HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

FOPO • NUMBER 079 • 1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, May 28, 2013

Chair

Mr. Rodney Weston

Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

Tuesday, May 28, 2013

● (1110)

[*English*]

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

Gentlemen, I want to thank you for taking the time to meet with us today. We really appreciate your being able to accommodate this committee and we certainly look forward to the discussion that we're about to have.

As you've probably been made aware by our clerk, we're in the midst of a study, and we certainly would like to bend your ear on the work that you've done previously. We certainly look forward to an opportunity to ask questions by all committee members, and we look forward to your presentation as well.

Mr. Lindsey, I believe you're going to lead the presentation.

Mr. Dan Lindsey (Director, Fish and Wildlife Branch, Government of Yukon): Sure. Thanks for the invitation. If it's okay, we'll begin briefly with the presentation.

The Chair: Certainly.

Mr. Dan Lindsey: Nathan Millar will present, more specifically, the actual status of the fisheries overview.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I should warn you beforehand that if I interrupt sometimes, I apologize if I offend you, but we are constrained by certain time limits for members' questions and answers. It's in the interest of fairness and trying to ensure that all members have the opportunity to ask questions.

Other than that, I'll turn it over to you to make your presentation and then we'll move into questions after that.

Mr. Dan Lindsey: Okay.

The focus was on the status of the Yukon fishery and to provide a bit of context and background to this. Up until 1989, Yukon had only managed wildlife, and through some agreements and negotiations we ended up with the Canada-Yukon agreement, signed in 1989, which essentially allowed Yukon to manage freshwater fish, administrative authority to manage freshwater fish, not anadromous fish. The agreement allowed for other aspects: habitat, fish inspections, and aquaculture. We added, I believe, aquaculture to that a year or two later. So we've been operating under that system since essentially 1989. There were some funds that were transferred and some adjustments to our base transfers, but that essentially created Yukon's involvement in freshwater fish management.

Around the same time, we were beginning the comprehensive land claim negotiations, and essentially in the early 1990s we end up with four final agreements and what was called the umbrella final agreement. Just so everybody is aware, this really changed the landscape of resource management, and particularly fish and wildlife management, in the Yukon, significantly. It wasn't an agreement solely for aboriginal people. It created a new management regime over all Yukon, to which all Yukoners and those visiting have adapted.

Just a brief view of what the agreements do. They have created a number of bodies, an overall fish and wildlife management board, a salmon subcommittee, and renewable resource councils for each first nation area. We have 11 completed modern treaties, three that don't have treaties, and then two transboundary. Overall, we're in pretty reasonable shape as far as modern treaties go. Essentially for close to 20 years we've been managing the freshwater fish and dealing with those bodies, the local communities, and the input that those public structures have.

Why undertake a status of fisheries review? After a 20-year period, you often have to look back to see where you need to go in the future, what's working, what is not working, what the users are doing, any trends that you see, and maybe any gaps that you might encounter. Essentially, what is the litmus test? What are we doing? Are we achieving the provisions that we agreed to in the final agreements, and are our general conservation principles respected under the Fisheries Act and in resource management?

We do have now a dedicated fisheries section. It's small but very efficient. Nathan has been managing that over the last while. One of the overall concerns is how are we doing with our fishery. How are we, collectively, managing? It's a question that we did receive from a number of the land claim bodies and first nations directly. We only really have one Yukon, so it's not like we can move along. If we're not managing correctly, it's going to take a long time to recover, especially in the north, where growth rates for fish can be decades.

That's kind of the overview of why we entered into the status of fisheries review and where we came from, in a nutshell. If there are any questions, I can answer those or wait until later. Otherwise I'll turn it over to Nathan to get into the specifics.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Millar.

Mr. Nathan Millar (Senior Fisheries Biologist, Acting Manager of Habitat Programs, Government of Yukon): Thank you.

As Dan said, the impetus for the report was that we'd been doing fisheries management in Yukon for 20 years and it was time to take a close look at what we'd been doing and where we wanted to go. It was an effort to bring together all of this historic and contemporary data into one place and lay out the context in which we manage fisheries, some of the specific conditions of fisheries in the north, and an assessment of how we were doing.

The first time we brought data together into one place, we looked at it across the territory, and within specific bodies of water or on a species-by-species basis. We asked ourselves how these populations were doing. We asked whether we were using the management tools we wanted to use and that were appropriate to get the information we need to make good decisions. We went into a lot of detail about individual species and the kind of information we used to collect them over that 20-year period in particular, and then looked forward to whether we should be doing things differently in the future. At the end of this report, we had useful lessons in terms of the things we wanted to be focusing on for the next 20 years of fisheries management, and new and arising concerns.

To jump to some of the lessons learned here, overall the fish stocks are primarily very healthy in the Yukon. There are some notable exceptions, but they're exceptions that we know about and spend more time managing. We found that our ability to monitor these populations had some constraints, and the report really prompted us to examine new ways, novel ways, more cost-efficient ways, and also more robust ways, of monitoring fisheries so we could make some good science-based decisions as to how we manage these stocks.

Communication with our partners, as Dan laid out very well in the introduction, and the context in which we do fisheries management in the Yukon, is unique. It has some shared aspects with other northern jurisdictions, but in the context of the final agreements, the way we do our work with our first nation partners and regional resource councils is a very important component of that. Strengthening those relationships was something we found to be important.

There were a few trends and threats on the horizon that we were aware of and that we're starting to work toward addressing. One of those is aquatic invasive species. We're still in quite a healthy state in regard to aquatic invasive species, but we know it's a threat. It's one we're conscious of. We're beginning to develop some programs around that because we can see the detrimental effects of these introductions elsewhere.

Those are just a few of the take-home messages from this work that we've done.

I'll leave it there, Mr. Chair.

● (1115)

The Chair: Thank you very much, gentlemen.

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

We'll start off with Mr. Sopuck.

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Great. Thanks. I appreciated your comments.

In terms of the fish stocks, you made the point that the fishery is, by and large, fairly healthy, with some exceptions.

What Yukon fish stocks are not in good shape?

Mr. Nathan Millar: Thanks for the question.

It would be more the populations for particular species. The three main fisheries that are most heavily utilized are Arctic grayling, northern pike, and lake trout. Within each of those three species, there are certain populations that we found were probably overexploited to some degree. The fisheries in the Yukon aren't distributed evenly across the landscape, so they tend to be focused around the communities, particularly around Whitehorse. They tend to be small lakes with campgrounds, for instance, or close to the towns. That would be for the lake trout populations.

For some of the stream dwellers like Arctic grayling, people tend to know where some of the good spawning runs are, so those easily accessible runs have been depleted over a number of years. Primarily we'd say that lake trout and Arctic grayling have declined, and to some degree we're finding that burbot populations have probably declined, but our information on them is somewhat less. We're still looking into that.

● (1120)

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Okay, great.

What is the rough dollar value of each of the recreational fishery, the commercial fishery, and the domestic fishery in Yukon?

Mr. Nathan Millar: The data I have from the recreational fishery comes from the five-year national recreational fisheries survey that's done across the country and led by DFO. From that survey we estimate through direct and indirect expenditures about $23 million for the recreational fishery across the territory.

These days the commercial fishery is quite small. The way it's regulated it has the potential to be somewhat larger. We don't have direct estimates of the value, but I can tell you there are probably around five to ten part-time commercial fishermen. They would be out a month or two per year, so it's a relatively small dollar value.

With regard to the domestic fishery, in the Yukon, just to give the context, the domestic fishery is for those individuals who lead a traditional sort of on-the-land lifestyle, in which they spend extensive periods of time away from cities or access to grocery stores. There tend to be about 10 to 20 of those licences issued per year, and so they would be harvesting food to feed themselves.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: You mentioned aquatic invasive species as a concern. Which aquatic invasive species are you mainly concerned about?

Mr. Nathan Millar: We did a threat assessment, which is a separate document I would be happy to share if the committee were interested, that lays out as far as we can gather based on some of the biological principles or the biological characteristics of the species whether they are likely to survive if they are introduced to Yukon waters, because that's a question we have considering the climate up here. We also asked by what means they would be introduced into the Yukon, and what kind of damage they would cause should they be introduced.

We narrowed that down to a smaller list of species. They range from fish species to some parasites to algae. I don't have that list in front of me right now, but we're dealing with a couple of species right now like didymo, which is a multifilamentous algae that we do have in the Yukon. We're not sure of the extent of its invasiveness, but it's something we're beginning to monitor right now.

To answer your question more directly, we have done that work, but it's based on our best assessment of what could come, whether it would stay if it came, and if it stayed what kind of damage it would do. Those are the questions we're asking.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Given that our committee is developing the idea of a northern fishery study, what gaps could our committee fill if we were to carry this idea further? What would you like to see us do if our study proceeds?

Mr. Dan Lindsey: One thing that comes to mind if you're focusing specifically on the previous topic on aquatic invasives—and there's of course a committee we participate with Canada in—is that essentially with movement of invasives whether they are on a boat or whatever, as soon as they're in Canada there's no monitoring of them. So anything that comes along and moves interprovincially or inter-territorially is really a very difficult piece to monitor. I know the question of how you prevent the movement of invasives within Canada has often been raised.

It's a tough one for everybody to try to grapple with. Really either we need legislation, which each jurisdiction would prepare, or there could be more of a global piece developed. That's one area on the invasive side. I'll leave the other one that's more on the population management piece to Nathan.

● (1125)

Mr. Nathan Millar: Yes, I agree with Dan. I think more knowledge of invasives, their likelihood of invading northern environments, and the kinds of impact they would have, would be something that would be very useful to us.

Climate change is something that's always in the front of our minds because the north is changing at a much more rapid pace than more southerly jurisdictions, so the impacts of changing climate, be it temperature or precipitation, how that would impact fishery resources. I know there has been some good work done to date, but that's always something on our minds.

I also think that there are some gaps in basic science and understanding of fish populations. The north tends to be a place where there's lots of interest, but the depth of our knowledge is most likely less than in more southerly and more studied places. Even understanding the causes of productivity and exploitation pressure on fish stocks is something that work has been done on for many decades, but the depth of that work and the understanding is less than in more southerly jurisdictions.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Chisholm.

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

Gentlemen, it's a pleasure to have you here with us today. My name is Robert Chisholm. I'm a member of Parliament from Nova Scotia.

This committee is excited about exploring the fisheries in the north and the impact of pressures on the fishery in the north. We're very interested in the report that was done on the Yukon fishery in 2010. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to pursue some of the issues that you raise.

Maybe to begin, I thought your report was quite instructive. It talks about moving to ecosystem-based and watershed-based management in order to deal with your fishery. Would you explain that to some degree and also talk to me a little bit about the relationship with DFO in that regard?

Mr. Nathan Millar: Sure. Thanks for the question.

The idea behind what we conceive of as ecosystem and watershed-based management is that there are a lot of commonalities and similarities among fish species within particular watersheds. For those reasons, managing them as a unit collectively or considering them collectively has some sound biological and scientific basis.

One example that springs to mind is in the Southern Lakes area of Yukon, close to Whitehorse. We have a chain of very large lakes that are connected by short and somewhat longer rivers. What we find is that there is a lot of movement of fish in amongst these lakes. What we have been doing primarily is managing them on a lake-by-lake basis. What we realize is that because of the interconnectedness of these lakes and of the populations that live in them, we need to consider them as a whole. So that's what we're considering by this ecosystem and watershed-based management—you're looking at the interconnectedness of the species and the populations that you're managing.

I was wondering if you could clarify the second part of your question in terms of our relationship with DFO. Would you like to know just in general the sort of division of labour, if you will, between the governments, or did you have a more specific question?

● (1130)

Mr. Robert Chisholm: First of all, let me say that I appreciate what you're saying about the interconnectedness of the ecosystems as it relates to fish populations and the importance of habitat in protecting those populations.

I'm trying to get a sense of, in the Yukon, what role does DFO play in assisting or working with you and your partners in order to perform that management, whether it be science, whether it be habitat protection. What role?

Mr. Nathan Millar: In 1989, the Yukon government was delegated management authorities from Canada, but that delegation did not include management of habitat. Those responsibilities still lie with Fisheries and Oceans Canada. They're responsible for managing all fish habitat for salmonids and also for freshwater fish. As a result, we work quite closely together, given that we're the managers of freshwater fish, but they are responsible for the management of their habitat.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: That's interesting. I was curious about that agreement from 1989, and this gets right to the heart of it for me. So DFO is still responsible for management of habitat.

Mr. Nathan Millar: That's correct.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: As you know, the Fisheries Act went through some significant changes last year, particularly in relation to the question of protecting fish habitat. Have you seen a change in the resources and the focus of DFO in the Yukon so as to continue to carry out this work of protecting fish habitat?

Mr. Dan Lindsey: I think we're in the midst of a change, quite frankly. There has obviously been a change in the number of people devoted to that kind of work. We're probably seeing a shift more to the salmonid rather than the non-anadromous fish.

There are some unique provisions in the Yukon, too. We have a different placer mining regime, which has different standards for habitat risk assessment and management. It is a bit unusual, compared with the rest of the country.

So yes, there have been some changes. We hope those changes don't remove the habitat management provisions related to the freshwater program, but they probably have already. We're in a transition right now and haven't seen the full impact of what the new structure might look like under the legislation.

I don't know whether that helps.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: It does and I appreciate it. We're not here to talk about the legislative changes, but it is important for us to understand, especially in light of the Canada-Yukon agreement, the relationship the Yukon has with the Government of Canada through the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. So thank you for that.

Mr. Dan Lindsey: Just as a summary comment, I think it's safe to say that we have enjoyed a very good relationship with the northern region over the years. I think it's been a very good partnership. Frankly, I think that partnership was due in part to this being a shared activity and to its being defined, so we worked collectively together on it. I think it was a good model.

Thank you.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: That's good to hear. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Allen.

Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, folks, for being here today. We really appreciate it.

I want to ask a few questions with respect to coming in at a high level with respect to the types of fisheries that are in the Yukon. You commented, in your responses to Mr. Sopuck, that you are talking about a $23-million-a-year industry on the recreational side, for direct and indirect value. Also, your report talks about a decline in the number of non-resident anglers, as well as about participation by youth.

Can you tell me what your assessment is of the impact that is going to have upon that perhaps $23 million, going forward? What are some of the strategies you're undertaking to reverse that trend?

● (1135)

Mr. Nathan Millar: Thanks. That's a good question. Certainly something that came out very strongly in our report was that when we looked at trends in participation and recreational fishing in Yukon, we did begin to see a slight decline in some categories. Overall, I'd categorize it as relatively stable right now, but the indicators are there such that we believe in the next 10 to 20 years, we're going to have a reduction in the number of people who participate in the recreational fishery.

I'm not an economist and I can't speak definitively to those numbers, but my biologist assessment is that we're going to see a reduction in expenditures that will be concomitant with the reduction in angler activity, which is concerning. Also, from a fisheries and management perspective, there's a big concern about reduction in angler participation because of some of the non-economic values that those provide. So what I'm talking about here are people who are out on the land who are engaging with fishing and with those species tend to have a lot of interest in maintaining those populations and in maintaining healthy ecosystems. When you start to see fewer people engaging in that activity, I personally get worried that you're not going to have as much advocacy for those important resources as we did in the past. That's really concerning for me as a fisheries manager.

You know what? I talked to colleagues across the country and these are trends that everyone is seeing. This is not a Yukon phenomenon. This is a national, maybe a worldwide phenomenon, where there's less uptake in angling by youth. The average age of an angler is increasing and increasing at quite a rapid rate in Yukon.

Dealing with this is a lot of programming, a lot of education, a lot of trying to encourage youth to get out and participate in angling. I think we're just scratching the surface now in terms of what those programs will be. But as I say, it's not necessarily just a Yukon phenomenon. I think every jurisdiction across the country is dealing with this same issue.

Mr. Mike Allen: So therefore you're seeing some of that on the tourism side as well, with respect to people buying packages and coming there as well?

Mr. Nathan Millar: I'm not sure if we're able to determine specific trends like that right now. It would need a more in-depth analysis than what we've done. In talking to operators, what they're saying is that the state of the world economy is a much more important driver of their success on a year-to-year basis than those big trends right now.

Mr. Mike Allen: Okay. Thank you.

I understand you also have a stocking program in the Yukon with respect to maybe helping divert some attention away from the wild stocks. On your comment with respect to the uneven fishing effort, and it's more of an issue of stocks being depleted where it's easy to get to, is that stocking program helping with diverting fishing effort away from the wild stocks?

Mr. Nathan Millar: Yes. We definitely believe so, and that's what the data suggest. As you said, the impetus behind that is to provide, first of all, very easy, accessible opportunities to people near communities, so that gets people out. So it's a fostering of angling opportunities, but at the same time diverting pressure away from what tend to be more slower-growing, more sensitive wild species.

Typically, the stock lakes—there are 23 of them around the territory—are close to communities and they're really heavily used. It's a very successful program. We just had one of our fry releases last weekend and had 40 young people come out and help put some of the young fry into a lake near Whitehorse. It's an activity that throughout all of its stages has a lot of community involvement.

● (1140)

Mr. Mike Allen: Okay. Thank you.

I just want to ask you a question with respect to some of the other economic drivers. We know that there's uncertainty as to where the commercial fishery is going to go there, but can I ask you a question about aquaculture and just to the extent of aquaculture in the Yukon?

From what I understand, they are small operations. There's not a lot going on and it has an estimated value. Can you talk a little bit about the nature of the aquaculture industry up in the Yukon, and do you see potential for expansion of that?

Mr. Nathan Millar: Sure. I'll just give an overview, and then maybe, Dan, you could talk about the projected future of aquaculture.

I'd say on a year-to-year basis we issue a dozen or so licences. There are two major categories of aquaculture in the Yukon. One is family-run, stocked.... There are also pothole lakes that are seeded with young fry that are left to grow out and then they are harvested. They tend to be in more remote areas. They would be accessed by plane or ATV. Generally the fish from this type of aquaculture is just for local consumption.

Then we have one exporting tank farm, where Arctic char are raised in tanks. This is a facility in Whitehorse, and there's some processing of that product and that's exported certainly within North America, if not around the world. They produce about 30,000 kilograms per year.

On the scale of aquaculture in Canada, we're a very small player. The tank farm, as far as I know, has a relatively steady production. On the more small-scale, local production, it's also relatively steady, but it's quite a low level, I would say. So there are a handful of operators who are actively producing products for the local market.

Mr. Dan Lindsey: Just to add to that, one of our challenges, obviously, with the, for lack of a better term, pothole lakes aquaculture program is that it's a long way from market. I think those are marginally economic and folks have struggled with just the distance piece. What Nathan mentioned is that when some of those fish are provided locally, that makes sense, but from a distant market it becomes a little bit more challenging.

Mr. Mike Allen: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. MacAulay.

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

Thank you, guests, for appearing.

Basically, I do not know very much about your fishery. Have you just touched the edge of your expectations? I'd just like you to elaborate a bit on what you see taking place in the commercial fishery and the recreational fishery. Looking at the recreational fishery, just from my mind, I would believe that.... If I understand correctly, your recreational fishery is declining from outside anglers, which is difficult to understand. I would think it would be a major experience for tourists to go north and to have the experience.

If you could, just first of all elaborate in that way. It's difficult for me to understand why people wouldn't want to go there. People have money and they would like to have this great experience to go north and go right out into the wilderness. Is there much of that going on, or what?

Mr. Dan Lindsey: There is certainly some of it that is specifically for fish. Sometimes you see it connected to other activities. In the hunting and outfitting industry, there is obviously fishing as a sidebar, but a very important piece. There is also a variety of wilderness recreation, whether canoeing down the Yukon River or rafting some of the more challenging areas. Fishing is still a pretty integral part of that program. As to a dedicated, sole, specific fishing experience, there are opportunities. We're not seeing a huge increase in demand for it. It might come, but it's generally wrapped up with other activities.

Just as a point concerning our recreational fishery, we probably have one of the highest or the highest participation rate amongst residents. I think that's a good piece. As Nathan mentioned, there is an age unit that is going through, and younger folks aren't experiencing it as much. We have seen, on the harvesting or hunting side, a bit of a switch going on. We were constantly going down. Now we're coming back up with some of our younger folks. The same experience has been identified in the U.S. recently—over the last couple of years.

It's hard to say what the future holds concerning participation. Downward trends can change. We've seen it on the hunting side recently, whether as a blip or as something new. Much of our effort is still focused on the recreational fishery. The commercial fishery, as far as a contribution to the economy is concerned, doesn't involve nearly the benefits economically that both resident and non-resident recreational fishing do.

● (1145)

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Is that because you're too far away from the markets?

Mr. Nathan Millar: Let me give you a brief overview of what the commercial fishery is like. I think that to understand why that's the case, it will help.

Basically, our commercial fishery takes place on Yukon's large lakes. There are six lakes that have commercial licences. The challenge we face is that these are also lakes on which there is a strong recreational fishery. There's a lot of attention to commercial fishery, which is done through netting. Recreational anglers come out and see that there's a conflict.

The ability of this industry to grow is limited to a large degree by overlap with a recreational fishery. Because the recreational fishery is very large and is a very large part of life for many Yukoners, there's a very high value on it. The ability of the commercial fishery to expand is, on that basis, very limited. Basically, they're sharing space. There are not a lot of large lakes not accessed by people that could sustain the productivity you would need for a commercial fishery.

I hope that gives a bit of the context for some of the constraints we would have in a commercial fishery in Yukon.

Mr. Dan Lindsey: Largely, it's a productivity issue in many cases on lakes. If you're going to increase the commercial harvest, you're probably going to have to reduce the recreational take.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: We're used to that battle.

Is it six bodies of water, six lakes that you fish out of? Why is it only the six, or why has it not expanded beyond these? Or have you answered this in saying that the market is not there, the commercial fishery is not there, or the recreational fishery is not there?

Mr. Nathan Millar: There was a process undertaken. Dan mentioned the political and regulatory context in which we do fisheries management. Yukon is largely driven by processes from the final agreements. This collaborative management process has involved stakeholders, first nations, renewable resource councils—so they are regional resource councils.

There was an examination of the commercial fishery and which bodies of water would be good choices for that kind of activity. Those six had historic fisheries, but they also were large enough and had enough production that they would be appropriate places to do this kind of activity.

I guess there are a variety of things that are taken into consideration. Part of it is the biological productivity of the system, but there are also the social values and the interaction with the other fisheries that are taken into consideration when making those decisions about where commercial fisheries should take place.

● (1150)

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Am I to understand that these bodies of water are more accessible to the recreational or the commercial fishery? Am I correct?

Mr. Nathan Millar: They are all road and highway accessible.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Which fishery is not road or highway accessible? What I'm thinking of, and I guess I'm out to lunch on this thought, but I would expect that in an area like that, a recreational fishery way out clear of highways would be quite an experience. Obviously I don't pick up that's the direction you're in at the moment because you do not feel you have the market for that. Is that correct?

Mr. Nathan Millar: It's a good question. I invite you all to come up to experience fishing—

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: You see what goes on in B.C. and everywhere, and everybody wants to do it and it's a pull both ways. Here you have such a territory and it's basically not happening.

Mr. Dan Lindsey: There are not any huge barriers for it to happen. We don't have a lot of barriers. What we have is a wilderness tourism licence and a person can acquire it. There are very few limitations on it. So if you wanted to take people out to fish on a remote lake, there are very few barriers to allowing you to do that. It's get a licence, and there are hardly any caveats on it. Your only caveat is if you wanted to build a number of lodges, that gets into a bigger review.

But overall we expect that if there was a very lucrative aspect to it, there would be a lot more people coming in. You're probably right. There hasn't been that, other than for those who have established a fairly good market and been able to attract mostly European folks coming over. So we have some flights from Germany and Europe directly to Whitehorse, and I think that helps that industry quite a bit.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Donnelly.

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

Thank you, both, for being part of our committee today and providing your testimony.

My colleague asked about the Yukon's relationship with Canada. I'm interested in the United States and your relationship, if any, with Alaska. I'm wondering if you could compare how you manage your fishery to how the Alaskans manage their fishery. For instance, what are the major differences? I appreciate that yours is heavily a recreational fishery versus the Alaskan emphasis on commercial fishing.

I'm also curious—it was brought up about aquaculture. I'm wondering if there are any differences there in terms of that. My understanding is that the Alaskans don't do aquaculture. They are more into ocean ranching. Basically, could you highlight the main differences between the Yukon and Alaska?

Mr. Dan Lindsey: Sure. Alaska is a lot more heavily populated, of course, than the Yukon. Alaska has both the Arctic and the Pacific marine fisheries, which are incredibly huge. For things like the pollock industry, the economics around that are hugely significant to the state and to the communities on the coastline.

There really isn't a comparison. They are largely focused on the salmon, halibut, and pollock offshore industry. Their interior management of fresh water isn't substantively different from the situations we encounter. Their greater focus is obviously on the marine and anadromous fish.

We deal with them. Of course, salmon is DFO's mandate, but we generally deal with the Alaskans on the Yukon River Panel in trying to make sure that enough fish come into the Yukon as part of the treaty, which hasn't happened in the last few years. We have a pretty reasonable working relationship with them, but their focus for the most part is definitely marine. It's just so much more.... The economics around that and the livelihood issues associated with all the communities are pretty integral to the marine industry.

Nathan might have some additional information on our liaisons with Alaska.

● (1155)

Mr. Nathan Millar: Yes, I think Dan is right. I think there are some fundamental differences in terms of the types of fisheries that Alaska prosecutes compared to what Yukon does. They have very large offshore fisheries. Dan mentioned the pollock fisheries. America's largest fishery takes place in Alaska. A lot of the communities tend to be coastal. They're very oriented towards salmonids and other anadromous fish. These systems tend to be a lot more productive as well, because of the marine influence and the productivity of the systems.

But I would agree. I think generally their management of freshwater systems is not that different, to my knowledge. In the systems that we would manage, they would be similar. I think there are a lot of commonalities. We have a good relationship with Alaska. We have a reciprocal licensing agreement whereby Yukoners can purchase a recreational fishing licence in Alaska at the same cost that an Alaskan would pay, and vice versa.

Dan mentioned the Yukon River Panel, which is under the Pacific Salmon Treaty, and is a particular annex to that treaty that deals with management of salmon in the Yukon River. Of course, it's a shared resource, so there's a group of individuals who work together on managing that shared resource.

Those are a few of the differences and highlights.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Thanks very much.

I have time for a very quick last question here. Again, Environment Yukon's 2010 report was referenced. A quote in there states that a "[m]ove towards ecosystem and watershed based management and increased emphasis on management of river systems" is a priority that guides the direction of fisheries management in the Yukon.

I'm wondering if, in a very short time, you could say quickly why that move was a management priority in the Yukon.

Mr. Nathan Millar: I think it stems largely from an information gap, a data gap. We have been focusing our management efforts on lakes, on large and small lakes that are readily accessible. We know that a lot of fishing goes on in rivers. They tend to be much more difficult to study, which is partly why management is focused on lakes.

It was really an acknowledgment of that information gap, but also of their biological importance to those systems as well. I think that's probably the short answer.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Donnelly.

Mr. Weston.

[*Translation*]

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

[*English*]

It's hard to miss the sense of excitement and pride you have about the wildlife, about the collaboration, about the successful relationships with first nations. I think there's a real reputation here. The Yukon comes across as being a casual, friendly place. I think I speak for everybody here when I say that we're excited to visit.

I also want to mention that we don't all wear ties and jackets all the time.

I have three questions for you that relate to best practices. Both of you have referred on several occasions to relationships with partners. One of the things I'm very keen about in terms of the recent budget is the $10 million the government is going to invest in partnerships for habitat enhancement. I'm wondering if you might speak about some of those partnerships.

Second, is there any other thing you're particularly proud of that you want us to take back in terms of a best practice for habitat management?

Third, we're still designing our trip. I'm wondering if there are any places that you think we should be visiting where you feel that some of these best practices are modelled well.

● (1200)

Mr. Dan Lindsey: I'll speak to the partnership question first.

I think in general when we were under the negotiations for all these comprehensive claims, we had to immediately put our money where our mouth was. We had to work with these boards. They're very strong advisory boards. They're not judicial boards, but they have direct access to the minister, with timelined ministerial responses. If the minister doesn't respond to the board's recommendations within 60 days, we have to give effect to that recommendation.

So we're obviously working with them, trying to land on the same place and respect the provisions of those agreements that really talk about.... They use the same terminology as the old Fisheries Act did for the conservation of fish. The boards and councils really hold us to that test of making sure we're managing that way. The best way to do that is to work with first nations and the boards collectively. Even the report you see in front of you has been reviewed by the fish and wildlife management board, and has been improved or modified with their stamp of approval on it.

I think it's just a common state of business in our new world since the claims here. We need to work with the partners. If we don't, quite frankly we'll generally fail, and we've done that. After the agreements, we tried to do a few things on our own and we found that we were going back to the drawing board. So there have been a number of partnerships. We work closely with them, for example, on the Yukon River Panel. We work with them in the communities. We find that it does take more time to engage, and that's a challenge, but I think at the end of the day the outcome is a lot more long term and lasting, and it feels like people have certainly had their involvement in it.

That's on the partnership side.

As for the $10 million, I could take all of that—

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. John Weston: I guess the point I was making, Dan, was with regard to getting many partners involved across the country, not with huge amounts of money but giving them an incentive to work...and it sounds like you've done that in various ways. Have you any great examples that you want us to know about?

Maybe that will move you to the third question as well. Are there any places we should be going to visit that will help us see that in action?

Mr. Dan Lindsey: We could certainly advise the panel on it. It depends on when you come up. There are different venues and different opportunities to see things, but it depends on the timing. I'm not sure what the timing is.

If you give us some thought on that, we could certainly get back to you on locations where you could either observe or actually attend hearings. You may want to participate in and observe, for example, a board reviewing some particular fisheries matters. That's an opportunity.

● (1205)

Mr. Nathan Millar: I was thinking that if you have some flexibility in your schedule, August is a really nice and interesting time to come, partly because that's when the salmon are here.

Certainly, there's an experience to see freshwater fish throughout the open water season, but the salmon are in the Yukon in August, and these are some of the longest salmon runs in the world. They've come up 3,000 kilometres from the Pacific Ocean, and to see them arrive in the communities in Yukon at that time of year is a celebration of the natural world, but it's very much a cultural celebration as well. People are very excited to see fish come back to Yukon. It means so much to them.

In Whitehorse, certainly, they're here in August, and a little bit sooner in some of the communities downriver, like Dawson City. I would recommend coming up in late summer. It's an excellent time to see some of the fisheries resources.

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

Mr. Toone.

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

Thanks again for coming today. It's been very informative. I share Lawrence MacAulay's certain ignorance of the region, so the more we can learn, the better, and I thank you for it.

You were mentioning just a moment ago that the conservation fish and wildlife boards and the first nations have been worried about fish conservation. Just to follow up on what my colleague Robert Chisholm was saying, last year in Bill C-38 we changed the definition of habitat protection, so if I could, I'll just go back to that for a moment.

I appreciate your comment that change is coming, and I think that's probably true. I know that DFO last month sent out a discussion paper on definitions for habitat protection. I wonder if your government has had an opportunity to comment. Have you have had an opportunity to send a brief to DFO regarding that?

Mr. Nathan Millar: It's something that we're preparing right now, actually. We'll get—

Mr. Philip Toone: Do you realize that the deadline for comments —

Mr. Nathan Millar: —them finished for them very shortly.

Mr. Philip Toone: —is tomorrow?

Mr. Dan Lindsey: Yes. That's correct.

Mr. Philip Toone: Okay. So you'll be sending something today or tomorrow.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Dan Lindsey: We have a draft in there. We always have to be concerned. It's always a little bit of a challenge for us when we provide comments that we don't bypass the opportunity for the board. The board is actually responsible for making comments on legislation. It's actually a "shall" clause in the final agreement. Before a government introduces legislation, the fish and wildlife management board shall have an opportunity to review it.

There is a public component to that, and we don't necessarily have that opportunity, so for us to come out as a government and speak to changes without having the benefit of the board's input is a challenge for us. We've been talking with them and trying to work through that piece.

I don't know if that makes sense, but—

Mr. Philip Toone: Yes, I understand, and that's a perfectly understandable process. The problem, of course, is that the legislation has already passed, right? We already have the new definition, so would you say that the opportunity for comment has been rather short, then?

Mr. Dan Lindsey: Yes.

Mr. Philip Toone: Have the various boards actually had an opportunity to comment on it?

Mr. Dan Lindsey: The time is incredibly short, and I don't think the boards had an opportunity to comment, because part of their mandate is to seek public input. For them to do that adequately, they'd need to have some time to go out to the public and entertain their views.

Mr. Philip Toone: If I could make a suggestion, perhaps asking DFO for an extension would be appropriate.

Mr. Dan Lindsey: We've certainly asked in previous correspondence to have more time to respect the processes under the final agreement.

Mr. Philip Toone: Thank you for that.

I'm also wondering about infrastructure. Could you talk about that, about small craft harbours and that sort of infrastructure? I'm not talking about commercial installations. I'm talking about publicly accessible infrastructure such as small craft harbours that may be installed by DFO.

Who are the owners of that infrastructure? What is the state of the infrastructure? Are there any calls for improvements to that infrastructure?

● (1210)

Mr. Dan Lindsey: In a nutshell, most of the access points and harbours are not managed by DFO. They are put in place either by the Yukon government or by private commercial operations.

Mr. Philip Toone: How do you control the quality of the wharves, then, if it's largely private interests that seem to be driving the building of these wharves? I suspect there would be regulations, then, and inspections regarding the quality of the wharves?

Mr. Nathan Millar: I think just a description of the nature of access would clarify. There's no marine access in Yukon, except for on the north slope, which is not accessible by road. So what we're talking about are essentially boat ramps in lakes and in some cases maybe a breakwater. So there is basically a gravel boat ramp or maybe some concrete lines down to water, typically installed at campgrounds or in a couple of small private marinas on rivers. That is the nature of them. They're relatively small and the amount of infrastructure needed to make sure they are safe is much less than what you need in a marine environment.

Mr. Philip Toone: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Davidson.

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

Thanks, gentlemen, for being with us today.

My riding is around the Great Lakes on the lower part of Lake Huron, so certainly the fishing atmosphere and the fishing location that I'm used to are far different from what you offer in the Yukon. Certainly what I've heard here today is exciting and interesting, and I think that, like many of my colleagues around the table, I would be thrilled to visit and see first-hand some of the wonderful opportunities you have in the Yukon.

I want to go back briefly to the status report on the Yukon fisheries. We've reviewed your 2010 report, and I'm wondering if that is something that's done every five years, or whether there is another report in the drafting stage. How often do you release those reports?

Mr. Dan Lindsey: That was the first report in 20 years. We don't have a schedule for additional status reports.

Our fishery section is a very small group, but we do identify our projects, and through the public process, we identify and prioritize the activities we will be working on for the year. We provide that information to the boards and councils, and we demonstrate why we're undertaking those activities.

You can imagine that we have a lot of requests to do fisheries work throughout the territory, so we have a priority process just as any other jurisdiction does. We do report to the board on an annual basis. We don't specifically report on the continuing status of fisheries. It's more of a roll-up of fish and wildlife interests that the board has in front of it. We report to them annually on what we've done and highlight different projects and activities.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: I was interested in what you were saying about the decline in the number of non-resident anglers and the lack of participation by youth. I know you've talked a little bit about that, but you've also talked about the 23 stocked lakes and the fry releases. I think your comment when you talked about the fry releases was that it was a community event and many youth took part in that. Is that part of your strategy to reverse the trend of lower participation by youth, or is that something that's been ongoing for a long time?

● (1215)

Mr. Nathan Millar: I like to take credit for it, as it's part of a very directed strategy, but I think the truth is that it's something we try to do as a general practice. We try to involve the community and involve youth. It's something that young people in particular are really passionate about. It's been ongoing for quite a long time.

Just to talk about that trend, what we've seen is a decline in non-resident anglers, but it's been very gradual. I just want to highlight that. We haven't seen a precipitous decline. We're worried about the future because of the trends we've seen in regard to the average age of anglers, but we haven't started to see the effects of that.

It has been a really good tool for us to forecast what we expect to see. I think that having a component of education and involvement in all the programs we do is going to become increasingly important. More programs in the future that are focused specifically on youth, on getting youths out there angling and on teaching them how to angle, will be increasingly important as well.

Mr. Dan Lindsey: We've certainly added to that such things as a family fishing weekend, where basically there's no need for a fishing licence per se. You have conservation officers or fisheries officers who come out and actually help kids fish. That has been very popular. It's actually brought together some of the enforcement and monitoring folks in a bit more positive sense.

There's been a lot of really good take-up throughout the Yukon on those events, where you get people out and they have an officer or a fisheries biologist come along with them and show them how to fish. There are a lot of programs that are moving towards that. We see programs in the south, as well as the U.S. and Alaska, that try to keep that engagement going, and we're trying to pick up on some of that as well.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Davidson.

Mr. MacAulay.

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

I don't want to dwell on this subject too long, but I'd just like to know.... Perhaps I haven't been paying proper attention, but just where are you going? With Ms. Davidson's questions on recreational fishery, it's for the local people. Is it the commercial fishery? Is it the recreational fishery with the local people? Or is it the rich angler that you can take in and put in resorts and that type of thing?

What is the long-term view that you would have in order to bring new dollars in the fishing area? I know that we've talked a lot about this. Am I barking up the wrong tree or what?

Mr. Dan Lindsey: It's an interesting question, because I think under our new.... I always say it's new because I was part of the negotiating crew, but it's different. The first and foremost interest for the majority of Yukon is to make sure that the fish stocks are healthy. I think that's universal.

I think the second thing is that in providing fish for communities, some people will call that recreation, but for many communities there's a heavy reliance on fish, whether it's freshwater fish or salmon. So I would say that the second interest is to make sure that those opportunities are there and that people can still bring country foods into their homes and get out and enjoy the fishing activity. I would say that's second.

Commercial is a far third. There is not a huge demand to have commercial activity in the Yukon, especially if it affects either number one or number two, as mentioned.

That would be, in essence, I think where most Yukoners are coming from.

● (1220)

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Thank you very much.

Mr. Nathan Millar: Just to add one point to what Dan is saying, it also comes back to the mandate of the fisheries managers in Yukon. Our mandate is really around ensuring that the resources for whatever fishery is prosecuted remain sustainable.

We don't have a mandate for the economic development of fisheries, which I think is maybe the distinction between our role for Yukon government and the role of a lot of other provincial agencies. When I'm talking to my colleagues on the east coast, I'd say that is really one of their main jobs. Our job here is primarily around management of the resource. Part of that deals with management of the industries, but our main focus is on the resource rather than economic development.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Basically, a large part of it is food source for the population—am I correct?

Mr. Nathan Millar: You mean the recreational fishery?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Yes.

Mr. Nathan Millar: It's interesting, actually. We've done studies and we've asked people why they go fishing. The top five answers have nothing to do with catching fish, eating fish, or taking fish home for their freezer. They have to do with being outside, being with their family, and being relaxed. The recreational fishery is slightly more complex than just going out and getting a fish for yourself to eat. It's about all of these other values and experiences that people have when they're doing the activity.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Yes, I can see that.

I'd better go on. We'll leave that. It's interesting.

Regarding the first nations, you co-manage with the first nations. I'd like you to give me a brief summary on how that is progressing.

Mr. Dan Lindsey: Okay.

The agreements basically lay out the rights of a first nation. This particular comprehensive claim created boards and councils so they could have greater involvement in the overall management of fisheries. When we're dealing with first nations, their rights are identified in the treaties but the boards and councils are constructed to inform management and to direct, to some degree, management activities. These are separate bodies. They're not representative of first nations. They're just some folks who have been nominated by first nations or by the minister. That's been a challenge for us within the initial start-up. Overall, it certainly sets a bit more of a tone as to the direction management takes based on the information and input of the boards and councils.

Instead of the way things were in the old days when Yukon said it was going to do this with the fishery and going to introduce this type of legislation, we're not in a position to do that anymore. We have to respect the bodies that were developed and take some of their guidance into consideration. That certainly has shaped how Yukon manages the fishery.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacAulay.

Mr. Chisholm.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Thank you, gentlemen.

I want to follow up on that line of discussion a bit. According to what you just said, we're managing the fishery more along the lines of the sustainability of the fishery as a food source or whatever, rather than in terms of the commercial or economic development aspects. That's interesting.

One of the points I wanted to make was that when we had senior officials from DFO here a few weeks ago, they talked about the northern fishery. One comment that was made, which stuck with me, was that the priorities for their activities were the subsistence fishery, the recreation fishery, and then the commercial fishery. I was trying to square that in my head and what that meant. You've just put your finger on it.

Let me move from there. You also talked about the relationship of the first nations and the Yukon government with the boards and councils that manage the fishery. That must be quite an interesting process. Could you comment on that process of managing the management activities with that goal in mind?

● (1225)

Mr. Dan Lindsey: It was a learning curve for all of us when the councils and boards fell into place and as more came along with each successive individual first nation final agreement.

You're moving from generally a fish scientist or fish biology focus to now considering a lot of human dimension issues, for lack of a better term, or social scientist type of issues. We weren't all that prepared for it. It was a situation where we had to slowly learn those skills and work with groups that collectively had very strong influences. It's no doubt created more upfront time, when we plan. In the long term, once you reach it, you have buy-in from the communities and the general public. From a territorial perspective, those are the people you're interested in.

It's been dynamic; that's for sure. At the end of the day, we still have the opportunity for the first nation governments to deal directly with the minister, on a minister-to-minister basis. The boards and councils are separate entities. They don't represent either government or first nation, but they bring first nation people and others together in trying to identify concerns. They generate many of these concerns on their own. Some, we bring to them and say, "Here are our challenges. Here's our dilemma. Here's what we're dealing with. What do you think about it?"

It's worked well from our perspective, but by no means has it been a simple process. At the end of the day, I think it's better than what we had previously, which was an arbitrary, single-minded focus.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: It's interesting to me. I introduced myself as being from Nova Scotia. I'm the fisheries critic for the official opposition. I've been dealing with the small boat fisheries off the Atlantic coast for 20 years.

That whole consultation management process, with the people who are involved, needs a lot of work. I was particularly interested in how your system works and am interested in learning more, so that we can come up with a better system in our small boat fishery, which would allow for greater participation and ownership of the decisions —hopefully, decisions that are made in the best interest of a sustainable fishery.

Mr. Nathan Millar: An additional value that comes forward in a system like this is that the identification of a problem or issue is no longer the sole responsibility of the management authority. Now, you're getting all these people who have very intimate knowledge of the resources, being on the land, saying that they see a problem and that something needs to be done about it. There is a real value-added component, from that aspect, of this system we're working in.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chisholm.

Go ahead, Mr. Woodworth.

● (1230)

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Thank you, very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, to the witnesses, for coming today.

I'm going to start with what I think are fairly simple questions, which I know you have the answers to and I don't. The first is that, as I look at the map, it appears to me that the north shore of the Yukon is the Beaufort Sea. Is that correct?

Mr. Dan Lindsey: Yes, that's correct.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Okay.

It doesn't appear to me there is any large port or entry point from the Yukon to the Beaufort. I wonder whether your fisheries industry is a Beaufort Sea fishery in any respect, or is it entirely a freshwater fishery?

Mr. Dan Lindsey: Our legal obligation is the freshwater fishery. There have certainly been discussions about the offshore fishery, particularly off the Beaufort. There's no road access to that, so largely the activity right now comes from the delta, from Inuvik, Tuktoyaktuk, and Aklavik, and from some of the communities of Inuvialuit and Gwich'in that fish there. There are very few suitable port sites on Yukon's coastline, with the exception of perhaps Herschel Island, which is wedged between the Ivvavik National Park and Herschel Island Territorial Park.

But it is the area where we certainly are seeing some of the warmest trends going, some of the close to six degrees, if I'm not mistaken, in warming activity. It's probably one of the hotter areas in the world that's changing, so we are seeing a lot more ice-free conditions in that area. We actually are starting to see salmon—chinook salmon, and I believe there's been coho salmon—that have never been seen up there before. Maybe they're doing a little bit of a loop around the Bering Sea.

But again, it's not our mandate in the offshore.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Regardless of mandate, it sounds to me like there aren't very many Yukoners who would be doing offshore fishing. Is that correct?

Mr. Dan Lindsey: That's correct.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: So we're really here to talk about freshwater fishing, correct?

Mr. Dan Lindsey: That's right.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: All right.

Regarding the role of DFO in relation to habitat, can you tell me if there have been any significant habitat issues or challenges in the last six or seven years for the Yukon fisheries? Or has it been running pretty smoothly?

Mr. Nathan Millar: I would characterize the main threats to habitat as mining—mineral extraction, both hard rock and placer mining—hydro development, and to some degree linear development, so roadways.

Yukon government, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and the Council of Yukon First Nations agreed some years ago to develop a new system for managing placer mining in the Yukon, but in particular the impacts of placer mining on fish. Just to clarify, because I'm sure people are wondering what placer mining is, it's a kind of gold mining that doesn't use chemicals. It uses water and gravity to extract gold, usually from stream beds. It tends to be a little bit more small-scale than the giant mines or open-pit mines that you've probably seen pictures of, but tends to be working directly in or nearby fish habitat.

That system...[*Technical difficulty—Editor*]...in place now for a number of years.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: I'm sorry, I just wanted to catch your last statement. Did that system, that cooperatively developed system, become finalized, and is it now in place for placer mining?

Mr. Nathan Millar: That's correct, yes. The Minister of Fisheries and Oceans has issued authorizations to permit placer mining activities in different watersheds. There is a set of rules and conditions that would apply to those operations.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Does the Yukon have any of its own environmental assessment procedures for mines and/or hydroelectric projects?

● (1235)

Mr. Nathan Millar: Yes, we certainly do. In most of Canada, the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act applies. In the Yukon, CEAA does not apply. We have a Yukon-specific act called YESAA, the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act. There's a very similar but different process that's very rigorous, which involves environmental assessment of all projects that have an impact on land and water in the Yukon.

So there's a whole regulatory system specific to Yukon that deals with environmental assessment.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Excellent. Thank you very much, gentlemen.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Woodworth.

Go ahead, Mr. Kamp.

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

Thank you, Mr. Lindsey and Mr. Millar, for taking the time to talk to us today.

I'm from British Columbia but have been to the Yukon a number of times. It's a great place. In fact, I was just there a couple of weeks ago.

The Fisheries Act of course now refers to commercial, recreational, and aboriginal fisheries. Each of those terms is defined in the act as well, after Bill C-38. In your report you talk about commercial, recreational, domestic, and subsistence fisheries. I just wonder if you could give us a brief clarification on what those terms refer to. I think domestic and subsistence are terms that are less familiar to us. Is the term FSC—food, social, and ceremonial—relevant at all in the Yukon?

Mr. Nathan Millar: Basically a subsistence fishery is our term for an aboriginal fishery. They are more or less interchangeable. But we distinguish between a domestic fishery, which is a licensed fishery, and a subsistence fishery, which is a fishery taking place under aboriginal treaty rights, so it's not a fishery that the Yukon government licenses. A domestic fishery, on the other hand, is typically done by non-aboriginal people for their own food fish needs. But it's a food fishery, which we distinguish from a recreational fishery.

I'm not a subject expert, but the way I understand the FSC—and maybe, Dan, you can clarify—is that, once the final agreements have been signed, they are constitutional level documents. They specify aboriginal rights to fish in Yukon. So all members of that first nation have their rights to fish enshrined in those final agreement documents. In most cases, those are different from FSC, which is cases where the final agreements would not apply. But basically those rights are enshrined in those final agreement documents that allow for food, social, and ceremonial purposes.

Mr. Randy Kamp: They have the right to fish under those final agreements. Do they have the right to sell those fish under the agreements?

Mr. Dan Lindsey: I can speak to that. The agreement basically gives a first nation the ability to trade amongst first nation members. They cannot sell that for commercial gain in a public market or separately for what would normally be considered trade amongst themselves for sharing. So they do recognize that and the agreements do recognize that. There is only actually one reference to it in the agreements, where we identify commercial fisheries. As an economic benefit they have the opportunity to receive 26% of the commercial fishing licences, once we had a transitional period. That was not part of the fish and wildlife chapter. It was part of the economic benefits chapter.

I think for the most part in the Yukon there is a fairly clear distinction between commercial and subsistence fishing. With the subsistence fishing, for the most part, we've never had a concern about sale. There's been a little bit of barter and trade amongst first nation folks but largely not a significant piece.

● (1240)

Mr. Randy Kamp: Okay. I have one more question, and then I think I will have run out of time.

You haven't painted a very rosy picture of commercial fishing in the Yukon. In fact your report talks about $65,000 of economic output as measured in 1986, and the report says it has actually diminished since then. It doesn't sound very robust at all.

You talk about the lakes where it takes place. It sounded as if there was some tension because there were not enough fish to go around and that kind of thing. Do you have a formal principle that recreational fishing has priority over commercial fishing? How do you manage the overlap? I guess that's the fundamental question.

Mr. Dan Lindsey: I'll speak to the general piece, and then if Nathan has any comments, he can certainly add to my response.

Part of it is that the productivity in northern lakes is not what you would see in southern jurisdictions. If you have been here, you know that the lakes are not all that productive, in comparison. We have very slow growth rates. The ratio of ice-free versus ice-covered time is significant. So we have lakes that aren't nearly what you are familiar with by way of productivity.

Also, speaking to your second question, I would think that, without its being written in stone.... First of all, the subsistence fishery has priority. That's clear. As for the recreational needs, or the interests of Yukoners in acquiring food or acquiring the opportunity to fish, implicitly a policy has been coming out through the boards and councils, but not written as a formal policy. If you were to analyze all the recommendations and all their input, I would think the outcome you would have would be that recreational fishing would be the second important piece, with commercial being third.

Mr. Randy Kamp: Thank you very much. I appreciate this.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kamp.

Gentlemen, I want to thank you on behalf of the committee for taking the time today to answer our questions and enlighten us on some of the facts you face in the Yukon. Certainly we appreciate your offer, if the committee decides to travel, to help facilitate some of the arrangements. I'm sure our clerk will be in touch with you, when that decision is made.

Once again, on behalf of the committee, I want to say thank you very much for taking the time to meet with us today. We appreciate the information you provided to this committee.

Go ahead, Mr. Lindsey.

Mr. Dan Lindsey: Thank you. We look forward to your coming up here and spending a couple of days on the lakes and seeing for yourself what kind of experience you can have.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

There being no further business, this committee now stands adjourned.