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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 will call this meeting to order.

I'd like to thank our witnesses, our guests, for coming back. I apologize for the interruption the last time. I really appreciate your accommodating us and coming to join us again. I know committee members are anxious to hear your presentation, and anxious for the opportunity to ask questions of you as well.

Mr. Comuzzi, the floor is yours, whenever you're ready to proceed.

Hon. Joe Comuzzi (Canadian Chair, International Joint Commission): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for asking us back. I thought that after the first time we were here you took a look at us and said we shouldn't ask those guys back. That's quite an honour for us for you to extend the invitation again.

I'm very happy to introduce to you our heavy hitters at the International Joint Commission: our secretary, Camille Mageau, and Dr. Bill Taylor, who is the co-chair of our science advisory board and a professor at the University of Waterloo. He serves on these institutional bodies in his professional capacity. As you know, when we bring people into the IJC, they come with their credentials, and it's not necessarily always the dictum of the person who's attending to put the IJC's position forward. They have their own responsibilities.

For some of you who may not know, the International Joint Commission resolves disputes or is supposed to resolve disputes between the United States of America and Canada. Ms. Mageau will provide an overview of our work.

We work under the 1909 Boundary Waters Treaty. If any of you studied law at any time, you'd read that document and realize that the people who structured the 1909 agreement had a lot of wisdom. They foresaw so many of the events that we face today. It's quite an impressive document. It became part of the Statutes of Canada in 1937. The treaty itself was attached to the document for clarification.

When you do those things, Mr. Chairman, it's not always easy, and it wasn't easy to try to convince some of the people who had been ingrained with the IJC philosophy to realize that they were subject to all the rules that most of us who have served in the House of Commons or ministries were subject to, the rules of the governance of Canada. What I'm talking about is subject to the Financial Administration Act and the Public Service Employment Act. Those are areas that, when you accept this responsibility, I hope—and we're having a difficult time sometimes convincing people of this—we're accepting the responsibilities that all of us have if we try to serve the public in Canada.

We pride ourselves on being able to offer the best science available. We have a staff that works very hard at trying to get to the facts and taking the facts and applying them to the problems at hand. We're involved in settling disputes between the countries on the quantity of water. You don't hear a lot about this, and the reason you don't hear about it is it's really running very well and there are no disputes. There might be the odd dispute in Montana, with some water going across, but very few disputes. When you get two countries of this size, and the border we have between Canada and the United States, and you don't have problems with water, that goes to the success of these structures and the institutions that are in place to avoid these serious problems that sometimes cause wars.

So I think we've got something admirable, and we work at it to make sure it continues to be so. We also do it with.... I'll let Camille talk about the quality of the water. But it's working out very well. We have our problems, as all governmental agencies do, but we try to correct them.

● (1540)

Camille.

Dr. Camille Mageau (Secretary, International Joint Commission): Thank you, sir.

As the chair mentioned, in addition to the 1909 treaty, the IJC has specific responsibilities under the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement. As I think you have probably heard from other witnesses, the agreement is being renewed in order to incorporate a more ecosystem approach to the way in which the water quality issues of the Great Lakes are addressed, again recalling that the main purpose of the agreement is to help both countries work toward the restoration and the maintenance of the biological, physical, and chemical integrity of the Great Lakes. Clearly, with respect to aquatic invasive species, one talks of the biological integrity of the lakes. That's how the IJC has become involved, has tracked and has been concerned with respect to aquatic invasive species.

[*Translation*]

The International Joint Commission has been extremely interested in the issue of invasive species for a long time. In 1988, both the Great Lakes Fishery Commission and the International Joint Commission studied the matter and alerted both governments that aquatic alien invasive species in ballast water posed a significant threat to the Great Lakes. That's when the two commissions urged the nations' coast guards to take immediate steps to end the ongoing introduction of exotic organisms via ballast water discharge, and to investigate other vectors of introduction.

The commission is pleased to note that now both Canada and the United States have adopted a ballast water treatment standard for the Great Lakes for "salties", that is, those ships that enter the Great Lakes from the Atlantic Ocean, in other words, that use the St. Lawrence River as a gateway. The standard which the United States has just adopted, and which Canada committed to adopting as well, when it signed the International Maritime Organization agreement, is more or less the same.

The discharge of ballast water is believed to be the cause of the introduction of 80 non-native species or more into the basin since 1959. The good news is that no non-native species have been seen in the Great Lakes since 2006, and this success is attributed in great part to the measures which were implemented, certainly in Canada, in 2006. These measures require that vessels empty their ballast elsewhere, or take specific measures to prevent new species from being introduced.

However, the commission also remains concerned about other pathways for introduction, including the live food fish industry, the aquarium trade, recreational boating, recreational fisheries enhancement, the bait business, and horticultural practices. And of course, canals, which brings me to the issue of Asian carp.

● (1545)

[*English*]

Ten years ago the commission was one of the first to recognize and raise the threat of Asian carp with the governments. The commission has advanced the position that there should be an ecological separation between the Great Lakes basin and the Mississippi River system, which would help prevent Asian carp from entering the Great Lakes and devastating the ecosystem. An ecological separation need not necessarily be a complete hydraulic separation, but it could be achieved through the use of other types of barriers.

I am sure you have been briefed on the alternates that are being studied for the Asian carp, and have also been made aware that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has foreshortened the delay by three years, I think. They were supposed to deliver options by 2015. Now they have been given the order to have their solutions or options ready by 2013, again targeting Asian carp control.

One of the fundamental roles of the IJC that we try to deliver with diligence is to advise governments on the challenges that need to be met, and we offer up some solutions.

As early as 2004, in one of our biennial reports, we recommended to the governments that they give us, the IJC, a reference to coordinate and harmonize binational efforts to counter the threats of aquatic invasive species in the Great Lakes. In fact your committee endorsed that recommendation in 2005.

Now, although the governments chose not to give us such a reference, the commission has continued to do work in this area in order to continue to inform not only ourselves but also the governments through our biennial reports and through various assessment reports.

The commission undertook the development of the biennial aquatic invasive species rapid response policy framework—we haven't tried to put an acronym on that one, because it would sound horrible—which was a priority that we set in 2007-09.

We again, in 2011, in the 15th biennial report, reported to governments on the need for this rapid response approach. Since that report was tabled, the IJC has received more than $143,000 in U.S. Great Lakes restoration funds to develop a pilot binational AIS response plan for the boundary waters, specifically for the Detroit and St. Clair corridor. That plan is nearing completion.

As we're getting into more detail of what the nations are doing with respect to AIS, I think I'll turn the presentation over to Dr. William Taylor, who is, as the chair said, the Canadian co-chair of the science advisory board that provides scientific advice to the commission and therefore to government.

Dr. William Taylor (Co-Chair, Science Advisory Board, Work Group on Aquatic Invasive Species Rapid Response, International Joint Commission): Thank you, Camille.

What I'd like to do is brief you on our efforts to develop that binational response plan and where we're at with it.

I'd like to preface those remarks by saying that the very attempt to develop a rapid response plan is somewhat controversial among Great Lakes scientists. Many of them believe that it's unlikely that a new species found in the Great Lakes could be eliminated after it's discovered. The reason is that by that time, it might well be too well established for anything to be done. And if that's the case, we'd either be learning to live with it or would be adopting another very expensive control measure, as we have for the lamprey. So everyone in the Great Lakes community, certainly in the scientific community, agrees that prevention should be the highest priority and that rapid response is a second level of defence.

However, I think it is plausible that a harmful species could be discovered at an early stage of its invasion. If we are going to have a chance to do anything about it, we need to have a plan in place. The reality is that without a plan in place, by the time a response is planned and the diverse parties that need to be consulted are consulted and resources are obtained and the like, it would be too late. We have a negative example of that already in the history of AIS in the Great Lakes.

When we talk about a rapid response plan, there are several elements of it. One is a monitoring program that will increase the likelihood that we'll detect something at an early stage.

A second element is risk assessment. Those species that are most likely to get here and damage our ecosystem will be known in advance and we will be ready for them.

A third requirement is what we call an incident command system so that we know who's responsible and who's in charge when the situation arises.

A fourth element is what we call a tool box—the methods and the materials that will be brought to bear in the case of an incident.

Last is a commitment from those agencies that work around the Great Lakes. They will be asked to drop what they're doing to meet the event and carry out the rapid response.

We've recently done some things towards this end. In our last work cycle, we did a gap analysis of Operation Silver Screen. That was not a rapid response effort. It was an international effort to remove the Asian carp from the area just downstream of the carp barrier that keeps them out of Lake Michigan. Essentially, the electric barrier had to be turned off. We wanted to make sure that there were no carp in the area, so there was an international, multi-agency effort to kill all the carp in the vicinity of that barrier. Since that has some of the components of a rapid response, we did a gap analysis, as we called it, to learn from the issues that arose during that effort.

We've also recently done an assessment of the monitoring programs around the Great Lakes, looking, again, for gaps and shortcomings. We did an assessment of the available tools to see if there were missing components that would be needed in the case of a rapid response.

The current activity we're working on is a rapid response plan for the St. Clair River and Detroit River corridor. We think that's a likely place for an invasive species to show up. It's a complex area ecologically. Of course it's international, with multiple jurisdictions in the area, including state governments, provincial governments, and tribes. It has all of those complications.

We're developing a plan in that area that we think will have all the elements to advise on plans for other parts of the Great Lakes. I think that plan will be completed in the near future, in late summer or early fall. Following that will be attempts to implement the plan. First will probably be tabletop exercises with all the agencies that will eventually be involved. Probably after that will be field exercises.

● (1550)

We're going to work up to it so that we don't trip too badly on our first attempt. Anyway, we hope to develop this plan and demonstrate that it can work.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll move right into questions. We'll start off with Mrs. Davidson.

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

I thank the witnesses for making another trip back here to see us. We're sorry we didn't get to hear you the last time, but we're certainly glad that we're getting to hear you today.

We probably all have heard about the IJC, but I'm not so sure we know a whole lot about it. We hear about it. We hear about the work. Joe, we hear about things that you're doing and announcing. We appreciate the fact that you keep us up to date on your announcements and so on.

I think it's good to hear directly from you. I'm interested in—I don't know if you're calling it a pilot project—the development of the rapid response plan for the St. Clair River and Detroit River area in particular. Do you look on that as a pilot project? Okay.

I'm certainly interested in that area, since it's right in my backyard. Definitely, a tremendous number of jurisdictions play a role there. There have been a lot of meetings and discussions over the past number of years with different organizations on both sides. I've taken part in some of those discussions as we've gone back and forth in national meetings and so on. Is the cooperation good with the IJC when it comes to trying to set up this? Could you talk a bit about that?

You said that you received $143,000 from the U.S. Great Lakes restoration initiative funding, but there was money, $17.5 million, announced last week on the Canadian side, on the four key activities for prevention, early warning, rapid response, and management and control. Do you have any sense whether the IJC is going to get funding from this? Could you talk about that, please?

● (1555)

Dr. Camille Mageau: The intent is not for the IJC to get that money. This is, again, the government's investment. DFO has a dominant responsibility with respect to prevention and control. A lot of the scientists are with DFO, and the information we rely on is generated by DFO. It would be their contribution to a common issue we're working on. We're working with them, but this would be their wherewithal to continue collaborating with us.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Would the information they collect be available for you to use when you're setting up your rapid response plan? I suppose your pilot will be done before theirs is under way much further.

Dr. Camille Mageau: Again, as you pointed out, there are multiple initiatives they're involved with. This certainly would be their contribution, or it would allow their scientists to participate, to present the monitoring information, and so on, *un apport* that they would bring to us. It wouldn't be a distinct study. Again, the responsibilities are much broader.

Hon. Joe Comuzzi: It's important to know that the IJC alerted both governments some years ago about the threat of the Asian carp. Not to get political, but we alerted, and we don't think there was much done about it.

I don't know how many people in the room know that the Asian carp is not brought in by some absence of ballast water cleanliness in ocean-going vessels. The Asian carp was brought in to the Louisiana Delta, I think—if you could correct me, Doctor....

Dr. William Taylor: Somewhere in the Mississippi system.

Hon. Joe Comuzzi: It was brought into somewhere in the Mississippi system to prevent something else from happening. It was working out fairly successfully until a huge flood came and released all of the dikes and so on, and the Asian carp got loose and started swimming north. That's how the Asian carp became an invasive species in the Great Lakes system.

From all reports and from the coast guard, those electrical wires are doing a very good job. When you hear what can happen, it's a bit frightening. When they come in, they just clean everything out. They're a scourge. It's a real challenge to make sure that we keep it under control.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Is it the IJC's thought or belief that it needs to be a physical barrier? Is that what the IJC feels?

Dr. Camille Mageau: No. Our position has been that an ecological barrier would be more useful, in that there are air bubbles and a number of things, like a series of electrical barriers. There have been a number of proposals that have been put forward, and that's one of the things that the Army Corps of Engineers is going through, the full spectrum, to see which are the ones they believe would be the most effective and the ones we could invest in.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Does the IJC have a list of preferences? When you talk about the ecological separation, exactly what are you talking about?

● (1600)

Dr. Camille Mageau: Again, the way it's been explained to me is that you're able to have a series of ecological responses or barriers. They're much more flexible, so you can adjust. If you've built a physical barrier and there's a way around it, you end up having a canal being dug for other purposes, you end up having some transfers for other purposes.

Again, it's looking at one vector only, the physical vector. It doesn't deal with the transport of live Asian carp for nutritional value. It doesn't deal with many of the vectors, whereas if you end up having a series of bubbles, a series of meshes, a series of.... They've used water cannons. They've used a whole series of various ecological or biological deterrents.

They're looking at using pheromones as a biological means of reducing their fertility or controlling their reproduction. All of those are a little bit more amenable to adjustment when you're dealing with the problems, rather than putting up a big physical thing that may solve one of the vectors but not all of the vectors.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Is there anything in place now, Joe, that you know of? You talked about them being brought in to take care of another problem and then creating a worse one. What kinds of regulations, rules, or whatever are in place now, precautionary things, before you bring in an outside and invasive species to look after another kind? That's happened in other areas.

I know that with the moth in northern Ontario, they brought in those great big blackfly things from Japan. There are lots of different things. What precautionary controls are there?

Hon. Joe Comuzzi: First off, for invasive species, there are two problems. One is the invasive species that comes in through the ballast water on ocean-going vessels, and the other is the invasive species that's transported intra-basin on lakers and ships that don't leave the basins.

What is it, the OMI...?

Dr. Camille Mageau: It's the IMO, the International Maritime Organization.

Hon. Joe Comuzzi: Canada should be very proud of that organization, inasmuch as they adopted the principles of how we control invasive species coming in on salties. Eventually everyone bought into the Canadian Coast Guard's procedures and Environment Canada's procedures. Now we have invasive species coming in from ballast water. On ocean-going vessels, there's not been one found for six years or so. So we're doing pretty well, but we haven't stopped the research on how to better that.

We're working on how to control it on the lakers. If you recall, New York really had some very stringent guidelines. That presents a problem, as you're always trying to get all the states to have the same guidelines, which is very difficult.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Toone.

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): You get to go again, so don't worry.

Again, thank you for coming, as Patricia mentioned, for the second time. It's very appreciated that you could come back after we treated you so poorly the first time.

One of the first things I want to pursue is that the IJC might not be well understood by most Canadians. I was wondering if I could get a better sense of how you do your work. If I could bring you into a bit of a history lesson, we had the situation of invasive species involving Devils Lake, North Dakota, and the Red River. There was a lot of tension there. I think the IJC had a strong role to play there. I was wondering if you could just walk us through how you were able to bring what was essentially a local issue in North Dakota under control. They were just going to go off and do their own thing. They were going to breach the 1909 agreement, which, as you said, is well drafted, but it seemed they weren't prepared to respect it. So how does the IJC deal with those situations?

● (1605)

Dr. William Taylor: That's a tough one for me, being a Great Lakes person.

Sorry, I really can't comment on that.

Dr. Camille Mageau: I think one of the key roles that the IJC plays, just to familiarize you, because we have multi-facets—we're not Eve, but we are multi-faceted—is a facilitation role.

As the chair was saying, we draw back on the science. So in that case, it was to try to dispel misunderstanding. There was a lack of cohesive and rigorous documentation of what the problem was, so it was a step back: What's the evidence? Is the presence of these species in this area very different from their distribution elsewhere? Is there a particular situation?

A lot of it was dispelling misunderstandings, putting the problem in context, elucidating on what the context of the problem was, bringing the information to the table so they were able to determine that it's not desirable, but it's not much worse, and it's not their problem, it's our problem. They're not the culprit. It's a situation we both need to deal with.

A lot of the defusing was based on the provision of knowledge. Again, the IJC as an independent third party is able to come in to both Canada's provinces and U.S. states and put the information on the table. We come unbiased to the table, so the messaging is a little bit more palatable. It's not “my scientist versus your scientist”. It's “our scientists together”. As the chair said, scientists such as Dr. Taylor come to the table in a personal and professional capacity. Whether they work for the U.S. EPA or Environment Canada, they park that, and they come with their discipline and with their knowledge.

Hon. Joe Comuzzi: Devils Lake was really not a new issue. I can recall Devils Lake being on the agenda 20 years ago, and we knew it was one day going to be a very serious problem. But before it became a serious problem, we kind of talked about it and then went away. But as the water levels started to rise to 14-something, and were getting close to the top, everyone had to become alarmed: the province of Manitoba, North Dakota, the Sheyenne River, the Red River, and so on. I know it got to cabinet at one time, and there was a solution there that didn't work, but it was implemented.

When the last episode came with Devils Lake, Paul Pilon, our guy who handled that, monitored it almost on a daily basis. It got up to about six inches below what it was supposed to go to, and then they started to relieve the pressure. They were releasing the water, and it was going down the Sheyenne—I may have the rivers wrong—and it was flowing around and coming back to the Red River. The problem was how much of that was going to find its way into Lake Winnipeg, because that's where the river was emptying.

So they had some experiments, and some of you may recall the fish they caught and froze for specimen purposes to find out whether there were dangerous pathogens. We found out eventually that the pathogens were not dangerous, and that whatever was going to happen was not going to destroy the fish stock in Lake Winnipeg, so there was an announcement on that.

So it's been a serious problem, ongoing for a number of years.

Mr. Philip Toone: On the pathogens you discovered, I'm interested in how much influence the scientists at DFO had in your acquiring that knowledge.

You have your own scientists, clearly, but,

● (1610)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Mageau, you said that you depended to a huge extent on the scientists of Fisheries and Oceans Canada. To what extent do you depend on them to obtain your data?

Dr. Camille Mageau: We depend on them a lot. It must be said that the International Joint Commission employs engineers and is trying to recruit an ecologist. However, members of the scientific advisory committee come from academia, from Environment Canada, from Fisheries and Oceans and Health Canada. The scientists come from government. We recruit them based on their area of expertise and their qualifications. If we need a toxicologist, we find the best toxicologist for the problem at hand. A good deal of the work is done by volunteers, people who have come forward of their own initiative or who have been volunteered by their department. If you take away these areas of expertise from departments, we will be in a bad spot.

Mr. Philip Toone: We have learned through the Budget Implementation Act, Bill C-38, and also through near-daily announcements, that a huge number of federal scientists will be fired in the coming weeks and months. One of your mandates is to protect the fish habitat. You have signed several bilateral agreements. For example, the Canada-Ontario Agreement Respecting the Great Lakes Basin Ecosystem specifically addresses habitat protection. I am wondering if Fisheries and Oceans Canada's mandate will change because the Fisheries Act will have been transformed to the point where it will not be possible anymore to protect fish habitat. We will not have the scientists to do the inventory, if you like, of fish stocks. Some stocks may collapse if their habitat is not protected.

If we do not have this protection, if we do not have the scientists, and if we do not have the mandate to protect fish habitat anymore, how will that change the mandate of your commission? How are you going to change the way you operate, if this information, this data, or the scientists, are not there anymore, if Fisheries and Oceans has lost its mandate?

Dr. Camille Mageau: I will not speak to the changes to the Fisheries Act, since I used to work with those people. My knowledge on internal changes must remain within the department.

As for the commission, it will have to find that expertise elsewhere. It will have to find and pay consultants. We will still need that expertise, because when it comes to the biological integrity of the Great Lakes, clearly, fish habitat is part of the equation. It is part of the ecosystem. It's a single envelope.

That will not change our mandate. We still have to uphold the agreement on biological integrity. We will have to see what the other parties to the new agreement on the Great Lakes intend to do. Perhaps that is where we can look for solutions.

Mr. Philip Toone: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Sopuck.

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

Before I get to my questions, I think it's important to set the record straight. The changes to the Fisheries Act will do nothing of the kind that Mr. Toone suggests. I would recommend that he read the new habitat section of the Fisheries Act. There's a very strong likelihood that habitat protection will actually increase on waters people actually care about. So read the legislation.

Ms. Mageau, I have a question for you. In the second paragraph of your presentation, regarding "pathways for introduction", you listed a number of possible pathways, but you also threw in that one possible pathway is "recreational fisheries enhancement". Can you expand on what you mean by that? Because in most cases the enhancement of recreational fisheries is considered a very positive activity.

● (1615)

Dr. Camille Mageau: Are you in a better position to answer?

Dr. William Taylor: I could give that a stab.

Dr. Camille Mageau: I would give my understanding of it, but he has direct knowledge. Is that all right with you?

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Sure.

Dr. William Taylor: I think what that probably refers to is the movement of fish to places where they didn't previously exist, either by government agencies in some cases or by well-meaning but misguided individuals. So we have damaged a lot of fish populations and environments by moving fish around, probably with good intention.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: But surely, Dr. Taylor, you will make a distinction for non-native species that have been introduced into the Great Lakes that have actually benefited fisheries. I'm thinking of species like the steelhead trout and the Pacific salmon, both of which replaced lake trout and Atlantic salmon that had been extirpated. We're not talking about those kinds of species. They are clearly beneficial.

Dr. William Taylor: Right. I would agree with that, as a sport fisherman.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Good. That's a very important distinction, because in this particular game definitions are critical, in my view. The Asian carp clearly is a negative species. The snakehead, the round goby, all of those are negative. But rainbow trout and so on seem to have fit in.

Dr. William Taylor: But as Commissioner Comuzzi stated, some of the problematic species that we already have or could come, like the European carp or the Asian carp, were brought here intentionally by well-meaning individuals.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: I would strongly agree with you.

Dr. Taylor, could you give me an example of where a rapid response has resulted in the eradication of a harmful aquatic invasive species?

Dr. William Taylor: Not directly in the Great Lakes yet.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Anywhere in the world.

Dr. William Taylor: There have been successful eradications of invasive species in bodies of water in the Great Lakes basin, in smaller lakes and so forth, at least on the U.S. side, that I'm aware of.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Okay.

One of the DFO scientists who was here before us—actually speaking in a public forum, I might add, for the opposition's benefit—made the point when I was talking to him afterwards that given that these Asian carp are cyprinids, the powers that be are developing possible biocides specific to the Asian carp. Can you talk about that research?

Dr. William Taylor: I've heard a little bit about it. It would involve creating a pellet of the correct size that they would likely ingest. They are filter-feeders. So you could imagine such a pellet. You could design a toxic pellet. But even more high-tech, it's possible that you could create a coated pellet that might only lose its coating in the digestive system of a specific species.

That sounds very—

Hon. Joe Comuzzi: Sophisticated.

Dr. William Taylor: Yes, thank you, Joe. But it's not beyond the realm of possibility, and people are working exactly on that.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: I'm delighted to hear that this kind of creative research is being done.

Regarding the Fisheries Act, some of the amendments proposed to the Fisheries Act provide for the establishment of a list of aquatic invasive species and means to control them via activities such as regulating possession, import, and export, and so on. One of you perhaps could answer the question. Have any of you had a chance to review these proposed changes in our Fisheries Act, and does this seem like a common sense thing to do as part of the new Fisheries Act?

Hon. Joe Comuzzi: I haven't seen anything.

Dr. William Taylor: I haven't read it, but they sound like very sensible measures.

Hon. Joe Comuzzi: Before we leave that, you bring up a pretty good point, I think. Something that we're not doing is on the sea lamprey. All we've done since we found the sea lamprey is control it, and we're doing a marvellous job. I think it's a scientific miracle how we control the sea lamprey on the Great Lakes. But we don't allocate any funds for research to find a solution, to eliminate the sea lamprey.

We did something up at the Soo a little while ago, by chance, where they streamed into a fast current. We found that it eradicated a fair number of the sea lamprey. But we're not doing anything in research to eliminate the sea lamprey. That's something we should really be putting our minds to. I know that when I was around for a while, we tried to allocate funding for the eradication of the sea lamprey. Those guys from the eastern part of Canada weren't interested in it.

● (1620)

Mr. Robert Sopuck: That's always been a difficult nut to crack, I understand that.

Given all of the actors that are involved with managing aquatic invasive species in the Great Lakes, is there a difficulty in coordinating the activities among all of these groups, or is there some kind of coordinating committee or body that brings everybody together on a regular basis?

Dr. William Taylor: The short answer is yes, there is quite a bit of coordination. On the particular issue of rapid response, the idea there is that because we might be dealing with international waters, permission might have to be obtained from both sides. That's why we're trying to get those mechanisms and the approved methods all sorted out in advance.

There's a body that meets regularly, I believe four times a year, an aquatic nuisance species panel that's brought together by an organization called the Council of Great Lakes Governors. They invite DFO, Environment Canada, and other people. They come to the same table and update each other on what they're doing. That's also the forum where we've been trying to interact with these folks, bring them onside and include them in the development of our rapid response plan.

Our ulterior motive is to make them think it's theirs, and they own it, so that when we ask them to participate they're glad to. There's nothing like developing something and then trying to tell someone else they've got to execute it.

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

Dr. William Taylor: We can take advantage of that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sopuck.

Mr. MacAulay.

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

I don't want to annoy Mr. Sopuck. Whatever I say, I want to be careful, my good friend.

And to the honourable commissioner, Joe Comuzzi, it's a pleasure to have you here—sounds good—and your able-bodied assistants.

On the Asian carp, is it inevitable that they will get in? What needs to be done? I'd like you to elaborate on that. It's a major issue. It will cost an enormous amount of money should it come in, massive destruction, financial destruction. Is there more that we have to do? I'd like you to elaborate a bit on that. Are the electric barriers good enough? Where are we? Is it inevitable that they'll get there, and then we'll have to do what we do with the sea lamprey?

Dr. William Taylor: I can give that a stab, if you like.

I don't think it's inevitable, but I don't think it's unlikely either. It's a real risk. Even if we went for a physical barrier, which many people are seriously advocating, as I understand it, it might be a decade or two before it's actually accomplished. The engineering isn't as simple as a few dump truck loads of fill. There will be lots of things that need to be done. We need a plan, at least over that time scale, even if there's eventually going to be a physical barrier.

There are also other aquatic connections besides that canal. It's been discovered that in the headwaters of various rivers in springtime, when water is high, and even possibly in marshy areas in the headwaters, carp might actually spawn there and the larvae go in both directions. There are other connections that the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers are trying to discover to actually make physical alterations to prevent—

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: So what you're saying is that you're giving a pretty strong look at putting in a physical barrier.

Dr. William Taylor: Well, people are; there are certainly people who are advocating the physical barrier.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, I can't help but believe, are drawing up the plans and estimating the costs. That will be part of this document that we're all waiting to see in the near future.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Thank you very much. Of course with the value of the fishery in the Great Lakes, it's something that has to be looked at.

Now, Commissioner Comuzzi mentioned that you haven't done that much on the sea lamprey. I do believe it's very expensive. Plus, there are so many different areas for the fish to migrate to; it's a massive job.

Not to say anything against my good friend Mr. Comuzzi, but it would be a big job to eliminate the sea lamprey. It would be a lot of money. Am I right? And is it even possible—within reason?

● (1625)

Dr. William Taylor: In my view, right now it's not possible. We don't have the silver bullet. I think currently the control program costs are approaching $30 million a year.

If somebody could find the silver bullet, that would be great. It would save a lot of money. That shows you the value, if the research could be.... You could save $30 million a year if you came up with the silver bullet.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: But there are so many different environments in the lakes, correct?

Dr. William Taylor: Well, actually, as species go, the lamprey is vulnerable compared to many. It spawns in tributaries, and it takes many years between when it spawns in the tributaries and when it comes back down to the lake. All the control measures are focused on the larval stages in the tributaries. In that way, it's more vulnerable than a species that spawns in a lake.

But still, it can be knocked way back—

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: But then come back again.

Dr. William Taylor: —and that's what's happening. But to actually eliminate the last one, with current technology it does not seem to be feasible.

If it were a matter of spending twice as much in one year or something like that, it would be done, but it's.... I don't think it's feasible.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Now, on your rapid response plan, I'm interested in the toolbox of preprepared tactics. What would that involve?

Dr. William Taylor: It would mostly be biocides, toxic chemicals. The use of those is highly controlled. We've been looking at—we're advocating, anyway—and have taken a stab at all the likely species that haven't got to the Great Lakes yet but could, and what we'd want to use to murder them if and when they were discovered in a local area, and whether those chemicals were approved for use. Often chemicals are.... You know, if we decided that we want to use chemical X, and it's not approved for dumping into Great Lakes tributaries—

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: You're in trouble.

Dr. William Taylor: —the legislation to get that won't happen in any short period of time.

Often the things that are registered for use—for example, for killing lampreys—are only registered for that very specific use, not for killing another species of fish that isn't here yet. We need to remove those impediments so that the tools are ready: not just that we have a gun, but that we have a warehouse full of them, ready to move.

If you call up a chemical company and say that you want 15 tonnes of chemical X, they'll say, oh, yes, we could make that—in three years.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: The idea is just to make sure that you have the chemical available—

Dr. William Taylor: And it's approved for use.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: —in order to hit whenever it needs to hit.

Dr. William Taylor: Yes.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: What's the difference, or are there many differences, between the regulations in the United States and Canada? Should they be comparable? I would like you to comment on that.

Dr. William Taylor: All I can say is that they are different. There has been some attempt to make them less different under the North American Free Trade Agreement, but they still are different.

As far as I can see now, you would have to solve the problem on both sides of the border independently.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: It's the trade deal that's causing the problem?

Dr. William Taylor: No.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: What is causing the problem?

Dr. William Taylor: It's just that the regulations in the two countries are different. If you get approval to use chemical X in Canada, it doesn't mean you can use it in the States, and vice versa. And in international waters it gets quite muddy.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: In fact, Dr. Taylor, the problem is governments, I suppose.

Dr. William Taylor: You could say that. I won't.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: You have in this country Invading Species Watch. I'd like you to comment on that and on what they have in the U.S. that's somewhat similar—or do they?—and how valuable this is.

Dr. William Taylor: I don't know. Have you had Francine MacDonald from the MNR here speaking about Invading Species Watch?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: No.

Dr. William Taylor: I think that's largely a volunteer program.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Yes, it is a volunteer program.

Dr. William Taylor: It's probably most valuable in keeping invasive species that have gotten into the Great Lakes from getting farther inland. As you know, that's the second level of the problem, which is also important.

This is mostly looking for things that we already know are here, so it's not as relevant to early detection of invading species in the Great Lakes. The Great Lakes are big places. It takes a larger-scale activity than a cottager keeping an eye out on their waterfront.

● (1630)

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: The problem is that a cottager can cause you a fair bit of trouble too, or anybody can, by bringing in invasive species, and not only from the waterway. They can truck them in. There's this type of problem. That is a big problem too, isn't it?

Dr. William Taylor: Yes. Well, yes, as we get the—

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: And what should the rules be? How do you think it should be handled at the borders?

Dr. William Taylor: To me, actually, these cases where Asian carp have been stopped at the Ontario border have been great. It has signalled that we have a problem. There are people carrying live Asian carp around, and it's great that they got intercepted.

On the other hand, if you want to say the glass is half empty, that means there are Asian carp coming to the Canadian border. They're probably coming to U.S. cities like Detroit and Chicago. If they're not getting to Toronto and Montreal, well, then—

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: They are.

Dr. William Taylor: Well, yes. Stopping them at the border doesn't help. It's illegal to bring them across state borders, but state borders are a lot more porous than the international border. So if we keep them out of Toronto and they're still getting to Detroit, it's not keeping them out of the Great Lakes.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: I'd like to ask you one more question, when I get another run at it.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacAulay.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank our guests for joining us today. I appreciate you taking the time from your busy schedules to come back twice, answer our questions, and make presentations to this committee.

If you have any further evidence or comments that you'd like to submit to the committee, please feel free to do so. You can do that by sending them to the clerk, and the clerk certainly will make sure that all committee members are made aware of any comments, concerns, or anything at all that you might want to provide this committee as we proceed with our study.

Again, thank you on behalf of the entire committee. We really do appreciate you taking the time today to appear.

Hon. Joe Comuzzi: Mr. Chairman, I'd like to just mention how pleased we were when we got the invitation to come and visit with you folks today.

We're proud of the group of people with whom we work. We think they're experts in their field. We have some problems that we're trying to confront on the Detroit River and in Lake St. Clair. We'd be more than happy to keep coming back, if you ask us, to explain what we're doing. I think the committee would be pleased to hear that there are some good results happening.

Thank you for asking us to be with you today.

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

There being no further business, this committee stands adjourned.

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