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Chair

Mr. Rodney Weston

Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

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● (1110)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Rodney Weston (Saint John, CPC)): We'll call this meeting to order. I'd like to thank our guests for joining us here today. We have one by video conference, Mr. Martin.

Can you hear me all right?

Mr. Alan Martin (Director, Strategic Initiatives, B.C. Wildlife Federation): I can hear you, yes.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We can hear you as well, Mr. Martin.

Mr. Riddell, thank you very much for being here as well.

We're going to start off with presentations.

Mr. Riddell, if you would, start with your presentation. We generally try to keep the presentation to around 10 minutes so that we have plenty of time for questions and answers from our members as well.

Any time you're ready, Mr. Riddell, go ahead. The floor is yours.

Dr. Brian Riddell (President and Chief Executive Officer, Pacific Salmon Foundation): Thank you.

Ladies and gentlemen of the committee, thank you very much. I think you are addressing a very important topic for west coast Canada and across Canada. I said in the text that I provided to you that I think you're talking about something that we consider “fabric of life” on the west coast, and I really mean that. We have a very substantial following, and I think you'll see right away that it's economic, social, and cultural. It's also fair to say that this is a very complicated fishery to manage; that it gives us opportunities and challenges as well.

My experience is very much limited to B.C. and to mostly tidal waters. Mr. Martin is much more capable of talking about the freshwater recreational fishery. I drew your attention to the Freshwater Fisheries Society of BC and provided a web link to it. I provided in the material submitted an excellent summary report of the economic value of the recreational fishery. That was provided in 2013.

I also highlighted in my text a number of statements, which the Pacific Salmon Foundation strongly endorses, provided to you by Mr. Greg Farrant with the Ontario hunting and angling federation. In that text, he makes a number of excellent points that we would certainly want you to keep in mind. I won't read them but have just noted them in my text.

I want to emphasize one point he made, on the promotion of recreational fishing as an investment in our future. I think this is a very important point—difficult to quantify, but I think one of the most important things we can do for our communities.

He also identified that, like any industry, recreational fishing requires ongoing investment, support, and promotion for achieving its potential. This is the main point that was addressed by Dr. Gerry Kristianson and Mr. Owen Bird on March 31 as well. They have provided the minister with a document called the “Recreational Fisheries Vision Implementation Initiative”. That is fundamentally what it's about: how we better regulate and manage the true benefits from the recreational fishery in western Canada.

I won't read my background. I provided it to you only so that you know where my perspective is coming from. I want to emphasize that, when we talk about the recreational fishery in B.C., we're talking about many fisheries—probably hundreds—because of the diversity of different species and the habitats that they use.

Probably the best documented evidence I can give you about the economic value of the fisheries is provided by the provincial government. They have a series of reports called “British Columbia's Fisheries and Aquaculture Sector”. It's a financial assessment. They identify four sectors: the commercial fishery, the aquaculture sector, processing of fish, and then the recreational fishery.

The numbers provided in the document for recreational fishing include those for freshwater and tidal fisheries. It's an excellent document. It gives you a lot of detail on how they define the various sectors and gives you three metrics of value to compare the sectors and two time periods. They give you the GDP, or really a measure of the net economic value to the economy; they give you employment; and then the give you direct values on expenditures.

I'm not going to go through the details; you can see them in the document. I think it's a very clear indication of the economic value and significance of the fishery in British Columbia. It really does stand out currently as the leading economic driver.

I place two other issues as equally important, though. One is the contribution that the anglers and angling communities provide to conservation in Canada and also to the social and educational value of the fishery. In B.C., the most direct indication of contribution to conservation is the salmon stamp. In tidal waters, anyone wishing to retain a Pacific salmon must also buy a stamp with their licence. It's not the licence; it's “in addition to”. At this time, it costs only six dollars, but we have between 225,000 and 250,000 people who buy it annually. You can simply do the math to indicate that it generates a significant amount of money. All of that money, because of a decision by the current government in March 2013, is returned to B. C. through the Pacific Salmon Foundation so that we can invest it in work through communities to restore salmon habitat, manage small hatcheries, and do community planning and education.

At the bottom of page 5 in my text, I give you the recent five-year table of the actual money from the stamp and the money that goes out in grants, which is the stamp plus my foundation's donations that we contribute to the communities. The total value is the value of the entire project conducted, including community values, which have to at least match. I'll read you the values from the top of page 6, because they are the strongest indication of the contribution I can give you. Since 1989, when the stamps started, through 2014, the Salmon Foundation has managed $9.2 million in stamp revenues, which has been translated into a total project value of $90.2 million invested in salmon habitat and restoration.

A 10:1 ratio on investments is not a bad deal. It really does show the the power of community and large numbers. We use that money in habitat, small hatcheries, and then in education, outreach, and community planning. Those are the six categories where we invest money.

The other thing I want to emphasize is that it's not just money that the anglers contribute. Many of them participate in these programs and do hands-on conservation.

The other point I'd like to make is that we definitely support the current recreational fisheries conservation partnerships program. We see it as complementary to the foundation because you have a large upper value of $250,000 per project. Very few of our projects ever get to that size because communities must match the money. Now, with a larger source of funds like that, we can take on bigger programs using networks or partnerships programs. A particularly good example is the restoration of estuaries in the Strait of Georgia that are very commonly neglected.

Let me move on to the social value. I want to emphasize the educational element. As we look at licensing and stamp sales over a long period of time, there's no question that there is a slow, steady decline. We interpret this to be a lack of recruitment of younger fishers or new fishers into the program. I think that an educational program is an important complement to the recreational fisheries conservation partnerships program now, which focuses on habitat. We have to invest in the youth and new fishers to support our future. We emphasize that in the foundation. I've given you a couple of examples where we have things like family days where you don't need a licence to go fishing. The organizations will provide rods and reels, and teach people how to fish. A family can get together and do that for a weekend. There are 50 communities in B.C. that do this now.

Let me go on to the issues and opportunities, because the difficulty with the recreational fishery is its scale. It's made of hundreds of thousands of people, with millions of boat days of effort, and it's a huge challenge to regulate a fishery such as this. I think this is the emphasis that you saw from Mr. Kristianson and Mr. Bird. I want to emphasize that the Salmon Foundation fully endorses their implementation initiative. It does have strong merit, and particularly money into catch reporting and stock assessment. They have initiated important programs as well. There are two examples I gave you: certified tidal anglers, which is about public safety when you employ a charter fisher, and the other is a fisher app. This is using smart phone technology to improve our ability to get messages out to anglers and for anglers' safety in terms of where they are and weather communications, and eventually into catch reporting.

The other thing is opportunity. I want to point out that the recreational conservation stamp has been $6 since 1996. With the current numbers of people, if we simply adjusted that for the cost of living, which we have in all of our annual statistics, it would be $9.80 or essentially $10 per stamp in current value. That extra $4 would be another million dollars to invest into the habitat community, which we could match with the recreational fisheries conservation partnerships programs. It's small steps like that because of the huge numbers that really provide the power of that recreational opportunity.

I wanted to endorse that one of the things the Salmon Foundation would certainly recommend is a continuation of the national recreational fisheries conservation partnerships program. We do see it as complementary. I think there are five submissions that we made this year for it and they all involved restoration of the Strait of Georgia estuaries.

I want to finish by making a point that I started with and say that the recreational fishery is a part of the fabric of life on the west coast. We believe that so strongly in the Pacific Salmon Foundation that we have our largest project ever directed at restoring the recreational fishery in the Strait of Georgia. This is the Salish Sea marine survival program.

● (1115)

I can't go into the details of it. I gave you the website. All the information is there before you. The objective is to understand what happened to salmon production and how to restore it, because the Strait of Georgia alone used to support the most valuable recreational fishery in Canada, but that all stopped in two years in the mid-1990s, and we don't know why yet.

We are taking it on because we think that's the most important project we could undertake in B.C.

I simply want to say thank you again for taking this on. The Pacific Salmon Foundation and the recreational sector have worked closely together since the foundation began in 1989, and we think that you have taken on a really important component of resource management and use in Canada and for all Canadians. Thank you very much.

● (1120)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Dr. Riddell.

Now Mr. Martin, the floor is yours when you want to proceed.

Mr. Alan Martin: Thank you very much. I appreciate the opportunity to address the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans. I certainly will focus from a B.C. perspective and echo the words of Dr. Riddell, in terms of the core values of fish habitat and fisheries to the people of B.C. from an economic, social, and cultural perspective.

As a bit of background, I represent the B.C. Wildlife Federation, a non-profit, non-partisan conservation organization. We have 46,000 members in over a hundred clubs distributed throughout British Columbia, and our members contribute over 300,000 hours annually to fish and wildlife stewardship.

I will say a couple of words about myself. I am a fisheries biologist by training. I am a member of the Hunting and Angling Advisory Panel. I am also a member of the provincial round table on the environment and the economy, and I am on the board of directors of the Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation and the coastal centre for aquatic health. I do have a background in fisheries, but as Dr. Riddell said, it's primarily focused on the freshwater side.

As an organization, the B.C. Wildlife Federation's goals are to promote British Columbia's use and enjoyment of fish, wildlife, and outdoor recreation. Certainly the sustainability of the resource and the sustainability of the opportunities afforded to the recreational fisheries are a fundamental interest of our members. Our priorities are to increase investment in fish, wildlife, and habitat management in the province; increase opportunities for hunting, fishing, and outdoor recreation; and increase influence through partnerships and collaboration with government, first nations, stakeholders, and other organizations. We see collaboration with federal agencies, provincial agencies, and non-profit organizations, including the Pacific Salmon Foundation and others, as being essential to moving forward in terms of both long-term sustainability of the resource and maintaining opportunities for recreational fishing.

In terms of the importance of recreational fishing, 400,000 anglers fished 3.8 million rod days, both in fresh water and salt water. Anglers contribute more money to our economy than the total capture fisheries—$936 million in expenditures and $326 million in GDP—and create 8400 jobs in B.C., many in rural and small coastal communities. Of that, 56% is driven by the saltwater or tidal fishery, and 44% is contributed through freshwater.

In terms of conservation, recreational anglers contribute $3.2 million from fresh water through the Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation, and approximately $1.4 million through tidal licence conservation stamps. Not to put too fine a point on it, non-tidal anglers—and there are approximately the same number of anglers—contribute twice the amount of money to the Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation. As an organization of participants, we have an opportunity, I think, as Dr. Riddell has pointed out, to increase the contribution through the conservation stamps, and our members are already doing that with the contributions through the surcharges on freshwater licences.

There is an opportunity to increase investments, and what I am saying from an organization that represents hunters and anglers is that there is the appetite, desire, and need to invest more in recreational fishing in B.C. We think there is a tremendous opportunity. If your committee would take leadership on this, it would hopefully be able to accelerate that agenda federally.

● (1125)

In terms of angler profiles, basically there are 338,000 freshwater anglers and 228,000 saltwater anglers.

What do we catch? In freshwater we catch about 9 million fish per year, of which we keep about 2 million. In saltwater we catch about 3.2 million fish and keep about 1.6 million.

I think we need to increase investment in program priorities. I think those areas should be fisheries catch monitoring; hatchery transformation and modernization; and science, research, and development in projects such as the Salish Sea. We also think it is a priority to extend the recreational fisheries conservation partnerships program.

What level of investment should occur? The Province of B.C. recently committed all the licensing money to go into recreational fisheries management through the freshwater fisheries program. I think a similar investment of investing all the tidal water licence revenue in fisheries catch monitoring; hatchery transformation and modernization; and science, research, and development, to the tune of $5 million a year, would provide some symmetry in terms of the approach both in terms of licence revenue and its application federally and provincially, and the investment of surcharge and stamp money for habitat-related activities.

So investment for management functions certainly has been reduced and there is a great need for stock assessment and harvest monitoring, species and ecosystem management, research and development, licencing systems, data management and analysis, public consultation and communication, as well as marketing and education.

What would this investment mean? I think certainly it will increase recreational participation and angler opportunity. As Brian said, increasing participation will result in healthier and more active families, increased stewardship and protection; increased leverage for conservation; more licence revenue; more jobs; a healthier rural and coastal economy; and a balanced, solution-based approach to recreational fisheries development.

The key outcomes that we're trying to achieve as an organization include, first of all, and fundamentally, sustainability of the resource through the conservation programs and also development of opportunities for recreational fisheries for the key social, economic, and cultural objectives. I think we need to collaborate nationally, provincially, and locally, and I think the investment is due. We need to implement, evaluate, and communicate our successes. As we've seen through the fisheries partnership program, there is a large amount of capacity out there waiting to be energized and waiting for an investment back both to the resource and to recreational fisheries.

Thank you very much.

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

We're going to start with a 10-minute round. We'll begin with Mr. Chisholm.

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Gentlemen, thank you very much for your presentations.

There is certainly no denying by anyone who lives in this country how important the salmon and the recreational fishery is to not only the country but also to British Columbia.

Certainly there were some things that happened over the past decade. Dr. Riddell, you referred to the runs in the Fraser River or the sockeye in the mid-1990s and how things changed, and that led, of course, to the Cohen commission. It's very important to the sustainability of that stock to find out those particular answers.

One of the first questions I had was, are you satisfied that enough has been done to follow up on some of the recommendations by the Cohen commission? Or is there more that can be done relative to the sockeye?

● (1130)

Dr. Brian Riddell: We're really touching on two issues here. One I have to point out is that the sockeye, about every two out of four years, is a recreational opportunity. When the commercial fisheries open, recreational fisheries can retain sockeye, but it's not a driving force in most years and in most areas. In terms of the recreational fishery program I don't think that the Fraser sockeye issue is paramount.

In terms of the response to the Cohen commission and sockeye salmon production, more generally, I think most people would say that there has not been a comprehensive response. I think you'll find that many of the independent groups are taking on other responsibilities and taking on some of those roles. Certainly with the Salish Sea marine survival program, our first funders that allowed us to raise $8 million, were the Pacific Salmon Commission's endowment funds. They are under the U.S.-Canada Pacific Salmon Treaty. They contributed $5 million of the $20 million required. We have dedicated some of these resources to understanding the dynamics of sockeye salmon.

As a particular group, we're definitely trying to address some of these things. One of the issues that continues to linger is the potential for interaction with salmon farming in Johnstone Strait. We're also working on that. This year we are implementing sort of a second generation of acoustic arrays, which is a specialized type of tagging program. It's an active tag that you can insert in salmon and then you use passive arrays on the bottom of the ocean. By this we can get direct measures of survival, migration rates, and migration timing around the farms and through the entire ecosystem. There's a lot of money being invested to continue the study of Fraser sockeye, but I think the common answer would be that most people on the west coast would not say there's been a comprehensive response.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: I guess—and Mr. Martin will bring you this—I'm talking about the tidal waters particularly. With respect to habitat management by the DFO and habitation protection, there are some concerns that there's been quite a reduction in the capacity of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to do that work. I know that the Pacific Salmon Foundation and other non-profit groups have been stepping in to some of that breach to do some of that conservation work.

I'm wondering if either one of you wants to comment on whether enough work is being done, number one, and number two, whether there's sufficient coordination of the work that is being done to make sure that over the long run that conservation work is moving forward in dealing with some of the habitat management issues.

Mr. Martin, do you want to start?

Mr. Alan Martin: Yes, certainly. In terms of implementing conservation projects, I think there is a great deal of coordination between the various non-governmental organizations in collaborating and implementing projects.

I think the larger issues around habitat and habitat management are the changes in the Fisheries Act and the fisheries protection program. DFO held a number of workshops, which have included NGOs and federal officials, on how the new fisheries protection program has been implemented and run out. I think they've made strides in communicating that.

I think there are two components to this. One is preventing damage to fish habitat and the other is remediating it. I think the jury's still out on how effective a fisheries protection program will be. There are certainly some high level cases, such as the Mount Polley case that is currently under investigation provincially by the Conservation Officer Service. It's important to note that the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans and Environment Canada are participating in that. Clearly there is federal-provincial coordination on that side of it. We'll have to see what the outcome is there.

I think fisheries protection will always be a work in progress, and prevention is a much higher priority over the long term than trying to recreate habitats that have been damaged. That's where the emphasis should be put.

● (1135)

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Dr. Riddell, did you have anything to add?

Dr. Brian Riddell: Maybe just two quick points.

First, I'd like to emphatically support what Al just said about prevention. We talk very glibly about restoration, but really, effective restoration is costly and not high probability. We always tend to lose something. We have to be very much aware of that.

Second, I think the only thing I'd really add to what Al said is that NGO groups, private organizations, and universities can step in to a certain degree, and I really would call this a matter of scale. When you get a continuous barrage of development proposals, things like pipelines or major port developments, these are things that public groups would really struggle to deal with, and I don't mean just being vocally opposed to them. If you really have it coming and you have to do restoration and manage the impact, there is a certain scale where you simply have to have government leadership because they have the experts and the resources.

Even with the Salish Sea initiative that we're undertaking, we have 47 organizations involved in a network that's implementing this program, but the real leadership is in the expertise of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, because of their laboratories and their staff. We simply can't do things independently of them because of their capacity. So there is a certain issue where you can depend on community organizations, and certainly, Ducks Unlimited would come into this sort of thing, Trout Unlimited in other areas, but there is a scale where you still need government assistance.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: The point about prevention, I think, is an important one. It was the case in the Fisheries Act that when there was an undertaking, when there was a development that was going to have an impact, you could get an equivalent offset and moneys could be allocated. The developer or whoever was putting in the pipeline or doing the development and damaging the habitat could pay for another project somewhere else. I know that in Nova Scotia, for example, where I'm from, they're having some difficulty getting the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to properly recognize the need to redirect money to areas that would be preventive, as you've suggested.

I'm wondering what your experience has been in British Columbia, Dr. Riddell.

Dr. Brian Riddell: Well, that requirement is still in the new Fisheries Act. So I don't think there is any fundamental change there. No, I'm sorry, I would say that the fundamental change is that the onus is on the developer and then reviewed by the department. But the requirement for offsetting still exists.

Now there's a lot of concern about how offsetting is going to be handled and they are still trying to work this out. Al made the point that there are a number of workshops that we've had, but there's one particular thing we're concerned about. In the past, people took some solace that if there was a major development, compensation would be in place and in kind; it had to be nearby, it had to be similar, and therefore it would support species similar to what were there before.

In some areas we're simply running out of those in-kind, in-place locations and so now we have this idea of habitat banking and offsetting elsewhere. That's a slippery slope.

● (1140)

Mr. Robert Chisholm: That's where you get into the problem with repair and prevention, because as you've properly said, if we don't stop the damage before it starts, we're running out of opportunities to find places to fix.

Dr. Brian Riddell: Well, we have opportunities to respond but some of the new regulations, in our opinion, are limiting our opportunities. I'll just give you one example that we're still talking to Fisheries about, and this is the 10% in cash compensation. We have locations where, if there's development, there's not a lot of habitat around that you need to fix. Rather than this idea that 10% can only be used in cash, it may be far better to take more of the compensation so you can do the science, the stock assessment and the management, and so that you can approve the use of resources available to us. That might be better compensation, but you will have groups who will say that it's a small ratchet; you continually lose pieces of habitat. It's a difficult call and I'm not sure that everybody's totally happy with the regulations at this point in time but they're still being worked out. We're still in discussion.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Weston.

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Nashville has its country and western stars and LA.A. has its actors, and in British Columbia we have our B.C. Wildlife Federation and our Pacific Salmon Foundation. We're proud of you and we're proud that B.C. is a place where we venerate our salmon and our fisheries and our outdoors.

When you throw around these numbers, gentlemen—about 30,000 to 40,000 volunteers at the Pacific Salmon Foundation, and I think you said 43,000, Al—it's truly astounding. I'll never cease to be as amused as I was when the fisheries minister came out—Minister Shea—heard those numbers, and then walked into the Coho Festival in west Vancouver and saw thousands of people living the whole saga of salmon and paying tribute to our environment and outdoors. She really got it.

So thank you for the things that you do.

When we look at the genesis of the recreational fisheries program, what the government wanted to see was certainly a restoration of habitat, but also the inspiration of people to take to Canada's outdoors, to help support our habitat restoration and the things that we're doing. The things that you're talking about, a 10:1 investment, for instance...that's why our government wanted to restore the salmon stamp revenues to the PSF. It's happened, and we're very pleased at those results.

Our committee has done some things that I think respond to what you just said this morning. We did a study on salmon aquaculture that culminated a couple of years ago , and one of the recommendations was that we create a closed containment salmon aquaculture centre of excellence, and some of us are still working on that. We are encouraging our government to pursue this. That was a unanimous report by our committee.

In B.C. we've seen the fisheries minister come several times; you've hosted her. We have a great parliamentary secretary who is one of the longest serving parliamentary secretaries in any department, who knows the area inside out. And many special projects have been undertaken in the last few years.

Dr. Riddell, as to the Salish Sea marine survival program, I support it. I know that the B.C. government caucus supports it. We think this could be really great for the future of B.C. salmon.

As one of those who called upon the government to do something that generated the Cohen commission, I would just like to say that the government has said it uses the Cohen report to inform its decisions, and I hold our government to account on that. On the things we do in fisheries and the environment, I expect the government to take the Cohen report seriously. I do, and many British Columbians who participated in that commission do as well.

Let me ask you this question. Dr. Riddell. It's astounding—30,000 to 40,000 volunteers. Can you tell us what are some of the best practices that the foundation has developed to generate that kind of impact in the province of British Columbia? They attract all those volunteers.

Dr. Brian Riddell: Well, let me say that the source of those volunteers really does come back to a government program called the salmon enhancement program that was initiated in 1977. The Pacific Salmon Foundation was established in 1987 and it really got going in about 1989. We were able to really build off the community program within the salmon enhancement program. The nucleus was there in groups like the streamkeeper federation of B.C.

There was a good footing in place that was initiated by government. By having the seed money to support these community groups, we've been able to provide them with technical expertise. We do a very careful technical review of every project before we fund it and then we work with them to implement the programs.

I think the support for the endowment and why we've been successful in matching their money and bringing in so many donations from individuals and corporations is because we take managing people's money very seriously. We have a very strong, independent board of directors from business leaders throughout B. C. We have a required practice of technical review, and then board review, and then approval all the way up through the course. If anyone has a problem with why they weren't supported, we'll have an answer for them.

I think that accountability has really been one of the key elements to it.

The fact that we continually have money that we can invest because of the support from corporations and individuals has really built the nucleus of community programs. There are 345 community organizations in B.C. and the Yukon that we provide money to on a regular basis.

● (1145)

Mr. John Weston: Mr. Martin, do you want to elaborate on how you attract so many people to support what you do?

Mr. Alan Martin: There are two areas.

First of all, people who participate in fishing and hunting and outdoor recreation certainly have an interest in their local watersheds and landscapes, and they take them very seriously. Whether it's the Pacific Salmon Foundation or the Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation or other sources of income, there are very well-organized grassroots and local organizations that tap into various levels of funding, often collaboratively, to undertake projects of various sizes and scales. If you look at the drain that the Province of B.C. has put on the recreational fisheries conservation program, it's because of that capacity and its history that we're able to respond quickly to any opportunities.

Part of it is structure, as Dr. Riddell has pointed out. A lot of it is history, and both a diversity of local groups and a diversity of opportunities wherein people have the desire and interest to improve the environment around them.

Mr. John Weston: Dr. Riddell, you described that 10:1 ratio. The foundation has never depended solely or even significantly on government funding for its operations. Would you care to discuss a little bit the tension between working with government and making sure that there's a healthy amount of financial support from the community?

Dr. Brian Riddell: That's the yin and the yang. It really depends on whom you talk to.

The only time the PSF has ever really depended on government money was for a major five-year program called the Fraser salmon watershed initiative. It followed from the federal government's green plan in the 1990s. The Fraser, of course, is our most important salmonid watershed. It's one-third of the province of B.C.

There was money driven by what's called the B.C. Living Rivers Trust Fund—I guess it was $22 million—established in 2006. We used that money to leverage $5 million of federal money and $5 million of in-kind labour for a five-year program, and it ran from 2007 to 2012, by the time we finished. That's the only time we used a directed fund like that.

The difficulty with it, of course, is that it doesn't encapsulate all of the people of British Columbia. There were large areas that felt they weren't getting attention. We had to be very careful to direct other moneys to balance that spending in other areas.

Money is tighter now, and I think we've matured as a foundation. We have the community program, we have science programs, we have educational programs. We have found that we've been able to generate enough money from corporations and individuals that we haven't had to rely on government.

Now, for the Salish Sea marine survival program, we have a request in for the final $2 million. This is where I say it's the yin and yang. You talk to some people, and they don't want to give you money if government is giving you money. Other people don't want to give you money unless government is involved, to show that there's an interest. The way people see federal money very much depends on whom you're talking to and what the issue is.

Overall, right now we include the stamp money as a federal contribution in our cost accounting. Many people don't see it that way; they see it more as money from people fishing on the west coast being returned. We don't depend on government funds at all right now, but if we get the money today with the federal budget, we will have raised $10 million in two years to complete the Salish Sea initiative in Canada. That's going to be a major step forward.

● (1150)

Mr. John Weston: To be clear on that, is it $8 million from the private sector?

Dr. Brian Riddell: It's $8 million from other donations—from foundations, private individuals, and corporations.

Mr. John Weston: Again, there's tension between the two. You recognize it, you deal with it deftly, and you get great support from the community.

Let me distinguish between grassroots and grass tops. In terms of the leadership that the foundation provides, you can talk about all those numbers and people in the communities doing what they do, but you also started with a group of distinguished people whose names and reputations added to the appeal of the foundation.

Do you want to comment on that? I'm thinking of all the recreational fisheries organizations around the province that will be looking to the foundation as a model. How do you choose your board? How do you make sure that you have the kind of reputation that the foundation has managed to maintain?

Dr. Brian Riddell: I think we were fortunate to have an extremely strong initial board. George Hungerford was asked by Minister Tom Siddon at the time to chair it and to find other board members. We had the Honourable John Fraser become an early board member and John Woodward with the Woodward family name in B.C. There were very select groups, or individuals, selected to be the initial board. We had strong representation from the first nations. Bob Wright represented the recreational sector very passionately as only Bob could.

We did benefit from having a strong board leadership in the early going. Now we take a more strategic approach to replacing board members and the current composition in terms of their expertise. Do we have sufficient number of people on it to enable corporate fundraising and reaching out to people? Do we have people with the expertise in the recreational sectors? We have two members who are prominent in the lodge industry. We do look carefully at board membership, but it's always about accountability and composition of the board.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. MacAulay.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Cardigan, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I want to welcome the witnesses here today. Dr. Riddell, it's interesting that most of the funding that you access is now from the private sector I take it.

Dr. Brian Riddell: Yes it is.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: You talk about the stamp funds and education in one sentence. I think education is vitally important. I'd like you to elaborate a bit on what you do in the education line. That is important in my opinion.

Dr. Brian Riddell: I agree. Most of our education funds are not stamp funds. I think the percentage of stamp funds shown in the text of my remarks is 23% for education, outreach, and training. The education amount is probably in the range of 10% to 15%. It always differs between the years.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: What dollars would that represent?

Dr. Brian Riddell: Probably something like $100,000 or less each year. What we do with it is that we have a program in B.C. called incubators in the classroom. There's a core curriculum in the education program about Pacific salmon and the ecosystems in B.C. Fundamentally we support them. There's one program that we support that you may have seen out here, and it's very common in B. C. If you have public schools with frost aluminium fences everywhere, we have colourful fish that become big streams and they're wooden fish that are cut out. It's part of a curriculum program where they teach children about not putting contaminants in drains, marking stream drains, and teaching them that all drains lead to salmon habitat.

● (1155)

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: How long have you been at this and could you give an idea of the success? I think it's so important. We have done a number of studies here on invasive species and this type of thing, which have caused so much trouble for governments and everyone else. I think education in all areas is so important. Is it just in the institutions that you're in, or do you do education other than that? Are you talking about what you do in schools and on the fences? I guess that would be out of the schools.

Dr. Brian Riddell: I think the Pacific Salmon Foundation is mostly focused on supporting the school programs. Other educators that go into schools, such as the Stream of Dreams Society I just described, are working right across North America. I think they're only about 12 years old and yet have won 12 national awards for education. It's very successful.

I think in reaching outside of schools alone, the Freshwater Fisheries Society and the Family Fishing Society are like that. Those are more community based organizations and they're supported by a lot of what Al and I have talked about today. We in the Salmon Foundation are currently reviewing our strategic plan and looking at a significant increase in investment in educational programs. It could be through new publications, or it could be through a lot more money into trips to see salmon in the rivers and to talk about it, and that sort of thing.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: You indicated that there were 345 groups getting funding. Could you give the committee an idea of what the groups do? What is the allocated funding used for? It would be a wide range I would imagine, but in general.

Dr. Brian Riddell: Absolutely, it's a very wide range. In the beginning, the logo of the salmon foundation rather captures it: bring them back, stream by stream.

These were very much local community organizations that had salmon in local streams. These streams required habitat restoration. You have to get rid of the shopping carts and the tires and whatever is there, so they would go in and do these stream clean-ups.

We've now evolved really beyond that. We're now looking at habitat restoration. For a long time, people used to take woody debris out of streams. It turns out that this was a really bad idea. It just makes a stream into a straight chute, so it's more like a stream drain. You have to restructure streams, and we look for recreating what they call riffles and pools.

All of this work is done under the technical guidance of the department or what we call registered professional biologists. They do a wide variety of small stream activity. We're now branching out more into the estuary work and to larger river systems. In many of these cases, you have to work with registered biologists, because it becomes more dangerous in larger systems.

These programs are evolving, and that's why the recreational fisheries conservation partnerships program has come at an opportune time for us to build on. They also do educational programs. They have their own programs whereby they go into schools, and they do a lot of enhancement.

The community enhancement program started with DFO's salmonid enhancement program in the early 1980s. Many of our community organizations now manage small community hatcheries. These are not our major hatchery production systems; these are small ones that would put out the tens of thousands of Chinook, coho, and chum salmon. Small hatcheries are the second biggest draw on our community salmon moneys.

Then we do stream enhancement restoration by opening up side channels that have become isolated from the flow. If you reconnect it, you immediately get benefits of fish production.

They build on their own partnerships. We have other organizations in the province, such as the B.C. Conservation Foundation, a very professional group that works in water management, now building small dams in some of the coastal lakes so that we can address climate change in the future.

So there are areas with a wide diversity of activities that these people get into. They're very creative.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Thank you very much.

Mr. Martin, from looking at the economic and cultural impact of the recreational fishery and at the recommendations that were made at the Cohen commission, are there recommendations that you feel should be implemented that have not been implemented? Are there recommendations that you think would do a lot more to help the recreational fishery in British Columbia?

Do you feel, also, that removing fish habitat protection from the Fisheries Act and cutting the funding has any effect? I'd like you to respond to that.

● (1200)

Mr. Alan Martin: I think an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. The fisheries protection program has been realigned, and the jury is still out concerning its ongoing effectiveness.

In a number of areas there needs to be greater investment. Some of them are related to Cohen and some of them aren't. I certainly think of hatchery transformation and modernization and increased scientific research and development to understand both how the environment is changing and how fish behaviour is changing with the aquaculture industry, but also with all the other cumulative effects that are going on.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Mr. Martin, I hate to interrupt you, but are you indicating that we need more funding for scientific research? Is that what you're indicating would help and what you're recommending?

Mr. Alan Martin: Yes, sir, I am recommending that.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Thank you very much.

I interrupted you; I apologize. Continue.

Mr. Alan Martin: The focus of Cohen was restricted to the return of the sockeye salmon. I think investment in the west coast, not only for recreational fisheries but for all other fisheries, needs to deal with the sustainability issues and deal with how the resource is evolving and changing over time in the face of development and climate change, and not just with one specific species in one specific timeframe. I think there needs to be a much more comprehensive view of the relationship between fish and fish habitat in both the freshwater and marine ecosystems.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Thank you very much.

Concerning quotas and looking possibly at the halibut fishery, there's always, as you know, a tug-of-war between the recreational fishery and the commercial fishery. Would you have any recommendations or any words of wisdom for the committee as to how this could be handled in probably a more favourable way for both sides?

Mr. Alan Martin: First of all, from a scientific perspective, I think the halibut fishery is very well managed. I think there can be increased fisheries catch monitoring on the recreational side, but ultimately the decision around allocation is a policy decision—a political one, not a scientific one.

I think we need to be very clear. Science will inform you in terms of where the opportunities are or where the threats are to the overall harvest of halibut, both in B.C. and in other U.S. states that harvest halibut. How you apportion that halibut in B.C. among the recreational, the aboriginal, and the commercial sectors is ultimately a policy decision between the commercial and the recreational fisheries, and there are certainly some issues in terms of first nations' constitutional rights for food, social, and ceremonial purposes that may apply to that fishery as well.

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

Mr. Sopuck.

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

Just to correct my friend, Mr. MacAulay, the habitat provisions of the Fisheries Act are still there, and I recommend that he look at section 35.

Regarding the Cohen commission, which has been brought up a few times, Cohen's mandate ended in 2009. Funnily enough, the sockeye runs in Fraser of 2010 and 2014 were the highest in history. I found that very interesting.

A study done out of Cornell University not that long ago looked at the conservation efforts of the hunting community. I have the honour of chairing the Conservative Hunting and Angling Caucus, and I deal with hunters and anglers across the country. Their conservation passion never ceases to amaze me. This particular study from Cornell talked about hunters—and it applies to anglers as well—as "conservation superstars" who get little credit for what they do, but it's incalculable in terms of the contribution to society.

I had the honour last summer of visiting the Oyster River enhancement project and saw, Dr. Riddell, exactly what you were talking about in the very gentle environmental enhancement that went on to produce and protect that salmon run. It was extremely impressive.

Dr. Riddell, I'd like to ask you specifically, what can we do to enhance Pacific salmon stocks? I know that as biologists one of our first responses is "more research", and I can certainly accept that, but in terms of actual, active projects, what can we do to enhance Pacific salmon stocks?

● (1205)

Dr. Brian Riddell: Well, we're doing a lot, as you hopefully have heard. As for where we can do more, there's an unlimited amount of work we could do in habitat, and we really do have to scale that over time because there are certain capacities.

One of the big areas that I think we're finding in terms of restoration of production is in the estuaries. On the west coast, we have one real model of success here with the Campbell River, which used to be a highly industrialized estuary. But if you were to see it now—and I think there are videos of it—you would see that it really is a natural-looking estuary that still has development around it but is greatly improved. Unfortunately, we have many examples of these.

We're also finding that in terms of big changes in production you need to really identify the stocks that are contributing significantly. What are the big producers? A lot of these tend to be in the Fraser River. The lower Fraser is certainly an area of great concern on the west coast because of future development there. A lot of people are very concerned about what we are going to be able to do to maintain capacity in the lower Fraser River.

I think we also have to keep in mind that one of the things we are losing is the stock assessment base, and we really do need to understand what populations are doing well or what are not, so you can tease out why. I have a great example of that. On Saturday, I was working with an angling group called the Avid Anglers, in the Strait of Georgia. They gave us the results of DNA analyses from catch in the Strait of Georgia.

It turns out that the majority of the fish they sampled last summer came from an area where we do almost nothing. It's natural habitat. It's the whole mainland coast around Powell River, Sechelt, and up into Johnstone Strait. It was so different from anything I'd seen that I really questioned them on how they could get that, but I think what it's telling us about is the power of natural habitat. We have to maintain and get the diversity of fish into the habitat. So that that means, really, that we have to know the abundance, and we have to regulate the fisheries, which the department has done for years. These animals have the capacity to come back, but the common factor in all of these is that they have to change from fresh water to salt water through estuaries.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: I happened to fish the Campbell last summer and saw the estuary. I think you've done a terrific job there. The number of pink salmon I saw was truly remarkable.

When I asked you the question, here's what I wanted to get at, or what I meant. You're saying that we need to focus on habitat, and that's fine, but I want you to be a lot more specific. If you had *x* amount of money and you wanted to work on an estuary, what would you actually do in the estuary? I want you to be really specific.

Dr. Brian Riddell: Well, being specific differs with every single estuary you turn to—

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Fair enough.

Dr. Brian Riddell: —but I'll tell you exactly what we're doing.

One of our main focuses on this sort of thing is the Cowichan estuary. What commonly happens in estuaries is that to get to deeper water we build causeways, or a port, or a mill or something. You can't fracture estuaries and maintain their productivity, because it's all about the connection of the flow from the fresh to the salt, the flats that contain the eelgrass, and then into the deeper water with the kelp. When you break that down and increase the silt load in the rivers, what has happened is that we've lost many of our eelgrass beds. We have about 40 community groups in the Strait of Georgia alone working to see if they can actively restore eelgrass.

In other areas, and in the Cowichan in particular, this year for the first time we got agreement to really open up one of these causeways, put in a bridge, and reconnect the entire estuary so that it now can flow naturally. It's still not natural because it still has the impediments, but there's a much greater flow. We have to look at the natural dynamics of these habitats when we're talking about estuaries.

The other thing we're really focused on is avoiding things like log-booming during smolt migration. In the Cowichan we have a very big problem, where seals use log-booming and prey directly on smolts going to sea. A very obvious response, if we can demonstrate the level of mortality, is to work with that one mill that's left and ask them to dryland sort for two months, not all year, but two months.

This could make a world of difference in production. It also will reduce the bark deposit on the bottom. In some estuaries, that has been there for 100 years, and we have a huge problem. We don't believe that you should even touch it. We think you should cap it, put rock on top, put the sand down, try to contain it, and then let the eelgrass restore itself.

For some of these estuaries, these are big issues.

● (1210)

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Yes, those are the kinds of things I'm particularly interested in, given that the recreational fisheries conservation partnerships program is very project oriented. I know that's a difficult question to answer because we never have enough research, but I really appreciate those examples.

Mr. Martin, you made a comment on the angler conservation passion. You talked about how there's "capacity" waiting to be "energized". I think that's what you said. What limits this pent-up demand for anglers and angling groups to do conservation work? Is it money? Is it time? What is it?

Mr. Alan Martin: I think there are basically three things that limit it. You need to have the right people, in the right place, and the opportunities for funding. Dr. Riddell mentioned the Cowichan. The Cowichan Valley has a very active stewardship group. They work in partnership with the Cowichan First Nation, and they also have the technical expertise, a lot of which comes from retired DFO employees.

The Cowichan really is a success story that started high in the watershed, where they remediated silt input at smolt slides. The consequence was that formerly very low chum salmon escapements to the system rocketed up when you took the silt out. Dr. Riddell has said that there needs to be some work done on the estuary, and that's certainly being done with the recreational fisheries partnerships program in the estuary. There is other work going on, particularly in terms of maintaining flows in Cowichan Lake, and particularly in the summer through changes in the operations of the weir at the outlet of Cowichan Lake.

If you have the right people, in the right place, and opportunities for funding, such as the recreational fisheries partnerships program, good things will happen. In the Cowichan, those three stars aligned, and it's been very effective. There are other areas in the province that, given the opportunity, I think will coalesce around these issues, look at things on a watershed basis, and link individual projects into a larger community initiative.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Thank you.

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

Thank you very much, Dr. Riddell. I certainly want to thank you on behalf of the committee for appearing today before us and sharing your thoughts with committee members and taking the time to answer our questions. We certainly do appreciate the time that you've given this committee as we pursue our study of the recreational fisheries in Canada.

We're going to suspend for just a couple of minutes to set up our next witness and then we will proceed right away.

● _____ (Pause) _____ ●

● (1215)

The Chair: We'll call this meeting back to order.

I'd like to welcome Mr. Sporer to our committee today.

Thank you very much for taking the time to join us this afternoon. As you are probably well aware, Mr. Sporer, we're studying recreational fisheries in Canada and will certainly welcome your opening remarks. We try to limit them to about 10 minutes so we can get into questions and answers from members as well.

So whenever you're ready, Mr. Sporer, please, the floor is yours.

Mr. Chris Sporer (Executive Manager, Pacific Halibut Management Association of British Columbia): Thank you.

As mentioned, my name is Chris Sporer. I'm executive manager of the Pacific Halibut Management Association of B.C., an organization representing commercial halibut vessel owners on Canada's Pacific coast. We're pleased to be able to make a presentation to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans as part of its study on recreational fishing in Canada.

We're here to provide the perspective of the commercial fishery, in particular the commercial halibut fishery, because considering recreational fishing, at least on the Pacific coast, cannot be done without looking at the broader context that includes the commercial fisheries and how they provide food to Canada and the world. We are concerned that without understanding the broader context, the committee could come up with a report that is incomplete and unfair to the commercial fisheries and to the people on fishing vessels—the people who fish for food and the families they support.

PHMA would like to provide some background information about the commercial and recreational fisheries on Canada's Pacific coast and then use our fishery to help illustrate the relationship between the two fisheries and how allocation disputes can be resolved. Given that Pacific halibut and most commercially harvested species on Canada's west coast are caught in tidal waters, our comments are focused on the tidal water recreational fishery.

As mentioned, commercial fisheries are about providing food to Canada and the world. In fact, commercial fishing is the only way most Canadians can access fishery resources for food. It's the public fishery. There are two components to the commercial fishing industry, fish harvesting and seafood processing, but one part cannot exist without the other.

In contrast, recreational fishing is a leisure activity that, at least for the tidal water fishery on Canada's Pacific coast, is undertaken by a small number of Canadians whose numbers have declined in absolute terms and as a percentage of the population over the past 20 years. The recreational fishery is comprised of two sectors. There's the private fishery, where individual recreational harvesters fish on their own, without the services of a guide. Then there is the fishing lodge and charter vessel sector, or the commercial recreational sector as it's sometimes referred to. These are businesses that, like the commercial fishery, profit from the harvest of various fish species. The fishing lodge and charter vessel sector can account for a significant portion of the total recreational harvest of a fish species, 60% in the case of Pacific halibut.

Finding common metrics for measuring the economic contribution of the commercial and recreational fisheries can be difficult. We know that people often fire economic numbers at committee members that are not comprehensible or credible. Committee members have to be careful not to utilize metrics or reports that are flawed or make apples-to-oranges comparisons.

In 2004 the provincial government commissioned a report that looked at the economic contribution of the commercial fishing, tidal recreational fishing, and aquaculture industries on an equal footing using a methodology that was approved by all user groups. The report shows, and continues to show in updates provided by the principal author, that the commercial fishing industry contributes more in terms of GDP, revenue, employment, and wages and salaries than either tidal water recreational fishing or aquaculture.

The commercial halibut fishery is part of Canada's Pacific commercial fishing industry. It has a landed value of approximately $43 million a year and a wholesale value of about $116 million. The fishery started in the late 1880s. Today there are fourth- and fifth-generation fishermen participating in the fishery. The fishery has played a vital role in British Columbia's economy and has shaped its communities, culture, and cuisine. Commercial halibut fishermen have worked hard over the past 25 years to transform their fishery into what is now considered one of the best-managed fisheries in the world. As a result, the David Suzuki Foundation has described the fishery as "one of the high-bar examples in the world" of how a multi-species longline fishery should be conducted. The commercial halibut fishery was also the first in B.C. to receive the globally recognized Marine Stewardship Council eco-certification, which acknowledges the fishery's catch accounting system as "one of the most rigorous in the world".

Fisheries managers need to know how many fish have been caught if there is to be sustainable resource management. Fisheries management does not work without precise and accurate information on total removals. DFO has this information for the commercial fishery. The department does not have this information for the recreational fishery. Improving the management and the monitoring of the recreational fishery, particularly for the fishing lodge and charter vessel sector, is urgent. Given that it can take a significant portion of the total recreational harvest—60% in the case of Pacific halibut, as mentioned—the fishing lodge and charter vessel sector should be regulated in a manner similar to that of a commercial fishery.

● (1220)

There is presently no DFO licensing of fishing lodge and charter vessel businesses and they do not have mandatory catch reporting requirements. The recreational fishery, in particular, the fishing lodge and charter vessel sector, needs to be able to meet global standards with respect to catch monitoring and reporting. Recreational fisheries in developed countries increasingly look toward Marine Stewardship Council certification in order to demonstrate sustainability. As we know in the commercial fisheries, market forces are powerful and can transform fisheries management. These recreational fishing businesses should strive to get to the same standards as commercial fisheries, whereby they too could be certified by the Marine Stewardship Council.

There has been a commercial and recreational allocation framework in place for Pacific halibut. It was implemented in 2003 following substantial consultations with all fishing sectors. The framework provided stability and certainty for all participants and, as a result, commercial fishing families made investments not only in fishing vessels and gear and access privileges but also in conservation, in industry-funded monitoring programs and research surveys to collect the scientific information necessary to perform stock assessments.

In 2012, the long-standing allocation framework was changed and the recreational allocation was increased by 25%, from 12% of the total allowable catch to 15%. That decision took away business certainty and stability, eroded the investments of commercial fishing families and made people reluctant to reinvest in the fishery. Who is going to invest if their access to the critical component of their business can be taken away?

The recreational halibut fishery is dominated by fishing lodge and charter vessel businesses. It is patently unfair to take allocation from commercial fishing families who have invested in the fishery; to take from one group of Canadian family-owned businesses simply to give it to other businesses. It also makes little sense to take allocation from a well-managed and well-monitored fishery and give it to one that is poorly managed and monitored.

The 2012 decision was unnecessary. New management changes introduced into the recreational halibut fishery in 2013 have allowed it to remain open and the sector has not had to fully utilize its new, increased allocation. Halibut that could have been utilized in the commercial fishery went uncaught, resulting in millions in lost revenues and associated economic benefits and employment. There is a solution and there's a better way that addresses allocation disputes in a manner that is equitable and transparent.

Under a voluntary program for Pacific halibut, recreational stakeholders—recreational fishing businesses or individual recreational harvesters—can apply for a no-fee licence and acquire commercial halibut quota via the market. This allows them to fish for halibut beyond the limits of the standard recreational licence as well as ensure continued access to halibut in the event the sector attains its allocation and the fishery is closed. This gives recreational stakeholders greater certainty and stability, particularly for business planning purposes.

It allows for the transfer of allocation between the two business sectors of the halibut fisheries—between commercial fishermen and fishing lodge and charter vessel businesses—as well as between commercial fishermen and individual recreational harvesters. At the same time it does not impede those choosing to fish for halibut under the standard tidal water recreational fishing licence.

Fisheries allocation disputes are generally thought to be unsolvable. Fishing interests are continually arguing and lobbying for a larger share and government always finds itself in the middle, spending considerable time and resources trying to deal with these disputes. DFO, the commercial fishing sector, and the recreational fishing sector have come up with a solution in the Pacific halibut fisheries; a way to solve intractable allocation issues in a manner that is fair, equitable, and sustainable and requires little financial investment and involvement by government. In fact, it removes government from the middle of the process. We hope all parties would endorse this approach as a solution to an otherwise intractable problem.

It is important to note that PHMA members view recreational fishing as a legitimate user of the resource. In fact, many commercial fishermen also recreationally fish. We have a great resource on Canada's Pacific coast that can provide food for Canada and the world and leisure activity as long as it is sustainably managed.

PHMA would like to leave the committee with three messages.

First, recreational fisheries, at least on the Pacific coast, cannot be considered in isolation; they cannot be considered without looking at the broader context that includes commercial fishing.

Second, market forces are increasingly bringing pressure for full catch accountability, one of the hallmarks of sound fisheries management. Recreational fisheries need to move in this direction sooner rather than later to ensure that B.C. does not get left behind and can instead realize a competitive advantage.

● (1225)

Third, there's a way to solve allocation disputes that can create a win-win situation for all parties rather than a situation where one party or the other always loses. It requires little involvement by government. In fact, it gets government out of the unenviable position of always having to be in the middle of these disputes.

We thank you for the opportunity to present to the committee.

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

We'll start off with a seven-minute round, and we'll begin with Mr. Cleary.

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Sporer. I find all this information on British Columbia's recreational fishery fascinating. I find it fascinating from the perspective of a member of Parliament from Newfoundland and Labrador. My riding of St. John's South—Mount Pearl has the largest fishing fleet in the province.

I have been a student of the fisheries for most of my life, but I learned things from this study that I had no idea of. For example, the recreational fisheries in B.C. are given an actual portion of the total allowable catch. As you stated in your notes, it has increased by 25%, from 12% to 15% in 2012.

With regard to the 12% of the TAC that was in existence until 2012, for how many years had that TAC for recreational fisheries been there, Mr. Sporer?

● (1230)

Mr. Chris Sporer: The allocation framework was implemented in 2003, when the recreational sector was provided the 12% catch ceiling allocation. There actually were years, in 2004 and 2005, when they didn't use their allocation and we actually leased that fish from them to use in the commercial fishery.

Mr. Ryan Cleary: This tug-of-war between commercial and recreational fisheries is not unique to B.C. We also have that on the east coast, for example.

A few of your remarks I found startling. One, if there's a TAC for recreational fisheries of 15% now, how can there be no mandatory catch reporting requirements? How do they keep track? How do they know when the 15% is caught?

Mr. Chris Sporer: It's basically based on an estimate using the available information they have. As I note in the report, in the commercial fishery we have concerns in that if we're going to have sustainable resource management, we need accurate numbers on total removals from all sectors, not just the recreational fishery but the commercial fishery as well.

We have a very rigorous catch monitoring system in the commercial halibut fishery, in fact in all the commercial groundfish fisheries on the west coast of Canada. There's 100% at-sea monitoring as well as 100% dockside monitoring. Every single halibut landed by our fleet is tagged in the tail with a unique serial number—

Mr. Ryan Cleary: I'm sorry, Mr. Sporer—

Mr. Chris Sporer: —by an independent validator.

Mr. Ryan Cleary: —but I still don't understand. How do they keep track of the total catch in the recreational fisheries? I know that in Newfoundland and Labrador, for example, when our recreational cod food fisheries open up, DFO enforcement is out there in numbers. They're out in Zodiacs. They're on shore with binoculars and in DFO trucks.

How do they keep track of the recreational fishery numbers? Is there dockside monitoring?

Mr. Chris Sporer: There's no dockside monitoring. There is a creel survey program, but that program has been cut back, to my understanding, in recent years, at least for some sampling. They use that, and they also will do.... It's based mainly on surveys. Fishing lodges and charters in some areas turn in logbooks. That's not a mandatory requirement.

Mr. Ryan Cleary: How is the halibut stock? Is it in good shape? Are the numbers up? Are the numbers down?

Mr. Chris Sporer: We're actually at some historic lows in the TAC. For example, over the past 10 years, the commercial TAC has declined by probably just over 50%. Having said that, halibut are managed internationally by the International Pacific Halibut Commission on the west coast. They do the science. They assess the stock as a coast-wide stock, all the way from northern California up into Alaska into the Bering Sea.

There have been some significant declines up in Alaska. We've had some declines in B.C., but survey results in B.C. are actually looking fairly positive. The concern, of course, is that halibut are migratory. They move from up in Alaska down into B.C., from west to east, if you will. We have to be cautious. We have to be careful. We have to make sure that we monitor and manage this resource properly.

Mr. Ryan Cleary: You have a specific concern that the monitoring of the recreational fishery isn't as stringent as it is for the commercial halibut fishery. Do I have that on the money?

Mr. Chris Sporer: That is a significant concern of our members.

Mr. Ryan Cleary: You talked about the number of Canadians who participate in the recreational halibut fishery having declined over the past 20 years. Can you give us some indication of the extent of the decline?

Mr. Chris Sporer: Sure. I generally look at four-year periods when I'm trying to do any work, simply because the commercial fishery here uses four years as well because the dominant sockeye cycle comes every four years.

If you look at footnote 2 on page 5 of my document, comparing the 1991-94 period to the 2010-13 period, it shows that total B.C. tidal water recreational licence sales declined by 29% over the 20-year period there. Sales of licences to Canadian residents declined by 22%, while sales of licences to non-Canadians declined by 54%. But over the same period, the population of Canada increased by about 23%.

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Do you also have a breakdown of the participants in the recreational fishery when it comes to the commercial recreational fisheries and, say, the food fishery—people who are out fishing for their table versus businesses taking tourists out in a boat to catch a few fish?

● (1235)

Mr. Chris Sporer: The only information I have there is that in 2011 DFO published a short report on their web page and it said that 60% of the total recreational halibut harvest could be attributed to the fishing lodges and charter vessels sector.

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Finally, in Newfoundland and Labrador jigging a cod for your table or your freezer is seen by many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, even so many years after the commercial moratorium, as God-given right.

This committee is not able to travel to B.C. It would be nice to be able to look into people's faces and ask them these types of questions, but how do people on the ground in B.C. see the halibut fishery? Is it a God-given right? Do they look at it as their absolute right to go out to fish for their table?

Mr. Chris Sporer: I think there are people from the recreational sector who would say that it is their right to go out to fish for halibut, or any species for that matter. I don't think anyone in the commercial fishery would dispute that. Many commercial fishermen fish recreationally. It's just that this resource needs to be managed in a way that makes sense and that is sustainable. There is room for everybody, but when the catches are down as they are now, we all have to take cuts, and then when the resource rebounds, we'll all benefit.

Mr. Ryan Cleary: But are the cuts proportional? Is the recreational crowd taking the same type of proportional cut as the commercial fishermen are?

Mr. Chris Sporer: They would have if the allocation had remained the same and had not been changed in 2012, but now commercial fishermen, because they now have a smaller share, are bearing a larger burden of conservation. They're paying a greater cost for conservation.

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

Mr. Kamp.

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

Thank you, Mr. Sporer, for taking the time to be with us today.

Let me begin by saying that I fully agree with your comments about the way the commercial halibut fishery is managed on B.C.'s coast. I was involved in the decision, back in the day, to implement the integrated groundfish fishery. I can tell you from this side that it was a pretty difficult decision, and I imagine it was probably at least as difficult or more difficult for the commercial sector to accept what was really being created by them but in a very cooperative and collaborative way. I really think it is one of the best in the world, so congratulations to all who have been part of that.

I think it hasn't been without its difficulties as well, but I don't want to talk about those today.

In your presentation, you mentioned the numbers. Just to clarify, you say a small number of British Columbians participate, and I suppose percentage-wise one might view it that way, but it's not an insignificant number. For recreational fishing, in British Columbia and around the country as well, if there are, say, between 300,000 and 400,000 British Columbians who fish recreationally, that really isn't insignificant.

Just to clarify on the halibut, you've given some numbers but I think your numbers are about recreational fishing for all species, not just for halibut. I think it is pretty clear that the interest in recreational fishing for halibut has actually increased over the years. Is that accurate or not?

Mr. Chris Sporer: Well, for example, in the past four years the average number of licence sales to Canadians has been about 260,000 tidal water recreational licences. That's about 0.74% of the Canadian population.

With respect to the increase in interest in halibut, if you look at the DFO national survey on recreational angling in Canada for 2005 and for 2010, I think you will see that in 2005 the total of fishing for days fished was about 9.5% of the total days fished, and it was about 11% in 2010, so there has been a slight increase. But if you look at the numbers, you see that what really drives the recreational fishery in B. C. is salmon, particularly chinook and coho.

Mr. Randy Kamp: I would agree with that, although I think it's clear that there is a significant growth in interest for fishing recreationally for halibut, which you may not have seen in 1990, say, compared to 2010.

My colleague Mr. Cleary has raised this, but for what your presentation called the "commercial recreational sector", as I know many refer to it, or the lodge and charter sector, what are you proposing there in terms of greater involvement? I guess I'm talking about what the federal government can do, because there may be other things the provincial government can do. What are you proposing in terms of more monitoring and so on and, I guess, more accountability?

● (1240)

Mr. Chris Sporer: The first thing is that there is no licensing of that sector, so DFO really has no understanding of how many charter vessel operations there are or how many fishing lodge operations there are. They have an idea.

If you license those operations, for example, and make it a no-fee licence—that way you avoid any complications with the User Fees Act—once you have a licence, you can place licence conditions on them. Then, just as you do in the commercial fishery, under those licence conditions, you can specify what the monitoring requirements are.

I don't think I have the answer here. I think there are a lot of good lessons from the commercial fishery, but I think those are the types of things.... As you pointed out correctly earlier, the way the groundfish fisheries are managed now was worked out collaboratively by both the industry and DFO in trying to find ways to address their objectives. That's the type of thing that needs to happen for the commercial recreational sector as well.

Mr. Randy Kamp: That might provide some answers in terms of what is caught by people going to a lodge or using a guide, or in some kind of charter operation, but what about the private fisherman who goes out and is that "tin boat angler", as they are sometimes referred to? Do you have any proposals on how to better monitor that fishery?

Mr. Chris Sporer: That one's a little more complicated, but at the same time, right now the only way to get a tidal water recreational licence is through the Internet, through the DFO licensing system, so right there you have one point where you can access everybody. Again, it's similar to what you do in the commercial fishery, and we've heard from the recreational sector that they're willing to pay more in licence fees or in fees to improve the monitoring of their fishery, but they're having trouble getting around the User Fees Act.

Well, why not just make it a condition of licence that before you go online and get your licence, you need to register with a service provider for $10 or $20 or whatever the dollar amount is? You go online, you register there, and you get a code. You then come back onto the DFO thing, sign in, and get your recreational licence, and you have monitoring requirements, just like in the commercial fishery. It could be that you need to just hail-in to your service provider, saying when you're going fishing and where, and they can make arrangements to come to sample you at the dock.

Again, I think it's one of these things where you don't need to sample everybody. You just need to make sure that you're doing a representative sample in a peer-reviewed process to determine what is an acceptable level of monitoring. But right now there's a bottleneck. Everyone's getting their licence through the Internet, so there's a way to use that.

Mr. Randy Kamp: I have one final question. You speak very positively about what I think is technically called the "halibut experimental recreational fishery program", or the ability for the recreational sector to purchase commercial allocation. It has been described for us by another witness as a failure. Can you comment on that?

Mr. Chris Sporer: The program started in 2011. In 2011, 68 licences were issued. In 2012, there were 61. In 2013, there were 103. In 2014, there were 107. There's a significant amount of quota being transferred there. You can compare the numbers. For instance, Alaska started a similar program in 2014, and our numbers are comparable with what you see in Alaska, but in terms of participation in southeast Alaska, for example, there were 92 licences issued, while in central Alaska, there were 19 licences issued.

I think that shows one thing. Just because there is not a lot of participation, or what may seem to be not a lot of participation, it doesn't mean that the program is a failure. It can mean (a) that recreational anglers don't need or want any more access and are comfortable with what they have, or (b) they don't value it as much as the seafood consumer does on the commercial side, because it's the seafood consumer, the end user of the product, who ultimately determines the landed price paid to commercial fishermen.

Mr. Randy Kamp: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. MacAulay.

● (1245)

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

I want to welcome Mr. Sporer to the committee.

In terms of the recreational fishery, does DFO know how much the recreational fishery, let's say the lodges, takes out of the halibut fishery?

Mr. Chris Sporer: DFO in 2011 estimated it to be about 60% of the total recreational halibut harvest.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]...and how would you impose this?

Mr. Chris Sporer: I'm sorry, you broke up there, Mr. MacAulay. I couldn't hear you.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: On the monitoring, you say it's about 60% of the quota. It is not exactly monitored. How would you recommend to this committee that this be monitored so that we would know what's taken out?

Mr. Chris Sporer: First of all, I think there are lessons from the commercial fishery and that you would need two components, catch monitoring and catch reporting. There needs to be mandatory catch reporting. It needs to be done in a way that is efficient and not costly for government. For example, with all kinds of technology out there now, information can be entered directly into the computer over the Internet.

At the same time, though, there needs to be a catch monitoring function, an auditing function that can come in and audit that this catch reporting is effective. We use camera technology in the commercial fisheries. You could have that camera technology, not necessarily on fishing charter vessels and on boats—although you possibly could on some—but on the docks where those fish come in, and have requirements that the fish.... When they're cleaning the fish and putting them down, you could take a picture. There are all kinds of ways that technology today can make it very cost-effective and a very effective way to produce and improve catch monitoring of virtually any fishery.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: To my understanding, Mr. Sporer, most of the monitoring is paid for by the people involved in the fishery.

You also indicated that the quota for the recreational fishery in 2012 was increased from 12% to 15%. Then you also indicated that part of it was leased back by the commercial fishery.

Looking at that, would you have any recommendation to the committee in terms of how there always seems to be a tug-of-war between what the commercial fishery needs and what the recreational fishery needs? As you said, you leased it back. Is there a way there could be a program put in place that would satisfy both, in leasing or paying for quota or whatever? I'd just like you to comment on that area.

Mr. Chris Sporer: Just to clarify, when the commercial sector leased the recreation allocation, that was in 2004 and 2005. So that was earlier on.

With respect to my comment about how this could be done, there's a mechanism in place right now with the recreational experimental program that allows recreational stakeholders to access and acquire commercial halibut quota via the market. That's already in place.

With respect to if the recreational harvest is being underutilized, DFO replied to us in a letter last year, as I quoted in footnote 10, and basically said that they don't feel the catch estimates right now are good enough on the recreational side to make what is perceived to be any unused allocation available to the commercial fishery. But there are mechanisms to do it.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: There are mechanisms to do it either way, then.

Mr. Chris Sporer: Yes.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: You're telling the committee that there are mechanisms for the recreational fishery to lease fishery from the commercial fishermen. Is that what you're telling this committee?

Mr. Chris Sporer: Yes. There are mechanisms in place. We've done it. We leased recreational allocation in 2004 and 2005. The recreational sector has been leasing quota from the commercial sector since, I believe, 2008 or 2009.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: I'd just like you to comment on the three recommendations that you made to the committee at the end of your presentation: recreational fishery not in isolation; market fairness, and I believe you might be referring to monitoring; and allocation resolved. Just give the committee a general view of how you would analyze these three recommendations.

Mr. Chris Sporer: On the first one, when I say that recreational fishing, at least on the Pacific coast, cannot be considered in isolation and cannot be considered without looking at the broader context that includes commercial fishing, virtually all of the fisheries resources on Canada's Pacific coast are fully subscribed. Any time there's a change to one sector with respect to access and allocation, the other sectors are affected. I think the committee needs to bear that in mind when doing its deliberations.

With respect to the second point that market forces are increasingly bringing pressure for full catch accountability, that is one of the hallmarks of sound resource management. What we've experienced in the commercial fishery is that market forces can come to bear very quickly and very rapidly, and you can get behind the eight ball very quickly. We've seen it in other fisheries. We've been fortunate in the halibut fishery and the groundfish fisheries, as Mr. Kamp alluded to; he was involved in that. Significant changes were made in all the groundfish fisheries and introduced in 2006. You have to stay ahead of the curve, and I think B.C. needs to make sure it doesn't get left behind.

Third, there are ways to solve allocation disputes that will get government out of the middle. Government just has to set the rules, step back, and basically monitor the quota, as they do now, and where it's moving, as they do already in the commercial fisheries. It creates a win-win situation, where people will voluntarily choose and make arrangements. You'll get win-win rather than one party or the other always losing.

● (1250)

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

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacAulay.

Mr. Leef.

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

Thank you, Mr. Sporer. We've focused a fair bit on recreational fishing in Canada's inland waters, so it's interesting to hear information around tidal waters—and, of course, the commercial perspective that's being offered is certainly beneficial.

In your intro, you talked about 60% of the catch in the case of Pacific halibut being in the fishing lodge and charter vessel sector. Anecdotally, it makes sense to me that this would be the case. There are guides and infrastructure and generally greater season lengths and opportunities. But how do we know that number? How do we come up with 60%?

Mr. Chris Sporer: Just to be clear, it's 60% of the total recreational harvest of halibut. Basically, it's an estimate that DFO does based on a number of sources.

As I said, in the commercial sector, there's quite a bit of concern about whether those numbers are accurate. That's because, if they're not accurate, if you have one sector that is overharvesting, it affects everyone who's using that resource. What we need is a catch monitoring and catch reporting system that has been peer reviewed, that has been looked at by scientists and statisticians who have said that it will produce accurate numbers.

For instance, in the commercial fishery, when we moved to using cameras on our vessels—video-based camera systems and electronic monitoring systems—DFO required us to go through a peer review process and undertake a study. In comparing an observer with the camera, I think back then it cost us $30,000 to do the report and the study, and then we had to go through a peer review process.

We need to make sure that whatever those numbers are, they're accurate, if we're going to have sound resource management. Right now, there's concern in the commercial fishery—right or wrong—that the numbers are inaccurate.

Mr. Ryan Leef: Yes, I know, and that's a fair point. I think the committee fully appreciates your comments on that piece.

With those estimates—again, I appreciate that we're dealing with estimates here—what's the estimate of the total recreational catch in comparison to the commercial catch? I didn't see that in your presentation, so if it's in here, excuse me.

Mr. Chris Sporer: Well, like I say, now we fish to 85% of the allowable harvest. In the past few years, the total harvest for Canada has been between, say, 6.5 million and 7 million pounds, in that range. The commercial fishery is fishing to 85% of that and the recreational fishery is fishing to 15% of that. In 2013 they were below their allocation by about 300,000 pounds, and last year I think the recreational fishery was below its allocation by about 120,000 pounds, based on the estimates using the current system.

Mr. Ryan Leef: Okay, and on the total allowable harvest, the TAC, compared to the stocks, how safe is that buffer?

● (1255)

Mr. Chris Sporer: That's a big question. The science is done each year by the International Pacific Halibut Commission. There has been a treaty in place since 1923, where an international body does the science and sets the TACs for Canada and the U.S., and then each country manages its fishery respectively.

The survey numbers look very positive, but we have to be cautious. Each year the IPHC does the survey and the weight per unit effort, as they measure it, is relatively high compared to historical values. We can go back to 1995. It's looking fairly good. The commercial CPUE is quite high but, again, we have to be cautious because halibut migrate from Alaska out and down into B.C. and down the coast, and things aren't looking as good up there. They may have turned around a bit, but we have to be cautious, and we have to keep those things in mind.

Mr. Ryan Leef: Yes, I appreciate that.

I see in some of the footnotes you have that the average weight of recreationally caught halibut in British Columbia is almost 19 pounds. Do you have an indication of what the weight for commercial would be?

Mr. Chris Sporer: Commercial is probably in the.... We classify it as 10-20, 20-40, 40-60, and 60-plus. In terms of an average weight, I don't have one off the top of my head. I could certainly provide that for you. I just don't have it on hand, but it would be more than that.

Mr. Ryan Leef: I am curious about the halibut biology. I really don't know much about halibut biology. In terms of that average weight of 19 pounds for the recreational fishery, and in terms of the commercial fishery, what is the breeding stock weight of halibut if that's averaged out? Is there an optimal release weight?

I know inland fisheries better. We want to release the older, bigger lake trout because they are the primary breeding stock. Does it work the same way with halibut, and is that release possible? Could we have some comments on the biology end of it?

Mr. Chris Sporer: Yes, that's a good point. For halibut, the larger females produce more eggs, so you want to try to leave those larger females in there. The size and age of halibut have dropped on the west coast, here in Alaska and B.C., but you do want to avoid the big females if you can. A lot of people do want to target a trophy fish in the recreational fishery. Halibut can grow quite big—some of the records are 400 pounds—but it's the bigger females that are more productive in terms of egg laying.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Ryan Leef: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sporer. On behalf of the committee, I want to express our thanks to you for appearing before us today and taking the time to answer our questions.

Thank you to all.

There being no further business, the committee stands adjourned.