



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

43rd PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 011

Wednesday, June 17, 2020

Chair: Mr. Ken McDonald



Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

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• (1505)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.)): Good afternoon, everyone. I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 11 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans. Pursuant to the motion adopted by the House on May 26, 2020, Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted on June 1, 2020, the committee is resuming its study of the impacts of COVID-19 on fishing industry stakeholders.

Today's meeting is taking place by video conference. The proceedings are public and are made available via the House of Commons website. So that you are aware, the webcast will show the person speaking rather than the entire committee.

Regular members know these by now, but for the benefit of witnesses who are participating in a House of Commons virtual committee meeting for the first time, I will remind you all of a few rules to follow.

Interpretation in this video conference will work very much like it does in a regular committee meeting. You have the choice at the bottom of your screen of floor, English or French. As you are speaking, if you plan to alternate from one language to another, you will need to switch the interpretation channel so that it aligns with the language you are speaking. You may want to allow for a short pause when switching languages.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. When you are ready to speak, you can click on the microphone icon to activate your mike.

Should members have a point of order, they should activate their mike and state that they have a point of order. If a member wishes to intervene on a point of order that has been raised by another member, I encourage him or her to use the “raise hand” function. To do so, you should click on “participants” at the bottom of the screen. When the list pops up, you will see, next to your name, that you can click on “raise hand”. This will signal to the chair your interest in speaking and will keep the names in chronological order.

When you are not speaking, please put your mike on mute. I can't say this clearly enough. We get feedback from people's offices or wherever they are, and this may interfere with the speech that somebody is giving.

The use of headsets is strongly encouraged, and when speaking, please speak slowly and clearly.

Should any technical challenge arise—for example, in relation to interpretation—or should a problem with your audio arise, please advise the chair immediately, and the technical team will work to resolve the issue. Please note that we may need to suspend during these times, as we need to ensure that all members are able to participate fully.

Before we get started, can everyone click on the top right-hand corner of their screens to ensure they are on gallery view? With this view, you should be able to see all the participants in grid view. It will ensure that all video participants can see one another.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses for today.

From the BC Seafood Alliance, we have Christina Burrridge, executive director. From the Maritime Fishermen's Union, we have Martin Mallet, executive director. From my home province, we have Keith Sullivan, president of Fish, Food and Allied Workers.

Ms. Burrridge, we will go to you first, for six minutes or less, please.

Ms. Christina Burrridge (Executive Director, BC Seafood Alliance): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The BC Seafood Alliance is the largest commercial fishing organization on the west coast. Our full members are both harvester associations, representing the owners and operators of commercially licensed fishing vessels in most major fisheries in B.C., and processing companies that process about 70% of B.C.'s salmon, herring, groundfish and some specialty products.

We do appreciate the opportunity to give you a sense of the impact of COVID-19 on west coast fisheries.

Our experience started in the last week of January when sales of geoduck, Dungeness crab and other live products ended when the lunar new year markets in Asia shut down. Those three products have a wholesale value of more than \$150 million annually. We've since seen that shutdown extend to virtually all food service sales worldwide. That matters because many, though not all, of our species were destined for the high-end global restaurant trade. Some species are adapting reasonably well to a market that is now predominantly domestic and retail, which means lower prices to the processor and the harvester because of high retail margins.

Some of our species such as geoducks, herring rolls and sea cucumbers will never have a domestic presence, so we need to figure out the cargo and container problems that complicate getting them to Asian markets. Markets were beginning to recover until the new cases in Beijing linked to a seafood market. We're seeing those markets shut down again.

Those species, with a couple of others in the same predicament, amount to almost half of the west coast wholesale value.

With slow markets, we have reduced processing production and then reduced it again to space out the line for physical distancing in the plant. We've been working with our processing plants to make sure that each has a COVID-19 plan. Of course, for both vessels and plants, access to PPE is essential. Funding is certainly nice, but access is essential. I'm glad to say that this is finally improving.

Plants, of course, need fish to be able to operate at all, so we need to be able to go fishing, which means keeping our harvester crews and communities, often in remote parts of the coast and often indigenous, safe. We've been working with other B.C. harvesting organizations and Fish Safe, our B.C. health and safety association, to implement fleet-specific guidance covering every aspect of a commercial fishing trip.

There are 14-day isolation periods beforehand, on-board practices, import procedures, off-loading and end-of-voyage procedures. These protocols have been reviewed and approved by both the Province of B.C. and WorkSafeBC.

For almost all species, production has dropped by up to 50%. Prices to harvesters have dropped by about 25% to 50% at this point, slightly recovering in some cases. Across the board, whether for harvesting or processing, we are getting less money while our costs have significantly increased.

On the emergency support measures, we appreciate the announcement of the Canadian seafood stabilization fund, but we are disappointed that B.C. has been shortchanged on that fund. We also need to understand exactly what we'll be eligible for.

Reorganizing processing lines for physical distancing or retooling for the domestic market and online sales is expensive. Automation technology and capital expenditures such as automated equipment or vacuum packing for retail can start at \$500,000.

The CERB has worked well in many fisheries but not for salmon harvesters, many of whom had a disastrous season in 2019 as a result of poor returns. It has complicated labour issues for processors, particularly on Vancouver Island. Of course, we're waiting to see what the harvester benefit and grant will look like. Again, we believe that salmon harvesters may lose out. Since 2019 was such a poor season, it will be difficult to meet the 35% decline in revenue.

• (1510)

We're also disappointed that the grant of up to \$10,000 for harvesters is less useful than a tweak to the Canada emergency business account, which is a loan of \$40,000, of which \$10,000 is forgivable if repaid by December 2022. That is much more useful for small fishing businesses, exactly the kind of small and medium-sized businesses that the CEBA was designed to help. The tweak would simply have been to allow all earned income evidence from

crews submitted to the CRA on a T4, no matter which box they filled out.

Fish harvesters, of course, have many costs in gearing up for a season, including DFO licence fees, and often do not get fully paid until the product has sold, which can be months later. Normally, they borrow money from processors or banks. Neither source is readily available this year, so for them, the Canada emergency business account would do exactly what it's supposed to do.

One other piece of COVID-19 assistance would be appreciated, and that's help with unexpected incremental costs of at-sea observer programs and science surveys. For instance, the at-sea observer program for Pacific spot prawns is essential to managing the fishery. If there's no—

The Chair: Ms. Burridge, I'm going to have to end it there. We've gone way over the six-minute mark.

Ms. Christina Burridge: My apologies.

The Chair: That's not a problem. Hopefully anything you haven't said in your opening statement will come out in the question and answer session, or please submit your written submission as well and we'll include it in the testimony.

We'll now go to Martin Mallet from the Maritime Fishermen's Union for six minutes or less, please.

Mr. Martin Mallet (Executive Director, Maritime Fishermen's Union): Good afternoon.

[*Translation*]

I will speak in French for a few minutes.

The Maritime Fishermen's Union (MFU) represents over 1,300 independent inshore owner-operator fishermen in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. Since its creation in 1977, the MFU's mission has been to represent, promote and defend the interests of inshore fishermen and their communities in the Maritimes. The MFU is also an active member of the Canadian Independent Fish Harvesters Federation.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in January, fishermen's associations across Canada have been assessing its impact on the livelihood of their members, the economic sustainability of the industry as a whole and the coastal-rural communities that depend on it.

In Atlantic Canada and Quebec, one of the most important fisheries in Canada is underway, the lobster spring fishery. As predicted, the COVID-19 pandemic is making life difficult for many fishers and crew members.

Last April, the MFU, in collaboration with other fish harvesters associations, requested short-, medium- and long-term financial support measures to provide a basic income, assistance for operating expenses, and business cash flow. These emergency support ideas were put together rapidly and with the objective that they could also be rolled out rapidly by the federal government because they are based on existing programs.

Today, while some support programs are available to our fishers, many of them will need to access the benefits and subsidies for fishers announced on May 14. However, the wait for details and access to new programs is damaging the fishing industry by creating confusion and hampering the planning process as our fishers move ahead with a fishery. Fishermen are questioning their ability to fish and cover their expenses this year, all the while supporting their families and crew members.

Here are a few industry particularities that need to be taken into consideration and addressed.

First, the seasonality of the industry is extremely important to consider. Many fishermen have a very short nine-week fishing window to make enough revenues to cover their fishing expenses and have enough net benefits to cover their living expenses until next year's fishery. This year, the window has already been reduced to seven weeks for many, due to season delays. In addition, fishers are faced with expected low lobster shore prices and daily catch limits.

Fishers are not paid before they start fishing and selling product. Therefore, they cannot demonstrate any financial impacts of the crisis before they begin fishing. However, many operational costs need to be covered, including wages, in order to get ready for the season. So, although several programs are now available to help fishers who are currently at sea, some of them will expire this summer and will not be available to support the upcoming fishery in August and later in the fall. In addition, details of and access to new benefit and subsidy programs for fishers, which could help many of them, are still expected.

The second point deals with crew members. Following the announcement of the new industry assistance programs on May 14, even though the employment insurance issue seems to have been resolved for EI claimants who are fishermen, crew members who are receiving benefits under the regular program are being left out in the cold. Many of our crew members are in this situation.

Third, family enterprises are extremely common in this industry. For instance, the fishermen's crew will many times consist of the wife, brothers and sisters or sons and daughters. The no-family-relations criterion needs to be eliminated for all wage subsidy programs in order to help this industry.

The fourth point is fishermen earnings and payroll structures, which are sometimes complex and difficult to use as a benchmark for program access for many of the existing programs. Many of our fishers fall through the cracks of the system because there are many business structures and strategies in the fishing industry. For example, many fishermen are not incorporated, nor do they have a business account with their financial institutions. Once again, the benefit and subsidy programs that were supposed to help fishermen who find themselves in these cracks are still not forthcoming.

• (1515)

Finally, the fifth point deals with new entrants to commercial fishing. They have bought fishing enterprises at historically high prices within the last year. Like many, they are not incorporated and did not have a fishing revenue and payroll history before the start of the 2020 fishery. They are completely left out of most assistance programs. They are the most indebted fishermen, and they are among those most in need of assistance.

The regional relief and recovery fund (RRRF), which provides support for small businesses, can help some of these fishers. However, many of them do not meet the demanding criteria of this program. We are even told that, in some cases, budgets are almost exhausted.

In conclusion, the MFU will continue to collaborate with the federal government and applauds its continued efforts to ensure the health and safety of all citizens. We believe that the current situation in the fisheries requires a broad and proactive approach from our federal and provincial governments, that recognizes the usual fishery management considerations, but also the economic impacts of this pandemic on the fishing sector as a whole. Financial support measures for the fishing industry need to be provided now and tailored to the realities of this industry. The goal is to ensure the sustainability of the economic pillar of the fishery for coastal and rural communities in the Maritimes and for Canada as a whole.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our views with you.

• (1520)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Mallet.

We'll now go to Mr. Sullivan from the FFAW.

You have six minutes or less when you're ready.

Mr. Keith Sullivan (President, Fish, Food and Allied Workers): Thank you and good afternoon, Mr. Chair, and members of the committee.

My name is Keith Sullivan. I'm here on behalf of the Fish, Food and Allied Workers-Union. FFAW represents nearly 15,000 working women and men throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. Most of our members are employed in the fishing industry and are spread out in more than 500 communities all around the province. About 10,000 are fish harvesters and some 3,000 are employed in fish-processing plants.

COVID-19 has had a serious impact on our province's fishing industry. Some fisheries were delayed by more than a month, at what would have been the beginning of valuable snow crab and lobster seasons, due to safety concerns related to the pandemic.

Now that fisheries are up and running in Newfoundland and Labrador, market challenges are severely impacting incomes. To put it in context, last year the fishery was worth \$1.5 billion to the provincial economy. The snow crab fishery was worth \$350 million in 2019. Entire fisheries, such as northern shrimp, are in jeopardy due to impacts from COVID-19. Losses related to the pandemic could amount to hundreds of millions of dollars. For small coastal communities, this is devastating.

Fisheries workers continue to be concerned about safety on the job, and how a shortened season will impact their income. Both harvesters and plant workers rely on employment insurance to supplement their incomes during the off-season.

With most harvesters expecting a significant decline in earnings this year, many were rightfully worried about qualifying for benefits once the season ended, and were relieved to hear the federal government's announcement on changes to fishing EI, so that harvesters can use the previous year's earnings to qualify in 2020, in addition to the new wage subsidy and grant for fishing enterprise owners.

Unfortunately, since the federal government's announcement last month, no further details on changes to fishing EI or details on the other harvester benefit programs have been released. This has created massive frustration and anxiety for harvesters. Each day our union receives dozens and dozens of calls from our members looking for information or clarification on these programs. While we understand that changes to EI and the rollout of these programs won't happen overnight, the challenges facing our industry are impacting harvesters today. They can't wait any longer to know how these programs will help them and their families.

Right now, most independent owner-operator harvesters in our province can't avail themselves of the CEBA. This must be fixed. We have young harvesters who have just invested huge amounts of money, sometimes millions of dollars, in gear and boats, for example, and now they can't access a program that will help them get through 2020 in order to participate in the financial recovery.

Fish-processing workers will face similar struggles. These workers rely on seasonal EI benefits and were left out of the federal announcement to support fish harvesters. Like harvesters, processing and other fisheries workers are on the front lines, providing fresh, high-quality seafood to domestic and international markets, feeding coastal communities and supporting fishing families.

Given the delays in the fishing season and market challenges that have limited the amount of seafood we will process and export this

year, many processing workers will not have enough hours to qualify for adequate EI, or will have extremely low benefits to carry them through until next year.

These workers will need support from the federal government, either through changes to seasonal EI, similar to the recent changes to fishing EI that will ensure they will qualify based on last year's insurable hours, or by adjusting the program in consideration of the pandemic. An example would be to decrease the number of the best weeks in the calculation of benefits.

In terms of other federal policy that I believe will safeguard the inshore fishery, the new Fisheries Act offers some opportunity.

For Newfoundland and Labrador, it's not hyperbole to say that the fleet separation and owner-operator are two of the most important economic development policies for our coastal communities. These policies have kept the viable inshore fleet in place and have provided significant wealth to every corner of our province.

Many billions of dollars have originated and remained within coastal communities because of owner-operator and fleet separation policies. They have succeeded in widely distributing fishing incomes, and play an integral role in our tourism industry, sustaining a vibrant cultural and social fabric in rural Newfoundland and Labrador.

● (1525)

However, corporate interests, both domestic and foreign, have influenced and interfered with the application and enforcement of fleet separation and owner-operator policies. As a result, corporations have gained control of fishing licences and are siphoning the wealth and benefits of inshore fisheries from our coastal communities.

In light of COVID-19, it is more important than ever to enforce these policies, particularly given the economic uncertainty facing fish harvesters.

Amendments to the Fisheries Act adopted by Parliament last year give these owner-operator policies the force of law. Enforcement will be more robust, with legal consequences. By changing this policy into law, the federal government acknowledged the principle that the inshore fishery should be guided by what is best for independent owner-operators and coastal communities, not corporate interests. This is a principle that we must protect now more than ever. Action to eradicate these under-the-table controlling agreements that undermine our coastal communities and economy must be taken now.

The inshore fishery is the primary economic driver in the majority of the coastal communities in Newfoundland and Labrador. Jobs in the fishery provide good middle-class incomes in rural communities, which is why support for the industry in the short term is so critical.

Protecting and promoting a fishery that serves communities, addresses challenges in food security and provides good wages and safe workplaces—these must be the priorities for all levels of government and all stakeholders in our industry if you want to come out of this pandemic with vibrant, sustainable coastal communities and an economy where nobody gets left behind.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sullivan. You were a little bit over, but we'll manage that.

We'll now go to our questioning.

First up for the Conservative Party is Mr. Arnold, for six minutes or less, please.

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

Welcome to our witnesses. I think we've all met before at this committee. It's good to see your faces again.

Currently, we see fishermen needing more and more support because they're not getting good prices at the docks and the government has yet to deliver a single dollar through the fisheries programs announced to date. How big a factor are the market conditions in the challenges facing you and your members during the COVID-19 crisis?

Mr. Keith Sullivan: I can start, and I'm sure everybody can speak to it.

That's really the biggest consideration for many right now. At first, the health and safety considerations really dominated the conversation, and rightfully so, but now we're seeing the impacts of most restaurants and food services trades really driving our prices down, as we've seen in lobster, for example, just with respect to the ability to market all of the lobster that usually would be in restaurants or on cruise ships.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

Ms. Burridge, I see you nodding your head. Would you agree? I want to keep moving on to questions here.

Ms. Christina Burridge: Yes, I would certainly agree. As I mentioned, for most species, prices to the fish harvester have dropped by between 25% and 50%. That's strictly because of mar-

ket conditions, the absence of food services and the difficulties in accessing export markets. At the same time, production is down by about 50% because of slow markets and because of the need for physical distancing. It's pretty severe.

• (1530)

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

Mr. Mallet.

Mr. Martin Mallet: Yes, just briefly, I'm going to echo what the others have just mentioned. It's a combination of market prices and volume limitations at the wharf. In the case of lobster, for instance, it's a double whammy. When you look at it overall, I think you can probably estimate it at between a 40% and a 60% reduction in revenues for this year up to now for most of our members.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

I'll go on to my next question. Would restored market opportunities and increased domestic markets and demand for Canadian fish and seafood reduce or possibly eliminate the economic harm being experienced by your members? Are you aware of any actions—not discussions, but actions—taken by the government to restore export opportunities and increase domestic market demand for Canadian fish and seafood?

Mr. Sullivan.

Mr. Keith Sullivan: Most of our markets are international so I think we have an undervalued domestic market right now. We've been looking for additional marketing, particularly domestic, for many years. I know the Lobster Council of Canada is considering this, and has done some in recent years, but I think absolutely it's an untapped market for many of us. It's certainly not the answer to all our problems with the size of the issues we have on international markets, but it would certainly help.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

Ms. Burridge.

Ms. Christina Burridge: Yes. We too see opportunities in the domestic market, certainly east of the Rockies. There are some pretty big cities there, and I think there are real opportunities for west coast seafood there. However, as I pointed out, about half the value of our fishery is derived from products like geoduck or sea cucumbers or sea urchins, and the prospect of a domestic market for them is pretty slim so we need to get those export markets back.

Of course the Canadian fish and seafood opportunities fund launched today so that is a way to access some funding for the domestic market.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Mr. Mallet.

Mr. Martin Mallet: Yes, I would agree with my colleagues. I think a domestic market initiative would help, also depending on where you are in Canada, let's say in the Maritimes, the biggest city is Montreal, and it's several hours away.

It's food for thought. I think it can only help in the medium- and long-term to try to increase the interest of Canadians in consuming more seafood in general. That's been an issue for years.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

Have any of you seen any actions by the government yet to promote either international or domestic markets for Canadian seafood?

Mr. Martin Mallet: Not specifically this year, but I would echo what Christina just mentioned, that new fund that was announced today. I think there's potential there. Hopefully, there's not going to be too much bureaucracy involved in getting these funds rolling.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Ms. Burrige or Mr. Sullivan, have you seen any movement from the government on promoting marketing?

Ms. Christina Burrige: I think the Canadian fish and seafood opportunities fund will do that.

Mr. Keith Sullivan: And again, small programs in the past—I mentioned the Lobster Council of Canada—were doing some work like that, but I will be interested to know how we can avail ourselves of the Canadian fish and seafood fund, for example, and what we can do from here to rebuild our markets and make sure logistical challenges are taken care of, and obviously get value back into the hands of people who are working and living in coastal communities.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

The Chair: We will now go to Mr. Cormier for six minutes or less, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier (Acadie—Bathurst, Lib.): Good afternoon, everyone.

My thanks to the witnesses for being here today. Thank you for the excellent work you all do in your communities for fisheries and aquaculture. I know it's not an easy year for anyone, but by working together, hand in hand, we can overcome these challenges.

First, my questions are for Mr. Mallet.

Mr. Mallet, it's good to see you. We have been working together for a few years now. I congratulate the members of the MFU for doing a fine job.

In your remarks, you talked about something that is close to my heart. Let me remind everyone that the \$470 million investment, the biggest investment in the fishery in the last 20 years, is not insignificant. As you said, though, some things still need to be addressed in terms of program criteria. We all want these programs to be made available to fishermen and fishing enterprises as quickly as possible. You talked about new entrants to the fishery. We have heard the minister say that she is doing everything she can to fix this situation for you, and that is why you are here with us. We would like you to give us some ideas.

What do you think would be the quick fix, if I can put it that way, so that these new entrants can take advantage of the programs without having to provide a ton of documentation?

• (1535)

Mr. Martin Mallet: In this entire story, the new entrants are clearly the ones who have the most to lose. They came into our industry with the largest debts in the history of the fishery, compared to the fishermen who are already exploiting the resource.

In our case, new entrants represent about 5% of our fleet. I don't know what the percentage is for the other groups, but nonetheless, a fairly large percentage of our group is in this situation.

Two things could help them quickly. First, it could be as simple as looking at the history of licence transfers. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) has those data. The associations themselves have the information on licence transfers; it's mandatory. When a licence is transferred, we need to know.

Second, another simple option is to look at the history of the former owners of the licences to see what the status of their fishing enterprises was before the transfer.

Mr. Serge Cormier: So it would be relatively easy to do, based on what you are saying.

You talked about employment insurance as well. As you know, there are two types of employment insurance: employment insurance for fishers and regular employment insurance. We clearly stated that we would rely on previous years. I want to reassure the men and women on deck. As the Prime Minister and the minister have said on a number of occasions, we are not going to let anyone down, not the deckhands and not the workers in other sectors who are having difficulty accumulating enough hours to qualify for EI. I want to be very clear on that.

What solutions are you proposing to allow these people to access EI more quickly?

Do you have in mind a program like the Canada emergency response benefit (CERB), or do you have in mind a relaxation of the criteria for employment insurance?

Mr. Martin Mallet: It could be a combination of the two.

The idea of giving access to regular EI if the person qualifies for the CERB might be a good idea for this year. I have a feeling that there are a few different ideas like that that could easily fix the situation. The sooner we receive news about this, the sooner we can address a lot of the uncertainties that we are experiencing in our coastal communities right now.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Okay.

With regard to the start of the fishing season, yesterday we heard witnesses and some colleagues say that postponing the fishing season was a bad idea. It seems to me that, in the context of the pandemic that was raging, decisions had to be made to ensure the protection and safety of employees, whether they be fishers, fishers' helpers, shore labourers or our plant workers. Without plant workers, and therefore without a functioning plant, it is very difficult to process our product. The MFU was one of several organizations that requested that the fishing season be postponed.

Do you still think that the decision to slightly postpone the fishing season was the best decision to make in order to allow the whole industry to prepare? As you can see, again, since we made that decision, there have been no cases of COVID-19 in the plants.

Mr. Martin Mallet: It was certainly a difficult decision. In hindsight, it's always easy to say that it was a good decision or a bad decision, but at the time, just two months ago, we didn't know how the situation with the pandemic was going to evolve.

So far, we have been lucky. Only one processing plant on the east coast has had cases of COVID-19. It could have been much more widespread. The health and safety of our plant workers could have been seriously jeopardized, as well as the health and safety of fishers and workers on the boats, who are over 60 years old on average.

So I think that decision needed to be made. We gave the plants a chance to prepare and to adopt the best standards available at the time. Today, we consider ourselves fortunate not to have had any problems in the communities in that regard or any problems with the fishing operations.

• (1540)

Mr. Serge Cormier: The federal government has implemented a major program, as you know. Like you, we are waiting for the details. We are going to ensure that the money is made available to fishers as quickly as possible.

Has the province of New Brunswick put programs in place for you, the fishers, or has it still not accepted any of your requests to date?

Mr. Martin Mallet: As far as the province is concerned, the injection of funds was done through the community business development corporations (CBDCs). Right now, that's where we're redirecting some of our fishermen to access some funds.

Mr. Serge Cormier: However, there is still no specific assistance, such as the programs provided to you by the federal government, is that correct?

Mr. Martin Mallet: No, they aren't specific programs; they're general programs for all the citizens in the province.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Thank you, Mr. Mallet.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

I have just a couple of quick reminders before I go to Mr. Blanchette-Joncas.

Could those who are not speaking please mute their microphones?

I'll also remind the witnesses and the questioners to please speak slowly and clearly. Interpretation is trying to keep up with your conversation to do exactly that. Be mindful of that.

We'll now go to Mr. Blanchette-Joncas for six minutes or less.

[Translation]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd first like to thank the witnesses who are here today.

I'd like to talk about employment insurance. My question is for Mr. Sullivan.

Mr. Sullivan, you mentioned that the fishing season hasn't started yet. You also mentioned the problems that fishers might face when they finish their fishing season. You raised the possibility that they may not have access to employment insurance because of current factors related to the COVID-19 pandemic, and you suggested that the number of best weeks be reduced or that the weeks from the previous year be taken into consideration.

I'd like to mention here that in eastern Quebec, we'd like the notorious "black hole" of employment eliminated. Employment insurance doesn't cover the period when employment insurance benefits have expired and workers haven't returned to work. They are then without an income.

In concrete terms, what would you like the federal government to do so that people don't find themselves without employment income? What measures could it implement to ensure that this doesn't happen?

[English]

Mr. Keith Sullivan: When I spoke, I spoke about the EI considerations for two different groups. Last month we had an announcement about the option for those who are in fish harvesting to get fish harvesting EI based on last year's earnings, a more normal year. Obviously, this year is going to be a disastrous year for many, and we still don't know how it will play out, but certainly, incomes are going to be down considerably.

It was good to get that announcement for harvesters on EI, but we still don't know any details. That's what I was saying. We're getting so many calls about that, so clarifying exactly what EI would be for those in harvesting EI would be key.

The other group can sometimes be harvesters who go through the regular labour, we'll call it, employment insurance system, or those who are in fish-processing plants or different places. They have a shortened season, and there's really been nothing. There's been no income security announced for those people yet. They've been working extremely hard in an extremely stressful year, and there's still no consideration as of yet.

The suggestion I would have on that would be to do as they've done for fish harvesters. Obviously, once we know the details, I'll be able to speak to it more. Base it on last year, or look at a reduced number of best weeks for people. What we're seeing in a lot of cases, because of the lower volume of processing and the shortened season, is that people are working hard now, but the ability to have enough time to have a reasonably sized claim is just not there. People are working, and unless something changes, they won't have enough to pay the bills in the fall and through the winter.

• (1545)

[Translation]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Thank you, Mr. Sullivan.

Mr. Mallet, I'd like to thank you for also giving us your point of view on employment insurance. You mentioned that it might also be a problem for some of your members.

What measures should the government put in place to not abandon seasonal workers in that industry?

Mr. Martin Mallet: Mr. Sullivan mentioned it, and I mentioned it as well in response to a question from Mr. Cormier. Several approaches could be combined in order to find a solution. However, we must be careful and avoid creating a problem where none currently exists. To get us out of this situation, we need people in our plants, in the industry, who work for the rest of the year. So we need a program that would allow people to work. However, if there is a shortfall to be filled, it should be possible to use employment insurance, as was the case in 2018 and 2019.

There is no obvious solution, but the CERB amounts paid could be considered insurable amounts under the regular EI program. If CERB is used, employees who don't have enough weeks could have enough money to live on until next year.

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Mr. Mallet, when \$470 million in aid for the fishing industry was announced, you deplored the fact that some fishers weren't eligible for the emergency wage subsidy. Then, the federal government introduced fishing benefits, which are intended for self-employed fishers and those who work on a percentage basis and aren't entitled to the emergency wage subsidy.

Do you think it's enough? Could the federal government do more to support the fishing industry in terms of the emergency wage subsidy?

Mr. Martin Mallet: Ideally, the emergency wage subsidy should be available to all our members. If the family clause could be eliminated, that would solve the problem for many of our members and for many working in the Maritimes and Atlantic sector in general.

The majority of fishing businesses have family members working on board the boats. A \$10,000 subsidy versus 75% of a subsidy,

sometimes for two or three deck workers on a boat, makes a big difference in the potential income to keep that business going.

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Thank you.

Mr. Mallet, do you think the reality and the challenges currently facing fishers in the Maritimes and Quebec as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic are similar?

Mr. Martin Mallet: Yes, that's the case. Our work brings us into the same waters; we have the same challenges.

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Thank you.

In a completely different vein, do you think that developing fishing for other species, such as seal and redfish, could be a way to positively diversify the fishing industry?

Mr. Martin Mallet: That's a good point. It's probably a longer-term solution. For several years now, our industry has been asking to address the grey seal issue, among others. Certainly, there are many opportunities to exploit this resource so that it can be a very important benefit to our industry.

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Thank you, Mr. Mallet.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

We now go to Mr. Johns for six minutes or less, please.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Sullivan, you talked about the lack of clarity around the programs that are rolling out, the delay of getting the money out the door and its impact on fish harvesters right now.

Can you talk a little bit more specifically about what can be done in the short term to help support fishers, especially new entrants?

• (1550)

Mr. Keith Sullivan: In the opening comments, I briefly mentioned new entrants into the fishery. The valuation of your business is much different this year than it would have been last year, when you've invested so much.

The very first thing that would really help when you have these massive payments would be to be able to access a program like the CEBA, the \$40,000, to help pay bills interest free, and then obviously the additional \$10,000 that may be forgivable if you meet the conditions, something like that for harvesters.

Right now, because of the unique structure of the fishing enterprise, as Mr. Mallet mentioned, not having a business account, you just can't get access to that, so you're left.... As for the people we're trying to draw into this fishery, their business could be destroyed. The people that we're counting on to carry on, to build our communities and to make sure that we have long-term value in the fishery have not been able to access that one. That's a big problem now that doesn't make sense. The people in the fishing business are not able to avail themselves of it on a technicality. Obviously these are businesses that would need something like that.

The other part is that we're in the middle of the fisheries seasonal industry for a reason. We harvest crab and lobster when it's the best possible quality for example, we can't move that until later. People now don't have any idea what these programs that were announced look like, so it's impossible to plan their businesses. Can they really take on another crew member now, when they don't know the details of the programs?

It's encouraging that we had an announcement, but the details are needed now.

Mr. Gord Johns: You talked about enforcing the owner-operator and controlling agreements, and how important that is right now.

Can you share a bit more about how those changes need to be made right now in light of COVID?

Mr. Keith Sullivan: Yes, and I can see why you might ask the question. It's like, okay, why now on COVID would you bring up something around these policy changes on the owner-operator and why we need enforcement? We've been working towards making sure that people are not finding loopholes and that large corporations and—usually—fish-processing companies are not finding any loopholes that undermine our coastal economy. We feel that it has been ignored and chiselled away at, and right now, when people are doing very poorly, obviously there are opportunities for these corporate interests to take over these enterprises at lower values, to be able to jump in and take over, in what they had been doing more slowly doing in the past.

Now is the time when we really have to work to enforce the owner-operator policies and get rid of these controlling agreements that, hopefully, soon will be illegal. That's why we need the regulations to match the legislation from last year. Again, it's not something that we should delay on. We know there are a lot of competing priorities, but I think this one should be really prioritized now, at a time when harvesters in our communities are so vulnerable.

Mr. Gord Johns: That's critical feedback.

Ms. Burrige, you talked about the Canada seafood stabilization fund, its impact and how it's unfair to British Columbians, and specifically about how it's hurting those on Vancouver Island. Can you speak a bit more about that and what needs to change there to support those workers?

Ms. Christina Burrige: Under the stabilization fund, B.C. is going to get less money than Quebec. The fish and seafood business in B.C. is worth \$1.8 billion, and in Quebec it's worth four times less than that. It comes because of a statistical anomaly with Statistics Canada, whereby salmon aquaculture is not considered to

be seafood processing, yet they have plants that turn out salmon fillets pretty much 24-7.

That's the problem. It's a statistical anomaly. It's dealt with one way in Atlantic Canada and in a completely different way in B.C. As a result, we simply don't get our share.

Mr. Gord Johns: Thank you.

Mr. Mallet, when you appeared before the finance committee and I had a chance to ask you questions, you talked about family-run businesses and how they're so common in the industry. Can you talk about what changes you've seen around family-run businesses since early May and what recommendations you have to be more inclusive of these types of businesses with the impact of COVID?

• (1555)

Mr. Martin Mallet: In particular, we would like to see the family rule taken out of the wage subsidy program. That would be a huge help.

What we're seeing right now in terms of the effects of not having access to many of these funds is what Mr. Sullivan just mentioned. Fishermen are making some tough choices. Instead of hiring three deckhands, or two, maybe they're just hiring one and fishing less often, and trying to squeeze whatever they can out of this season. In particular, that's one part of the rules that right now are excluding many of our fishermen.

Mr. Gord Johns: Great.

How much time do I have, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You have 15 seconds.

Mr. Gord Johns: Okay. Instead of diving into a full question, I'll wait for the next round. Thanks very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Johns.

That clews up our first hour pretty well. I want to say thank you to the witnesses who have taken the time to appear before committee today and also to the members for their co-operation in their questioning and in being respectful to all our witnesses, and vice versa.

I'll give those witnesses a chance to leave now, before we get into our next hour with the three new witnesses. We'll suspend for a moment and come right back.

• (1555)

(Pause)

• (1605)

The Chair: We will continue.

Again, for the benefit of witnesses who are here for the first time in a House of Commons virtual committee meeting, I will remind you all of a few rules to follow.

Interpretation in this video conference will work very much like in a regular committee meeting. You have the choice at the bottom of your screen of floor, English or French. As you are speaking, if you plan to alternate from one language to the other, you will need to also switch the interpretation channel so that it aligns with the language you are speaking. You may want to allow for a short pause when switching languages.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. When you are ready to speak, you can click on the microphone icon to activate your mike. When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute.

The use of headsets is strongly encouraged.

Finally, when speaking, please speak slowly and clearly.

Should any technical challenge arise, for example, in relation to interpretation or if a problem with your audio arises, please advise the chair immediately, and the technical team will work to resolve that. Please note that we may need to suspend during these times as we need to ensure that all members are able to participate fully.

Before we get started, for those of you using the computer, click on your screen in the top right-hand corner and ensure that you are on the gallery view. With this view, you should be able to see all the participants in a grid on your screen. That will ensure that all video participants can see one another.

I'll now list our witnesses for this portion of today's meeting. From Fred's Custom Tackle, we have Mr. Fred Helmer, founder and owner. From the Sport Fishing Institute of British Columbia, we have Mr. Owen Bird, executive director; and Mr. Martin Paish, director of business development. By telephone, from the Victoria Co-operative Fisheries Ltd., we have Mr. Osborne Burke, general manager.

We'll start now with Mr. Helmer's opening statement for six minutes or less.

Mr. Fred Helmer (Founder and Owner, Fred's Custom Tackle): Thank you.

I'm here representing the Fraser River Sportfishing Alliance. I'm the owner of Fred's Custom Tackle, guiding and retail store for over 45 years. It's been a long haul. Over the last 50 years, I've seen some really serious declines in fishing opportunities and fish resources in the province of British Columbia. There have been devastating consequences to our public fishery, as well as with first nations and commercial requirements.

With COVID-19, we're now facing another level of concern for sure. Things have become much more complicated, and it's escalated to the point of, in some cases, a question of survival. The uncertainty of not knowing what's happening is creating a lot of stress and anxiety. The reality is that in our business, it's all about opportunity, and we are certainly seeing a lack of opportunity.

Specifically, I'd like to talk about the Fraser River. It's an example of how opportunity has really been lost. Historically, the Fraser River was one of the most productive rivers in the world for five species of salmon, sturgeon, steelhead and trout. It was a world-class fishery, a destination and a producer of millions of salmon to

satisfy commercial and first nations needs. It's in serious trouble now. The Fraser River is extremely important to the province of B.C. The Fraser River public fishery, once estimated to add \$150 million annually to the economy, is practically extinguished.

Thankfully, we do have a very successful, well-managed catch-and-release sturgeon fishery that generates approximately \$30 million annually towards our economy. It also generates about \$5 million towards scientific research and monitoring through our world-renowned tagging program. This is a result of people working together, meeting challenges and needs, in a balanced and equitable manner. The abundance of Fraser River runs of chinook, coho, sockeye, chum and pink salmon are all on a list of conservation concerns, threatened or endangered, and a number of steelhead runs are close to extinction.

Something different needs to happen if we expect these genetically diversified and treasured species of fish to return. Some specific runs, like interior coho, early Stuart sockeye, have been in conservation mode for over 20 years, and here we sit today, still trying to figure it out. Anglers are increasingly facing more closures and regulations, restricted opportunities due to conservation concerns. Closing public fisheries has had a huge impact and has created a lot of negativity and frustration. We certainly need to do something different if we want to see a change, and if we want to see us survive COVID-19.

The Fraser River Sportfishing Alliance recommends that the economic and social value of the public fishery is looked at a little bit more seriously. If you compare the amount of fish that's taken versus the dollars returned, it's an obvious equation that you'd want to support and boost, because it's huge to the economy. Because of COVID, if you can get some more dollars going, it would be ideal. We suggest that the social value is also a huge value, probably even greater than the economic value, and I agree with that one.

There are far bigger issues here in the province that need to be dealt with when it comes to our fisheries. One thing that would really help is increasing the hatchery production. There are many hatcheries that are not at capacity, and there's a demand for an immediate jacking-up of those facilities with mass marking releases. That is important, because it does create opportunities.

We are facing a crisis, it's time to—

• (1610)

The Chair: Mr. Helmer, I have to interrupt for a second. The interpreters are asking you to get closer to the mike, so they can hear you better.

Mr. Fred Helmer: Okay.

We're facing critical times. We're definitely in crisis mode here. COVID-19 has put the last nail in the coffin for many people. I think it's time to start to look at what is needed. Out here we need an opportunity to go fishing. It's interesting that we have an abundance of opportunities sometimes, and we don't get it. I think it's from a lack of understanding of the recreational or public fishery as a whole, and sometimes we get forgotten about. It's time to pay attention or we won't be around for much longer.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Helmer.

We'll now go to the Sport Fishing Institute of British Columbia. Whoever is going first has six minutes or less, please.

Mr. Owen Bird (Executive Director, Sport Fishing Institute of British Columbia): Thank you. I'm going first, but we are sharing the time.

Hello, and thank you for the opportunity to appear before this committee once again.

I am sharing the time with Martin Paish so we can provide information about B.C.'s public fishing industry, the effects of COVID-19 on the industry and a detailed perspective on DFO's Sport Fishing Advisory Board, SFAB, proposals, that should play—but have yet to play—an important role in reducing impacts of the pandemic.

The Sport Fishing Institute of BC is a non-profit industry association that represents the interests of 250,000 licensed tidal water anglers in B.C. and the hundreds of businesses that support them. According to the most recent provincial sector report, the public fishery and related businesses produce \$1.1 billion in annual sales and create more than 9,000 jobs, resulting in a \$398-million contribution to the province's GDP. The public fishery is the single largest economic driver of all B.C. fisheries, yet anglers harvest only 15% of the annual halibut catch, and, while it varies year to year, 25% of the annual salmon harvest.

To this day in 2020, the department has paid little attention to the B.C. sport fishing industry or done little to address its concerns. The industry and many small businesses and coastal communities that are depend on reliable access and opportunity for the public fishery, hard-hit by broad and restrictive chinook measures implemented in 2019, and now again in 2020, are additionally suffering due to the impacts of COVID-19. There's a desperate need for certainty and stability for business survival and to allow the possibility of contributions to the local and provincial economies. The combined effect of 2019 and 2020 chinook restrictions, and now the pandemic, is a devastating one-two punch that could be mitigated by more timely and decisive action by the department.

The DFO response to repeated requests that reliable opportunity be a durable and entrenched aspect of annual fishery plans has been minimal. The public fishing and related businesses require an ability to plan for an upcoming season. Part of that planning includes communicating expectations to clients and pre-season purchasing and preparation. Anticipated access and opportunity are essential components of public fishery business and for its participants.

Clients plan a visit and go fishing based on many factors. Expectation and opportunity are foremost. Service providers, guides and lodge operations market and promote their services beginning each

fall prior to a regular season, which would ordinarily run from March until October. Small community tourism agencies will similarly promote various attractions, including access to the public fishery. Without a sense of opportunity and expectation, the ability to offer a predictable or reliable experience is significantly compromised, if not impossible. The pandemic has only exacerbated the limitations to promote business and plan.

It should also be noted the sector, recognizing the challenges and unprecedented effects of the pandemic on regular management activities of the department, has been actively considering ways to address catch-monitoring gaps created as a result. Utilizing guides, avid anglers, volunteer anglers participating in sampling projects and catch data collection, and making the SRIF-funded FishingBC app available as an interim data collection tool have been offered. Yet to date, incorporating all additional data sources to address pandemic-caused gaps and to allow for increased understanding of catch and collection of data has not occurred.

The public fishery is dependent on a reliable and predictable opportunity, particularly now during the pandemic. While the department could have responsibly and defensibly implemented relevant aspects of the SFAB proposals in April, we continue to wait. As COVID restrictions relax, British Columbians and other Canadians can now begin to contemplate fishing-related travel and tourism activities that could provide important relief and support to many small communities and businesses. Lacking certainty will negatively affect those plans. Without access and opportunity that the SFAB proposals can deliver now and in the future, the damage to coastal communities, businesses and misperception continue to build and may be irreparable.

Now over to my colleague, Martin Paish, for specific details about the SFAB proposals and their development.

• (1615)

The Chair: Mr. Paish, you have just over a minute.

Mr. Martin Paish (Director, Business Development, Sport Fishing Institute of British Columbia): I'm quite confident I won't be able to get through what I want to do in that time, but I'll do the best I can.

A few common themes have arisen that help us understand COVID impacts on the public fishery. These are the importance of the fishery to British Columbians as a healthy outdoor activity, a means for Canadians to harvest seafood that is a common property resource, and that the public fishery represents the most significant fishery-related source of employment and economic activity in B.C., which is the cornerstone of the economy of many small coastal communities.

Chinook are the driver of the B.C. tidal waters public fishery, and the 2019 non-retention regime was devastating to us. To allow the fishery to survive, the SFAB has submitted a series of proposals to DFO that allow for additional retention of chinook.

By using 30 years of stock assessment data based on coded wire tags and DNA analysis, we were able to identify 11 separate areas on the southern B.C. coast that will allow for retention of chinook while having virtually no impact on the stocks of concern. We can be confident of this statement because the data tells us that they historically aren't caught there, because they simply don't go there. It's important to note that all of this was undertaken in close collaboration with DFO stock assessment and science staff.

While we're grateful to the provincial government for taking the bold and necessary step to declare angling an essential activity in British Columbia, DFO has done nothing to help with the COVID challenges faced by our sector other than schedule conference calls where we update DFO officials of COVID impacts—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: A point of order, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Paish, you've gone over time, and I believe Mr. Blanchette-Joncas has a point of order.

• (1620)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Mr. Chair, there was no interpretation during Mr. Paish's intervention. I wanted to point that out before the next interventions.

[*English*]

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Nancy Vohl): Mr. Paish, I believe your language selected on your computer could be French.

Mr. Martin Paish: My language selected on the computer is English.

The Chair: Mr. Blanchette-Joncas, thank you for that, but the witness has more than expired the time.

We'll move on now to our next witness.

Mr. Burke, when you're ready, you have six minutes or less, please.

Mr. Osborne Burke (General Manager, Victoria Co-operative Fisheries Ltd.): Thank you to the chair and the fellow members of the committee.

I am general manager of Victoria Co-operative Fisheries Ltd., located in northern Cape Breton. We're a fishermen's co-operative, 100% owned by the harvesters, and have been around since 1956.

Our members harvest lobster, snow crab, groundfish on an annual basis. We, as others, have been significantly affected by COVID-19 issues, starting with our rush to acquire PPE equipment and the challenges with obtaining it, paying as high as six dollars Canadian for face masks from China, down to a dollar at the latter part of the month into April.

We look at some of the challenges we face or are currently facing. The new stabilization fund program was announced, similar to B.C.'s and others. With the program, I would say that for Nova Scotia, based on a proportional basis and \$2.2 billion in exports, the amount of money available is certainly not going to do justice to us.

Secondly, under the stabilization fund, it's our understanding that in this federal program all the funds that we spent on disposable face masks are not eligible. Only reusable face shields, Lexan panels on equipment, and that type of equipment will be claimable. The \$50,000 to \$60,000 we spent in masks, going through two to three per day, is not eligible.

The CERB was extended, we understand today, for another eight weeks. We had an attrition rate of almost 40% with local workers—we believe a lot of it due to the CERB. Workers decided not to come to work, and we've even seen it in the past 24 hours since the announcement. That's provided a significant challenge to us.

We thank everybody in the government and all parties for putting these measures forward. The federal wage subsidy is extremely helpful. It's making a difference in a tough year. However, in meeting the 30%, you have a challenge in the fact that some companies want to ramp up, but they need the subsidy. If they ramp up too quickly, they're disqualified from the subsidy.

There was some reference by the Prime Minister to changing the percentage. I would recommend that it should be on some sort of a sliding scale. If you're at a 30% loss in revenue, maybe it's 75%. If it's 20% or something, you get a reduced percentage back. That would still be helpful, but we don't want to be a hindrance to companies ramping up and hiring more workers so we can get workers off the CERB and back into the workforce. That's a significant challenge.

Currently for our workers and the harvesters, the harvesters are averaging about a 40% reduction in revenues just based on the receiving price for their product. Just this past week with the issues in Beijing, and with the Chinese government looking at checking all shipments live or frozen into China, it's created challenges for us. For example, tomorrow 40,000 pounds of live lobsters to the U.S.A. are being cancelled. We had two shipments to China of frozen product cancelled because of the delays that are going to be faced. The Chinese government has to hold live product for 48 hours now to clear it from COVID-19, and there are similar additional checks on frozen products.

These are all challenges. It's clear that the biggest challenge we have right now, for everybody who sat in isolation or sat at home during COVID-19, is that we seriously need to improve Internet access all across Canada, in the rural communities. We're here on a phone and the Internet comes and goes like the wind. We have significant challenges with it. It's bad enough that I drive 20 kilometres and I have to stop at three locations. I can't use my cellphone because we don't have proper coverage. The Internet and Internet access is critical, more so than ever today than it was prior to this year.

• (1625)

We heard some comments earlier, as I listened in, on markets. Within Canada we're always trying to increase our markets and outside of Canada too, obviously in the U.S.A. and Asia.

We hope that things will open up to travel so we can get back to doing trade shows with our federal and provincial partners, where we get to meet our customers, which is critical. Whether we're selling in Canada, we're selling in Shanghai or we're selling in Hong Kong, it's critical to make those connections and those relationships. That's been severely limited due to the restrictions on travel. As I said, the Internet is more important than ever, but we just don't have proper access.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll stop there.

The Chair: That's perfect, Mr. Burke. That was just about dead on the six-minute mark. I say thank you for that.

We'll now go to our round of questioning. Before I go to Mr. Fast, I will say to everybody, including the witnesses, please speak slowly and clearly and as much into the mike as you can so that we can get the proper interpretation for everybody who is part of this meeting.

Mr. Fast, when you're ready, you have six minutes or less, please.

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Thank you very much.

Welcome to all of our witnesses. It's nice to hear you again, Fred, Owen and Martin. Thank you, Osborne, for your contribution as well.

I want to talk about the SFAB's proposals to the minister. I've reviewed them and, honestly, they seem eminently sensible. They talk about mass marking of current hatchery chinook production, implementation of mark-selective fisheries in this and future years, enhanced catch monitoring regimes and improved assessments. It goes on and on and on.

You indicated you still haven't had a response from the minister. Can you tell me when you handed in that proposal?

Mr. Martin Paish: We submitted that proposal on April 9. At that point in time, we urged the minister to ensure that a timely decision would be made. Here we are in the middle of June, and people are still waiting to be able to understand what their opportunity to fish for chinook might be in some of these hard-hit communities.

Hon. Ed Fast: Thanks.

Now, your season starts, normally, when? Did you say April or May?

Mr. Martin Paish: The chinook season in British Columbia is 12 months long, but the peak of the tourist season and when people really get into going chinook fishing starts in April and continues through until the end of September.

Hon. Ed Fast: Your proposal suggests that the rebuilding of stream-type chinook will result in the collapse of the recreational fishery infrastructure unless mark-selective fishery is more broadly applied. You agree with that assessment, right?

Mr. Martin Paish: I do agree with that assessment. I believe that recovery of stream-type Fraser chinook will require a multifaceted, comprehensive type of program that is likely to take decades. The only way the public fishery is going to be able to survive and realize its potential will be through a wider scale implementation of mark-selective fisheries in southern B.C.

• (1630)

Hon. Ed Fast: You probably know that Minister Jordan was here at committee last week. I asked her about mark-selective fishing and mass marking of hatchery salmon. Honestly, she seemed to confuse genetic integrity and mass marking.

Can you tell me, first of all, how many hatchery chinook salmon are released every year?

Mr. Martin Paish: In British Columbia we release approximately 40 million chinook salmon. I'm not sure of the entire amount if you include coho, but it is 40 million chinook. Of those, approximately 10% or less are marked.

The State of Washington releases around 150,000 chinook a year. All of those or the bulk of those end up spending a good portion of their lives in British Columbia waters. It marks 100% of its chinook.

Hon. Ed Fast: Just for clarity, of these hatchery salmon that are already in the wild, only 10% are being marked. If we mark the other 90%, that doesn't impose any increased genetic challenge to our wild salmon, does it?

Mr. Martin Paish: The answer to your question is yes. The reality is that mass marking of hatchery-produced salmon actually helps with the genetic integrity. We can identify hatchery salmon. We can remove them from systems before they spawn. We can carefully select brood stock or progeny for hatcheries to ensure that we don't create domesticated fish by breeding hatchery salmon with hatchery salmon.

So the answer is that mass marking should actually be able to help with genetic integrity, not hurt.

Hon. Ed Fast: The minister suggested that there's lots of science still to be done; there are still questions about the genetic integrity of our wild salmon. I sense she was confused about the issue, because as you have said, mass marking of hatchery fish that are going to go out into the wild should not in any way affect additionally any genetic challenges that might exist. Is that correct?

Mr. Martin Paish: Yes. The reality is that the implementation of mass marking and mark-selective fisheries is something that for several years now the sport fishing advisory board has been asking for. There's been ample time to do the study that's required.

We are not asking for an increase in hatchery production. We're simply asking DFO to mark those fish that are currently produced in hatcheries for catch so that they can be identified and caught instead of anglers retaining wild chinook. It's pretty simple.

Hon. Ed Fast: If you were to prioritize future investments in your recreational industry—these would be federal government investments beyond the mass marking of hatchery fish—what would those be?

Mr. Martin Paish: I would suggest that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans needs to invest in the human and structural resources within the department in the Pacific region that reflect the value of the public fishery. In other words, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans would be well suited, in my opinion, to creating a division for recreational fisheries so that the fishery has adequate staff and financial resources to be managed properly. That is not the case now.

Hon. Ed Fast: Just getting back to mass marking, how much—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fast. Your six minutes are up. You're actually a bit overtime.

Hon. Ed Fast: Oh, man, that went fast.

The Chair: Yes. When you're having fun, the time goes fast.

We'll now go to Mr. Hardie for six minutes or less, please.

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to some old friends—or at least one old friend.

How are you, Mr. Bird?

I want to get back to the COVID-19 issue. That's really the focus of these hearings. We've heard from various sectors over time that, yes, COVID-19 has had an impact, but they can't avoid bringing in some of the foundational or systemic issues in their sectors. We heard this from elderly people. We're hearing it from you. Yes, COVID has certainly amplified what's been going on, but the founda-

tional issues pre-existed the pandemic, and they've been brought up even more sensitively now.

Mr. Paish, you mentioned that the primary time period, the most valuable time period, for sports fishing is April. But you'd have to agree that in April, Americans weren't coming across the border and Canadians weren't travelling very much, of course because of the lockdown. In this case, you missed the prime time simply because of the pandemic. Would that be your take on it?

• (1635)

Mr. Martin Paish: I think I would correct you on one thing there, Ken. I think what I said was that the season for chinook fishing begins in April and continues until the end of September, with the peak season really being the summer months of July and August. Your statement is essentially correct, though, in that there is no anticipation that the U.S. border is going to open in time for our season. People are running out of time to effectively plan their businesses and that type of thing.

We are still not in phase three in British Columbia yet, which encourages within-the-province travel. We're hoping that will come soon. That's why we're hoping that fisheries opportunities will be announced.

The other side of the equation, of course, is that—

Mr. Ken Hardie: I'm sorry, sir, I'm going to have to intercede here. I have more questions and limited time.

Do we have too much fishing need, chasing too few fish, in British Columbia? There's a desire on the part of a lot of people—sports fishing, commercial fishing, the indigenous fishery, etc.—to go out fishing, but in the same breath we hear that there's a shortage of fish and that we have some fundamental issues there, that are not pandemic-related, that need to be addressed to really come up with a sustainable solution to your problems.

Mr. Martin Paish: I would answer—

Go ahead, Owen.

Mr. Owen Bird: Okay, thanks.

I would suggest that the SFAB proposals are quite a road map to show that there is a reasonable, sustainable approach to addressing your concerns and concerns that—

Mr. Ken Hardie: Owen—just in the essence of time here—are you saying then that we might not be getting the right information out of DFO as to the state of the stocks and the necessity for the closures?

Mr. Owen Bird: I would say that is accurate. There are many—

Mr. Ken Hardie: I have one last thing, and then my time will expire.

We've seen in a lot of sectors that the people who are closest to the activity are being expected to absorb most of the hit, most of the pain, if you will, as a result of the pandemic. Is that the case, for instance, with the lodge operators, Mr. Helmer, or with the equipment providers?

What about upstream from you? What about the banks? What about the others who want to be kept whole while the person closest to the action is expected to take all the hit? Is that a factor you are looking at?

Mr. Owen Bird: Are you asking that of Fred?

Mr. Ken Hardie: I'd ask that of Fred if Fred is still online.

He is.

Fred, what are your thoughts?

Mr. Fred Helmer: Absolutely. The way I look at the whole thing.... It's a holistic value.

Mr. Ken Hardie: I'm sorry, Fred. We can't hear you.

Mr. Fred Helmer: Okay, hang on.

Can you hear me now?

Mr. Ken Hardie: Barely. Move as close as you can to your computer.

Mr. Fred Helmer: Okay, thank you for that.

I believe that we need to look at things holistically. Your question—

Mr. Ken Hardie: I'm sorry, Fred. We still can't hear you.

Is your language button on English or French? Maybe you could just check that.

Mr. Fred Helmer: It is on English.

Mr. Ken Hardie: It is on English. Okay.

Mr. Fred Helmer: Owen, can you answer that?

Mr. Owen Bird: Yes, maybe if I could make a remark.... It's a significant problem that there are no tools available to the public fishery and the industry to be able to make it through the significant effects of the pandemic, and to take them through to believe that they can operate in the next year.

Mr. Ken Hardie: The key question I have is whether the pain is being shared equitably, kind of up and down the financial food chain here.

Mr. Owen Bird: I think not entirely. There are means in place to generate funding support that the government has provided, and in some cases, that's been quite helpful. Unfortunately, for the tourism industry, as a general comment, and therefore for the sport fishing-related tourism industry, there still remain some significant gaps. There is not funding available.

Mr. Ken Hardie: If you have some examples of that, we would appreciate getting those after this session.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hardie, and thank you for reminding the witnesses that they can submit something in writing to the committee.

We'll now go to Mr. Blanchette-Joncas for six minutes or less, please.

• (1640)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being with us today.

My questions are for Mr. Bird, but first I'd like to pass along greetings to him from my colleague Ms. Gill, who couldn't be here today as she is in the House at the moment.

In Quebec, we don't have as permissive a regulatory framework as British Columbia. I have a lot of questions for you about recreational fishing.

How do the supports help the recreational fishing sector in the communities? How could the Department of Fisheries and Oceans help the industry at this time?

[*English*]

Mr. Owen Bird: I would say that it is an acknowledgement of the public fishery, the recreational fishery and the industry that it's difficult for the department to aid the businesses along the lines of Mr. Hardie's earlier question.

What we observe, per some of the remarks I made, and Martin would have made if he had made it all the way through, is that what we need is certainty and stability as far as opportunity goes. Fred, as well, touched on it. Opportunity is essential for the public fishery to be able to operate, to be able to plan, to be able to make its experience and options available to the people who would plan to participate. That goes for those who are interested in harvesting for food security, and also for those who are planning a trip to visit small communities and that sort of thing.

What we desperately need from the department is a decision about opportunity to make it clear what can be accessed and where the fishing is reasonable and possible.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: In British Columbia, what species can be caught in recreational fishing? If the list is too long, what species are prohibited?

[*English*]

Mr. Owen Bird: The resources in British Columbia and on our coast are fairly broad. There are options to fish for many different species. They are all managed and regulated accordingly.

The key here, and what we focused our time, energy and comments on, are the chinook. Chinook salmon in tidal waters is the marquee species. They are the ones that grow largest, and they are abundant enough to allow for harvesting. People enjoy fishing for them. Like I say, they are important for food security.

While there are other species and other opportunities, the main driver of the public fishery in tidal waters in British Columbia is chinook salmon. All others follow and are an important component of the activity, but chinook salmon are the driver.

[Translation]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Is it possible to quantify the impact of recreational fishing on fish stocks in British Columbia? If so, how do you do that?

[English]

Mr. Owen Bird: That is a complicated and complex question, because there are so many different runs along the coast extending into Alaska and the State of Washington. However, we can say that the amount of salmon harvested by the public fishery is in the order of 25%. That does vary from year to year, but compared with all other extractions from harvest, it's about 25% of the salmon harvested. That gives you a sense of the proportional withdrawals or the harvest of the public fishery.

[Translation]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Has the COVID-19 pandemic led to a decrease in recreational fishing activities?

[English]

Mr. Owen Bird: Yes. It absolutely has.

As Martin points out, the typical season begins in April. It does for various fishing that occurs all through the year, but it begins in April. All of the fishing from March until now has been limited to household activity and no business has been allowed to occur. Let's add the fact that restrictions are in place for chinook. That's had a fairly significant impact on licence sales to date this year. The last figure I heard was that licence sales were down somewhere from 20% to 25%.

As far as activity on the water goes, that's also equally impacted. This actually turns out to be a further argument to suggest that the department can make a decision about opportunity this year, which is all-important, because the effort is less as well. There is a reduction in catch at this time because of COVID. It's not exactly a silver lining, but it is an argument to suggest that changes could be made more quickly.

• (1645)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Blanchette-Joncas.

Mr. Johns, for six minutes or less.

Mr. Gord Johns: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all of the witnesses for being here, and for your testimony.

Mr. Bird, you've talked about mass marking of hatchery fish, the importance of that, of opening a mark-selective fishery in British Columbia. Can you talk about how this plays into conservation? Lowering mortality, these are the kinds of things people are talking about. This is a very important conservation opportunity as well. Can you speak to that?

Mr. Owen Bird: How mass marking can play into conservation?

Mr. Gord Johns: Absolutely.

Mr. Owen Bird: There is the idea that with additional marking to what already occurs—as Martin Paish pointed out earlier, it's only 10% of what's currently produced in hatcheries—if you moved to mass marking and also to an increase in mark-selective fisheries you are basically targeting hatchery-raised, hatchery-produced

salmon. You are able to identify those fish very easily and distinguish between them and wild salmon.

Currently, where you have mixed fisheries, you allow hatchery retention, and the potential for increased wild harvest when you have that kind of fishery in play is greater than it is if you have periods of time in areas where you understand that the prevalence of marked fish is high enough. And if declare that this should be a mark-selective fishery, you can avoid wild salmon stocks, plain and simple.

Mr. Gord Johns: Perfect.

Mr. Bird, we've talked about restoration. You and I have talked about this repeatedly and about the importance of the government ramping up investments in restoration. Right now, the B.C. SRIF is only at \$148 million over five years. They were oversubscribed on their first round. They had \$340 million in applications, and they only doled out \$70 million.

Can you talk about the importance of increasing that and about the restoration work of all of the people involved in recreation and the public fishery and how, if they're resourced, we literally have hundreds of thousands of man-hours, if you want to call it that, ready and at our disposal to get people into our communities to help restore that fishery? Also, as an opportunity for a COVID response for those who may not even get out this summer, because of the lack of people visiting our coastal waters, and from the United States in particular, can you talk about how this potentially will be important in the fall, especially, and in the winter?

Mr. Owen Bird: Yes, and thank you for the question. I think that's one of the really excellent things about those involved in the tidal waters and in sport fishing in B.C., and I'm sure in other jurisdictions as well. It's their absolute engagement and willingness, and that actually getting down to it, to work and to volunteer to help with enhancement issues and restoration activities and to be involved in net-pen work—not aquaculture, but net-pen work—to raise smolts for release and these kinds of things.

The funding that's being made available is good, but much more than project funding, we'd like to see funding for an overall plan that not only addresses fisheries management issues, but takes on restoration, takes on rehabilitation and considers enhancement projects with regard to hatcheries. It goes to your point, Mr. Johns, that we engage the angling community and those interested in fisheries resources to work on those projects. The ability to roll out those SRIF projects now, under the pandemic, and to get people doing these kinds of activities that are desperately needed by our salmon would be excellent, and basically can't happen soon enough.

• (1650)

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Burke, you talked about the wage subsidy and how they should scale that in terms of the rollout moving forward. Can you talk about what you would like to see in terms of scaling that rollout in what the government is doing right now?

Mr. Osborne Burke: Yes. Currently, it's a 75% subsidy, as we know, based on a 30% reduction in sales. What we're seeing in a number of companies I'm talking to in the seafood industry is that they're at a point where they want to ramp up as markets open up a bit. However, if they do that, they will be right on the borderline of the 30%, so they would disqualify themselves, and it's a disincentive at that point.

What I'm saying, as a taxpayer as well, is that we should seriously look at some sort of sliding scale. If you were at 30% and now you're down to 25%, maybe that 75% becomes 65%. Something on that basis going forward, beyond where we are now, I think would be a significant help. We would see more of the companies moving forward, bringing back more workers and thereby reducing the impact with the CERB, where you're paying the money out but we're not getting the benefit of those workers. In the workforce is where we want them to be.

Mr. Gord Johns: Super.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Johns.

That clews up that round of questioning.

I need probably a few minutes to do committee business. If nobody has any objections, we'll go into that now and let our witnesses depart. We'll thank them for their attendance—

Mr. Mel Arnold: Mr. Chair, is there any opportunity to extend the meeting so that we could get in one other quick round of questioning, like we did yesterday, and extend committee business?

The Chair: Yes. If the committee would consent to allowing us to go a little bit over our time to deal with committee business, I'd certainly allow a quick round with a question for each party, with maybe a minute for a question and a minute for an answer. If we could do that, if that's suitable to everybody, and if everybody is in agreement...? I'm seeing heads nod. I don't see any noes, so we'll go on to one-minute questions.

Next on my list—and I don't know if this will be the first questioner—is Mr. Calkins, for a one-minute question and a one-minute answer.

You're up.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

The 2019 salmon closures or salmon regulations were devastating for the guides, outfitters and sport fishers on the coast of B.C. My understanding is that these regulations are virtually the same this year as they were last year. Added to that is the COVID-19 border closures and restrictions on travel.

To Mr. Helmer, or the Sport Fishing Institute of British Columbia, what will be the effect if the sport fishing advisory board's recommendations are not taken into consideration? What is the future of recreational fishing for salmon on the west coast going to look like if we maintain the status quo?

Mr. Martin Paish: If there's a minute, I'll jump in there, Blaine.

I would suggest that the future would be quite bleak. If we are to maintain the current suite of non-retention regulations in B.C., as I think I pointed out in my talk, this is about survival. It's not about

thriving; it's about survival. Chinook drive the fishery. They're what drives the economy and the small coastal communities associated with it. Without the opportunity to retain chinook, and that is essentially what most of the inside of the British Columbia coast has now for the big portion of the chinook season, the fishery will just continue to decline, infrastructure will disappear, and the fishery and its associated benefits will go away.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Fred, is that what you're seeing as well?

Mr. Fred Helmer: Absolutely.

The Chair: Thank you.

It was supposed to be one question each for a minute, Blaine. You snuck one in there on me, but I'll let you away with that.

We'll now go to Mr. Battiste for a one-minute question and a one-minute answer.

• (1655)

Mr. Jaime Battiste (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Burke, two days ago the Department of Agriculture launched applications for the surplus food rescue program. The idea is that, in areas where there's a lack of demand, it's created a food surplus, such as seafood in Cape Breton, and they will assist organizations that can demonstrate they can purchase the surplus food and get it to food banks. Were you aware of this option for processors? Is this something you might look into?

Mr. Osborne Burke: I wasn't aware of those types of details. Currently we're probably processing right at our maximum now with the lobster landings and snow crab, so even if I'd been aware of it, I don't think it would be an option for us. A number of processing facilities for seafood are fairly busy at this moment. Give it a couple of weeks, and that would probably be of interest to a number of them.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Thank you, and I hope you share that.

The Chair: Thank you, Jaime, for that.

We'll now go to Mr. Blanchette-Joncas.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is for Mr. Bird.

Mr. Bird, quickly and concretely, what is the impact of the lack of funding and staff at the Department of Fisheries and Oceans on recreational fishing?

[English]

Mr. Owen Bird: I'm sorry, I heard "Mr. Burke", and I was distracted. Could I ask you to repeat the question? My apologies.

[Translation]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Mr. Chair, I'll take back my time, if I may.

Mr. Bird, what is the impact of the lack of funding and staff at the Department of Fisheries and Oceans on recreational fishing?

[English]

Mr. Owen Bird: I think we're seeing evidence of that right now, the lack of resources available to dedicate to making decisions in a timely fashion and to consider management of recreational fisheries properly, given the opportunity, as Martin Paish said earlier, to have a portion of the department dedicated to recreational fisheries. We do not have that now in the Pacific region, and it is badly missed. We come from a time when that did exist, and we saw things operate better and differently, so we are missing that and suffering the consequences of that now.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Blanchette-Joncas.

We'll now go to Mr. Johns for a one-minute question, please.

Mr. Gord Johns: My question is for Mr. Paish. It's back to the same question about dedicated resources from the department for the recreational fishery. We had to go to the wall begging DFO to come to Port Alberni and out to the coast last year to even explain the closures. Can you talk about the importance of the department's coming and answering questions around science and stocks of concern when they've left the rivers and whatnot? Also, just talk about what other supports the government needs to provide, because the CEBA program is only going to carry sport fishers for so long with no season up ahead and no EI beyond the summer. Can you talk about what the government needs to do to help these fishers get through the fall and winter?

Mr. Martin Paish: There's a simple and quick answer to your second question, Gord, and that is, what the government needs to do is implement the SFAB proposals immediately. Those SFAB proposals are put in place to provide opportunity for small coastal communities to get involved and get back to work. That's what they're telling us they want to do.

We're moving into phase three now. We have the opportunity to take advantage of what British Columbia is calling a "staycation" rebuilding plan. They're encouraging British Columbians to take their vacations in British Columbia. That will provide the economic opportunity to get people back to work and provide the jobs they need.

We are not suggesting that we're going to get any kind of specific help like processors and commercial harvesters are. Even though we appreciate and applaud that those are necessary, we have a difficult time identifying ourselves as harvesters, but getting people on the water fishing and allowing them to retain chinook is the most important thing we can do right now. The minister has the proposal on her desk. It just needs to be implemented.

The Chair: Thank you for that, and thank you everyone for cooperating so much on that "speed round", we'll call it.

I want to say a big thank you to our witnesses again, to Mr. Burke, Mr. Paish, Mr. Bird and Mr. Helmer, for your patience and for putting up with all the technical challenges to get this done today. Your attendance here is greatly appreciated, and your contribution is appreciated that much more.

Again, for those of you who have appeared before, we're glad to have you back and hope we'll have the opportunity to talk again real soon.

I'm going to suspend for a moment, just while we allow the witnesses to leave, and we'll do a little bit of committee business, which won't take long.

The Clerk: Mr. Chair, we do not need to suspend when the witnesses are not here in person. We can move on to the budget, if you want.

• (1700)

The Chair: Okay, I think our witnesses have gone off the air.

First up, of course, we have two budgets that need to be approved by committee. The first one is the briefing on the government's response to the Big Bar landslide, requesting an amount of \$1,500.

Would somebody move that we approve this?

It is moved by Mr. Johns and seconded by Mr. Hardy.

All those in favour? Countermanded?

Mr. Mel Arnold: Mr. Chair, do we have a couple of minutes to discuss these?

The Chair: Okay. They were sent to your P9s, if you check your emails, but we can have a couple of minutes to discuss this.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: In all fairness, I think the document you're talking about just came into the inbox while we were busy talking and listening to witnesses. In fairness, Chair, perhaps we ought to be given at least a moment to consider it.

The Chair: Yes, and that's exactly what I'm saying, Mr. Calkins. You have a moment to consider it, and if you'd like to ask any questions, either to myself or to the clerk on the numbers or the estimates, by all means, please do so.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Mr. Chair, if I may, I have a couple of questions.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Arnold.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

The FOPO meetings are using video conferencing. I see that there are phone lines being requested. What phone lines are required if we're doing this all by video conferencing?

The Chair: I believe it's for staff. The clerk can correct me if I'm wrong.

The Clerk: Yes, the committee is meeting by video conference, but the audio feed is for the staff, in order to listen to the meeting and not have the delay that comes with ParlVU. There is now a fee, and every single committee has to pay for their own lines. Regarding that fee that you see there, every single committee meeting virtually has the same fees.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Okay, thank you for the clarification.

One more thing is that FOPO witnesses have not been using the House of Commons issued headsets. I see that there are headsets in both budgets. Who is receiving these? Where are they going, and why are they \$75?

The Clerk: That's an excellent question, and I thank you very much.

Indeed, the good news is that up to today, we could not deliver headsets, but now we do have headsets. If the committee does adopt the budget, then the committee will be in a position to call witnesses ahead of time. If they do not have proper equipment, we could deliver that, so that the meeting can be of quality. That would be free of charge for the witnesses, and it would be at a very slight expense to the committee, but it would definitely make the meetings much better.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you for that clarification.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: You're welcome.

Again, it's been moved and seconded.

(Motion agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Clerk: Just to clarify, Mr. Chair, to be aligned with the motion adopted by the House, if the members are okay with the two budgets at the end, I will have to do a recorded vote.

The Chair: Are the members okay with the two budgets, not just the Big Bar, but also the impacts of COVID-19 on the fishing industry stakeholders? The amount requested there was \$2,250. Are there any questions on the numbers included in that one?

• (1705)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: I have a question, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Blanchette-Joncas.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: They don't necessarily have access to Zoom. We absolutely need phone lines for them so they can take part in the meetings.

The Clerk: I can provide some clarifications, Mr. Blanchette-Joncas.

The meeting is on Zoom, and the House interpreters are in the small interpretation rooms in the West Block on Parliament Hill. They must have a connection to ParlVu and interpretation.

This makes it impossible to operate as before, where a witness could simply use the phone to join the meeting. At the moment, it's impossible or very difficult, as we saw today.

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Okay. Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Are there any further questions on clarification?

Mr. Arnold.

Mr. Mel Arnold: I'm curious as to why they were only sent out five minutes ago when we're in the middle of a meeting. We could have managed a lot of these questions and saved some time if they had been sent out prior to the meeting.

The Chair: Nancy.

The Clerk: I also wanted to have the signatures and the approval before and have been texting the chair during the meeting. I was definitely hoping to get the budget, but I got it at the very last minute and I sent it in a distribution to your P9 and all your staff as soon as I had a chance. I did not receive it before that. I got it at 4:50 p.m. Ottawa time today.

The Chair: Mr. Fast.

Hon. Ed Fast: I'm wondering why these two budget items can't be put into one document? We've got two separate budgets covering the same thing. Is it covering different individuals? One may be staff, one may be the witnesses. Is that correct?

The Chair: From my point of view, I think the reason they're separated, Mr. Fast, is these are two separate studies. They like to keep the expenses aligned with each particular study and each piece of work of the committee.

Nancy, can you confirm or explain it any further?

The Clerk: That's correct. For any study, as soon as a committee has witnesses or expenses, it has to adopt a budget.

Because the committee only had the Big Bar Pacific salmon officials in February or March, there was no cost. As soon as the members want to invite witnesses to a study, the committee has to adopt a budget. It can be modified over time, so at this time the budget is for \$1,000 or \$1,500, but over time if the committee wants to have more witnesses, the budget can always be amended down the road.

Hon. Ed Fast: Thank you.

The Chair: If nobody has any further need for clarification, I'll ask Nancy to do the recorded vote on both budgets.

• (1710)

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

The vote is on the adoption of the two budgets for the Big Bar Pacific salmon study and for the study on the impacts of COVID-19.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Both budgets, big or small as they are, have been approved.

There's one other thing I'd like to get out of the way before we adjourn.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Mr. Chair, I have one other item as well, if I may.

The Chair: Okay, Mr. Arnold, you can go first.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

There is just a small motion that I'm going to propose here. On May 7, the Standing Committee on Finance hosted seven fisheries sector witnesses for the finance committee's study on the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Testimony provided to the finance committee by the panel of fisheries witnesses provided many insights into the challenges facing the fish and seafood sectors. I believe that testimony would benefit our committee's study on the impacts of COVID-19 on the fishing industry stakeholders. I will have my staff forward the wording of this motion to the clerk, if he hasn't already started.

As such, I move:

That the committee adopt testimony from fisheries representatives received by the Standing Committee on Finance in the first half of their May 7, 2020 meeting so that the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans may consider that testimony as the committee studies the Impacts of COVID-19 on Fishing Industry Stakeholders.

The Chair: Okay, we've heard the motion. Is there any discussion?

Mr. Johns.

Mr. Gord Johns: It sounds reasonable. I was at committee hearing that testimony and I think it's very important that it's part of this study.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Johns.

Are there any questions, concerns or thoughts from anyone else? If not, I'll—

[Translation]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Mr. Chair, I just want to take a minute to validate the information from my side, please.

[English]

The Chair: Okay.

Yes, Mr. Beech.

Mr. Terry Beech (Burnaby North—Seymour, Lib.): Mr. Chair, could we have the motion read one last time, please?

The Chair: Mr. Arnold, can you provide the motion orally again, please?

Mr. Mel Arnold: Certainly. I'll read it slowly so it can be translated well.

I move:

That the committee adopt testimony from fisheries representatives received by the Standing Committee on Finance in the first half of their May 7, 2020 meeting so that the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans may consider that testimony as the committee studies the Impacts of COVID-19 on Fishing Industry Stakeholders.

The Chair: Mr. Beech, is there anything else on that?

Mr. Terry Beech: No, I think that's fine.

The Chair: Hearing no other discussion, I will call the question.

The Clerk: I'm sorry, but it has to be a recorded vote.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0 [See Minutes of Proceedings])

The Chair: Now that we have that out of the way, I just want to talk about proposed dates for committee meetings. I know the committee decided to have two meetings in July and two in August. I took the time to send out some dates to several members.

Mr. Arnold, I think my office was in touch with your office.

The dates that were proposed for our two meetings in July were Tuesday, July 21, and Thursday, July 23. In August, the proposed dates were Tuesday, August 11, and Thursday, August 13. This coincides with our virtual Parliament schedule.

Are all members okay with those dates? Hearing no opposition to it, we'll say those are the dates.

The only thing we have to do now is to look at what's going to be studied by the committee on those particular dates. There was a suggestion a couple of weeks ago that we go back to Pacific salmon in July for two meetings.

Is it okay with everyone if we revisit Pacific salmon for the two meetings in July?

• (1715)

Mr. Mel Arnold: Mr. Chair, I believe the Big Bar study was scheduled for two meetings. We have had one meeting with the minister on that. Would one more meeting finish that off?

The Chair: I think it would, but then Pacific salmon and the Big Bar are tied together a lot, so I don't know if we want to talk about the Big Bar while we're looking at Pacific salmon, and if that would tie it into it. We would fit it in that way and dedicate two meetings to examining both those topics in July.

Mr. Hardie.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Was there an expectation that there would be some kind of report, interim or otherwise, on the Big Bar?

The Chair: Not that I can recall.

Mr. Johns.

Mr. Gord Johns: I would expect there should be something that comes out of it. I think we should have one meeting on Big Bar, like Mr. Arnold suggested, so we can wrap it up and get those recommendations set. That would be my thought.

The Chair: Okay, what do you say if we say July 21 would be Big Bar and July 23 would be Pacific salmon? Is everybody okay with that?

Does anyone have any preference for the two meetings in August?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Mr. Chair, we would have preferred August 18 and August 20.

[*English*]

The Clerk: If I can add, Mr. Chair, the dates of the meetings are not going to be decided by the committee. They will be suggested by the committee, but in the end the whips will agree on the calendar and on the dates.

The Chair: Okay. I think we'll finalize the dates when the whips get together and talk about which committee is meeting when. We're suggesting that we go with the dates proposed.

Perhaps, Mr. Blanchette-Joncas, you could ask your whip to make representation that the dates be those you mentioned, and we'll see where that goes.

Again, does anybody have any preference for this topic for the two meetings in August?

Mr. Hardie.

Mr. Ken Hardie: We could continue with the Pacific salmon, obviously, and get some wheels under that.

The Chair: Mr. Arnold.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Could we consult with our groups first and then get back to you or through the clerk to determine August?

The Chair: Yes, we can for August. We have the ones in July done. We can certainly communicate with each other and go back over it in the next little while to see what we can decide on those. We can do that by email if everyone is in agreement.

Seeing no opposition, that's the way we'll do it.

All right. Again, thank you, everyone. We have a little bit of a break from committee now, a week or two before we start the meetings in July, a couple of weeks actually. Enjoy your time over the next two or three weeks. I'd like to say I'm going to miss you all for that length of time, but I won't.

I hope you all stay safe and healthy and I hope to see you all back on July 21 for our committee meeting.

We are adjourned.

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