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Chair

Mr. Scott Simms

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• (0850)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.)): Good morning, everybody. Welcome.

We welcome our guests again, who certainly are no strangers to this committee. I think we just saw you, as a matter of fact, and here we are once again. This is déjà vu for all of us, but nevertheless it's important.

Pursuant to Standing Order 81(5), we are considering supplementary estimates (B) 2017-18. We have to dispense with votes 1b, 5b, and 10b under Department of Fisheries and Oceans referred to the committee on Thursday, October 26, 2017. We have to refer these back to the House.

We have Kevin Stringer, associate deputy minister; Jeffery Hutchinson, commissioner of the Canadian Coast Guard; Tony Matson, assistant deputy minister and chief financial officer; Andy Smith, deputy commissioner, strategy and shipbuilding; and Sylvie Lapointe, assistant deputy minister, fisheries and harbour management.

I understand you have a one-minute verbal presentation, and then we go to a video presentation.

I'm assuming, Mr. Stringer, you will be doing it.

[Translation]

Mr. Kevin Stringer (Associate Deputy Minister, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's a pleasure to be here today on behalf of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) and the Canadian Coast Guard to discuss supplementary estimates (B). I would have liked to begin by introducing some of my colleagues, but the chair has already done so.

Through the 2017-18 supplementary estimates (B) exercise, Fisheries and Oceans Canada is seeking \$55.3 million that will be used for a variety of initiatives. Our chief financial officer will provide an overview of areas of funding. However, before turning the floor over to Mr. Matson, I want to say how proud DFO and the Coast Guard are of the progress we've made this past year. We recognize that much of our success stems from the historic investments that have been made in our department and a renewed commitment to scientific excellence, marine safety and the protection of our marine environment.

We also recognize that work remains to re-establish Canada as a world leader on all matters related to the health of our oceans and aquatic resources.

[English]

We are confident these important investments that we are discussing today will assist us in this regard.

[Translation]

And now I'll turn the floor over to Mr. Matson who will run through a presentation, after which we will all be pleased to answer your questions.

[English]

People are working on a slide presentation in French and perhaps in English. Tony's going to speak English. The presentation at this point is in French. We're working on getting the English up there as well.

Tony.

Mr. Tony Matson (Assistant Deputy Minister and Chief Financial Officer, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): That's excellent.

Thank you, Mr. Stringer.

Hello, Mr. Chair, and committee members.

[Translation]

My name is Tony Matson. I am the chief financial officer at Fisheries and Oceans Canada. Let me reiterate our associate deputy minister's message by saying that I am pleased to be here this morning to go over the 2017-18 supplementary estimates (B) of Fisheries and Oceans Canada.

[English]

I prepared very brief remarks. This should allow plenty of time to go through any questions the committee may have. I would like you to follow along using the provided power point presentation, as my opening remarks are aligned with that document.

As outlined on slide 2, we are currently in the midst of the second supply period. Section 26 of the Financial Administration Act requires all spending to be approved by Parliament. Supply bills are referred to committee, where the contents are studied before voting takes place, hence our presence here today.

The honourable Mr. Brison tabled the 2017-18 supplementary estimates (B) on Thursday, October 26, on behalf of all organizations. Earlier that month, on Friday, October 5, he also tabled the 2016-17 public accounts.

I'll move now to slide 3 and provide a summary on Fisheries and Oceans supplementary estimates and authorities to date. We are seeking Parliament's approval on a grand total of \$55.3 million, which is broken down by vote as presented in the table. This would bring our voted authorities to date to \$2.662 billion, as \$2.606 billion has already been voted by Parliament through the main estimates, supplementary estimates (A), as well as transfers from central votes for our carry-forwards, and an advance from TB vote 5 for emergency assistance related to severe ice conditions on the east coast.

Although supplementary estimates (A) was directed at budget 2017 items and/or other key initiatives, three other budget 2017 items—aquatic invasive species, small craft harbours, and enhancements of the indigenous fisheries program suite—were not sufficiently developed at the time for inclusion back in the spring. All three items are included in these supplementary estimates (B).

Please note that the numbers quoted are those you are being asked to vote on. The bottom line numbers in the table include statutory authorities, more specifically, employee benefits, which has its own separate enabling legislation and is presented for information purposes only.

The table is an exact reproduction of what is presented on page 2-32 of the supplementary estimates publication

[Translation]

or on page 2-80 in the French version.

[English]

We will now shift to slide 4 of the presentation which itemizes those items contained in the supplementary estimates. You can also find these on pages 2-32, 2-33, and 2-34 under the explanation of requirements section

[Translation]

or on pages 2-80, 2-81 and 2-83 in the French version.

[English]

The highest dollar value item in these supplementary estimates is actually not new incremental funding. It is an adjustment to existing funding where we are re-profiling approved funding from 2018-19 to 2017-18 to reflect the new contract structure with Vancouver Shipyards, recently approved by the Treasury Board ministers to ensure the successful completion of three new offshore fisheries science vessels.

The next largest item is one-year funding for the Atlantic fisheries fund program that will support the fish and seafood sector in Atlantic Canada with targeted actions to stimulate the region's economy and increase job opportunities for Atlantic Canadians. Minister Leblanc and Minister Foote announced this seven-year program back on March 10, 2017, and reiterated the importance of boosting the economy and increasing employment opportunities for middle-class Canadians in coastal communities.

The last two items are budget 2017 initiatives. There is \$5.7 million being sought to address the threat of aquatic invasive species, such as Asian carp, in high-risk waterways. Budget 2017 committed \$43.8 million over five years, including \$10.7 million on an ongoing basis, to bolster Canada's efforts in monitoring and controlling. As well, \$5 million is one-year funding to further support small craft harbours. This budget 2017 funding helps us continue to play a major role in ensuring that small craft harbours are well maintained and safe.

• (0855)

Slide 5 starts off with our third and last budget 2017 item, which is another piece to this commitment to promote the economic resilience of indigenous communities. This \$3.6 million, \$82.2 million over five-year, item includes \$28.6 million in ongoing funding and will allow us to kick-start a new commercial program, the northern integrated commercial fisheries initiative, and to enhance our current collaborative management programs.

More concretely, as an example, this will allow certain indigenous groups that are currently ineligible under our current Atlantic and Pacific initiatives to access funding to support aquatic development, and new access capital tools for the commercial programs.

The second item on slide 5 is the renewal of funding, \$3.4 million this year, \$20.2 million over five years, of which \$4.2 million is ongoing. This will fund the HR and operating costs necessary to support the negotiation of land claims with first nations.

The remaining two items on slide 5 are technical, routine, and non-controversial in nature. They appear in supplementary estimates pretty much every year.

Slide 6 covers a few lower-dollar initiatives and a couple of vote 10 transfer payment re-profiles to ensure our funding profiles are being aligned to update project timelines or to match recipient requirements.

[Translation]

Finally, in terms of the conversions for our votes, there are multiple transfers that are neutral either for the government or for the department.

If you have any questions about these 14 transfers, I am sure we will be able to provide you with additional information.

This concludes my opening remarks on supplementary estimates (B).

My colleagues and I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

I want to point out to colleagues that all of you have supplementary estimates (B) as a handout. To avoid any confusion, you'll notice that it doesn't really end down here. This pertains to other departments. This is a very large book. It's the blue book, as we call it. What pertains to this particular meeting is in the middle between Finance and Foreign affairs. That's just to avoid any confusion.

We have some very special guests.

I want to welcome Mr. Guy Lauzon from the riding of Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry. It's nice to see you, sir. Thank you for joining us.

Do you have the Glengarry Highland Games in your riding?

• (0900)

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): They're just a little outside my riding.

The Chair: That's unfortunate for you, sir. That's too bad. They're a great time, the highland games. They're in Maxville, aren't they?

Anyway, we also have two very special guests. I always say that the most important people in the room are the youngest people when it comes to the future of our country. We have two special guests with us, and I'm going to allow our MPs to introduce them.

I think they're from the Boys & Girls Clubs and Big Brothers Big Sisters.

Mr. Terry Beech (Burnaby North—Seymour, Lib.): It's Big Brothers Big Sisters, and with me is Janice Yu from Vancouver. She has been doing a number of leadership programs since she has been here, but she's leaving tonight. She's going to shadow me today, and she'll see us at question period later today as well.

The Chair: She'll see us in our finest form. That's great.

Mr. Doherty.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Chair, it's an honour for me to introduce to our committee here, and everybody that's out there, Mr. Chris Wang who comes to us from Big Brothers Big Sisters from Burnaby North. He's a former cadet for four-plus years, loves snowboarding, and is currently at SFU. I'm really proud to have him as a shadow. He's shadowing the shadow minister today.

The Chair: That's great. There we go.

Chris and Janice, it's nice of you to be with us today.

You were a cadet. What type of cadet were you?

Mr. Chris Wang (As an Individual): I was a sea cadet, sir.

The Chair: You were a sea cadet. I was an air cadet, but we're still cadets all together.

Janice, what school do you go to?

Ms. Janice Yu (As an Individual): I go to Windermere Secondary School.

The Chair: Oh, very good.

All right, guys, thanks for joining us all the way from British Columbia.

Let's continue on. We have our questions, of course.

Up first we have Ms. Jordan, please, for seven minutes.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan (South Shore—St. Margarets, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, once again, to the department officials for being here.

I'm going to focus a lot of my remarks on small craft harbours. I'm seeing here that there were 85 major capital construction projects on wharves, floats, shore protection, and other assets at 78 small craft harbours.

What percentage of small craft harbours is that in this country? It's a very small percentage. Is that a correct assumption?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: I'll start, and I'll ask Sylvie to jump in.

There are 750 approximately core harbours, about 1,000 overall including non-core, so, yes, that is approximately 10% of our core harbours.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: In your estimation—and I'm not sure you can answer this question, but I'm hoping—how many of that 1,000 actually need work?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: I will ask Sylvia to speak to that one.

We have a good sense of what's required. Our main objective is safety and security, so if you're looking at it from a safety and security perspective, and that is the key piece, we do seek to always make sure we're doing what we need to do. In terms of what needs work, many of them need work to improve the situation they are in.

Sylvie, do you want to add to that?

Ms. Sylvie Lapointe (Assistant Deputy Minister, Fisheries and Harbour Management, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Thank you.

Good morning, everyone.

We have about 53% of our core fishing harbours that are either in fair or in poor condition.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: They are all in my riding. Sorry.

Okay, when you make decisions on who gets funded, I understand there's a scoring system. Is that correct?

Ms. Sylvie Lapointe: There is a rigorous peer review process that takes place with headquarters and the regions to assess where the investment should be made. That's based on the condition of the harbour, how much the harbour is used, how many fishing vessels there are that access the harbour, and if there are any safety concerns. They are prioritized within those parameters.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: How often does DFO do those reviews? Does it review every wharf every year? I'm just wondering, because in my riding I have a number of small craft harbours. I think I have 73. The concern I have is that I'm hearing about things but nobody has seen these wharves for years. Nobody has actually assessed them, and by the time they get assessed, what needs to be fixed is quite bad.

I am just wondering how that process works in terms of making sure things are safe and usable.

Ms. Sylvie Lapointe: There is a yearly review in terms of where the investments are made. There is a mid-year review process as well to determine whether we're on track or whether we need to shift resources.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: I don't mean where the money is allocated. I mean where the wharves need the work. Sometimes it's not the same thing, I would say.

• (0905)

Ms. Sylvie Lapointe: I believe that assessment is part of the review that takes place to determine where the investments are made, so there is an assessment that's made overall in terms of the conditions of the harbours across the country.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: I see there was a \$5-million investment in small craft harbours. Although I'm happy to see any money invested in small craft harbours, would you say that is enough?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: Talk to our people who manage small craft harbours, and they'll say they always welcome more funds.

In the small craft harbour core budget, the \$75 million, we've had significant B-base or short-term injections. We had \$149 million voted last year for last year and this year, which has made a difference, but there is no question that, with 53% being either fair or poor, we are challenged to keep up. We are very grateful for \$5 million and pleased to see it, but small craft harbours are constantly a challenge and we do hear from harbour authorities who work really hard as volunteers and are looking for assistance.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: Since coming into office, one of the things I've seen is that a lot of the time it's that this one needs something and that one needs something. Please don't take this as a criticism. It's not. It's just that the process, I think, is that a lot of the time we put band-aids on things as opposed to fixing them, and then we deal with the same problem two or three years down the road.

Is there any move toward a long-term plan to address the issue of small craft harbours, something like 10 years down the road, so that we can say that this year this one can get fixed, and next year that one is going to get completely fixed? I've seen two-thirds of a wharf fixed and now the other third is washing away and the first two-thirds that were fixed are now in jeopardy because the other third is a mess that they couldn't afford to fix.

Mr. Kevin Stringer: The answer is that long-term planning is required. We do as much as we can. We try to fix things so that we're not just doing a band-aid solution, knowing that we will have to kick it down the road. But with the amount of funds, with the criteria we have, it is sometimes the case that we do a short-term fix, knowing that we will have to do a longer-term fix in a few years.

Sylvie.

Ms. Sylvie Lapointe: It is a challenge to do the long-term planning. As Kevin has indicated, we've been reliant on B-base funding since about 2007. Our core budget is \$75 million. Over the last 10 years, we've benefited from about \$760 million of B-base funding, and that's coming to an end this fiscal. So it is a challenge to do the long-term planning that's required.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: Of the 85 projects you have going on now, how many are on track or are going to be finished? Are you

going to have money left over? If there is money that is not used, what happens to it?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: The small craft harbours group is extraordinarily good at landing on a dime and spending every penny they have. They do that every year.

This year they have their plans in place. There's a grand total of \$2.8 million in contingency that they've set aside, and that is assessed based on criteria, deciding what needs to be done.

If there's something that was more expensive than what we thought, if there's extra money that's left over.... It's pretty rare that we don't land on a dime.

Sylvie, is there anything else on that?

Ms. Sylvie Lapointe: I'll just add that while we have the core budget we've been focusing on projects in terms of renovation and safety. We have increasing costs that are related to dredging that are quite unpredictable from year to year, depending on the kinds of storms we're experiencing. That is an additional challenge. But, as Kevin said, we do manage the budget down to the last penny.

Some of the projects you've identified this year could be ones that started this year or ones that were begun and that are finishing this year. They're in various stages of progress.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: And—

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Jordan. I'm afraid I have to end it there.

You mentioned employees at small craft harbours. I would agree that they're very good employees. Also, they liaise quite a bit with Public Services and Procurement Canada, just to point that out.

Mr. Doherty, you have seven minutes, please.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My questions are going to be short and direct, so I'll ask our guests to be as to the point as they can with their answers.

Given the ships to be delivered, Mr. Stringer, to the Canadian Coast Guard and the Royal Canadian Navy by Seaspan, can you table with the clerk within the next seven days an integrated delivery schedule for seven ships that have been assigned to Seaspan, five for the Canadian Coast Guard and two for the Royal Canadian Navy?

• (0910)

Mr. Andy Smith (Deputy Commissioner, Strategy and Shipbuilding, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Mr. Chair, the program has evolved over time. Vancouver Shipyards has produced a number of schedules.

Mr. Todd Doherty: All I'm asking is, can the schedule be tabled with the clerk within the next seven days?

Mr. Andy Smith: There is a schedule that certainly can be tabled, although I will say there are a number of probabilities based with that schedule. But the answer is yes.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Thank you, sir.

Can you table with the clerk of the committee within the next seven days an updated outline of vessel life expectancy for all Coast Guard vessels, similar to the information released by access to information in December 2016?

Mr. Andy Smith: Yes.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Thank you.

Given that you have all visited the Seaspan facility, do you think the dates for delivering the three offshore fisheries vessels, one offshore oceanographic science vessel, and the *Diefenbaker* will be met, and can you provide us with these dates?

Mr. Andy Smith: The dates certainly can be provided. I will say that the very first OFSV, offshore fisheries science vessel, will be delivered in 2018, the second one in 2019, and the third one in the 2020-21 time frame. That's in accordance with the latest schedule that VSY, Vancouver Shipyards, has produced. The OOSV, offshore oceanographic science vessel, will follow that. We're still in the design phase for the OOSV. That will take some time.

Between the delivery of the OOSV and the delivery of the Polar, there are the two naval resupply ships in there. The Polar-class icebreaker will follow the delivery of the second joint support ship.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Thank you, sir.

Do you think additional capacity is needed in the national shipbuilding program to meet the new ships needs of the Canadian Coast Guard, or will Seaspan be able to meet all of your large ship needs?

Mr. Andy Smith: The national shipbuilding strategy was predicated on regenerating and sustaining a viable shipbuilding industry in this country.

The *Franklin*, which is the first OFSV—

Mr. Todd Doherty: Sorry, sir. With all due respect, my time is very limited. I just asked for a simple yes or no.

Do you think additional capacity is needed in the national shipbuilding program to meet the Canadian Coast Guard's new ships needs? Will Seaspan be able to meet all your large ship needs?

Mr. Andy Smith: Mr. Chair, given that the first vessel is yet to be delivered and accepted by the Coast Guard, I believe it would be premature at this point to render a decision on whether the national shipbuilding strategy is going to meet all the needs or not. I think that will evolve over time.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Thank you.

The 2016 Emerson report suggested that the Canadian Coast Guard was underfunded and unable to meet its obligation in relation to icebreaking, pollution controls, tanker disasters, and search and rescue. The government needed to act urgently outside the current national shipbuilding procurement strategy to address these capability gaps.

Do you agree with this assessment, and are you considering leasing icebreakers to meet these gaps in the coming season of 2017-18? When will a decision be taken, given that the solicitation with industry commenced last November?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson (Commissioner of the Canadian Coast Guard, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): The assessment in

the Emerson report speaks to several of the capabilities of the Coast Guard. In our view, the investments that have been put into the Coast Guard through the oceans protection plan and the recent economic update of about 10 days ago are significant in terms of helping to restore core strength in the Coast Guard when it comes to environmental response in particular.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Sir, are you considering leasing icebreakers to meet these gaps in the coming season of 2017-18?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: We've recently put an RFP out that will enhance our icebreaking capability this year, with the ability to do short-term call-ups where we have specific needs to be met.

In terms of the larger interim strategy, as we would call it, that is going through the cabinet process in the near term.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Sir, beyond 2017-18, can you table a note with the clerk within the next month on how you plan to meet the capability gaps for the Canadian Coast Guard as identified by the Emerson report?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: I expect we won't be able to do that due to cabinet confidence and the budget process which is now kicking into gear. I expect we would be restricted in what we could share for the next period of time.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Okay.

Can you assure Parliament and the business community that the Canadian Coast Guard will be able to break ice this winter to allow for larger Panamax vessels traversing the Panama Canal to sail safely to Montreal?

• (0915)

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: Certainly, we have our icebreaking plan in place for this winter. Will we be able to meet every request for icebreaking? That depends a great deal on what Mother Nature throws at us, but we're confident that we have the fleet, the people, and the training in place to break ice this winter.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Okay.

Mr. Stringer, in going through the supplementary estimates, I noticed that there is.... Perhaps you could direct me to where the funding will be for fisheries management plans.

We have met a number of times in this committee, and we know that 12 of our 15 fisheries are in a critical state. You committed earlier this year to have those plans before us.

I don't see in the supplementary estimates where that money is being allocated.

Mr. Kevin Stringer: That was in supplementary estimates (A), I believe, either in the comprehensive review or the program integrity funding.

Mr. Tony Matson: Yes.

Mr. Kevin Stringer: There were—and Sylvie, see if I have this right—19 FTEs created to work on this initiative. We actually do have a plan. I don't know if it has been posted, but it is soon to be posted. It outlines how many of the IFMPs are going to be updated this year, how many of the IFMPs that weren't done are going to be done, limit reference points, and so on. Those funds were in supplementary estimates (A).

Mr. Todd Doherty: May I ask that you table those with the committee?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: Yes.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now it's Mr. Donnelly, for seven minutes, please.

Mr. Fin Donnelly (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Again, welcome to our departmental officials.

Mr. Stringer, the supplement to the budget calls for \$8.2 million in funding for the implementation of the Atlantic fisheries fund program. Can you give the committee an update on the status of the Pacific coast equivalent to this fund?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: This is largely built on and connected to the Atlantic growth strategy. There are three points I would make.

First, it is linked to the Atlantic growth strategy.

Second, of the four components of it, which are innovation, infrastructure, science research, and marketing, marketing is national, so it is available to both coasts.

Third, I would say that if you're looking for a comparison, it's funding that we put forward to support the Cohen initiative and similar responses that are focused on the west coast. In addition, the oceans protection plan is a national program, so many of the resources also go to the west coast.

We do watch carefully to ensure that we're providing support on all three coasts, but this piece in particular is for the Atlantic provinces.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Thank you.

Turning to the wild salmon policy funding regarding Pacific salmon, an article citing recommendations from the Cohen commission in a 2011 report commissioned by DFO recommended that “adequate annual funding be allocated specifically for monitoring, assessment and management of Pacific salmon.” The author stated that the “number of spawning streams that are routinely monitored in the north and central coasts of British Columbia has declined by 34 per cent over the past decade.” The same article warned:

The Canadian government is at a crossroads. It now has the potential to deliver a powerful implementation plan, supported by strong leadership and adequate funding to improve the prospects for wild salmon. Alternatively, it could continue to under-deliver with a weak implementation plan, poor leadership and insufficient resources...

Currently, funding for WSP implementation must be found within the DFO Pacific Region's existing resources. However, both the Cohen Commission and the Gardner Pinfold Review highlighted that the existing WSP budget envelope is insufficient to implement the policy.

Do you agree with this?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: I'd make a couple of points.

One is that we're actually out consulting right now on the wild salmon policy implementation plan. We have supported new investments in wild salmon on the west coast. The investment of \$40 million last year in oceans and fisheries science has assisted there. There's new funding for the Pacific salmon treaty. So we are investing significantly. We're out talking now about how best to apply that and how best to implement the wild salmon policy.

Sylvie, do you have anything else on that?

• (0920)

Ms. Sylvie Lapointe: I would just note that you mentioned our investment in the Pacific salmon treaty, and that was \$1.3 million.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Great. Thank you.

Would you agree that the federal budget should provide adequate funding to be allocated specifically for monitoring, assessment, or management of Pacific salmon?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: It's hugely important. It's integrated into broader oceans monitoring, but the monitoring of salmon is unique. We do seek to do what we can with the resources we have, and we have made further investments in it. Yes, it is important.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: How many FTEs are currently routinely monitoring salmon spawning streams?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: I don't have that with me, but we can get you the specific number of FTEs.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Okay.

My next question was about filling the gap, how many you feel we need to overcome the monitoring gap, so we'll leave that one.

Under the oceans protection plan, are funds available for salmon spawning route monitoring beyond estuaries?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: Yes. The oceans protection plan is focused on the broad ocean, but it is about estuaries and the connection with rivers. There are a number of funds that try to connect those things up, between the oceans protection plan and what the Pacific Salmon Foundation is doing. There's also a piece in the supplementary estimates (B) on that, to provide them with support, and the recreational fisheries partnership program.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Do you think investment in this area is crowding out essential work that could be done upstream?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: No. As I say, there are other funds that focus on those areas. Both are vitally important. We have to address all of the elements of the life cycle, which include the streams where the larvae are, the lakes and the rivers where they are as juveniles, the estuary where they are for a period of time, and the broad ocean. We have to address all of them, and we have different programs to address them.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Thank you.

What role could partnering with first nations to implement the guardian programs play in solving the monitoring gap?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: It's a critical issue. Part of the supplementary estimates (B) initiative is an initiative for renewing our program suites with indigenous groups. Those involve a number of programs, including the aboriginal guardian program, one through which we've realized, and certainly we have known all along, new initiatives, the opportunity to partner with indigenous groups on monitoring and even on enforcement, but working with guardians to ensure that we're all getting the best benefit of groups that are there already.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Oceana Canada released "Fishery Audit 2017". I was just going to ask, without much of a preamble, about the status of the funding for rebuilding the 23 depleted fish populations they identified.

Mr. Kevin Stringer: I spoke to that previously. There has been an investment that was dealt with in supplementary estimates (A), and we've committed to tabling something with regard to our program on those issues.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Todd Doherty): Thank you, Mr. Donnelly.

We'll go to Mr. McDonald now, for seven minutes.

Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just want to continue for a minute or two on my colleague's line of questioning when it comes to small craft harbours. Of my communities, 99.9% have direct access to the ocean. There is only one community I can think of that is not bordered by salt water. They are very dependent on small craft harbours. Not all of them have a small craft harbour facility, because not all communities have fishing activity, per se. They may use the next community, or one that is two communities away.

I don't envy your work when it comes to small craft harbours. You can go into a facility and spend \$1 million, \$2 million, or \$3 million, and that can get wiped out overnight by a storm surge. You can spend massive amounts of money, and the environment and the weather can destroy it all in a matter of a few hours. I can see how it's hard to keep up. I guess when you are trying to allocate the funds to where you're going to spend the money, a lot of it would be reflected in the busier harbours: the type of activity, the number of landings, and the number of fishers in that particular zone. When you look at \$5 million as a budget item, you're not going to get much done with \$5 million.

As a department, are we seeking to start off with some big numbers again in the upcoming budget? You said that, for two years, you had \$149 million. I know that's nowhere near enough.

• (0925)

Mr. Kevin Stringer: First of all, we are always hopeful in terms of small craft-harbours funding. It really is hugely important for our communities.

One of the items in supplementary estimates (B) is around adaptation to climate change. The issue of effects of storms on small craft harbours has changed, and it has increased the costs. That is a factor for us.

We have had significant investments. The core budget is \$75 million, but there has been an additional \$75 million a year, on

average, through B-base and short-term funding. Are we looking at addressing that over the long term? We are always hopeful that we can, because it is critical infrastructure. Climate change and storms are having an impact on that, as well.

Mr. Ken McDonald: I agree. It is critical infrastructure. For a lot of communities, it's their economic driver—the harbour and what takes place in the harbour.

I noticed that one program is the divestiture program. Will there be much in the coming year with regard to divesting of facilities, for whatever reason, obviously, if they are not being used anymore, if there are no landings and no activity? Do we know where those harbours are?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: I'll start to answer this one, and I'll ask Sylvie to add to it.

The divestiture program.... This was back in the mid-1990s, I think. We had too many harbours that we were addressing in our small craft harbour program. A decision was taken to identify what we've called core harbours. There are about 750 of them, but we had about 2,500. There has been an attempt to divest to a municipality, to a marina group, or to some other group. In some cases it required an investment.

We have had great success, but the easy ones are done. We have about 1,000 now, and we have a number of them to go. A small portion of the budget each year is set aside for divestiture. It is a small amount.

Sylvie, do you want to add to that?

Ms. Sylvie Lapointe: It is a small amount from year to year, but with the additional B-base investments we've had, we've been able to put about \$7 million this year towards divesting some ports.

It is a complex negotiation, and it takes a lot of time. Some of them have hit a few speed bumps and might get delayed into the next fiscal year.

Mr. Ken McDonald: I'll go back to the \$8.2-million funding for implementation of the Atlantic fisheries fund program. Did that money come from the initial \$325 million that was announced in that program?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: It is the first down payment on that program of \$325 million over seven years.

Mr. Ken McDonald: Okay.

When Minister LeBlanc was in St. John's to announce the oceans protection funding, the \$1.5 billion, he mentioned at that time—and some of the Coast Guard ships were there in the backdrop—that some of that money would be used to increase the tow capacity of existing vessels. Has that work taken place, or is it scheduled to be done?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: There are three elements to the tow capacity. There's a study that will be done on the west coast and that contract is just about to be put in place between now and Christmas. There's the leasing of vessels, which is also for the west coast, as you may recall. There's the purchasing of tow kits, which will outfit all of the current large vessels in the Coast Guard fleet with towing capacity that's beyond what they have currently, and that will be coupled with training of the crew on those vessels. That process is in place. It's a large procurement and it's on track to put that capacity on vessels next year.

Mr. Ken McDonald: Thank you. It would be good to see it in action.

My colleague mentioned the icebreaking capabilities of the Coast Guard. I think last winter was probably one of the worst I can remember in Newfoundland for ice capacity and fishing boats trying to get in and out. We had one vessel that actually sank because it was jammed into the ice and eventually succumbed to the pressure, I guess.

Are we looking to increase capability there? The environment is a strange thing but it seems that we see extreme examples of things now more so than we did in years gone by. Is this something the department is watching and monitoring for their needs into the future when it comes to things like that?

• (0930)

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: It's absolutely something that we're watching, and monitoring and adjusting to. In terms of the circumstances in Newfoundland this year, you may remember one of the scientists on the *Amundsen* was quoted in the press as saying we were headed north to study climate change and instead we were prevented from going north by climate change. I paraphrased, but that's essentially what happened. An ice sheet in the Arctic broke free earlier than it normally does and they were facing Arctic ice, as were the people trying to go out and earn their livelihood on the water. They were facing Arctic ice off the north shore much earlier than is normally the case. At the same time, the icebreaking in the south wasn't as bad as some of the recent previous years. The years 2014 and 2015 are the ones that we often quote as almost the ice version of Armageddon, if you will.

It's hard for us to plan for every eventuality. We are looking to the future. We are looking at all of the ice models. We do expect with climate change that icebreaking in Canada will remain more of a challenge, not less of a challenge, but at the same time we have ferries operating on longer seasons, and we have people who earn their living in the fisheries trying to get out to maximize their seasons, obviously. Pressures on us are going up and the ice isn't going anywhere.

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

Mr. Arnold, you have five minutes, please.

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

I want to get back to the Coast Guard and icebreakers.

Mr. Hutchinson, why was the Canadian Coast Guard ship *Hudson* towed from the Heddle Marine yard before a refit was completed?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: The contract with Heddle took longer than we expected. The delivery dates weren't being met. The work was being done and the work was generally being accepted, but at the end of the day, we had to do a very basic calculation. That is that the seaway closes on a given day and we needed the *Hudson* back on the east coast before the seaway closed. We did our best estimates of how to get that work done and we undertook action to accomplish that goal.

Mr. Mel Arnold: What is the current projected completion date for that refit?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: I don't have the exact date in front of me. We're still on track to have the ship out of the seaway before it closes.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Before it closes with ice?

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: No, before it closes. The seaway is actually closed; as a piece of infrastructure it closes generally the last week of December.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Mr. Stringer, I've noted that the budgetary lines for the aquatic invasive species component in DFO are declining from \$14.2 million in 2014-15 to \$11.2 million in 2018-19. I notice a line for \$43.8 million over five years in the proposed 2017 budget. That's now down to \$8.76 million a year from \$14.2 million, just slightly over half.

Aquatic invasive species are becoming an increasing threat in a great part of Canada. They have already been introduced into the Great Lakes to much detriment. There's also a lot of money being spent in the Great Lakes, I believe about 80% of the budget for aquatic invasive species goes into two species in the Great Lakes. What else is being done in the rest of the country and what else is being done for budgeting to prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: Thank you for the question.

Aquatic invasive species really is the emerging issue in fisheries protection, particularly with climate change.

The \$43 million over five years replaces the \$15.5 million we had over the previous five years, and that was an Asian carp program. Other pieces continue. It is a significant augmentation of our work on aquatic invasive species.

There are three elements to it. One is that we are increasing what we do on our core two species. What we're doing on Asian carp is increased by \$1 million a year. What we're doing on sea lamprey is increased by \$2.5 million a year. It's \$1.5 million this year, but ramping up to \$2.5 million a year.

We're also, for the first time, establishing a core aquatic invasive species program in the department with—

Mr. Mel Arnold: What is the funding for that?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: It's \$1.5 million, ramping up to \$4.3 million.

Mr. Mel Arnold: If I'm correct, you were about \$1 million for each of two species, and then slightly over \$1 million for everything else.

• (0935)

Mr. Kevin Stringer: No, it's \$4.3 million ongoing for the core program, establishing a group of 20 FTEs, including seven fisheries officers. For the first time, we will have a national program, with a very small staff at headquarters, but staff in each region, to work with provinces, with stakeholders, and to work with indigenous groups.

Aquatic invasive species are a huge issue in the Great Lakes. There are 180 aquatic invasive species, of which Asian carp is important, and sea lamprey, for a long time. We realize it is a broader issue nationally.

Mr. Mel Arnold: It's a much broader issue nationally.

The zebra mussels and quagga mussels are spreading across the country. They've already hit Lake Winnipeg. How do we keep them out of our salmon-bearing streams on the east and west coasts?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: That's the key issue, and that's why we've invested in it. This is the first significant investment in a national aquatic invasive species program that we've had.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

I'm trying to go through the estimates to find where there are lines that would show what you're doing to actually restore fish stocks. When I'm going through, I see there's \$4 million being reallocated for an acoustic monitoring network. Where would I find a similar line showing what's being done in the streams, in the waters, that's going to bring back our Atlantic salmon stocks or our B.C. salmon stocks?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: I'll ask Sylvie to think about whether there is something specific in here.

The reality is, the supplementary estimates (B) don't have a lot in that regard. However, within supplementary estimates (A) and the main estimates, where we address those issues, we had specific items for that. In supplementary estimates (B), it is some specific initiatives, which Tony outlined.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Could that information be provided?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: Sylvie, is there anything else there?

Ms. Sylvie Lapointe: In supps (A), we did get some ongoing funding to complete rebuilding plans, update integrated fisheries management plans. We also got some specific funding—

Mr. Mel Arnold: We keep hearing that these are plans to build plans. We don't hear or see anywhere that there's work being done in the streams, in the waters.

Where can we find that in the budgets or in the supplements?

Ms. Sylvie Lapointe: We are going to be tabling some information shortly that will respond to the concerns expressed by the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development, and to follow up in terms of appearances we've had here on how we're progressing on that front.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

Do I have any time left?

The Chair: You have about 40 seconds.

Mr. Mel Arnold: I'll pass that to my colleague.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Mr. Hutchinson and Mr. Smith, we've heard testimony from you on both sides of the questions regarding icebreakers. I believe it's a bit contradictory. I was very specific in asking whether you believe you have the solutions, that you are set for this season. However, one of the comments you made to me also was that it depends on the weather.

In light of the recent CBC reports, winter navigation service disruptions in eastern Canada last year highlighted the lack of icebreaking capacity. Can you explain why shovel-ready interim icebreaking solutions offered by the commercial shipping industry have gone unactioned since they were proposed over a year ago? Telling us today that an RFP has gone out, or telling us today that it depends on the weather—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Doherty. You have to hurry up.

Mr. Todd Doherty: —is unacceptable.

Can you give us your assurances?

The Chair: Very quickly, please.

Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson: As I answered earlier, we do have a plan for icebreaking for the coming winter. We believe it's a robust plan. We can't plan for every unknown and for every contingency. The future of the icebreaking fleet is under active consideration, including the proposals we have received from across industry. They're all under active consideration at this time.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Morrissey, please, for five minutes.

Mr. Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

One of the budget items in small craft harbours is the amount that's budgeted each year for maintenance. Could you give me an indication of that budget over the past number of years? As you hear from harbour authorities, this is an issue where the budget has been the same for years while the costs continue to go up. Is the budget the same this year compared to last year? I look at the P.E.I. region, and I believe it's less than \$1 million.

Ms. Sylvie Lapointe: As we have outlined, our main budget is \$75 million for all ongoing work, whether it be maintenance, repairs, or dredging operations. That's been supplemented over the last 10 years with some B-base funding. Last year and this year, we received an additional \$140 million and some.

• (0940)

Mr. Robert Morrissey: The base budget—

Ms. Sylvie Lapointe: The base budget is \$75 million. It hasn't changed.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: It hasn't changed in years.

Ms. Sylvie Lapointe: It hasn't changed in more than a decade, I think.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Okay.

Have you any idea by how much the costs would have gone up over those 10 years? It's a project that 10 years ago may have cost \$30,000. Is this now a \$60,000 item?

Ms. Sylvie Lapointe: Our estimate, in terms of if we were keeping up with inflation, is for about 20% in increased costs.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: That's 20% over the 10 years. Okay.

Another question is—you referenced it in an earlier answer—on emergency dredging, and I do agree that conditions constantly change, so you never know.

One of the issues that's a bit frustrating to fishers and then to me as an MP is that it seems to be that something is actioned at the last moment when everybody knows, leading up to a particular opening of the season, that there is a dredging issue at a harbour. Can you explain a bit how you ultimately action an action?

Ms. Sylvie Lapointe: We work with our regions to be able to do that. We do our best in terms of meeting the requirements of fishermen, and we work with the harbour authorities to determine when is the appropriate time to undertake the dredging activities.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Be a little more specific. When there is a critical issue.... There's yearly maintenance dredging that occurs at a lot of ports, but then there are these situations that occur and create an emergency situation. Could you explain to me how a decision is made to action work there?

Ms. Sylvie Lapointe: If there are emergency situations, we respond as quickly as we can, given the amount of resources we have. Our first priority is safety in all cases for the fishing vessels that access the harbours.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: We've had incidents of safety because it was too late when they finally got a dredging project under way, when everybody knew it had to be done. It just seems to be unacceptable in this day and age for that kind of decision-making process to occur, whereby an incident occurs and you're still getting around to making a decision on dredging. I would just ask that the department be more conscious in how it reacts to this so that we don't have to address a safety incident down the road.

We talked about invasive species. One species appears to be becoming more of an issue and is being addressed to me more and more by fishers. Is it the striped bass?

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): It's the striped bass.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: It is the striped bass, which seems to be growing dramatically in population and stock. I know that it's an issue in New Brunswick, but now in Prince Edward Island fishers tell me that when they open these fish, they can find a lot of small lobsters in them. Why are we so slow, from a regulatory perspective, in increasing the fishing pressure on what appears to be an invasive species?

Mr. Kevin Stringer: I'm pretty sure I'm looking at striped bass. It's not an invasive species. It's natural to—

It was listed as—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Okay, sorry. Let me go back. It's not, but to some more valuable fisheries, it is invasive.

Mr. Kevin Stringer: It's invading the salmon.

It's not an invasive species.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: We got that.

Mr. Kevin Stringer: It is an issue. In fact, it's a really interesting story. It is a species at risk in the St. Lawrence.

It was a species of concern in the Miramichi many years ago, and then there was an explosion of them about five years ago. We've opened up the fishery. We've done a lot of studies, including stomach contents, how much they are eating. We're concerned about lobster, but we're really concerned about salmon, and are they eating fry. We've assessed that. There is a fishery each year. About 4,000 recreational fisheries participate in it, but it is an ongoing issue.

We have seen some reduction in the numbers in the last year or two, but it's still a much larger number than it was. In terms of valuable species, it is salmon, lobster, other species that we need to make sure are being managed effectively, and, yes, striped bass are a challenge there.

● (0945)

Mr. Robert Morrissey: What are you going to do about it?

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

I'm at risk here being the species invasive of your time, but I have no choice as the chair, so I want to thank our guests for being here. Ms. Lapointe, Mr. Matson, Mr. Stringer, Commissioner Hutchinson, and Deputy Commissioner Smith, I appreciate all of you doing this.

We now have to go to the votes, unless this is a point of order.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Just a quick note. We can do the votes first and do this afterwards.

The Chair: Very well, then.

Mr. Todd Doherty: I wanted to do it with our guests present.

The Chair: We're going to break, and then we're going to go straight to our guests next.

Do you want to do it before we go into Bill C-55?

Mr. Todd Doherty: Yes.

The Chair: Sorry, I don't mean to be misleading.

I want to go to the votes right now since we're following up with this.

We have three votes, pursuant to Standing Order 81(5), as mentioned, the supplementary estimates 2017-18, votes 1b, 5b and 10b under Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

DEPARTMENT OF FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Vote 1b—Operating expenditures.....\$15, 363,018

Vote 5b—Capital expenditures.....\$29,745 ,946

Vote 10b—Grants and contributions.....\$10,877,675

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

The Chair: Shall I report the supplementary estimates 2017-18 to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

The Chair: Thank you, folks. That concludes supplementary estimates.

Mr. Doherty.

Mr. Todd Doherty: I would like to seek unanimous consent to get a group picture of all committee members present today, along with our special guests, but I guess that won't happen now, but from Big Brothers Big Sisters at the close of this meeting.

The Chair: Very quickly, as in right now, let's do this?

Mr. Todd Doherty: Yes.

The Chair: Okay, let's break for a few minutes.

• (0945) _____ (Pause) _____

• (0950)

The Chair: Hello, everyone. Welcome back.

Just as a reminder, I need five minutes of your time at the very end to go in camera about some very important things. I just have a couple of questions to ask, and it won't take more than five minutes, which means that an hour from now, we should be done. I know some of us have committee afterwards.

A very special welcome to our guests. First of all, raise your hand if you can hear me, for those joining us by video conference. As I say your name, could you please raise your hand.

I have the executive director of the Prince Edward Island Fishermen's Association, Mr. Ian MacPherson. We also have the president of the Prince Edward Island Fishermen's Association, Melanie Griffin. Is that correct?

Ms. Melanie Giffin (Representative, Prince Edward Island Fishermen's Association): I'm the quality and program industry coordinator.

The Chair: I'm sorry. We originally had Robert Jenkins as the president. I apologize, that is my mistake. Thank you for the correction, Ms. Giffin. I appreciate that.

We have, from the P.E.I. Shellfish Association, the president, Kenneth Arsenaault.

As you know, we have with us two organizations. We're going to be providing you up to 10 minutes each. If you don't want to use your full 10 minutes, that's fine. After, we'll have a round of questioning, so if you don't get to your points, the questioning will start after, and maybe you can get your points in then.

In the meantime, I'm going to start with Mr. Arsenaault.

Mr. Kenneth Arsenaault (President, P.E.I. Shellfish Association): I have nothing to present.

The Chair: That's fine.

Mr. Kenneth Arsenaault: I was told at the last minute, and I didn't have time.

The Chair: That's fine. This is the first part of our meeting, and some of the questions may be coming your way, so you can discuss that then.

In the meantime, we have the P.E.I. Fishermen's Association.

Would you like to have a presentation for up to 10 minutes?

Mr. Ian MacPherson (Executive Director, Prince Edward Island Fishermen's Association): Yes, we would.

The Chair: Very good.

Mr. MacPherson, please go ahead.

Mr. Ian MacPherson: Thank you, Chairman Simms.

The Prince Edward Island Fishermen's Association once again welcomes the opportunity to present to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans.

My name is Ian MacPherson, and I am the executive director of PEIFA. Our president, Bobby Jenkins, was unable to attend this morning. He sends his regrets. I am joined, though, by Melanie Giffin, our PEIFA staff member who is handling the marine protected area file. Melanie is a lobster biologist and also has extensive knowledge regarding other marine species.

With all due respect to the committee, I would like to request that, in future, more lead time be provided to our organization when requesting a presentation to the committee. We were invited this past Friday afternoon to present this morning. There are many important files occurring in the fishery at present, and we have a keen desire to make our presentation as complete and informative as possible. We thank you for your consideration of our request.

The PEIFA represents 1,280 independent owner-operators who participate in our local fishery. Each of our captains has a sizable investment in equipment, training, and sweat equity to make their fleet successful. Therefore, very few people connected with the fishery have a bigger personal investment at risk should our fisheries not remain viable and sustainable. As a side note, we would like to commend Minister LeBlanc and this committee for supporting the strengthening of the owner-operator and fleet separation policies at this critical time.

The harvesters of Prince Edward Island have supported many conservation and gear reduction initiatives and the Marine Stewardship Council certification of our lobster fishery. These efforts are assisting in keeping our fisheries viable for Canadian generations to come. Therefore, when we speak of our concerns with the marine protected area and Bill C-55, we are speaking from the perspective of making our fisheries better. Recent announcements have confirmed that Canada has met the 5% target on MPAs with a further 5% being targeted by 2020. We know that these areas will be national in scope, and for the most part the Gulf of St. Lawrence, which is our fishing area, has not been significantly impacted at this time. However, several areas are under consideration. Our concerns rest with a number of unanswered questions regarding the MPA program, how the process is being conducted, and the lack of new information.

In terms of some proposed changes outlined in Bill C-55, the PEIFA has been a strong advocate of enforcing the rules and regulations around the fishery and setting sufficient deterrents to prevent future abuses. There have been cases in the past when fines have been viewed more as a cost of doing business rather than the deterrent they are supposed to be. The PEIFA is not in a position to comment on the amounts of fines that are stipulated in the offences and punishments section of the national strategy, proposed sections 39.6 to 39.92. We do, however, support updating and strengthening the powers of enforcement officers as outlined.

We are supportive of a review process that will assess whether an MPA is achieving some, or any, of its intended targets after five years. We support the suggestion that compensation may be provided to an interest owner should their activity be discontinued because of the marine protected area designation.

The PEIFA continues to have numerous concerns around the proposed oil and gas development known as Old Harry in the waters off Newfoundland and Quebec in the Magdalen Islands. We find it contradictory that we can be discussing MPAs in one area of the gulf, and oil and gas development in the same general vicinity. As we understand it now, you can have a limited fishing zone in a designated MPA area, yet oil and gas development may be allowed. This is a troubling example. The continued granting of exploration permits for this area and the suggestion that a rigorous environmental assessment will ensure safe exploration are also troubling to the harvesters in the gulf. This suggests that this type of development is a *fait accompli*. MPAs and oil and gas development do not mix. Bill C-55 should reflect this.

• (0955)

The PEIFA has specific questions on MPAs that require answers or clarification.

One, we understand that some areas may be shut down with exemptions. What does that mean, and how will it work?

Two, if an MPA is declared but target results are not achieved, how will this be assessed? How often will MPAs be reviewed?

Three, is there a possibility that some protected species will be identified and others can be added after an MPA opening? Will there be additional consultation if this happens?

Four, is the Governor in Council able to make decisions separate from the minister? Why is this role being expanded?

At present there are two newsletters per year being produced with updates on the MPA process. We find this to be too little information, too infrequently.

We would like to have language added to the proposed changes which stipulates that more industry consultation take place before an MPA is designated. We are keenly aware that the federal Ministry of Fisheries has had and continues to have ultimate discretion in making decisions involving the Canadian fishery.

The PEIFA is advocating for a process that is transparent and more inclusive of the experts who make their living from the ocean. This is a serious, long-lasting process that requires a high degree of dialogue and true consultation. Recent issues with whale mortality in

the Gulf of St. Lawrence underscore that the ocean is a fast-changing environment. We must also have a process that addresses these changes while not severely limiting the ability of our harvesters to supply food for Canada and beyond.

We ask the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans to take our input into consideration when drafting changes to Bill C-55.

Thank you.

• (1000)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we will go to questioning, with Mr. Morrissey from the government side for seven minutes, please.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Thank you, Chair.

Good morning, everyone from Prince Edward Island.

Ian, my first question is for you. Could you give me an example of a consultation that your organization would have had on changes to the Fisheries Act in the past?

Mr. Ian MacPherson: We have done submissions and met the timelines that were laid out. We've done two written submissions on the Fisheries Act, but generally, most of the dialogue has been through emails notifying us of the upcoming proposed changes and going on the website and giving the government feedback on those areas.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Is that in relation to the current act we're discussing, or are you referencing changes from a number of years ago? I want to get a sense of what you would view as an acceptable level of consultation between government and your organization, which you point out is the largest on Prince Edward Island, on legislation that would impact your clients, who are your fishers.

Mr. Ian MacPherson: It is important to get the stakeholder groups together around the table to have an overview of what those proposed changes are.

We're dealing with three things. You can correct me if I'm wrong, but there are proposed changes that have been on the table for the Fisheries Act. Today we're talking about changes to the Canada Petroleum Resources Act and the Oceans Act, so it sometimes does get quite confusing for our groups, but we are diligent in looking at those changes and submitting feedback.

As an example, the first proposed changes to the act were generally around inland waters, which would involve us to a lesser degree, but we still did respond to those changes.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Ian, could you enlighten me? Have sister organizations in the Gulf of St. Lawrence region taken the same position as it relates to exploratory permits for oil and gas drilling ?

Mr. Ian MacPherson: We're probably going back six or seven years, but certainly there was an extensive conference over the Magdalen Islands that a number of fishing groups attended. Part of why you might not know of our current position has been that the process has been delayed quite a bit in terms of the permit process that Corridor Resources was seeking, but it seems to be back on the table. The permit has been extended and I believe they've asked for a delay in coming out with some of the parameters for the environmental assessment, but they are still intending to go that route of drilling an exploratory well.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: I have a question for Ms. Giffin, who's a lobster scientist.

Can you give an opinion to this committee on the impact the lobster fishery or crab fishery would have on the ecosystem or the natural environment of the gulf where it's fished from a gear perspective? Can you give us an opinion on whether you feel that has a negative or a neutral impact?

• (1005)

Ms. Melanie Giffin: In terms of the trap fishery you mean, the actual fishing process?

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Yes.

Ms. Melanie Giffin: Trap fisheries have normally been deemed relatively safe fisheries due to the fact that there's no dredging and no trawling. It's not a situation where they're dragging the traps along the bottom and harming the habitat. In general, it's been considered very safe for the environment and the habitat of the fishery.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Could you elaborate a bit more on the MSC marine sustainable certification process, which now endorses the lobster fishery and the crab fishery? If you were explaining it to a person who had no knowledge of the fishery, how would you define that and its impact on the environment and on a resource? Marine protected areas are all about protecting the natural resource or a fishery species that is in trouble. That's a big part of it. Could you comment on that?

Mr. Ian MacPherson: I'll answer that one. I believe you're referring to the Marine Stewardship Council MSC certification.

Basically, for other people in the room, that's a third party certification body that comes in to look at a specific fishery. I can only talk to lobster because our Prince Edward Island fishery is certified for lobster. Basically, they look at the number of traps, the length of the fishing season, the types of traps that are used, how the biomass is protected or sustained, and a whole number of things. They audit both the harvesting side and the processing side, and it is basically a consumer-driven certification in that the organization certifies that the fishery is, in fact, sustainable.

There are annual audits that are conducted, and then by every fifth year you have to be recertified. They initially grant a five-year certification, and then you would have to be recertified in year four to have it continue.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: From all the work that your organization has done in collaboration with fisheries, from your perspective, the lobster... I know the crab fishery is extremely well regulated from a scientific perspective. Is there anything that you see on the horizon

that would concern your organization from a stock perspective on these two lucrative fisheries?

Mr. Ian MacPherson: You can speak to that.

Ms. Melanie Giffin: In terms of the work and the effort that we put into keeping an eye on lobster fisheries specifically, we do things as an association, for instance, the lobster larval collectors, which we take part in every year from a science perspective, to make sure we have a better understanding of the abundance in the area. That's something we do in conjunction with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

We also are aware of the fact that DFO takes part in dive surveys as well, to take a look at the young-of-the-year lobster, and the smaller lobster that are just recruiting into the fishery. The management measures that we have in place for lobster are more strict and stringent than in other places in terms of a shorter fishing season, the regulations we have on sizes and buried females, and what's thrown back to ensure that the sustainability of the lobster fishery is maintained.

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

Just a quick reminder to everybody, all of our guests are by video conference so I'd like to ask my colleagues if they have a question for a particular individual, please say that individual's name and then ask your question, because it's hard for them, obviously, to establish eye contact.

By the same token, to our guests from Prince Edward Island, if you wish to comment on a situation, please raise your hand so that the person asking the question can acknowledge you. It makes it a lot easier that way.

In the meantime, we're going to Mr. Doherty, for seven minutes please.

• (1010)

Mr. Todd Doherty: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to our guests.

Mr. MacPherson, you could not have spoken truer words in your opening comments than when you said more time is needed in terms of getting it right as we move forward with a piece of legislation that is going to impact so many people who live in our coastal communities and depend on fishing to support their families, to support others, and to support their communities.

Bill C-55 is being pushed through very quickly. On this side at least, we feel that adequate consultation has not been done. In your earlier comments, you were saying that the tight timelines to accomplish these goals make you feel that it is being rushed through.

We all agree that we should do whatever we can to conserve our waters and make sure the fish are there for the future. There's probably nobody else in this room who understands that more than the three there.

Bill C-55 will have an impact on our coastal communities. It will mean fisheries closures. The minister was before us last week and did state that there will be fisheries closures.

One of the things you commented on was that there was compensation. You were happy to see that there was compensation for displaced fishers. Did you know that Bill C-55 does not offer compensation for fishers? It only offers compensation for oil and gas companies if their certificate has been pulled.

Mr. Ian MacPherson: That's very interesting. When we go through this and look at it in terms of talking about an interest and about compensation, we think it's reasonable for us to be included—

Mr. Todd Doherty: We agree with you 100%.

Our colleague Ms. Jordan asked the minister twice, I believe, and for sure once, and the answer came back that there was no compensation for our fishers, only for oil and gas companies.

Mr. Ian MacPherson: That's disconcerting.

I want to point out a couple of things that we feel we're up against in terms of timelines. We have a great working relationship with DFO on a number of files and a number of issues, but basically there was a commitment that there would be two of these letters a year. We checked our files. There have only been two in two years. That's a concern.

Then, in one of those newsletters, it does say that the network is to have the next set—so we'd be talking about the areas designated for 2020—done by 2019. We're just about through 2017 and that really only leaves two years to find that other 5%. I realize that it's not all going to be in Atlantic Canada, but that said, I think collectively we've all acknowledged that the next 5% is going to be a stiffer challenge for sure.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Are you also aware—and this is for the panel—that Bill C-55 gives powers of authority to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, as well as the Minister of Natural Resources, as it pertains to MPAs and natural resources?

Mr. Ian MacPherson: No, we weren't aware of that, and I guess that does kind of loop back to only having a few days to review the actual legislation and get a presentation together.

Based on your earlier comment, certainly we're not excited about just oil and gas being compensated if there is some displacement in a fishing area. I think that needs to be looked at by the committee. These are all things.... As I mentioned, we are a little concerned about the Governor in Council. It appears that body is going to be given additional powers. I'm not totally up to speed on how the legislative process goes, but it does say in the one set of documents that it is looking at increasing the Governor in Council.... I'm not sure of those exact parameters either, and what that entails.

•(1015)

Mr. Todd Doherty: Bill C-55 has been described by the minister, and indeed the government, as a way to fast-forward our marine protected areas program. We are pushing the government to make sure we get this right. When you are dealing with people's lives and livelihoods, you should be getting it right. Would you agree that if it takes seven years or nine years to get it right, we should be doing what we need to do to make sure that it is right and that any negative impacts are mitigated?

Mr. Ian MacPherson: You're absolutely right. We are talking about people's livelihoods. We have a world-class fishery. One of my last comments in our opening statements was around the whole right

whale situation and how that has landed out of nowhere on DFO, fishing organizations, and the federal government. We commend DFO, because we have a good process going, and we hope it continues. The minister is hosting a round table on Thursday that we'll be attending.

However, at the end of the day, these are the kinds of dramatic changes that can happen. There needs to be proper consultation, because once these changes are in place, I don't think it's the intent to switch them on and off. We want to make sure we get this right.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Would you consider the consultations more as information sessions than information-gathering sessions?

Ms. Melanie Giffin: The one real consultation session we had was great and interactive, and our fishers gave an indication of where they fish around the island. Anything we've had since then has all been information sessions more than consultations, in all honesty.

To touch on the seven years that was mentioned and a way to fast-forward the MPA program, this was brought up at a previous round table I attended in Boston. If it takes seven years to put an MPA in place and to make sure environmental assessments are done, the habitat and species are not going to be affected in a negative way—it's going to make a positive impact. I'm not sure what is going to be a shortcut.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Giffin. I have to cut it right there.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Thank you for your testimony.

The Chair: Mr. Donnelly, you have seven minutes, please.

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

My thanks to all our witnesses for being here today, and for providing this testimony.

Mr. MacPherson, I want to thank you for putting your presentation together. I'm very sorry to hear that you were so rushed in preparing for this meeting. Hopefully, this standing committee has heard your request for more time in the future and will heed your advice for future witnesses. I appreciate your comments and hope the committee will take them to heart.

Mr. Ian MacPherson: Thank you very much. It's in the interest of being able to do proper research and come fully prepared. The request was made with all due respect to the committee, for sure.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: I appreciate that.

You mentioned in your testimony that you felt it was contradictory to look at protecting the ocean when you have allowed things like oil and gas activities. Could you elaborate a little more on that?

Mr. Ian MacPherson: I guess there are a couple of things. I mentioned earlier the conference over at the Magdalen Islands.

Even just testing for oil and gas has some significant impacts from a seismic standpoint if they're using the sound cannons. Until there's something drilled, they'll never know the exact size of the field, but it's anticipated that it's a pretty significant oil and gas find. You start with one well, but we know that the area will expand and that the whole seismic testing area will continually expand. We're pretty confident that there are negative impacts in a lot of those areas. There are concerns around possible blow-outs or other problems. We have ice conditions they didn't have to deal with in the Gulf of Mexico. There are a lot of big picture questions that make the gulf unique.

If there was a problem, it would affect all of Atlantic Canada because of the cycle of the currents in the gulf. So there are numerous areas of concern. We just don't see the net gain in trading off our multi-billion-dollar fishing and tourism industries.

• (1020)

Mr. Fin Donnelly: You talked about additional or potential additional species of concern. Do you have any species you're monitoring right now that you're concerned with?

Mr. Ian MacPherson: A few months back I attended a meeting in Halifax. It was around MSC certification. The certifying body out of Ireland was looking at making some changes.

One of the things that did come up surrounded bycatch. It was interesting, because are there going to be MSC-related conditions that start to affect bycatch, and will that mean that certain areas or species that aren't our problem now could start being pulled into the mix in terms of how they're assessed?

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Finally, could you talk about the consultation process? What would you like to see? You mentioned stakeholders at a table. What do you see as an effective consultation process, when you're talking about protection of the ocean?

Mr. Ian MacPherson: One thing we need to point out is that generally we have two regions of DFO, one is the gulf region and the other is the Maritimes region. One of the things that Melanie pointed out is that at one meeting we heard there will be limited fishing in the MPAs, and then at another meeting we heard there would be no-fish zones in MPAs. That's between two regions that are right next door to each other, so we need to get a consistent message out there.

I'm not a big fan of having meetings for the sake of meetings, but we have stakeholders and first nations. These are collective problems, and I guess what I find is that when you put people in a room where their livelihood depends on solving a problem, that's how you come up with some effective solutions, or things that will work properly versus getting top-down decisions that don't work for anyone.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Thank you.

Mr. Arsenault, could you tell us a little bit about what shellfish your members harvest, and any changing ocean conditions you've noticed over the past, let's say, 10 years?

Do you think your members have been adequately consulted when talking about proposed marine protected areas?

Mr. Kenneth Arsenault: I represent the oyster fishery, soft shell clam fishery, and the quahog fishery. We did see changes in the tides in P.E.I. over the last 10 to 20 years. It's hard to say how much.

You asked if we were consulted on the MPAs. I would have to say no. I've only been the president for a couple of months, and Friday was the first I heard about it, about MPAs or this new Bill C-55. I've had limited time to do any research, or make a presentation to the committee today, so I apologize for that.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: What do you harvest? Can you tell us a little more about what you harvest?

Mr. Kenneth Arsenault: The biggest shellfish fishery in P.E.I. is oysters. We had two seasons that ran from May 1 to July 15, and from September 15 to November 30, so we have a fishery going on at the moment. It's worth somewhere around \$18 million a year to the economy of P.E.I.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Have you noticed any changes to the shells, the size or number of oysters that you referenced in the last, say, 10 or 20 years?

• (1025)

Mr. Kenneth Arsenault: We noticed a big change in the quality of the product. Anybody who eats oysters, especially in a restaurant, likes to have the nice, top-choice oyster, and that quality has deteriorated in the past years. The shell has also changed probably in the last 10 to 15 years. The shell has deteriorated. As fishers, we call it a worm in the shell. It doesn't actually get into the meat of the oyster, but it affects the shell. In the end, the market does not want that product, so the processors are unable to ship that product to market.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arsenault. We appreciate that.

Thank you, Mr. Donnelly.

For seven minutes, we now go to Mr. Hardie.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's nice to speak with somebody from the other coast. I'm from British Columbia.

We too have been looking at marine protected areas and the impact, on the north coast especially, because some have been put in place up there.

There may be a little clarity needed with respect to Bill C-55. I'm just going to read this. "Clause 5 of the bill amends the Oceans Act to empower the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard to prohibit certain activities within a marine area of interest...identified for conservation...".

This is, if you like, an emergency measure to deal with what the department and the people on the ground see as a troubling issue. We could perhaps think back to 1992 when the cod moratorium was instituted in Newfoundland and along the coast. We saw that coming. A provision like this perhaps could have prevented such a drastic collapse of that fishery, when everybody knew that things were under stress and something needed to be done.

The main element of Bill C-55 is to give the minister powers to basically freeze the activities in a certain area, using the precautionary principle, while they look at the elements that may be necessary for a marine protected area sometime in the future. What we heard generally here was an interest in preventing certain things, especially oil and gas exploration and seismic testing, but not so much to change the fishing activities that were going on.

If this provision comes in, although some fishing closures might take place, for the most part, the focus—which at least I heard anyway—is on the extraction industries. If we look now at your areas of interest and your commercial activities, have you noticed any particular changes with respect to what you fish and where you fish, or has it been, if you like, fairly constant over the years?

Ms. Melanie Giffin: There have been some different changes, some small changes.

Ultimately, as an industry, the stakeholders are very aware of the changes. They are the first ones to step up and say that maybe we should create a working group and have discussions about how we can maintain, sustain, and possibly improve this, rather than leaving it until the last minute, as you mentioned with the cod, where it was a full-on fishery until it was depleted.

There were questions this year, specifically with the mackerel fishery. Because in the gulf region we deal with four different provinces, and different provinces have a different outlook on what they're seeing. The result of that has been a working group that was created. The first meeting of the Atlantic mackerel rebuilding plan working group is going to be on December 5, to have a better look at that fishery, what's being done, how we can improve that stock rather than depleting it.

I think that we've learned, since the cod industry, how to improve on those things. I understand that when you look at marine protected areas in terms of a specific species, that's to try to save them.

I guess my question, when it comes down to that, is if you're going to put a freeze on a species, or on an area because of a species, what are the rules and regulations around that freeze? Is it just long enough to confirm whether or not the species is doing okay and can be continued to be fished?

• (1030)

Mr. Ken Hardie: If I could, I'd like to interject here.

The freeze, as I understand it, is the freeze to the current activities. Whatever is going on now would be for the most part allowed to continue. The minister would put about a five-year span to review the situation. It may be a step toward a marine protected area or simply to allow the stocks to recover. What's going on now, for the most part, would continue.

With regard to your comments about the process you're using right now where you see some problems, could it then be integrated with the minister's decision-making ability under Bill C-55 to put in, if you like, an interim freeze on activities in an area, i.e., maintain what's going on but protect it against other activities that might want to come into the area?

Can you see a crossmatch between what you're doing and what the minister could be doing?

Ms. Melanie Giffin: I think the crossmatch in terms of the consultation is that the industry is already taking part in these kinds of things. They have collected information that could be shared to make sure that everybody who is making decisions has all the information available.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Go ahead.

Mr. Ian MacPherson: I want to interject and support what Melanie just said. A lot of it certainly centres around communication and more communication. One of the things that we as an industry may have to look at is having more multispecies working groups.

I get it, and I'm not saying the current system is flawed, but we solve issues in snow crab, and solve issues in lobster, and solve issues in mackerel, but as we're seeing with the right whale situation, I think there is going to be a real necessity for multispecies to work together to find collective solutions to deal with this issue. It may be something that would work well around marine protected areas also. I think the problem we get into sometimes is that we don't hear a consistent message or get consistent information from one area to another.

Mr. Ken Hardie: In my last few seconds, I want to emphasize the fact that if the minister does make this decision, it could freeze activities in the area at what is going on right now.

Mr. Todd Doherty: It doesn't necessarily, though.

Mr. Ken Hardie: That's a critical part for you to understand.

Thank you.

Mr. Ian MacPherson: Understood. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Arnold, go ahead for five minutes, please.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you, Chair.

I thank our guests today. I really appreciate having all three of you here.

Mr. MacPherson, you referred to hearing about different versions of no-take zones from region to region. Can you take a few seconds to describe a little further what you've heard there? There seems to be a lack of coordination.

Ms. Melanie Giffin: I can actually cover that, because it's my file, which I've been taking care of at the FA. We've had the DFO gulf region come in and have discussions with us about the plans, what's going to happen, the process, and the expectations. In terms of follow-up on that, I'm on the tuna file as well, so I attended the ALPAC meeting, which was held in the Maritimes region. The representative on MPAs for the Maritimes region gave a different idea of expectations from what was given to us by the representatives in the gulf. The representatives in the gulf told us that most likely the MPAs that were put in place would not be no-take zones. They might be exclusive to one fishery, and they would say that you're not allowed to fish mackerel there or tuna or whatever it might be, but you would still be allowed to fish, say, lobster.

When we went to the Maritimes region at ALPAC and heard the update from there, the representative from DFO there said that every single MPA put in place would be a 100% no-take zone, so there is a discrepancy there.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

This basically backs up some of the other testimony we've heard, that there is very little coordination between the fisheries management branch and the oceans branch. Would you say this is an indication that this is being pushed through too fast?

I can let all three of you respond to that.

Ms. Melanie Giffin: Yes.

Mr. Kenneth Arsenault: Yes, that's the way it sounds.

Mr. Ian MacPherson: We understand this is an international program that Canada is getting more involved in. There is a learning curve for all sides. We're certainly understanding of that. As we alluded to earlier, it's really important that we get this right.

• (1035)

Mr. Mel Arnold: I fully support you on getting it right.

Mr. Hardie referred to the freeze on activities with regard to what's currently happening. Do you feel the freeze or allowing only activities that have been happening in the previous year is appropriate? We've heard from fishers on all coasts about how fish stocks move from one area to another. In fact, in the Maritimes, just a couple of weeks ago, we heard that fishing grounds had moved 15 miles. They also have halibut moving into areas where they haven't been seen for a few decades.

Would the closures that consider only the previous year be appropriate or should there be more historic information included in those allowed activities?

Ms. Melanie Giffin: I'm not sure about the previous year.

Mr. Ian MacPherson: That's something that should be discussed a little more in depth among organizations to come up with something that's workable.

Mr. Mel Arnold: We have only a few weeks before this committee has to finish this study and report back to Parliament on that aspect of it.

Currently there is only consideration for activities occurring within the previous one year. Should that be longer?

Ms. Melanie Giffin: If I can address that, I feel this would be the prime opportunity for that consultation with our actual fishers, the people who that is going to affect. They know their fishery better than I do, for instance, in terms of where they're fishing, and if it's changed over the past year or not. I think they would have a better answer for that.

In terms of consultation with them, I can't say what their answers will be, if one year would be enough, or if a look at a longer historical background would be better.

Mr. Mel Arnold: With literally a few weeks left to do this, is there time for that consultation?

Ms. Melanie Giffin: It would be rushed.

Mr. Ian MacPherson: It would be rushed.

Mr. Mel Arnold: It would be rushed. Thank you very much.

Should there be a closure, an area of interest identified near shore, closer to a community in Prince Edward Island or any of the other provinces, what kind of an impact would that have on the local communities?

Mr. Ian MacPherson: Significant would certainly be the type of impact. Most of our fishery is inshore, so if something close were closed, it would have a dollar-for-dollar impact on what goes on in those communities or areas.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Would those communities—

The Chair: Mr. Arnold, I'm sorry, but I have to cut it right there. I'm really short on time. I apologize.

I'm going to Mr. Finnigan now for five minutes.

Mr. Pat Finnigan (Miramichi—Grand Lake, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the panel for being with us today.

Fishers have always been involved in the protection of their resource. Over time they all realize that, when the resource is gone, there won't be a lifestyle or a way to earn their living. I think they've done a terrific job. We're increasing the carapace size for the lobster.

Fishery closure, whether there is an MPA or not, would be regulated by DFO, I would assume, because, if the resource dwindles, at one point DFO would step in, as they always have. I think that's their duty, to make sure the resource is protected.

I think we have a minister who is very closely connected with the fishing communities. We were talking about owner-operators, and he realizes the importance of having community fishing going on, and I think we can respect that.

I think, from what I've heard—and we've heard different versions of it around the table—the minister has said that, whether you can fish in an MPA or not, there will be other areas surrounding it that could be open.

Having said that, Mr. Arsenault, I know maybe some of the information hasn't trickled down as much as you would appreciate, but how comfortable or uncomfortable are you with the fact that we want to protect ocean areas on our coast?

•(1040)

Mr. Kenneth Arsenault: I didn't catch the last part of your question.

Mr. Pat Finnigan: Knowing that, again, as I said, some information may not have been available as much as we would like to see, how comfortable are you with the proposed protection that we have in place, which started under the previous government? We're exactly where we would be, because they had a 10-year target, and we're halfway there, and we're going to meet halfway on our commitment across the globe. We want to make sure that we protect our share of the ocean.

How comfortable are you with what's been happening so far, as far as protecting our shore with MPAs or with Bill C-55 is concerned?

Mr. Kenneth Arsenault: I'm really not comfortable answering that because I haven't had time to research the bill and what the MPAs are all about. As I said, I've only been president for two months, and I've had a lot on my plate for the last couple of months. To answer a question on whether I'm satisfied on what's been happening, it's way too early in my position as chair to comment on that, and I apologize for that.

Mr. Pat Finnigan: Mr. MacPherson, could you comment on that same point?

Mr. Ian MacPherson: Yes, and I hope this answers it. You made some excellent points in the beginning that the fishery is important to the people who earn their living from it, and they want it to continue. If we haven't learned lessons from the crash of the cod, then shame on all of us. I think we have thousands of people who are working hard to prevent that.

At the end of the day, I keep going back to if we don't have current information, then people get positional or concerned about things moving forward. Probably one of the main points of our discussion here today is that people are making efforts. We're not saying they're not, but we're getting a lot of pressure from our members to find out

more, to know more, and to get answers to the questions that we asked a number of months ago. It's hard to get behind something if we don't have all of the information at our fingertips. That's what we need.

Mr. Pat Finnigan: Thank you.

I know you have indigenous communities. I'm from New Brunswick, so I know more about how they work there. What kind of relationship do you have with the indigenous communities in your part of the Maritimes? Have you had consultations with them? Do you feel they are also part of the process?

Mr. Ian MacPherson: They would probably be the best judge of that. We have a number of advisory boards and we make a point of inviting the indigenous communities to these meetings. Their attendance is optional. We also respect the fact that they are in separate negotiations with DFO on a number of files, which we generally aren't invited to. That concerns me. At the end of the day, all the fishers on the water want the resource to survive, and I think there is an opportunity there to improve that kind of communication. That goes back to what I mentioned earlier about not only having consultations on multiple species but also having all the stakeholders around those tables.

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

Folks, that concludes the witness part of the meeting. We will have an in camera session of about five minutes. I'm going to ask that anybody who's not an MP or staff please leave the room when we break.

In the meantime, I have a special thank you.

We thank you for your patience, Mr. MacPherson, Ms. Giffin, and Mr. Arsenault. We truly appreciate your time. Thank you very much.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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