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Chair

Mr. Scott Simms

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• (1555)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.)): Hello, everyone. Welcome to a belated start to our committee hearings this afternoon. I thank you for your patience.

Gentlemen, I understand that Mr. Rosser is unable to be here, but we have you four, and we look forward to it. I understand that you've been gracious enough to extend your time with us, given the fact that we've just had votes.

I'd just like to remind committee members that, following this, we have a discussion on committee business. The subject today will be what we do in May and June. We have done March and April but we'll talk about May and June, as well as other committee business that you may want to bring up.

Today we are discussing issues of the supplementary estimates (C), and we have questions.

Mr. Muldoon, I would ask you to go first.

Mr. Marty Muldoon (Assistant Deputy Minister and Chief Financial Officer, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good afternoon. I have very brief remarks to go through. A deck has been provided to you in both official languages. That will guide the remarks that I'll share with the committee today.

Before we do that, please allow me to introduce those sitting with me here. On my left is Jeffery Hutchinson, recently appointed deputy commissioner of strategy and shipbuilding for the Canadian Coast Guard. Immediately to my right is Kevin Stringer, our senior assistant deputy minister for ecosystems and fisheries management. On my far right is Trevor Swerdfager, assistant deputy minister of ecosystems and oceans science. Tom Rosser is our senior assistant deputy minister of strategic policy. He is currently hung up in Boston at the International Boston Seafood Show, which is a fairly major event for the department.

The appropriations process is not news to this committee. I just wanted to quickly reference that we're in the third supply period of the cycle. For us, as I'll explain in very brief remarks, it's a fairly important supply, because of the way this particular year has unfolded.

I'll just pass over the supply timeline but you'll note the growing appropriations for the department. We'll come back to those numbers again.

As we know, there are three supply periods for this year. It is unusual for us, but the department went in supplementary estimates

(A) because that was the opportunity to bring in the infrastructure funding. We brought in \$203 million in that first supply period, which is a large amount of funding. Almost all of it was for the infrastructure initiative to get us out of the gates and going for the fiscal year.

We were not in the second supply period, supplementary estimates (B). That was primarily reserved for items coming immediately out of the 42nd general election and the hot issues that evolved from that.

Therefore, this year, in a bit of an unusual way, we have fairly substantial supplementary estimates (C) as a result of having held on for the bulk of the year.

The table that appears in the official publication of the supplementary estimates (C) can be found on page 2-32 in English or on page 2-72 in French. What it shows you is that there are 25 items that we're seeking your support for through the voted process. Overall the supplementary estimates (C) total about \$184.5 million of which \$182.7 is subject to vote. The difference is the \$1.7 shown on the table in the total column, our statutory items that are brought in through other enabling legislation. Primarily, our employee benefits increases for the year.

The bottom of the page frames for you what the key increases are related to. I'm going to get into those in just a second.

Supplementary estimates (C), authorities to date, is interesting from my perspective because when you look at the horizon of each of the years previous to this year, you'll notice a fairly level total authorities story for the department. This year, in 2015-16, you see a fairly significant jump. That's because of the two big drivers and we're going to see those in this estimates process today.

This is our capital investment. We're one of the departments in the public service that has a tremendous range of capital assets and a need for capital investment to build our marine fleet and, as I mentioned in our opening remarks, this year we brought in about \$190 million just for the infrastructure program alone.

Let's move then to some of those details in your official documents under the explanation of requirements section, page 2-32 or 2-72. These are the big items and there are just a few other things that I'll touch on. Let me just explain quickly what they are and help align us with what our estimates are requesting of this committee in terms of support.

The first item is this year's installment of some \$116 million for the ongoing construction of the offshore fisheries science vessels.

We are building a package of three of them through Vancouver Shipyards. We're well into construction mode now. This year we're bringing a substantial investment into those construction costs. Over the next two fiscal years in particular, but ongoing for maybe three years in total, we're going to see some big numbers for this program. Next year, it's going to bump up into the quarter-billion-dollar range to support this build.

Moving down a notch, we have \$23.3 million for incremental operating costs. This was a year in which Fisheries and Oceans, after we had begun the year, ran into a few unexpected, unplanned requirements: things such as litigation and settlements for cases that have been ongoing for a while; things such as unexpected events, which in many cases occurred on the world stage, such as the MV *Marathasa* incident in the harbour at Vancouver—things that were adding up for us that we couldn't find a way to sustainably manage when we were early in the fiscal year. We sought and received approval for an incremental investment to help us with those operating surprises, if I could lightly put it that way.

Another item—and this committee has seen this a number of times—is incremental fuel for the Canadian Coast Guard. The way our operating model works is that we're funded for fuel to a certain threshold, and inevitably every year we need more than that threshold for the Coast Guard to sail all of our operations and run our icebreaking program annually. We seek, and pretty traditionally receive, a \$16-million top-up. The way that particular piece of funding works is that it's only accessible should we require it. If in a particular year we actually don't need a full \$16 million, the rest returns to the fiscal framework.

I won't go through every single item on this page. Moving to the next one, \$6 million is the renewal of a program that had sunset, for major projects management office funding. We're bringing back in now the first year of five years. This is an example of an item that, when we appear before you on the main estimates for 2016-17, I'll be seeking to bring in for the coming four more years through the main estimates cycle.

Skipping one, I'll go to the Pacific Salmon Foundation. We flow entirely the \$2 million named here through to the Pacific Salmon Foundation for a science research project that they're undertaking.

Last, just ending out the page, there are two more programs that were renewed. They have five-year funding profiles, so again we're bringing in this year's increment in supplementary estimates (C) and will bring in the remainder through the main estimates.

Slide 10 shows a number of other things that we're doing inside the house or between departments. Internally we are transferring funding between votes. What that basically allows us to do is move money that has been received in our operating vote for programs for which we wish to and would normally run a grant or a contribution with an external body. These internal transfers allow us to put the money from our operating into our grants and contributions vote. They're net-neutral; it's not a new ask.

Then the bottom item listed on that page is the transfers that are listed. There are eight of them, for which we transfer money to or receive money from a department through arrangements that have been made before the year begins. These are usually arrangements

whereby we're doing collaborative projects together or we are hosting a department in one of our facilities or are paying another department to do work on our behalf. Those are all listed in the supplementary estimates (C) documents on the pages following page 2-32, or in French page 2-72, as I mentioned before.

The final slide is slide 11. This is new for us. Anybody who followed the parliamentary budget office announcement or supplementary estimates (C) profile that he put out a week ago would realize that this is a new publication. It's not accessible through the supplementary estimates publications, but it is on the TBS and PBO websites. The PBO considers this to be an element of increased transparency. What it asks of the departments now is to declare those items which it feels it will be lapsing forward to next year and say what the reason might be. This table is a replication of the table that will represent our department.

This whole table totals \$28.7 million, and the vast majority is the single item on vote 5, capital expenditures. For us, as I itemize under vote 5, this is money we're pushing ahead to match our repair and maintenance needs for our vessel life extension program.

• (1600)

The usual issue for these things is shipyard capability and when we can get the vessels in for the major work that is required. We're moving the money ahead to match when the ships could be brought in.

That, in a nutshell, is what the supplementary estimates (C) publication represents for Fisheries and Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard.

Thank you.

• (1605)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Muldoon.

I'm assuming that you'll be the only one speaking for the opening remarks, so we're going to move on to questions right now.

Each of our members in this first round gets seven minutes.

Mr. Morrissey.

Mr. Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.): Correct me if I'm straying into different areas, but this is new to me. I'm curious to know whether you could take me to what your department's expenditures were as related specifically to enforcement and the amount that you spend.

Mr. Marty Muldoon: You wouldn't see it in the supplementary estimates (C).

We can certainly go into that lane, and I'll give warm-up time, if Mr. Stringer should need it. Basically what will happen is that when we're before you again—I think sometime in the near term we're coming to meet with you on the main estimates—you will see a much more conclusive and cohesive appearance of all of our budgetary requirements.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: We can deal with it at that time, if you want to.

I'll go back, Mr. Chair, to slide 9. I'm curious about litigation and settlements. Can you expand on that? I'm curious as to what cases these may be—whatever you can do without jeopardizing confidentiality.

Mr. Marty Muldoon: Certainly I can't go into the actual cases, but we're not a department that is not before the courts on incidents. The decisions we take can sometimes be contested, and as well, like the RCMP, for example, sometimes in doing our job we can break a pair of glasses. Things happen within the enforcement world. Things happen as a result of our policy decisions.

What happens is that we typically manage with a certain threshold of funding capability for litigation and settlement activity. Sometimes the costs exceed what we're able to handle, or they all come in bunches. This is one of those years when we had to brace ourselves for more than we normally set aside for it.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: What would be the range of those litigations settlements? Would you have that?

Mr. Marty Muldoon: It really varies.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: What would your largest single one be?

Mr. Marty Muldoon: The largest that has happened in the past? I honestly don't know the answer to that question. It could be in the low hundreds of thousands or it could be in the millions.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: And you wouldn't be aware of that?

Mr. Marty Muldoon: I don't have it off the top of my head, but I'd be happy to come back to the committee, if you'd like.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: I'd be curious to have it at another time.

On page 10, if I'm jumping correctly, your five internal transfers between DFO votes.... If I'm correct, the money was appropriated and voted on for a particular use, and then you didn't use it, so you moved it.

Where would it have come from, and where did that \$3.6 million go?

Mr. Marty Muldoon: That's the sum total, as outlined in the actual estimates.

The way it works is that we will often run our programs based on what will become the need during the year. The money is given to us for that intended purpose as an operating dollar in our vote 1, but we will then set up the profile for how much we need for grants or contributions. In order to make those payments we have to come here and convert it into vote 10 monies so that we can actually deliver the payment to the institution or organization that we're supporting.

We're transferring it in-house to get it into the right shape, and then it will run the various programs.

If I look at the list here, one of those was to allow us to continue our work with the North Coast-Skeena First Nations Stewardship Society. Another one was to advance our public relations activities concerning awareness of invasive species—for example, the Asian carp infestations—and to promote angler awareness and those kinds of things. Another one we have is the academic research contribution program.

Not knowing exactly what every individual contribution may be, we've worked ourselves towards knowing how much we need—the program experts are sitting here with me—and then we will put the money in the right frame so that they can make those contributions.

I'll turn it over to Mr. Stringer.

• (1610)

Mr. Kevin Stringer (Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Ecosystems and Fisheries Management, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): I'll add one example. It is a transfer from one vote to another vote. In other words, it comes in as operation and maintenance. That's what we have in our A-base core budget; we don't have specific authority to make a grant and contribution.

For example, Marty mentioned one of the transfers with respect to the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters. That was part of our Asian carp program. We have \$17.5 million over five years to do that program. It's in operation and maintenance. A decision was made that we really need to provide a grant, because they're doing some important communications and education work. These are for the most part small grants. There are five of them. None of them was for more than about \$300,000.

It's literally to transfer it from operation and maintenance to grants and contributions. I think all five were that.

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: What's that? I'm not even sure what the Standing Orders say about that, Mr. Sopuck. You may have a point. How about I get back to you? Mind you, I just wasted 30 seconds trying to say I don't know the rules.

Mr. Strahl, you have seven minutes, please.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Before I get into my questions on the supplementary estimates (C), Mr. Hutchinson, I noted that there were reports of a fire on a Coast Guard hovercraft, and I'm wondering whether you could provide this committee with a brief update, please.

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson (Deputy Commissioner, Strategy & Shipbuilding, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): We did have a fire on Coast Guard hovercraft *Mamilossa* around noon today. The vessel was operating in Lac Saint-Pierre, in Quebec. The fire was in an engine compartment. On the hovercraft, the engines are fairly self-contained. They're in an enclosed space with a forced air intake. That's how they're able to achieve combustion, if you will.

The crew of five is safe. The machine is disabled at the moment, but we have a helicopter and another ship on site keeping things stable. We've slowed traffic down in that area. When large vessels are going through that track, they're going to create a lot of wake, and when you have a disabled vehicle, particularly at this time of year, you want to keep it as stable as you can. Traffic is co-operating. It's very light at the moment.

We're looking into the cause of the fire, but at this point everybody is safe and sound and the vessel is secure.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Thank you, and please pass along best regards from the committee to all of the crew and those who are responding to this.

I want to stick with the Coast Guard. There is more than \$116 million listed for fisheries science vessels. Is that a cost overrun, or is it expected incremental costs for the Coast Guard?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: That money is not a cost overrun. The budget for this project was reset in 2015, and this is drawing down the first tranche of money from that budget. It is a large amount, there's no question about that, but we're now 40% into the first vessel, and the monthly goals are pretty significant. This is an expected access to cash that we need to pay for the vessel that's being built.

Mr. Mark Strahl: These are three fisheries science vessels. Is that the same project as the oceanographic science vessel, or is it a separate funding envelope that we should expect to see at a different time?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: These are different vessels. You can think of it very simply as that the fisheries science vessels are concerned with the health and well-being of the fish stocks themselves; the oceanographic vessel is primarily focused on the chemistry of the ocean, the temperature of the ocean, how currents are working. It does a little bit of other work, such as coring the seabed and that kind of thing, but the oceanographic budget and oceanographic project is a completely separate piece.

Mr. Mark Strahl: There's also listed funding of more than \$10.7 million to purchase search and rescue lifeboats. Where will those be deployed?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: Those new vessels form part of a larger program. These are not the 47-footers that you may be most familiar with. Most of our lifeboats are the 47-footers. These are the larger Arun class. They can handle heavier seas and can go further offshore. We've been doing a risk assessment on various geographic locations to assess where they'll best be deployed, but final decisions haven't been made.

•(1615)

Mr. Mark Strahl: The last time you were here, we talked about the Coast Guard station at Kitsilano. Is there money in these supplementary estimates (C) pertaining to its reopening? Or would we expect to see that at a future date as well?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: No, there's nothing for Kitsilano in the supplementary estimates (C). We would expect that to be in for the coming year.

Mr. Mark Strahl: I want to move to some of the transfers between organizations. That caught my eye. It's interesting to see a transfer from Fisheries and Oceans to the RCMP to provide "essential" services for staging the Pan Am Games in Toronto. Maybe you can walk us through what happened there.

Mr. Marty Muldoon: The approval for the funding was multi-agency for the security of those games. The way that model was set up right from the get-go was that there was a lead agency. If there was a need at any point during the process of that overall program rollout for a reallocation amongst those agencies participating in that endeavour, we would be corporate about it and do that.

In our case, the Canadian Coast Guard was able to deliver its full safety requirement contribution to the Pan Am Games without fully utilizing the dollars set aside for it. Another organization—in this case, the RCMP, as you note—needed extra funding. This is a

transfer of the funding that we didn't require within the envelope for costs they actually incurred and did require funding for. That's all it is.

Mr. Mark Strahl: I want to turn briefly to the \$2 million for the Pacific Salmon Foundation. Can you describe some of the work that's being undertaken there on the Salish Sea marine survival project? Obviously it was announced in budget 2015 and is still proceeding. Maybe you can describe what those funds are currently being used for.

Mr. Trevor Swerdfager (Assistant Deputy Minister, Ecosystems and Oceans Science, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): That work is proceeding, as you know. It's being done in a collaborative way, primarily with the Pacific Salmon Foundation, but not entirely. They are, if you will, the project coordinator and leader. Many parties, including DFO, are contributing to it.

Essentially, there are three avenues of inquiry. The first is what we're trying to do collectively, and please interpret this as the royal "we", as opposed to just DFO. It's collaborative. We're trying to understand more about what's happening to these animals when they go to sea. We have an awful lot of information about what happens when they're in their natal streams and how they behave in the early parts of their life. We know a lot about what happens to them up to that point when they leave. We don't know exactly where they go, and we don't know what happens when they get there, so there's a fair bit of effort devoted to that.

The second thing is to try to understand a little more about them while they're in nearshore waters, what is happening to them and what sorts of pressures and stressors and so on are upon them.

The third one is, for lack of a better term, a catch-all. We have a bunch of very specific questions. We're trying as well to amp up just a little some of our survey program work so we can determine out-migration a little better and improve some of our counting on the returns. The overall initiative is designed to get us to the point where we have a better understanding of what's happening to these animals, predominately after they've left, but not solely, and what's going on when they get to wherever they're going.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Swerdfager.

Mr. Donnelly, please, for seven minutes.

Mr. Fin Donnelly (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): In terms of operating costs and looking at ocean management, I was wondering if you could comment on Canada's commitment, the UN commitment, to achieve 5% by 2017 and 10% by 2020 in terms of marine protection. The departments obviously have to ramp up not only the process of protecting marine areas, but also significantly invest in the department's resources for marine planning and protection. I'm wondering if there is any money here or if it will be coming, and what kind of investment we are looking at and how soon, etc.

Mr. Kevin Stringer: Point number one is that there's nothing specifically in the supplementary estimates (C) that speaks to the marine conservation targets. I get your point about the challenge in terms of the investments.

Next—and I spoke to this the last time—the specific targets of 5% by 2017 and 10% by 2020 that have been set are very challenging and very ambitious and, we're saying, achievable. We will do it. Public servants will always tell you that it would be nice to have more money to be able to do that. This is a program that has been challenged in terms of resources, as many programs are, but it's something that I think we'd be dealing with in the future. There's nothing actually in supplementary (C)s to deal with that one.

• (1620)

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Thanks. I would also add that I think some of the stakeholders around the table would like to see the department have more resources as well, not just department officials but others in the process, whether it's provincial governments or non-profit organizations that are working with you on it.

Switching to fish farms for a second, I want to mention specifically some work by a couple of individuals, Alexandra Morton and Rick Rutledge, who published a paper in the peer-reviewed *Virology Journal*. I'm sure you're familiar with that. They looked at trout in Cultus Lake, which is also home to Canada's most endangered Fraser River sockeye salmon population run. This same virus has ravaged the salmon industry in Chile. I want to read you a quote from Alex Morton:

When [ISAV] travelled from Norway to Chile, it sat dormant for about eight years. Then suddenly, in 2007, it just took off and infected so many farmed salmon, it caused \$2-billion worth of damage.

Given that government testing facilities are over their capacity by about 30%, is there a consideration for outside help in terms of additional government investment?

Mr. Trevor Swerdfager: I guess I'd say a couple of things in response to that.

First, I would echo Kevin Stringer's comment to the effect that, just to be clear, there's nothing in the supplementary (C)s that addresses those issues materially, if there's any question about how that links.

With respect to the paper, we're aware of it. We have people who are looking at its conclusions. The debate around many of the topics that it touches on is a very robust one, as you know.

Insofar as lab capacity is concerned, on some of the issues that are touched upon, not only in the paper but in the regulatory domain that gets into that same field, lab capacity in that particular area for the most part is not a problem for us. We have lab capacity shortages in certain areas as compared to the demand upon them, because demand has continued to increase, but in this area our ability to meet the laboratory testing requirements and activities we think is actually quite sufficient.

Should the demand change, then we might have to think about different approaches to it, but for the most part, our lab facilities across the country—we have four that we use mostly for this sort of work—are extremely busy. They're working at full capacity, but their ability to touch on these sorts of things is quite high.

We also work in collaboration with people in the university community and in other agencies when we get into some of the other issues that are about more food safety and other things, so they're not only in DFO labs. We do have access to that set of expertise as well.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: I have just under a couple of minutes left, so due to time, I want to switch to the Coast Guard for a second and talk about the fleet operational life, which, according to my understanding, lags well behind 50% on the target. Maybe there's a comment on that. Also, construction delays and cost overruns are quite apparent in the current procurement process, and we've only achieved 20% of our critical milestones to date. I'm wondering if the government has plans to turn that around, and again, either here in the supplementaries or in the main estimates.

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: It is true that our fleet, particularly our large vessel fleet, is aging. I will note that our small vessel fleet has a much lower average age and is of much less concern.

We're looking in particular at the icebreaking fleet, for example, where the average age is creeping up pretty high. I'll say that on the one hand we build Coast Guard vessels to a high standard, so they do tend to last longer than what you see in the commercial world, and that's intentional. We put them through their paces. Icebreaking is a much more difficult task, as you can imagine, than moving cargo, but we build them to last.

In terms of the second part of your question about the longer term for the fleet, my team is currently developing the fleet renewal plan. We do that on a five-year cycle, and we have a 2017 complete renewal plan that will be due out. We're certainly working with the yards within the NSPS to maximize the time they'll have available to build ships as we move to later stages.

• (1625)

The Chair: Thank you. That's exactly seven minutes.

Mr. Hardie, for seven minutes.

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): I want to talk more about the science vessels. Who's actually managing the procurement of these vessels?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: The procurement under NSPS is a partnership, if you will. Public Services and Procurement is in charge of the actual procurement process. The defence procurement secretariat resides there, and the DPS is in charge of procurement. Our role is in partnership. We work directly with the yards to ensure that our specific requirements for those vessels are understood and they're being built to the standard we need.

The lead on the procurement process itself is PSPC, but the delivery of ships is a partnership between ourselves, PSPC, and DND as well.

Mr. Ken Hardie: I know that initial estimates can sometimes lead the average person astray in terms of what to actually expect, but I would like to get a sense of the number we started off with versus the number we will end up with for these science vessels.

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: The original budget for these vessels was set in a rather different time and place. For one, NSPS wasn't contemplated at the time, so the question of what a fisheries science vessel would cost was kind of using commercial comparators. I don't think they were the right comparators.

Second, those initial budgets didn't take several key things into account. They didn't account for inflation. If you have a delay in building the ship, a gap develops between the budget you set and the actual price for the ship, because inflation kicks in, and marine sector inflation tends to run hotter than general inflation.

Third, we know that some specific costs that are required for a shipbuilding project weren't included in those old numbers. Without getting too technical, warranties, for example, were not costed in. Engineering wasn't costed in. Insurance during the build process wasn't costed in. No matter where you build your ship or when you build your ship, you'll have some other costs within your project management that were never reflected in those budgets.

Our costing internally is significantly more robust than it was in 2005 or 2006. In fact we don't use the words "cost overrun". That may sound a little defensive, but we actually think of it in terms of properly setting the budgets at this time. We're trying to take a comprehensive view of what the project costs to run. We're taking a comprehensive view of the impact of commodity prices, inflation, currency fluctuations. We're definitely working towards costing on those vessels that's in a completely different league in terms of its reliability from the original numbers.

Mr. Ken Hardie: You mentioned a budget reset. What was the amount of the reset?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: The total project went from \$244 million to \$687 million.

Mr. Ken Hardie: That's quite a reset.

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: It is. Within the \$687 million, \$514 million is actually for building the vessels. Within that \$514 million, you have a fairly significant margin for contingency.

We set our contingencies fairly high at the moment. As people know—it's public knowledge—within NSPS we're working with a pretty green yard in Vancouver. They're following the growth curve. They are developing, but we're mindful of the fact that every process they run building our ships is the first time they've run that process. We have taken that into account in how we've set our budgets, but our third parties who are watching the process are saying they're where they would be expected to be in their growth and maturity, and these projects are where we would expect them to be as well.

•(1630)

Mr. Ken Hardie: Do you have a set cost and set time of delivery procurement with these folks?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: We do have a delivery date. Those three ships, the offshore fisheries vessels, are to be delivered before the end of calendar year 2017.

Mr. Ken Hardie: You haven't seen the first one yet but you're confident the other two will be built in time?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: The first one is well under way. The construction on the second one will start shortly. They will be building the ships in parallel. They don't have to work one at a time.

There are some interim milestones that we're paying attention to. I wouldn't say they're hitting all of them, but we're in discussion with the shipyard about the delivery of all three vessels by December 2017, which is their contractual commitment, and whether there will

be any slippage on that. I don't have a conclusive answer for you today. The yard is working to keep those three ships on schedule.

Mr. Ken Hardie: I want to turn your attention now to the work going on in the Salish Sea. The Cohen commission, obviously, is going to be a focus, particularly for me as the member from British Columbia on this side of the committee. Does the Salish Sea itself include the Broughton Archipelago?

Mr. Trevor Swerdfager: It does.

Mr. Ken Hardie: In addition to the work with the Pacific Salmon Foundation, can you talk about any other departmental allocations that are going into research that will at least help us understand the recommendations of the Cohen commission and resolve some of the issues it raised?

Mr. Trevor Swerdfager: There are a number of areas where our research is targeting that broad geographic area that some people call the Salish Sea. You can use whatever geographic boundary you like.

Essentially, I would describe it as a focal point of our science program that tends to fall in three main streams.

One is around fish, fish stocks, and fish health itself. As I said earlier, we are trying to understand what is happening to these animals. What is happening when they are in their natal streams? Where do they go? All those sorts of things. What is affecting their health? This is the fish stock work. There is a fair bit of work being done, not only but primarily, on salmon, all elements of the salmon stocks. We do a fair bit of pelagic work there. In that whole geographic area, we are also looking a fair bit at shellfish, for a variety of reasons. I could talk about some of the content of that.

The second area of inquiry is more about the environment in which the fish are swimming, living. One of my colleagues earlier mentioned the oceanographic program. A big part of what we are trying to do is to understand or improve our understanding of the physical conditions in which these animals are living. Is temperature changing? Is pH changing? Is salinity changing? If so, so what? How do all these interact?

The third chunk of our work, which focuses a bit more on the Broughton but also throughout the west coast, is to try to take all of that, put it together, and model what we think will happen if certain disturbances or changes occur. There is a fairly substantive modelling element.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now in our five-minute rounds, we are going to start with Mr. Sopuck.

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): In a briefing note that was described in an article on February 24, a briefing note that your department wrote to the minister, there was a quote from somebody who wrote, "As minister, you are well-positioned to attest to how Canada's fisheries are managed in an effective, science-based and sustainable manner".

This is a rhetorical question, obviously, but since this appeared in the briefing note, I assume you stand by that statement, that Canada's fisheries, going back a decade or so, have clearly been managed in a science-based and sustainable manner. Given that I don't have much time, if you could, keep all the answers brief.

Mr. Kevin Stringer: Yes.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Okay. That's pretty brief.

In terms of the sockeye, for example, in the last five or eight years, when were the two largest sockeye salmon runs in the Fraser, which two years?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: I think 2010 was the big year, and 2014. I believe those were the two really significant years.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Interestingly, the Cohen commission's report ended in 2009, and shortly after that we had the two largest sockeye salmon runs in history. It is very clear that the system overall is capable of producing large numbers of fish. Is that correct? Is that a fair statement?

• (1635)

Mr. Kevin Stringer: Certainly, the system is capable of producing large overall numbers of fish. Those years, 2010 and 2014, were significant years. It is a four-year cycle, and the years four years before those were positive as well.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: There is no denying that there were some years before that when the sockeye run was extremely low.

Many people have criticized our changes to the Fisheries Act, but in spite of the changes we as a government made to the Fisheries Act, those two massive sockeye salmon runs occurred. In terms of the statement that I read from the briefing note, in spite of the changes we made to the Fisheries Act, you will still attest that Canada's fisheries were managed in a science-based and sustainable manner.

Mr. Kevin Stringer: I would attest that is the case. Changes to the Fisheries Act may not have had a significant impact on the core fisheries management decision-making approach. I still think we have well-managed fisheries and we do follow scientific advice.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Yes. I certainly concur with that.

In terms of a program that I have a particular interest in, the recreational fisheries conservation partnerships program, perhaps Mr. Stringer or Mr. Swerdfager can describe how many projects were funded under that program and give me a quantitative estimate of the impact on fish spawning habitats and riparian habitats, if they have that.

Mr. Kevin Stringer: I'd be happy to do that. I can get you the specific number. I believe that upwards of 400 projects have taken place so far under that program.

We do have some specific numbers we've quoted in the past, for at least the first ones, that speak to the amount of linear kilometres or square metres of riparian habitat and fish habitat being restored. It really is a partnership program with local watershed groups, local environmental groups, and local conservation groups and angling groups that do riparian work, work on fish habitat restoration, and work on repairing fish passage and fixing up culverts and those types of things.

They're small things in the scheme of things, but when you add them up, with the 400 or so projects and the thousands of volunteers we've partnered with, this has actually made a difference.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Yes, I'm very quirky in that regard. I actually care about environmental results as opposed to environmental process.

In terms of the Atlantic salmon stocks, that's probably the most significant challenge you have as a department in terms of managing fish stocks. What do you see in the future for Atlantic salmon going forward and what do you think the next steps should be?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: It is a challenge. Atlantic salmon is a very complex system. We are seeing reductions at the southern range of Atlantic salmon. It's still in reasonable shape in Labrador and in northern Newfoundland. The farther south you go, the bigger the challenges. The U.S. is in really tough shape.

There was a panel, an advisory committee, that reported to the minister last July. We're looking at the results of the recommendations. The number of the recommendations was made public. We'll be looking at that. We'll be guided by that as we go forward. There will be a response to that.

We're meeting with the Atlantic Salmon Federation and with many groups that are involved in the Atlantic salmon fishery and that care about Atlantic salmon. Also, we have the Atlantic salmon advisory committee. There is also the wild Atlantic salmon policy. That requires a review, which we've been asked to do.

It is very complex. There are issues such as the Salish Sea issue. There are issues around at-sea mortality that nobody really understands. There's habitat. There is predation. There is the issue of whether you keep catch-and-release where we've been, and a number of other matters and measures that we're going to have to take a look at.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. McDonald, you have five minutes.

Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.): I have a couple of questions. If I do have any time left over, Mr. Finnigan has a question he'd like to ask, so I'll ask him to do that.

• (1640)

The Chair: You're splitting your your time.

Mr. Ken McDonald: I have a quick question on science. Since 2009-10, the department's core annual science budget has been reduced by some \$39.5 million to \$211 million. Is it your hope going forward that you can replenish that fund and increase the amount of science actually being done?

Mr. Trevor Swerdfager: Like my colleague said earlier, I would say yes.

You're quite right. There has been a diminishment in the program. I think it's possible that there will be further investments in the science program in the department, and obviously those would be welcome.

Mr. Ken McDonald: I have another question. On January 28, 2016, the federal government announced a contribution agreement worth \$150,000 with the Government of Nunavut under the federal certification and market access program for seals. Is that federal contribution of \$150,000 part of the \$474,000 in appropriations for DFO to establish a certification and market access program for seal products?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: I'll start by saying that I believe that it is, but if it's not the case and there's something different, we'll undertake to get back to the committee.

Mr. Marty Muldoon: I can give a bit of an added flavour to that. Basically, this is the beginning of a four-to-five-year journey we're on now to start to move the market access for the indigenous seal products overseas. It very likely is the relationship piece that you're relating it to, so we'll leave it as it is. If it's incorrect, we will definitely follow up with the clerk of the committee.

Mr. Ken McDonald: Could you provide an estimate of the annual cost of providing icebreaker support for the commercial seal harvest? For example, for a typical ice year, how many icebreakers, support vessels, and aircraft are required, and for how long?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: It's a very difficult question to answer. I can't give you a number.

One reason is that although icebreaker is an easy term to use, our icebreakers are actually multi-task vessels. We don't cost things by saying that an icebreaker is specifically tasked to a seal harvest or a specific activity like that. We don't view things that way, and it would be very difficult for us to work the numbers out on that basis.

The Chair: Mr. Finnigan.

Mr. Pat Finnigan (Miramichi—Grand Lake, Lib.): When we look at the chart on page 8, we can see continuous cuts to the budget, especially the part represented by the blue line. I'm looking at some of the problems we've been having in our rivers on the Atlantic coast, specifically the Tabusintac River and the Miramichi River, where enforcement has been really reduced. Is that a new direction the department is undertaking?

Mr. Marty Muldoon: No, I wouldn't relate it to increased investment and enforcement.

It's hard to tell from these types of graphs, but this is all project-specific capital investment. It's primarily in vessels and infrastructure renewal.

Mr. Chair, if I could, I have an answer to the question that was asked of me in the very first round.

The Chair: I will give you time at the end, Mr. Muldoon.

Mr. Pat Finnigan: I have one quick question on the seal industry.

Would the new certification process be recognized? Is that the point, to eventually be recognized by Europe and eventually be able to access that market? Is that the reason for the investment?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: It is.

A number of initiatives are under way to help the seal industry support itself, not just in Europe but elsewhere as well.

The Chair: Since there's a minute left, Mr. Muldoon, you said you had an answer to an earlier question.

Mr. Marty Muldoon: I was able to get my hands on an answer to the question asked of me by a committee member with regard to cases. I can tell you that the seven most recent settlements the department has agreed to have ranged between \$2.5 million and \$2.9 million on average.

The Chair: Mr. Arnold, you have five minutes.

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll see if I use my full five minutes. If not, I'll pass on a question to my colleagues here.

On page 9, there's \$23.3 million for incremental operating costs. When you were speaking about that earlier, you said part of that was in response to the spill in the Vancouver harbour.

Are those costs not recoverable from the polluter pays system?

•(1645)

Mr. Marty Muldoon: I'll turn it over to my colleague, but I'll just give you the general idea.

The staging of when we get paid and whether we get paid typically doesn't happen in the same fiscal year as the event occurs. The issue is whether we will get paid enough and whether we will recover the actual costs or whether it will be some fraction thereof. Often, it's a fraction thereof. The purpose of planning is that we're going to incur expenses. We're sitting at the start of the fiscal year facing mounting costs and we can't foresee how we will manage the entire year without in fact curtailing other core operations. The dichotomy is to make an incremental investment or to curb operations, and the decision was made not to curb core operations.

Mr. Mel Arnold: There were some questions earlier on the Salish Sea program. There was one program there a few years ago that I heard about. I think the acronym was POST. It was an underwater radio receiver system in which they would actually implant radio transmitters in the outgoing smolts and record where those smolts travelled up the coast. The transmitters would shut off for two years while they were at sea and then turn back on and record where they returned.

Is that program still running? It seemed to be a very valuable tool at the time.

Mr. Trevor Swerdfager: Some of the technology didn't work, fundamentally.

You describe very well the nature of the program, how it was supposed to work, and so on. It sounds as though I'm being flippant, but please don't take it that way, but some of the smolts didn't behave as they were supposed to. They didn't go where we thought they would, and when they got there some of the tags didn't work as well. But, that said, we learned a huge amount from it. That particular program, in the incarnation that you described, has morphed just a little bit. Essentially we're continuing to invest a fair bit in improving the technology itself so that some of the tags we put into these animals will actually work better, we think. The ocean tracking network, which is based at Dalhousie University and operates all over the world, is the key partner in that regard. As well, as I was mentioning in one of my earlier answers, we're trying to figure out what ocean conditions affect some of our modelling work. We're starting to get a much better idea of what happens to these animals as they move out of the system, but that's still a great mystery, quite frankly. When they go out to sea, it's almost like "there be dragons". We don't know where they go and what happens to them when they get there.

Mr. Mel Arnold: The next question I have is on the funding towards the certification of indigenous seal products. Is this strictly for indigenous sealing products or is it also being used for sealing products from the east coast as well? Also, is there a movement to move only towards indigenous seal products?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: The specific funding announcement was in support of the indigenous certification because that is what the EU has at this point agreed to in terms of enabling access to the market, so we are taking advantage of that, but we are continuing to work to develop international markets to support the industry as well. There are broader initiatives and efforts, I would say, financial and otherwise, at stake, but this is to take advantage of the specific opening that there was from the EU.

Mr. Mel Arnold: So is there a plan to promote or certify the other producers of seal products?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: There is an effort to ensure that it does get to market.

The Chair: Ms. Jordan for five minutes, please.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan (South Shore—St. Margarets, Lib.): I have a couple of particular questions. You mentioned earlier the MPAs, and Mr. Donnelly asked about fish farms. You said they were not included in the supplementary estimates. Is that correct? So I guess to that point, what's the support regulatory reviews for major natural resource projects? What does that go to fund?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: That is for major projects. There was the establishment in 2007, I think it was, of the major projects management office, and there was extra funding that was provided to various departments—DFO being one of them—all the regulatory departments, so environmental assessment, NRCan, Natural Resources Canada, Transport Canada, and a couple of others, including us, Environment Canada, to review major products: mining, pipelines, oil and gas, and those types of things.

This is funding that we've had. It's B-base funding, so it was funding that sunset and is now being renewed. I think I've already said that we'll probably be addressing it at the main estimates as well. That's what that funding is for. It could actually be taking place in the ocean, but it's also for mines, pipelines, etc.

• (1650)

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: Those not specifically geared to you.

Mr. Kevin Stringer: It's for all major projects in the country.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: All major projects, okay. And I see \$2.2 million in royalties from intellectual properties. Can you explain that one to me?

Mr. Marty Muldoon: The way that our business model works, there are a few things that we do that actually generate income, and one of these is selling hydrographic charts for marine activities, boating charts, and the technology for others to sell those through royalty regimes. Each year at this time of the year, we'll come and collect the revenue that has been paid to the Government of Canada on our behalf, and that's all this is.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: Your \$434,219 for the ship-source oil source pollution fund cleanup doesn't seem like very much for the amount of cleanup that needs to go on. I'm looking at it thinking that's not even going to clean up one mess, so I question that number and where it came from.

Mr. Marty Muldoon: Correct. Jeffery will speak to that item, but that basically was some of what I was saying. We may or may not get fully refunded. In many cases we won't.

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: Normally at this point in the year we would actually see a higher number in that column. This year we've had an ongoing discussion, I'll say, with the ship-source oil source pollution fund about some of the legal requirements that go with the payout of the settlement, so there are actually several settlements that will bump into the next fiscal year, and we will recover that money.

That said, the last time I was here, you'll remember I spoke about the Coast Guard being funded at the point the fire bell rings. That was my analogy, that we're not funded for response. You've just said that it doesn't seem like very much and asked if it is enough. I would just underscore my comments from the last time we were here that it's an area where we do feel pressure and where we think some modernization would reinforce the polluter pay principle in Canada.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: With regard to the \$23.3 million for incremental operating costs, you mentioned that it was for unplanned litigation settlements, unexpected events. Have you used that amount, and what happens if you don't? Do you switch it to other places? Does it just go back into general funds? Incremental funds means it's not something you'll definitely spend.

Mr. Marty Muldoon: That's an excellent question.

Normally you would want to have some accountability at the end of the journey, and we're two and a half weeks from the end of the journey this particular year. I can tell you, without a doubt, if we hadn't received that investment, we would have had to curtail operations somewhere in order to end the year with the right colour of ink on the page.

We're at the point where we have fully exploited that investment. At the start of the year, you have to forecast what the pressures are, which may materialize as slightly bigger or slightly less. Basically, it all came to fruition, and we're grateful we had the investment.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Donnelly, three minutes, please.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Mr. Stringer, I'd like to come back to your comment about your confidence in achieving the targets. I'll leave the 10% and just focus on the 5% by next year on marine protected areas. Given that we're at less than 1%, I'm just wondering what you think the biggest hurdles or challenges for the department are.

I know that you work with Parks Canada and Environment Canada, but obviously the oceans department, with the Oceans Act, has a significant role. What do you see as the biggest challenges to achieving that 5% next year?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: There are a lot.

The first point I would make is the one that you just made: we're not alone on this. Parks Canada is a major partner on this. In fact, of the 1% that is protected now, Parks is about half and we're about half. Then there a lot of smaller players. There's also Environment Canada, with migratory bird sanctuaries and those types of things, including other wildlife areas that are in the oceans.

There will probably be maybe three broad strategies—west coast, east coast, north—and they will be unique. We'll have to look at the types of things we'll do. The first is making sure we have the right strategy, and the second is getting the right players around the table. The minister has met with environmental groups, indigenous groups, the fishing industry, and other industry in all of those areas, and talked about engagement. It's about setting the table appropriately.

A huge amount of work has already been done by science to identify ecologically and biologically significant areas. Some of the key stakeholders and environmental groups have done a lot of work as well, as have indigenous groups, provinces, and other partners. It's a question of very quickly pulling together all of that material, identifying the areas we would want to protect, and the measures we would want to apply in those different areas. It's not easy.

So there's all of that to do. It really is about getting the partnerships right. We've established a federal-provincial task group on this. We've pulled together environmental groups in a couple of forums. We've talked to indigenous groups, we've talked to the fishing industry, and it's a question of now getting those things together, pulling together the information we have.

There's one other thing: when exactly is “2017”? Is it January 1, 2017? Is it December 31, 2017? Is it June 8, World Oceans Day, 2017? At this point it makes a big difference.

There are lots of things to consider.

• (1655)

Mr. Fin Donnelly: I'm sure the government will choose whichever date is best to announce the best plan, but I would probably take the full year, if I could.

Thanks for explaining some of the hurdles. It involves working together, co-operating.

• (1700)

The Chair: Now, gentlemen, thank you so very much for joining us today—Mr. Swerdfager, Mr. Stringer, Mr. Muldoon, Mr. Hutchinson.

Since we are now in the position of completed discussions on estimates, we have some voting to do, which of course is necessary.

Pursuant to Standing Order 81(5), the supplementary estimates (C) for 2015-16, votes 1c, 5c, and 10c under Fisheries and Oceans were referred to the committee on Friday, February 19, 2016, as you all recall.

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Vote 1c—Operating expenditures.....\$51,423,443

Vote 5c—Capital expenditures.....\$126,856,438

Vote 10c—Grants and contributions.....\$2,690,000

(Votes 1c, 5c, and 10c agreed to on division)

The Chair: Shall I report these supplementary estimates (C) 2015-16 to the House of Commons?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

We only have 30 minutes left. Rather than take a break, let's proceed into committee business.

Since we're all here, what I'm going to do for the sake of scheduling is go over the schedule once more. To get into May and June, as I said earlier, let's just recap what we're planning to do in March and April. We do have a full schedule for March and April. Following that, we can discuss what to do in May and June. Keep in mind, we have one study to do that we've passed and haven't discussed yet. That would be the northern cod study that Mr. McDonald brought forward.

Mr. Donnelly, go ahead.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: I have a point of order. I didn't mention it during the presentation, but normally we have the presentations on the screens in front of us, and I'm wondering if there was a reason that we didn't get the department's deck on the screen.

The Chair: I'm told the witnesses just offered to bring the decks. Next time I'll ask for that to happen. We'll bring it up when we talk to witnesses if they have presentations. We'll see what happens.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: I always find it helpful.

The Chair: I agree with you.

Back to the schedule.

Let's go to March and let's finish this off. Today, we have committee business on supplementary estimates (C). On March 10 we have our first witnesses for the study on Comox. That's up to eight we have so far. We'll have five witnesses in total at that point.

March 22, the House is open, but the budget will be taking place in the House of Commons, so we've decided that we will not have a meeting for the sake of the budget.

Something has come up, or not. On March 24 we provisionally put in that we wanted the minister to come in to discuss the mandate letter. We've been informed that the minister is not available on that particular day. He is available on two dates that I'll talk about in just a moment, but first, let us deal with the 24th. It is the Thursday before Good Friday. In the past, sometimes we've used a Friday schedule on a Thursday, but my understanding is, after discussions with House officers, that this is not going to be the case. We're going to stick with the Thursday schedule, but it is the day before Good Friday. Do we want to have a meeting at that point, given that it is the Thursday before Good Friday?

Any discussion? Would you like to think about it and I can move on to the next day?

Mr. Mark Strahl: Can we talk about what we would be doing? We didn't schedule Comox for that day because we were hopeful the minister would be here, which he won't be. I'm happy to come and have a committee meeting, but I don't want to invent a study or something to look at just to say we were here.

The minister is not available and I don't know that we can bump the Comox stuff forward. The only reason we would want to meet is to advance the second Comox meeting to that date. If that's not an option, then let's not be silly about it.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: I agree with Mark. I only see a few of the witnesses that we've asked, so I don't know if there's a report about the other witnesses who were contacted. Are they available or are they not available?

We could also put some time in there to ask questions of the witnesses. Right now it seems that they're just giving presentations, unless that's not the case.

Is there an hour scheduled for presentations and then an hour for questions?

The Chair: Are you talking about the witnesses on Comox?

Yes, there's going to be a question and answer round. That's my understanding.

• (1705)

Mr. Fin Donnelly: That would be an option if the minister wasn't available and the witnesses were, to move that into—

The Chair: To bring them in on the Thursday before Good Friday?

Mr. Fin Donnelly: That's a loaded question, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Ms. Jordan.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: That was actually my question. Would witnesses be willing to come the Thursday before the long weekend? I'm actually with Mr. Strahl on this one. If there's nothing scheduled, having a meeting for the sake of having a meeting is irrelevant, but if you think that the witnesses would be willing to travel or come on the Thursday right before the long weekend, that's a different thing.

The Chair: I throw it out there because it might be problematic for some, perhaps, being the Thursday before the long weekend. Anybody else on this matter?

I still don't see a consensus here, whether to do something on the 24th or not. Can we return to that date and I'll just proceed into April?

Let's go to April 12. This was the original day for the Comox witnesses. We have four to eight witnesses available. We've got March 10, that we just talked about, but we also have April 12, with four to eight witnesses.

Going to April 14, there we have a discussion about the report, once we have all the witnesses giving their testimony. We've questioned them and now we get into the discussion, and then we'll also talk about committee business once again if need be.

We now go to April 19. We have the minister on the main estimates. He is available for that date. It's a two-hour meeting. We could do the estimates and the mandate letter at that same time.

Mr. Donnelly.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: It's all right now. I think I just figured it out.

I was just going back to the witnesses. It's 30 minutes for presentations and 30 minutes for Qs and As for each of the hours. Is that correct?

The Chair: It's 10 minutes per witness. Then we have the questions and answers as per our format.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Per our format, and that's twice. I'm just looking at our Thursday meeting, which is probably the model for what we're looking at for the 14th.

The Chair: Yes. We're looking at two rounds. You have 10-minute presentations by each panel member and then questions and answers. In the next hour, we proceed with the same formula.

Let me go back to the 19th, with the minister, estimates, and mandate letter.

Mr. Strahl.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Yes, this is clearly what we did not want to happen. What is being offered to us is one day. We asked for two separate meetings, one to talk about the mandate letter and one to talk about the estimates, and now we're being offered one day with the minister. He might appear as a witness in two consecutive panels, and that would be a cute way to get around him being here twice.

Clearly, we requested at the very first meeting when we formed this committee that he come and speak to us on his mandate letter, and now we're getting what we talked about and voted on. We said at the last meeting that we would not agree to one combined meeting, and that's what we are being offered.

I would say that we're happy to have him on the main estimates on the 19th, but we still expect him to come and talk about his mandate letter—we had hoped to have that happen certainly by now—before the middle of April. We requested this quite some time ago. It's regrettable that he hasn't made himself available for the committee, but due to the request we've made, I think we have to stick with that and have him here on two separate occasions for two separate issues.

The Chair: Okay. There are two dates that he has offered: the 12th or the 19th. That was the offer. You're saying, obviously, that you want two different meetings.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Yes.

The Chair: Now, I don't know if that's for the 12th and the 19th, which pushes back the Comox study, or if you want him in two separate meetings.

• (1710)

Mr. Mark Strahl: On Comox, in our previous meeting we talked about this in camera, so I want to be careful that I don't violate anything that was said there, but there's some urgency to having the Comox study occur as we've laid it out. I don't think we want to bump Comox and not meet that requirement.

But again, we expect him to be here for the motion that was passed by this committee to talk about his mandate letter, and we also expect him to be here to defend his estimates, in separate meetings.

The Chair: This is what we are pushing up against, Mr. Strahl, when it comes to this, because we know what was mentioned. I appreciate the fact that we did talk about two separate meetings at that time. We also have, under pressure of time, the date that was mentioned about the Comox decision, so we want to get that done ASAP.

Let's just say that the minister is coming in on the 19th—

Mr. Mark Strahl: On the main estimates, right?

The Chair: Yes, on the main estimates, because they have to be reported.

Would you like to have the minister at a later date—we're now talking May or June—for his mandate letter? That motion was passed.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Right, and I'm smart enough to be able to count to six and understand how this will go. But I believe that this is a kind of violation of the spirit to which we agreed early on, which was that he would come early on for the mandate letter. This is now being rolled into the main estimates. It's just unfortunate. I'll leave it at that.

The Chair: Ms. Jordan.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: Can we do the main estimates on the 21st? I know that we want the minister there for both. He has to be there for the main estimates as well as the...?

The Chair: Well, no, he doesn't have to be, but what I'm saying is that he's available on the 12th or the 19th. That was the response.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: I understand that. Does the minister have to be here for the main estimates? That's my question, I guess.

The Chair: That's normally the case, yes.

Is there anything else?

I don't know how you propose to do this, unless, Mr. Strahl, you want to propose a later date for him to talk about his mandate letter.

Mr. Mark Strahl: I think we want him to come and defend his estimates on the 19th but I don't think that will fulfill the request of this committee to have him appear on his mandate letter. Obviously there are going to be discussions about the department at that meeting, but I think we want to encourage the minister to be here as much as possible.

If we are told this is the day, take it or leave it, then we want to take it for the main estimates, but I think that request for him to appear on his mandate letter remains in place until he comes to a meeting for that purpose. So that can be for future business, absolutely.

The Chair: Okay, we can bring it up again in further business.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Mr. Chair, when is the minister available? You obviously have found out about the dates. Were there two dates he was available to come?

The Chair: Yes, the 12th or the 19th. That was communicated to the clerk by his office.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: So the 12th and the 19th? He's available both dates.

The Chair: Either or, he's available the 12th or the 19th. I don't want to put words in his mouth; we were told he'd be available the 12th or the 19th. That's it.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Thank you.

The Chair: So we're good with the 19th, for the minister coming in on the main estimates.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Can I suggest the minister come at the earliest possible date after that, so if that happens to be May, at least we get the minister in here?

The Chair: You can suggest it, yes, of course. But that's what I mentioned to Mr. Strahl, which is to say to bring in the minister some day in either May or June, because in both those months we haven't scheduled anything for those meetings yet.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: My suggestion is that we at least get him in here. It's not ideal. It's not what we wanted. Obviously, you'd want the minister within a short number of sessions of the start-up of the committee, but is that not a compromise to get the minister here for both sessions, obviously given his schedule. It's difficult to balance what a minister has to balance but also be in front of the committee to satisfy our motion and the needs of the committee.

• (1715)

The Chair: In keeping with the spirit of the motion, we asked him to come to talk about his mandate letter ASAP. I guess that's what you're talking about. The only thing we can do at this point is go back to the minister's office and ask that he make it the next available date following April 21. I haven't talked about April 21 yet but I'll talk about that in a moment. There is something scheduled for April 21.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: I think you summarized it well, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Chair, the only question is the main estimates are deemed reported by the end of May. Am I correct?

The Chair: May 31.

Mr. Mark Strahl: So we would take the minister on the 19th on his mandate letter if we knew that we could get him on the main estimates prior to May 31, or I guess it would be prior to May 19.

The Chair: That is correct, but the reason...go ahead.

Mr. Mark Strahl: No, I don't really care about the order, other than I think he should defend his estimates as a priority. So given what we've experienced for the last two months, if there's a chance that he's not that available to the committee, I would rather take the guaranteed meeting on the main estimates. If we knew he was available in that next three-week chunk, I would flip the meetings. I think it would make more sense to have him talk about his mandate and then his estimates, but I don't want to have him on the mandate and then not have him appear on the estimates.

All that to say I'd agree with what Mr. Donnelly said as well, getting him here as soon as possible after the 19th.

The Chair: We have six meetings at our disposal in the month of May to do that.

The reason I suggested mains over here...it's not a hard and fast rule. It's just in our discussions we say we'll get him ASAP on the main estimates and on the mandate letter ASAP when he is available. We were given the dates 12th or 19th. We just threw in the mains as a suggestion and the mandate letter at that time.

If it's up to the committee to have that second meeting, then we have to explore a date in May. If it's the main estimates it has to be by May 31 or it's deemed reported, whether we talked about it or not. The mandate letter, however, has no time limit.

Mr. Mark Strahl: We will take him on the estimates, because I think it is too unpredictable whether he would be available, based on the fact that we haven't been able to secure him prior to the 19th. Let's do the mains on the 19th and hope for the best, that he will talk to us about his mandate letter before the end of the session.

The Chair: We will send communication to the minister's office that we would like to secure his presence for another date down the road. However, do we say that it's about the mandate letter?

Mr. Mark Strahl: Yes.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: Does it usually take two hours to do the main estimates?

The Chair: It normally does. In the last session, it was an hour. Some were an hour; some were two. It varies.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: I understand what you're saying, Mr. Strahl. I totally get that we said we wanted him here for the mandate letter and we wanted him here for the main estimates. Given that the Comox study is timely, and we can't bump that, and we're now looking at May before we can possibly get the minister here again, I'm just wondering if it's possible to do the two on the same day. I know what you're saying, but I guess you're talking about—

The Chair: Wait one second.

Mr. Donnelly, you have a point?

Mr. Fin Donnelly: I just wanted to clarify that we'd normally have the minister for an hour and officials for an hour. Is that not the case?

The Chair: It varies to an extent by committee. I wasn't on the fisheries committee in the last session, so I apologize. You were? Is that how you did it last session?

Mr. Fin Donnelly: That's how we did it.

The Chair: Okay.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: I just wanted clarification.

The Chair: Mr. Strahl.

Mr. Mark Strahl: That would be our request. The minister would exclusively answer questions for the first hour, and then we'd reset and have officials continue on with the main estimates, so the full two-hour meeting would be on the main estimates.

• (1720)

The Chair: We're still proposing that be on April 19.

Mr. Mark Strahl: That's correct.

The Chair: We'll leave that there. We're solid on April 19. I have good consensus on that.

On April 21, we're going to analyze the Comox report prepared by our trusty analyst here. We'll discuss the report as presented to us,

make any changes, look at any suggestions you have, and possibly finalize it at that time.

If there are changes to be made to that report when our analyst presents it on the 21st, we'll have to have a subsequent meeting to deal with those changes, pass the report, and bring it back. That being said, we're okay with April 21 for the Comox report. Done.

Let's all turn to May. It's an open sheet here. What was one priority is now two and possibly three.

Number one, we had the cod study as proposed by Mr. McDonald. I think there was some interest in travelling with this particular study. There's also now the mandate letter to be discussed at one of the meetings. Again, I can't set a date for that, because we don't know what date the minister is available.

Can we have some discussion about May and June? I would like to have a discussion, if it's okay with everyone, about the cod study and what we would like to do with this. Do we want to travel to areas affected by the northern cod? Do we want to stay here and do it, and have witnesses here? I'm open to discussion on that one.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: I would like to experience and hear from those on the front line who have been affected. That would be, primarily, within the province of Newfoundland. I would be interested in travelling and hearing from them. There are plants there that we could visit or see that have been impacted but that may still be running.

I'd rather do that than just hear witnesses. If the process is the same as what I've seen to date, and I'm new to the committee, I think I'll learn a lot more outside of Ottawa.

The Chair: Is there anybody else on this issue? I hate to implore people to talk, because it's up to you folks.

Mr. McDonald, it's your motion. Do you have any thoughts on what you'd like to see?

Mr. Ken McDonald: I'd like to see us travel, as Mr. Morrissey just said, to experience it first-hand, and to talk to the people who have been affected by what's happened to the cod fishery and hear about where they see it going in the future. We have a lot of resources in Newfoundland that we can talk to. It may be easier to talk to people there versus getting them to come here.

The marine institute would be a great facility to visit in order to see the new technology they're looking at, and so on. You have fish plants in the area. You have fishermen who are certainly not far away from St. John's, if that's going to be the point of entry, I guess, if the trip to the province is done.

I think we could make it a worthwhile venture and an informative one as well.

The Chair: Folks, we have about six minutes left in this meeting. Before I go to Mr. Strahl, let me say that in the next meeting we have our Comox study, with four to eight witnesses coming in, but can I propose that we use another 15 minutes at the end of it to discuss committee business once more? It looks like this cod study discussion could open up. Is that okay?

Okay. We'll do that. I don't want to impinge upon the time of the witnesses with that, but we will talk committee business.

Mr. Mark Strahl: I guess there's another item that needs to be considered: would this be the full group? I know that in the past some committees I've been on have travelled with a reduced quorum, which generally makes the chief government whip a little happier. We would be open to that as well and to have a representative group. Mr. Donnelly would be a part of that, I assume, either way.

It also helps to keep the costs more reasonable. I would throw that out there as an option. It's something that we on this side would be open to.

• (1725)

The Chair: How about we do as was just suggested? We first have to come up with a place. Once we decide upon where we're going, we can ask the logistics officer to propose two options: one with a full committee and another one with a reduced committee, and you can see the costs. But before that, I think we have to decide how many meetings and where we go.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: On that, Mr. Chair, I would assume that it's going to be a week or so of travel, so that's probably a couple of committee meetings. I don't know if it's going to go longer than that. As well, we could hear from witnesses who we couldn't see; there could be a meeting or two to hear from witnesses. Certainly, we had a great presentation this morning. I think it could be either. It could be a place to visit or we could hear them presenting their vision of cod and cod fishing. Also, there's the shrimp issue that we talked about.

If we could give our analysts and our clerk direction on what the study could look like, they could come back with a recommendation for what travel might look like and for hearing a few witnesses. It's going to take a number of committee meetings to put the report together and then to review the report and the recommendations. When you say six, that will get eaten up pretty quickly with just this study.

The Chair: Six meetings, yes.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: With six committee meetings, if two are for travel and if even one is just for witnesses, then you have three to finish the report. That is incredibly ambitious.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: I hate to be a wet blanket, but logistically the travel is a nightmare, and it will take a lot of time. I think it's mandatory that only part of the committee go. That's the way it was normally done in the fisheries committee.

The other thing is that any travel has to be done during a parliamentary week, not a constituency week. I assume that's understood.

The Chair: That's a good point.

We're running short of time, but we have Ms. Jordan.

Please, let's be careful of our time here.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: You said six meetings. Were you just taking May into account here?

The Chair: I didn't mention six meetings.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: Oh, I'm sorry. I thought I heard someone say six meetings, and that you only had six meetings to deal with it.

The Chair: That was suggested.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: Okay, because we have June as well, correct?

The Chair: Yes.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: That was just for clarification. Thank you.

The Chair: Since our time is done, how about we go back to our respective corners, if those indeed exist, and talk about this amongst ourselves? When we come back, we'll start our Comox study with our witnesses. Near the end, we'll take the last 15 minutes, I'll say, as long as it doesn't impinge upon the time of our witnesses, to talk about this once more. Give it some more thought, but remember, before we get into the logistics of how much it will cost, we have to figure out how long the study will be, with how many visits.

Mr. Mark Strahl: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: That's right, Mr. Strahl. Good catch.

We have to do something that some may think is perfunctory, but it's necessary. We have to approve the budget for our witnesses for the Comox study.

Mr. Mark Strahl: I don't know if you have to read the amount, but as it was circulated, I so move.

The Chair: The amount requested is \$10,900 for the gathering of witnesses regarding our study on the Comox issue. That's the closure of Comox MCTS station of the Canadian Coast Guard.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: It's unanimous.

Thank you very much for that.

Keep in mind our study on northern cod, and we'll see you on Thursday.

The meeting is adjourned.

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