

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: What you're actually saying, Tim, is that you probably do not have the answer, but we'd better find it and make sure they stay out.

Mr. Tim Purdy: Yes, and I hope it's not too late. I'm very scared.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Well, I hope not.

Peter, I wouldn't ever mention the study to Tim after what he stated about studies, but I understand that on the American side there's a study done indicating that the impact of invasive species is $180 million to $800 million a year. Was any of that done on the Canadian side, or not?

● (1630)

Mr. Peter Meisenheimer: It's very difficult to know sometimes. The Army Corps of Engineers and the organization—whose acronym I forget—of governments and mayors on the U.S. side just commissioned a study, and none of the Canadian numbers were included in it. So it's not at all clear to me that the numbers that are put forward are comprehensive at any point in time.

I've heard numbers for annual impact considerably higher than that. It's a bit of a mug's game, I think, to try to put a dollar value on it.

It's a lot of money to us. Speaking on behalf of our industry, it has clearly had a profound effect on the viability of our industry for half a century or three-quarters of a century.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: I take it, listening to you, that you're not against having environmental reviews before projects take place.

Also, before you get going, I'd like you to—because my time is short here, if I don't get the questions in.... The Fisheries Act could, in the budget implementation bill, bring in changes on possession, import, export, and the release of invasive species.

I wonder whether you have any recommendation to the committee. We've heard a lot of different suggestions—and no doubt it's probably factual—that it comes in, it's flushed down toilets, you find it in ponds. Would you have some advice for the committee as to what type of regulation should be put in place in order to make sure that it's not just imported into the country?

Mr. Peter Meisenheimer: I'm a major proponent of risk management as a way of dealing with fisheries issues generally as long as it is fully open, transparent, and accountable to stakeholders. I think this is an issue that could very well be structured through that kind of approach very productively. For example, I can't think of any credible reason why anybody should be allowed to bring a snakehead into Canada alive.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: But do they?

Mr. Peter Meisenheimer: Who knows?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Is there anything that can stop them?

Mr. Peter Meisenheimer: It's a very thin border. It's very difficult. When we were dealing with the Asian carp stuff, the Ministry of Natural Resources people approached the Border Services guys, and I am told the Canadian Border Services guys were just effusive in their gratitude. They had nothing. They didn't understand the issue. They didn't understand the technology that was being used to transport these things. They didn't know how to identify the fish. There are many fish that can be moved in legally that are carried in exactly the same tanker trucks in which the Asian carp come in.

Something like the snakehead may not even necessarily be brought in predominantly for the food trade in these live markets in Markham and north Toronto. There is interest in them from aquarium collectors as well. The problem with them is they get huge. People think they're cool when they're little, but when they get big, well, they're not so cool anymore. It's fairly clear that some of these exotics that are crawling around the United States right now were brought in by the aquarium trade, without much in the way of permitting required at all.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: It would be education that's missing there too, wouldn't you think, Peter? The fact of the matter is, I do not believe society in general wants to destroy things, but people do not realize what harm they're doing when they bring this stuff in.

Mr. Peter Meisenheimer: That's it up to a point. I think actually there was a lot of real clarity about what Asian carp did when they were brought into the United States. They were brought in with the express purpose of cleaning up nutrient-rich waters that were nutrient rich because they were polluted. They were polluted in part through aquaculture activities and agricultural activities. They were deliberately released by people with the full knowledge that these things would go out and filter the water clear. Nobody thought about what came next. It was not part of the thought process.

There's an awful lot of revisionist history that's been circulated around these things from the folks down in Arkansas and elsewhere in the southern States. The U.S. state agencies were deliberately releasing these things into bayous to clean them up. It was no surprise to anybody when they got loose.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: I'm sorry, but they cut me off.

Mr. Peter Meisenheimer: Did I use up all your time?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: No. It's good. We need to hear that.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll move to the five-minute rounds now, and Mr. Donnelly will lead off.

● (1635)

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

Welcome to our witnesses. To the Purdy family, I appreciate your passionate testimony, and the same goes for Mr. Meisenheimer as well.

I'll start with Mr. Purdy. You mentioned the shipping industry as a real focal point. We heard earlier this week, on Monday, at our standing committee here about U.S. changes to legislation that are coming. I'm wondering if you've seen those drafts, if you know about that, if you feel those changes go far enough for the American side, and if there's anything related to shipping on the Canadian side that you could recommend this committee should look into, or if you have any suggestions or recommendations on that.

Mr. Tim Purdy: I honestly haven't heard about any of the conditions you're talking about. Ten or twelve years ago I was part of the fishing element with the CMAC, and they were talking back then about the different things they were going to bring in with the freighters, exchanging ballast water and things like that. Back then I was part of those meetings and I listened to them, but I haven't heard anything recently about the changes you're talking about. Sorry.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Do you think, though, that that issue is probably one of the—I get this from your testimony—most significant things that we as a committee, or as the Canadian government, could focus on to deal with aquatic invasive species?

Mr. Tim Purdy: I do. I think if we can stop—and I know you guys probably know the number better than I do—however many they say come in every year.... If we could at least get that number way down, we'd have a lot better chance of not having the next zebra mussel or something like that come in when we really don't know what the long-term effect would be.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Okay. Thank you, and good luck. I love the value-added approach that you're providing. It's an excellent example for a lot of the fishing community across the country.

Mr. Tim Purdy: Come and visit me and I'll show you first-hand what it tastes like.

Thank you.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Mr. Meisenheimer, in your testimony you talked about another $3 million a year needed, at the very least, for dealing with the sea lamprey program. We know there are many other invasive aquatic species that are threatening the fishery in the Great Lakes.

We've also heard that there are cuts to DFO. The department is facing cuts, and they're going to have a hard time in terms of the marine science, which I would assume is an important element of tackling this issue. I'm wondering if you could provide any comment on that, in terms of the marine scientists or any of the proposed changes to the Fisheries Act dealing with this suggestion, beyond providing more resources, which I think is an obvious suggestion.

Mr. Peter Meisenheimer: I guess it would be politic to begin with one of the things that I think is good about what's being proposed, which is legislation to address the Larocque judgment. This is going to make some small amount of money available for research through formulas that used to be used but no longer are.

On the other hand, as an industry, in Ontario we have invested hundreds of thousands of dollars in primary research in recent years. As a tiny industry, that's a lot of money. We were levying our members a penny a pound on perch and pickerel for one set of projects and 1% of total landed value for another to pay for university researchers to do fundamental research. Frankly, we think that should have been done with government dollars, but it wasn't going to get done if we didn't pay for it.

What happens when you don't have stock assessments, when you don't have good ecological analysis is that managers become extremely risk averse. They don't allocate fish when they aren't sure. The more they know, the more risk they are prepared to shoulder, because the more certain they are about the numbers they're dealing with.

We've seen a spiral over the last few years where the perceived risk profile in management agencies everywhere, whether they be provincial or federal, has gone through the roof. Over and over and over again you hear, “We don't know, and we don't want the northern cod happening here.” Those are the words you hear all the time. If you ask what the northern cod has to do with this situation, the answer is, “Well, we don't know.” If you ask if they can actually explain what happened with the northern cod, they don't know that either. That's the reality of using a common property resource for economic activity. You are at the mercy of a risk management exercise that involves a whole lot of stuff that's beyond your control.

When public agencies aren't doing the work to underpin their decisions in a way that they are comfortable with their own decisions, it has fallen to us to go out and do a lot of that work ourselves, at a time when we really can't. The economic climate for us over the last few years has been absolutely brutal. The largest, oldest fish processor in the province was closed in bankruptcy in 2009. We've lost thousands of jobs in the last 15 years. On Lake Erie alone, since 2000, we've gone from over 70 tugs to under 50. It's rough out there. We're in a position where we've made the call that if we don't do this work, we're going to get shut down.

I'm really concerned about the idea of less science, and I don't like it.

● (1640)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Sopuck.

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Going back to your testimony a while ago about live fish markets, are you telling the committee that any of us can go down to a live fish market in the Toronto area and see live Asian carp?

Mr. Peter Meisenheimer: No. You used to be able to very commonly. It's very clear that some of the fish that were apprehended at the border as recently as a year and a half ago were headed into the live fish trade in Toronto. Everybody down there now knows that they can't do that.

As well, I think everybody down...or not everybody, but some people down there know where they can go to do that. I mean, the story you hear is that the reason these fish are showing up at the border alive is that, to guarantee freshness, they keep them alive until very close to the border, and then they drain the water out of them. That's a violation of U.S. federal law. They are simply not allowed to do that.

I believe the reason they're doing it is that these fish are incredibly robust. If you drain the water out of them close to the border and carry them across dry, you can throw water back at them on the other side and they all come back. Within the space of 15 or 20 minutes, they're swimming around again. They're tough as nails, these things. Then, when you get them into Toronto....

They've busted the same guy now twice. He paid a $55,000 fine the first time, and then he was back at it a year later.

The thing that's remarkable about these things is that, as I told you, 14¢ a pound is what the guys in the Mississippi are being paid for these things at the dock. I find it almost impossible to imagine how anybody would bother shipping them the distances they ship them when that's the going market price for a landed dead Asian carp. It just beggars the imagination. I just can't imagine, right?

So we're asking for a protocol where these things may not be brought into the country unless they've been gutted. If they're dressed, they're dead.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Okay.

Do you know if there's been any outreach to those communities who have Asian carp in their diet to talk to them about the seriousness of what may be occurring?

Mr. Peter Meisenheimer: I can't really speak for the ministry on this one, but my understanding is that, yes, they have done some of that. They have an ongoing initiative, I think, working with some of the folks.

They're Asian fish markets where these things are being sold. They cater to the Asian community in the greater Toronto area. They're largely centred around Newmarket and Markham, in that area. There's a number of them. They bring everything. They sell eels. They sell the whole business.

So the ministry has an ongoing initiative with them, and they're working with them, yes.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: I would assume that in Lake Erie there's common carp.

Mr. Peter Meisenheimer: Yes.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Is the difference between the common carp and the Asian carp strictly their feeding habits? These Asian carp are pelagic feeders. Is that the big difference?

The common carp seems to have sort of shouldered its way into many fish communities. It seems that room has been made for it, to speak colloquially.

Mr. Peter Meisenheimer: In fact the common carp has been enormously destructive for a number of native species.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Right.

Mr. Peter Meisenheimer: They're very destructive in wetland habitat, which is really rough on things like pike. There are a number of native....

If you go into Hamilton harbour, Burlington Bay, that area, they've invested huge amounts of money in getting the carp out of this area, called Cootes Paradise, simply to bring back some of the native fish population. The carp were destroying it.

Nonetheless, yes, they're a bottom feeder. They stir things up. That's how they do their damage. It's a very different thing.

It's important to keep in mind that although we talk about silver carp and bighead carp as if they're the only Asian carp species at the border, there are two more that actually do feed on the bottom. One is grass carp and the other is black carp, which is a mussel eater. There's a lot of hemming and hawing about whether these things would eat zebra mussels because they specialize in eating molluscs, but Lord, if it turns out they like zebra mussels and they get into the Great Lakes, I mean, we're going to have to do some market development.

● (1645)

Mr. Robert Sopuck: I was interested in your notion of the enzyme issue with the smelt. Back where I come from in Manitoba, the smelt have invaded Lake Winnipeg and have become a primary forage fish for the walleye there. The pickerel there seem to be doing excellent on the smelt.

Is that the same thing that happens with Lake Erie?

Mr. Peter Meisenheimer: Yes. In fact, there are two things there. One, the thiaminase in smelt is not as toxic as the thiaminase in.... It's a different type of thiaminase. It's a little less toxic than the one in alewife. And walleye is one of the species that's resistant to it.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Okay. That explains it then.

Mr. Peter Meisenheimer: Not totally, but largely.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Right.

Mr. Purdy, I gather that perch are a big component of the Lake Erie fishery. They're little discussed in all of these deliberations. How have the perch fared over these decades of invasions of different species?

Mr. Tim Purdy: In Lake Huron the perch quota has actually gone up in the last 10 to 15 years. Back in the early nineties, perch quota was at its lowest for different reasons; nobody really knows why. Some of the fishermen blame it on some of the restocking of lake trout. I think it was different cycles, with a couple of bad year classes. With perch stocks, a lot of it can depend on how cold the winter is, and the spring, and things like that. I think we had a couple of bad year classes. Since the alewife have gone, the perch stocks have really rebounded well.

You were talking about the live Asian carp getting delivered at the border and that. As little as two and a half weeks ago, there was a shipment in Sarnia of live Asian carp. They were still live in the tank when they got there.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Okay. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Toone.

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): I want to start by putting out that any delay that may have occurred to the start time of this meeting today is not my fault.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Philip Toone: Thank you for your interventions. I think the presentations were really quite enlightening.

I was especially interested, Mr. Meisenheimer, when you said earlier that there's a bit of a struggle between DFO officials and local fishers. They don't necessarily see eye to eye. That's unfortunately very true.

I think what you're bringing, Mr. Purdy—your family, the long history you have, and your knowledge is invaluable. Local communities and local fishers tend to know what's going on, even if DFO seems to sometimes think differently. DFO certainly has their constraints with a precautionary approach. They don't want to go beyond a certain floor, and that's certainly understandable.

What I am also hearing from both of you is that there is a lot of volatility between—the species that are populating our Great Lakes are changing quite dramatically, due largely to the invasive species. It's not from overfishing or because fisheries are not trying to manage their stocks, but because invasive species are forcing them to re-evaluate. That leads me to the question of what is a commercial fishery. We can't think of this in the long term any more. It's always quite short term. From the presentations I've seen recently, we're looking at about a 10-year turnover between what's commercially viable today to what's going to be commercially viable tomorrow. Those are incredibly short periods of time. It's very hard for families and for any community to be able to survive that kind of a transition.

I'm going to bring it back to the fact that we're also talking about changing protections within the Fisheries Act. Article 35—we're going to be scrapping the idea of protecting habitat per se. We're going to be talking about protecting species at risk that are commercially viable. I wonder what that means now. How in the world can we know what's commercially viable if it changes every 10 years? If the Canadian dollar's variations from year to year—that alone could impact what's going to be commercially viable.

DFO is no longer going to be keeping track, essentially, of all fisheries. They are only going to be interested, frankly, in commercially viable fish. How are we going to know what's going to be the commercially viable fish in 10 years? Are the local communities able to predict these things for us? Who is going to do that science?

Do you have any comments on that?

● (1650)

Mr. Peter Meisenheimer: This is the downside of not being nervous in these sorts of situations. It always falls to me.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Tim Purdy: Maybe I can throw things at you.

Mr. Peter Meisenheimer: We're very big advocates of an approach to management decision-making that's commonly called structured decision-making. On the west coast I think the buzz phrase is management strategy evaluation. It used to be called decision analysis and adaptive management, but basically it's a way of going about making decisions with the things you don't know very clearly articulated and on the table and an assessment of the risk that attends them, having that as part of the management decision process.

I'll be fairly blunt here. Part of the reason it hasn't happened in a big way nationally is that a lot of folks with interests in a political process around management—and I'll be honest, that would include folks in elected offices as well as folks within the bureaucracy—like to be able to work with it. They don't necessarily want everything laid out. They want to be able to work with it.

It hasn't been a system that has worked terribly well, the old way of doing things. I'm sure if you got some other members of the commercial fishing industry or representatives of the commercial fishing industry from elsewhere in the country in this room, they'd tell you I'm crazy, that they don't like it either.

But from our perspective, and this is speaking with some experience, because we've managed to get this kind of approach brought to bear in the international decision-making process that we have to live with in some of the Great Lakes.... A total allowable catch, for example, with perch and walleye on Lake Erie is set by an international process, not by our local officials. They participate in that.

But we've managed to get the new management planning process opened up to stakeholders from both sides of the border, with a full facilitation from competent folks. We're going to come up with what we consider to be a real science-based management plan, with full transparency that our members can understand.

That's the answer, as far as we're concerned, that kind of an approach.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Kamp.

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

I know my colleague from Sault Ste. Marie would like to ask some questions, but I want to take a moment or two to thank you for coming. It has been good. And I want to ensure that you don't leave with any misunderstandings about the proposed changes to the Fisheries Act, some of which you've heard referred to today.

At the heart of the new strategic direction there's still a prohibition. The prohibition reads that:

> No person shall carry on any work, undertaking or activity that results in serious harm to fish that are part of a commercial, recreational or Aboriginal fishery.

So the notion that we have to somehow figure out commercial viability is certainly not in the act...or to fish that support such a fishery. So the notion of ecosystem and how that supports one another is certainly there in the act.

At the beginning of the new Fisheries Act, in the definitions section, there will be a definition of what serious harm is. There it says:

> serious harm to fish is the death of fish or any permanent alteration to, or destruction of, fish habitat.

So the notion that somehow habitat has gone missing from the act and we're going to no longer be interested in it is just not accurate.

I think that as you see this debate get fleshed out and some of the facts become more apparent, you'll be pleased. In fact, I would say that if I were a commercial fisherman or part of a commercial fishing association, like you are, Mr. Meisenheimer, I would be pleased with what I see here, in addition to the new regulation-making powers about invasive species and the ability to enter into legally binding agreements with associations like yourselves perhaps and other factors. I think you'll find it interesting.

I wanted to clarify that before passing it over to Mr. Hayes.

● (1655)

Mr. Bryan Hayes (Sault Ste. Marie, CPC): Thank you. I have three minutes.

Can I ask Leigha a question? It's an easy question. Have you ever seen a sea lamprey attached to a trout?

Mr. Tim Purdy: It's the one your brothers chase you with.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Tim Purdy: She goes on the boats—her brother more, but she goes on the boats and her brother takes them and chases her with them.

Mr. Bryan Hayes: Thank you.

Tim, how often are you seeing sea lamprey attached to a trout or other kind of fish?

Secondly, not only that, but obviously sea lamprey detach themselves too. There's a lot of scarring concerns. Do you see a lot of scarring, and is the trend changing in terms of what you've seen in the last 10 years?

Mr. Tim Purdy: I think in the last 10 years we're seeing more lamprey in southern Lake Huron than we had, say, 10 years ago.

When we fish in the wintertime, we fish probably about 25 miles north of Sarnia. We get right in the middle of the lake, so it would be pretty much straight off Bayfield or Grand Bend, right in the middle of the lake, right on the international boundary line, 130 or 150 feet of water. We would average, probably some days, just one or two, and some days four or five.

I'd say we would see 20 lampreys a week. Most of them, when they come up, try to drop off just as you're coming around the puller. Sometimes they'll fall off right there. Most times they come around the puller and the guys get them.

As for actual wounding rates, it's hard to tell. On the whitefish, it's easy to tell. You'll see where the lamprey was on there and just let go, because you have the nice circle where the lamprey was, but it just didn't quite break the skin. I don't know if they come off because we're pulling them off, but the further south you come, the less lamprey you see.

When we fish trap-nets right close to shore, Grand Bend, right down into Sarnia, you might see one lamprey every two or three weeks.

Mr. Bryan Hayes: What do you do with the lamprey you catch?

Mr. Tim Purdy: We used to put them in formaldehyde and ship them off to the sea lamprey control in Sault Ste. Marie. Funding was cut for that for the southern half, so now we cut them in half. We make sure they don't go back alive.

We used to put them in formaldehyde, and then they would study them to see if their reproduction organs were still in place—male, female, those are the types of things that were done.

I believe they still do that in the north; they just don't do it with the south half of the lake.

Mr. Bryan Hayes: I have 30 seconds?

The Chair: That's it. You're done. Sorry.

Patricia.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: I wondered, Mr. Chair, if you would allow me to ask the committee if I could have consent to take a picture as we finish up our testimony.

The Chair: Is there unanimous consent to allow for a photograph —I assume you want one of our witnesses, Ms. Davidson?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Oh, I thought it was the opposition.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Yes, I'll get you in it, too. I figured you were asking the question, so...as they're talking.

The Chair: Yes, as they complete their testimony.

There's unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Yes.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. MacAulay, you have the floor now.

● (1700)

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

Tim, you mentioned there was something in the sport fishery. Did I hear correctly that there was some difficulty a few years ago with the sport fishery? Would you like to elaborate on that?

Mr. Tim Purdy: Yes. When the local club kind of got started, we had a lot of trouble with the local sport fishermen. Basically, they thought we were killing everything we caught. They didn't realize that a trap-net allows you to pick the type of fish you have. It allows you to pick the size of fish. For example, a pickerel trap-net fished right out of Sarnia, in 20 feet of water...there's a slot sized for the pickerel, and anything under 14 inches goes back alive. For the whitefish, anything under 18 inches goes back alive. With perch, anything under eight inches goes back alive.

We're allowed to pick and choose the type of fish we want. Smallmouth bass goes back alive; it's a sport fish.

The local sport club didn't realize that we were selective in the type of fish we kept. They thought we just killed everything.

When they were able to come on our boats and realize that we went by a quota system, that we didn't take all the small pickerel home, that we didn't kill everything...once they realized that, we got along very well.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Thank you very much.

Peter, in the Fisheries Act it indicates that no person shall kill a fish unless through fishing, basically. Now, on that note, on looking at the authority the minister will have—I'm not really against ministers having authority—I'd just like you to comment on the environmental review side. It just looks to me, in this omnibus bill, that there will be less environmental review, and it will give the minister more authority, in fact, that some fish could be killed. It could be worthless fish and sea life.

I'd just like you to comment on that and the seriousness of this move.

Mr. Peter Meisenheimer: With the caveat that I came here to speak about Asian carp and haven't done a whole lot of prep on the changes to the Fisheries Act, I may be in error in some of my comments if I go too deeply into this.

I will say that, from what I have seen, there are changes in language that—if I properly understand what's in the act, and I haven't had a chance to actually talk to anybody at length about this from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans yet—really worry us.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: I'd just like your review. If it is this way, how do you feel it will have an effect?

Mr. Peter Meisenheimer: It is something that worries us.

There are so many caveats I would have to append to any comment on this at this point. I don't have a detailed understanding of what's being proposed. I had one opportunity to read through a document that was provided to me on my way here on my BlackBerry last night. I caught half of a conference call this afternoon, which gave me a little bit of insight into things.

I'll be frank. I don't like some of what I'm seeing. That may or may not be an informed opinion. I don't know.

There's no question, in my mind, that the Fisheries Act is something that could use some improving. When I see some of the changes that are being proposed around habitat, when the habitat regulations have been important as they have been, I get nervous.

The sorts of questions you're putting, in terms of what's an important fish and what isn't, are certainly questions we.... One of the things we do on an ongoing basis is try to find markets for fish we catch as incidental capture that currently aren't worth anything. As it stands right now, those fish I think would be considered of no value. It's not for lack of interest in trying to find value for them, and from time to time we find value.

Perch used to go for pennies a pound in Lake Erie, when the fishery in the 1960s was predominantly for blue pike, which are now extinct. The perch were a really low-value species. Eel was the same. They used to catch them and sell them for chicken feed, as an incidental capture, in Lake Ontario. When they finally were wiped out by the seaway and the power generation on the St. Lawrence, they were worth $4 a pound in Japan.

● (1705)

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Lobster were fed to prisoners.

Mr. Peter Meisenheimer: Yes, exactly.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacAulay.

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

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank our guests for appearing before us today and providing us with some very valuable and useful information. We certainly do appreciate it as we proceed with our study on invasive species. We do appreciate your taking time out of your busy schedules to come to join us today. On behalf of the entire committee, thank you very much.

We'll just take a very brief break, just to excuse our witnesses, and then we'll move into committee business. Thank you.

● (1705)

(Pause)

● (1705)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Chisholm, I'm going to give you the floor.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

We spoke with the clerk and you earlier. There was some concerns about the original wording of the notice of motion I presented on Monday. It was agreed. We made subsequent changes.

The intent is the same, but the wording needed to be cleaned up a little bit, so we're resubmitting that notice. It would read as follows:

> That the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans consider at the first opportunity the subject matter of the Fisheries Act and other provisions affecting federal jurisdiction over Canadian fisheries waters referred to in Bill C-38, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 29, 2012 and other measures, and that the minister be requested to testify.

Thank you.

● (1710)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chisholm. You have provided notice.

Mr. Donnelly.

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

Mr. Randy Kamp: A point of order.

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

Mr. Randy Kamp: I'm assuming that Mr. Donnelly is going to move this motion. It's essentially committee business. It's been part of our normal practice for committee business to be in camera, so I would move that we move in camera.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kamp.

It's been moved by Mr. Kamp that we move in camera for committee business. It's not a debatable motion.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The motion has carried, so we will take a break while we move in camera.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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