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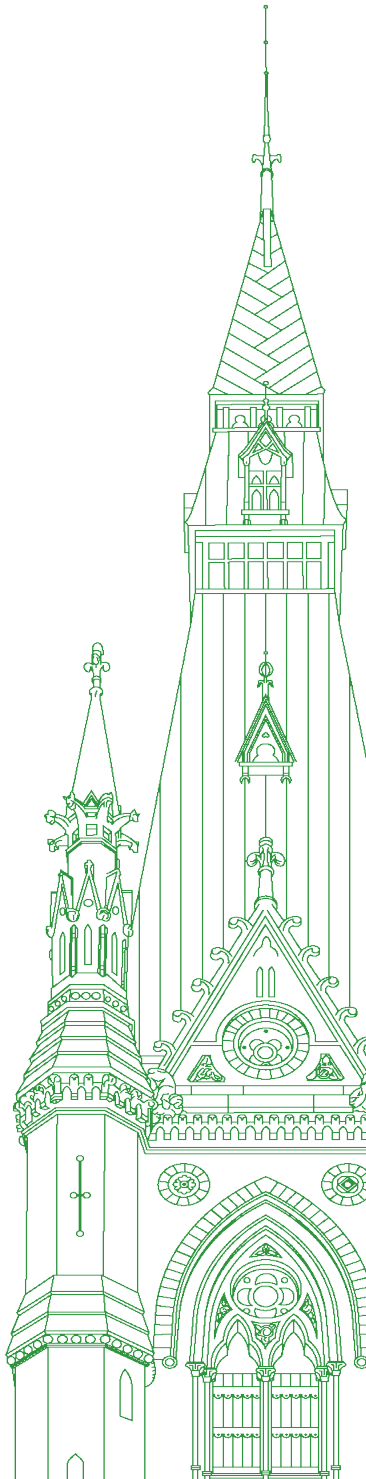

Chair: Mr. Ken McDonald

Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

Monday, February 1, 2021

● (1610)

[*English*]

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

Welcome to meeting number 16 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted on October 19, 2020, the committee is meeting on its study of the state of the Pacific salmon.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of January 25, 2021, and therefore members can attend in person in the room or remotely by using the Zoom application. The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. So you are aware, the webcast will always show the person speaking, rather than the entirety of the committee.

Given the ongoing pandemic situation, and in light of the recommendations from health authorities as well as the directives of the Board of Internal Economy on January 28, 2021, to remain healthy and safe, all those attending the meeting in person are to maintain two-metre physical distancing and must wear a non-medical mask when circulating in the room. It is highly recommended that the mask be worn at all times, including when seated. Also, of course, they must maintain proper hand hygiene by using the provided hand sanitizer at the room entrance.

As the chair, I will be enforcing these measures for the duration of the meeting, and I thank members in advance for their co-operation.

For those participating virtually, I would like to outline a few rules to follow. Members and witnesses may speak in the official language of their choice. Interpretation services are available for this meeting. You have the choice, at the bottom of your screen, of floor, English or French. With the latest Zoom version, you may now speak in the language of your choice without the need to select the corresponding language channel. You will also notice that the platform's "raise hand" feature is now in an easier and more accessible location on the main toolbar, should you wish to speak or to alert the chair.

For members participating in person, proceed as you normally would when the whole committee is meeting in person in a committee room. Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. If you are on the video conference, please click on the microphone icon to unmute yourself. For those in the room, your microphone will be controlled as normal by the proceedings and verification officer.

I remind you that all comments by members and witnesses should be addressed through the chair. When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses. From the Indigenous Leadership Initiative, we have with us Ms. Bev Sellars and Mr. Frank Brown. From the Skeena Fisheries Commission, Mr. Stu Barnes is supposed to be present, but maybe he's not here yet. From the West Coast Aquatic Management Association, of course, we have Tawney Lem, executive director.

Ms. Sellars and Mr. Brown, you have five minutes between the two of you. I will let you divide the time among yourselves as you see fit. You're good to go now for five minutes or less, please.

Before you start, I will say that if we run into a problem hearing a witness or understanding, if it can't be translated properly by interpretation, we will interrupt and probably will have to cancel that particular testimony. If that happens, any of the witnesses are more than welcome to send in a written submission of their testimony, and it will be put in as testimony before the committee.

Thank you.

When you're ready, you're good to go, Ms. Sellars or Mr. Brown.

Mr. Frank Brown (Senior Advisor, Indigenous Leadership Initiative): [*Witness spoke in Heiltsuk*]

[*English*]

I am of the Heiltsuk from Bella Bella. We are the salmon people. Salmon play a key role in our lives. Around 10,000 years ago, Heiltsuk built salmon weirs after the last ice age and also transplanted them from salmon-bearing streams to non salmon-bearing streams.

My chief's name, Yím̓ ás ƛáƛíyà sila, talks about when our first ancestor came down from above as a half-man, half-eagle and landed on a salmon trap. What you see here is an artistic rendition of that name, which goes back to the beginning of time.

We have a sacred covenant with salmon back to the olden times when food was scarce and an ancestor went into the salmon world where Maesila was the salmon chief. This ancestor brought back teachings, laws and ways to be in relationship with salmon. Still today, this ancient relationship is recognized within our Heiltsuk potlatch ceremonies, where twins lead our salmon dance. Many of our existing village sites are close to salmon rivers within our territory.

When we transitioned from the traditional economy to the cash economy, our rivers in our territory were overflowing with salmon. Our old people said that you could walk across the salmon, because it was so plentiful. Now, today, they are nearly barren of any salmon. In their last count, there were five or six pieces on their return.

Over time, we adapted and adopted and had a fishing fleet of both seine boats and gillnetters. In our recent history, salmon was a major economic driver for our village, with millions of dollars generated through our local band store, fuel company, fishing fleet, fish plant and other spinoff benefits. We currently own a 50,000-square-foot fish plant that is now completely underutilized. We not only had a large fishing fleet but shore workers who depended on the plant for a livelihood.

This statement is representative of the majority of coastal fishing communities in British Columbia.

We chose not to participate in finfish aquaculture because we could not turn our backs on wild salmon. We have opposed finfish activity from 2003 onwards, when an Atlantic salmon hatchery was established in Ocean Falls. My granny Maggie's grandfather, Andrew Wallace, was the chief of this village. This place had an abundance of salmon. They called it Ocean Falls because the river sounded like the ocean, and again, salmon was abundant.

The decision to hold our relationship to salmon and not participate in finfish aquaculture because of the disease, escapement and habitat impacts has had a devastating toll on the Heiltsuk people and has had a major impact on our employment and economic and social existence.

We have taken from wild salmon and it is now time to give back and look after these wild salmon. We need to invest in habitat restoration and research to find out why these salmon are not surviving in the ocean. Could it be the big blobs, the ocean acidification? We need to plan and support these fishing communities. It's imperative. This needs to be addressed at local, regional and transboundary levels.

We need to reconcile our relationship with the earth before we can reconcile our relationship with Canada, which is one of the major political drivers of the nation-state of Canada.

We're going to continue to uphold our responsibility and we're willing and able to work with Canada to address the needs of the salmon. We want to uphold the doctrine of priority that was established through Sparrow, where conservation comes first; first nations' social, ceremonial and food requirements are second; and commercial and commercial recreation come third and fourth.

We need to transition from DFO central management to a more collaborative management system.

We need to transition to support indigenous participation in all levels of management and fisheries science.

We need to rework environmental standards, with indigenous people involved, look at projects on a cumulative basis, pay attention to enforcement of regulations and account for the real price of resource extraction and continued pollution.

● (1615)

We need to treat salmon with the respect they deserve as a culturally important icon of not only indigenous people, but all people in Canada.

We need to consider a managed harvest of seals and sea lions to reduce their impact as a threat to the survival of wild salmon in B.C., and provide economic opportunity to first nations harvesters as a part of an economic reconciliation initiative.

We need to ensure indigenous people in B.C. are equipped as allies on salmon issues with indigenous organizations from Alaska to Oregon.

We need to support the development of the national indigenous guardians network, to be the eyes and ears on the land and sea.

We need to remove open pen fish farms from the Pacific waters to give our wild salmon a fighting chance, and to save the genetic biodiversity of these wild salmon as a strategy to manage through the precautionary principle.

Walas Gixiasa. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Brown.

Ms. Sellars, I'll give you a couple of minutes, because I know you did have part of an opening statement to make.

Ms. Bev Sellars (Member of the Team, Indigenous Leadership Initiative): Thanks very much for that.

My community of Xat'sull is approximately 550 kilometres north of the mouth of the Fraser River. My people have always depended upon the sockeye salmon and other fish that come up the river. In 1980, we saw disturbing changes in the salmon, and tried to sound the alarm to DFO. We saw worms, the quality of some of the salmon was not good, and over the years it's gotten worse.

DFO was insistent that this was normal, but unfortunately at the time, indigenous people had no voice in trying to change things. Maybe if we did, we might have been able to avoid the situation we are in now.

The Fraser River has been on the endangered list for over 25 years, and one would think that when it was placed on the list, it would be protected, but that didn't happen. It is still used as a dumping ground for all kinds of industries along the river. The salmon have to swim through the pollution to get to their spawning grounds.

As we said in our written brief, and as Frank said, over the centuries, indigenous people have developed an intimate knowledge of the land and waters in their territories. While science is important, without the indigenous knowledge, it is like trying to put together a puzzle with many of the pieces missing.

Anyone who has studied history knows that without indigenous people, it would have taken the newcomers much longer to establish a footing here. Without the indigenous knowledge, many of the newcomers would have perished in what they only knew as foreign land and waters.

At this critical time, indigenous people are needed again. It is time for indigenous people to take their legitimate place in managing the resources.

Thank you.

● (1620)

The Chair: Thank you for that.

We'll now go to Ms. Lem, for five minutes or less.

Ms. Tawney Lem (Executive Director, West Coast Aquatic Managment Association): Good afternoon.

Thank you, Mr. Chair and committee members, for this opportunity to address you today.

My name is Tawney Lem, and I'm the executive director of West Coast Aquatic, a not-for-profit organization committed to increasing collaboration in natural resource management.

In the evidence presented to you in your December meetings and again today, witnesses have brought forward many concerns about the state of Pacific salmon that touch on fish abundance, fish health, habitat restoration, enhancement and marine conditions to name a few.

I'd like to talk to you today about something that I feel is going very right and that we need to be doing more of in salmon management. It's an understatement to say that the rebuilding and management of salmon is complex. Salmon don't stay within the lines of the human boundaries we create. The interactions and influences of and on Pacific salmon are from the tops of trees to the ocean, from my home on Vancouver Island to Alaska and back. Therefore, our systems of management must be equally integrated. This means a coordinated and collaborative approach within the branches of DFO; between federal departments; between federal, provincial, regional and indigenous governments; and with local communities and stakeholders.

This concept of collaboration in fisheries and ocean management has long-standing roots in federal documents, such as the Oceans Act, the wild salmon policy and more recently in fisheries ministers' mandate letters. The challenge has been to put these commitments into practice. Efforts on collaboration have started and stalled in the past. An example of that is the West Coast Aquatic Governance Board, which was the genesis of the organization I represent.

Formed in 2001 under the Oceans Act, with the terms of reference signed by all levels of government, this board looked at strategic and policy-level issues affecting the whole of the west coast of Vancouver Island. Unfortunately DFO has not had a representative attend the board in several years. A request will be forthcoming shortly, seeking the department's participation to refresh that board's mandate.

At the same time, there are some excellent examples of collaboration under way. On the west coast of Vancouver Island, in area 23, Barkley Sound, the 1990s and early 2000s were a time of conflict and protest where the predominant strategy was that of lobbying with win-lose outcomes. Groups went out on a limb to try something new. A salmon round table was formed where all harvest groups were able to come together, under the principles of improving sustainability, to develop joint fishing plans that reflect local values and maximize the value of everyone's catch. Its path has not been smooth nor easy. The table's achievement though is being a durable and persisting venue for making difficult decisions over the past 15 years.

The success of the area 23 round table paved the way for tables now existing on three quarters of the west coast of Vancouver Island, with new tables forming on the east side of the island and in other areas of B.C.

The premise of these tables is that everyone who has an interest in or the potential to impact the resource needs to be at the table in order for management to be ecosystem-based and to consider the interactions of habitat, hatcheries and harvest—in other words, an integrated approach. These tables are inclusive. They involve all harvest groups, all levels of government, stewardship groups and industries such as aquaculture and forestry. When considering how to collaborate, there is no one-size-fits-all model. Form must follow function, for example, the round table's focus on terminal fisheries and their related natal streams and watersheds.

They're organized at the scale of subregions or sounds. The round table principles, though, are scalable and are present in efforts such as building a salmon recovery strategy for the whole of the west coast of Vancouver Island and considerations for how to coordinate recovery strategies coast-wide.

I've shared the innovations being used on Vancouver Island and elsewhere in B.C. with the hope that they provide the committee with ideas for a collaborative path forward. You've heard from others about how important Pacific salmon are. Salmon bring people together. If we hope to save salmon, we must bring people together.

Thank you for your time today.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lem. You're a little under time, so that will work well.

I want to let the committee members know that the witness we were missing hasn't joined us yet. We will start our rounds of questioning. I would remind members that we have a hard stop at 5:30 eastern standard time. I want to try to be fair to everybody along the way. I will be very strict and stringent on the time allotted.

First, we'll go to Mr. Arnold for six minutes or less, please.

● (1625)

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's good to be here.

Thank you to our witnesses for appearing today. West coast salmon is becoming very important to all of us.

In our briefing notes, there was mention of an indigenous program review that was done by DFO in 2017, and there were recommendations that came out of that regarding indigenous knowledge on Pacific salmon and so on. One of those recommendations was to have A-base funding for indigenous knowledge and science. That means it would be a budget line, not a year-by-year program, something that could be counted on in perpetuity basically.

Mr. Brown or Ms. Sellars, have you seen any of that funding dedicated to any of that work?

Mr. Frank Brown: I haven't seen any of that funding you're referencing. It is a good idea. One of our colleagues, Ethel Blondin-Andrew, who was also a parliamentarian, was supporting the national fisheries advisory process. It takes time to trickle down. The Heiltsuk in Bella Bella haven't seen that funding yet. I can't speak for anybody else.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

Go ahead.

Ms. Bev Sellars: Just from my area, we haven't seen any of that either.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you. That's good to know.

Ms. Lem, you mentioned a collaborative approach with seemingly everyone at the table and the round table working in area 23, where everyone can discuss what's needed for the fisheries, the people who harvest the fish, our first nations and everyone involved.

Can you explain any possible reasons you can see for why that's not happening?

Ms. Tawney Lem: Do you mean why it is not happening in other areas?

Mr. Mel Arnold: Yes. There seems to be a siloed approach to fisheries management. There's no ability to get everyone into the same room at the same time so that we can all understand how much we need to work together to restore our salmon stocks. Do you know of any reasons why that's not happening?

Ms. Tawney Lem: I think there are probably a few. One of them, which you already mentioned, is that concept of a siloed approach. It's understood that government is big, but we are seeing evidence of that kind of working between departments and the branches of DFO, so it's taken a little bit of time but it is coming forward.

The other real difficulty is that getting people into the room itself is hard, and often, maybe, processes are brought forward as suggestions. They're needed to bring in a particular management problem in place, but in the absence of those relationships already being there, it could be difficult for that table to really take hold. In part, one of the things that we've really tried to emphasize is starting to create a bit of a culture, if you will, of collaborating, wherein the communication is made from the top all the way down, and of giving people some concrete ideas of how to bring these tables forward.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

Mr. Brown, you mentioned in particular the multiple factors that are affecting our fisheries out there. One of the things that have been looked at is having more selective fisheries—more in-river, very selective for specific stocks and so on. Have you been able to implement any of those programs in your areas? Was it your nations that were putting forward those proposals, and if not, was there any reason you weren't able to?

● (1630)

Mr. Frank Brown: I have referenced the long history of our people on the coast. That's exactly where we were harvesting the salmon, through the weirs that I mentioned. Both rock weirs and wooden weirs were placed at the mouth of the river. We could selectively harvest salmon. That changed with the industrial revolution. Now the situation that we refer to with regard to conflict has come basically because of gear conflict between the seines and the gillnetters and the natives fighting over an ever-shrinking biomass of salmon.

I was suggesting that the doctrine of priority be enforced—specifically, conservation first; then food, social and ceremonial; commercial; and commercial recreational. That's what the legal directive is. With the in-season fishery, however, the economics almost always trump the decision-making around salmon management.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

Does anyone else have a short comment on that?

The Chair: Hearing nothing, Mel, I guess that's it. You have about 10 seconds left. I don't think you can get much in and get an answer in that length of time.

We'll move on now to Mr. Battiste.

You have six minutes or less, please.

Mr. Jaime Battiste (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Thank you very much.

Thanks to our witnesses for their discussion. I'm coming to you from Eskasoni, the largest Mi'kmaq community in the Atlantic. We struggle out here too with salmon conservation.

One of the focuses you mentioned, Mr. Brown, was this term of environmental reconciliation. I'd like you to expand on that a little bit. Expand on what you feel we can do to reconcile some of the damage done to our environment and to the species that we have relied on for generations, since time immemorial. I'm wondering if you can expand a bit on your thoughts about environmental reconciliation and also some concrete measures that we can take.

Mr. Frank Brown: I believe it really goes back to values, when you put your value on only financial capital gain as opposed to taking into consideration the whole impact on natural capital through a development process. Based on carbon dating, our people were able to continue to exist in our territories for over 14,000 years. Canada as a nation-state is relatively young in comparison. There were reasons why we were able to survive. We have gone through climate change. We have gone through radical changes. We have gone through times of famine. We had our own laws and our own teachings, based on a long-term relationship with these resources, and fundamentally that idea of respect.

The Heiltsuk are part of the coastal first nations. From the central coast, north coast and Haida Gwaii, we've done a marine use plan. We subscribe to a conservation-based development approach where we look at doing things in a more sustainable way. We manage riparian zones near salmon-bearing rivers so that you have to be so many metres outside. Before, with logging on the.... I mean, we had the War in the Woods over this, to protect salmon. That's how highly we regard our salmon. We want to take care of it, because salmon takes care of us.

It's this idea of a reciprocal relationship and a fundamental shift in values that we need so that we as a society can move forward in a more sustainable way. It's imperative not only for the indigenous people of the coast, who have an intimate relationship with salmon. It's also an important biological indicator of the health of our marine ecosystem. If the salmon go, then we're not too far behind. I think we do have something, certainly, to offer this discussion.

● (1635)

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Thank you for that.

Ms. Lem, you talked about the culture of collaboration. One program that we have heard has been really well received by indigenous communities is the indigenous guardians program, and I feel like it's been successful because of the collaboration.

Could you let us know what your thoughts are on the indigenous guardians program and whether it's a working model? Does this in fact lend itself to what you consider the culture of collaboration?

Ms. Tawney Lem: Thank you very much for the question. We have seen quite a level of interest in the program here on the west coast. In part, that's because it recognizes indigenous and local knowledge and really bringing that information to the table. Yes, it does contribute to that cultural collaboration, because it has people who are local to an area being part of that solution.

I think one of the aspects of the guardian program that speaks to one of the things that's really needed is an investment in jointly developed research and science and joint monitoring. When it's conducted by one party in the absence of collaboration and the absence of others, sometimes that information isn't trusted, and then it's hard to bring that information forward to use in a good way for stock assessment, habitat restoration or enhancement.

The guardian program, in using that indigenous knowledge, in having people who are in those communities and close to the resource being part of that solution and having them work with sectors and others in the community, absolutely could be a path forward for that aspect of collaboration.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Just to expand on that, I really liked your point about the co-management of science. When we're talking about that collaboration, it's not just around enforcement but around actually finding solutions based on indigenous knowledge and western science. It's a kind of the “two-eyed seeing” approach, as we would view it in the Mi'kmaq culture.

Is that the kind of approach you're advocating for?

Ms. Tawney Lem: Yes, absolutely, and having all of those ways of seeing, if you will, is part of that solution. You mentioned that idea of enforcement. When the research is collaborative and when the solution and the plan are collaborative, people have a greater sense of buy-in. With that, there is greater following of a plan, with less need for that enforcement. What we also see is that where groups have created something together, they will enforce their own, if needed, to ensure there is a protection of what they have all built together.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Battiste.

We'll now go to Madam Gill for six minutes or less, please.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would also like to thank all the witnesses who are with us today.

At the outset, I would like to humbly say that I don't have a lot of traditional indigenous knowledge about the fishery and salmon ecosystems. I'd like to hear from the witnesses here about their knowledge in general.

Of course, there is no order for the interventions.

I would also like to ask sub-questions. I can come back to them later, too.

Does the department have access to sources of information on this topic? Does it consult them?

In addition, I would like to know, although it is difficult to say, to what extent the department understands and uses such knowledge for the enhancement of Pacific salmon populations.

[*English*]

Mr. Frank Brown: Go ahead, please, Bev.

Ms. Bev Sellars: With regard to the indigenous knowledge, before the newcomers came, there were the natural laws and common sense of indigenous people. What they do is that they get down into the nitty-gritty of being on the land. They see the small changes, like we did 40 years ago when we started seeing the change in the salmon.

We go from the natural laws and common sense to this whole web of man-made laws that many times are harmful instead of helpful. These laws seem to be focusing more on advancing business development goals, and at some point.... You know, I say that we have two economies. We have the indigenous economy that walks on the land, swims in the waters and grows on the land, and we have the other economy, the monetary economy. That monetary economy is going to eventually kill the other economy.

I'll use my sister Tina as an example of what happens. She's the hunter in our family. She goes out and she sees the changes. She came back one day and was angry because they had logged out the moose calving grounds. If indigenous people had been involved, that wouldn't have happened.

These are just examples. There have to be no go zones.

I'll turn it over to you, Frank.

● (1640)

Mr. Frank Brown: To the question about resources that are available for reference purposes, in British Columbia, in the International Year of Biodiversity, I was an adviser to scientists exploring this question of biodiversity conservation, and we wrote a paper called “Coastal First Nations Fundamental Truths: Biodiversity, Sustainability and Stewardship”. We had the Haida, the 'Namgis and the Heiltsuk knowledge keepers, who basically were educated in western methods but were also students of our culture. We looked at the question, “Are there core values along the coast?”, and these knowledge keepers said, “Well, of course, silly.”

Then, the next question was, “What are they?”, so we came up with these seven core value statements or fundamental truths. That publication is available. We validated our truths with our stories, practices, languages and maps because it's the language that holds the knowledge. Biodiversity mirrors cultural diversity, so the genetic biodiversity of wild salmon is imperative because that's what gives the salmon the resiliency to adapt to climate change and the other issues that will be challenging them.

It's the same with our culture. There are very rich and diverse cultures that have relationships with this resource. As far as the government-to-government work goes, unfortunately the history has been one of disrespect and exploitation, and the only time we get any movement is when it becomes combative, when we have to stand up for these resources, because they don't have a voice for themselves.

I used to be on a Pacific fisheries conservation council, making recommendations to the federal and provincial ministers of fisheries, and I heard first-hand from the Atlantic Conservation Society about how DFO was hundreds of percentages off the biomass projections for decades, and how the economic pressure of the draggers also caused the collapse of the cod fishery.

As I said, it goes back to the values. What we have observed is that western science takes a little bit of information and then extrapolates out with computer-generated models, but if they're wrong, by the time it gets out here, they're totally off the mark. We have been witnesses to that, and we are the ones, as the indigenous people, who have to live with the results of these decisions that are made in Ottawa.

There needs to be more consideration given to the local people to consider their input in a collaborative way. I appreciate what the other witness brought forward. The first nations are about collaboration. We are about collaboration. We believe in taking the best of what western science has to offer but also incorporating our traditional and local knowledge to allow for informed decision-making and holding the salmon up as the key resource that sustained us all through the millennia.

● (1645)

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Gill. That was a little bit over time.

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

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I want to thank all the witnesses as well.

It's an honour to be joining today's committee from the Nuu-chah-nulth people's territory and from the unceded territory of the Hupacasath and Tseshaht people.

Chief Brown, you talked a lot about local and indigenous knowledge, and we continue to hear from the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans that she supports local and indigenous knowledge. When we look at the decision-making, however, whether it be salmon allocation or herring in the Salish Sea, local and indigenous people are saying that they want to see it either suspended or curtailed until a whole-of-ecosystem management plan is in place, but the department continues to ignore local and indigenous knowledge and decision-making.

Do you agree that the minister needs to do more to demonstrate that those words are actually meaningful?

Mr. Frank Brown: I absolutely agree that the minister has to put into effect a verbal commitment. It's a challenge, because the status quo has been a heavy industrial driver, and it has been to our detriment.

You brought up the issue of herring, which is a main keystone species, a forage fish, a feeder fish for salmon. If you look at what's going on in British Columbia with herring, it's very similar to salmon. The herring have collapsed on Haida Gwaii. The north coast is in jeopardy. The gulf is questionable. There are no more herring on the west coast of Vancouver Island, which is the main food for both salmon and the orca, and that is on the watch of DFO.

We had to, basically, take direct action and occupy a Department of Fisheries and Oceans office because the herring biomass had collapsed in our territorial waters for six years. Finally when it started to come back a little bit, they wanted to have a commercial fishery. We said, “No, you cannot do that. You have to give the herring an opportunity to rebuild.” Look at what happened in the Atlantic. We took it right down to the last cod. When are we going to learn? We have to do things differently.

The other thing is that, yes, I believe the indigenous people are the voice of reason in this deliberation, but we have.... It's massive, because we're dealing with transboundary issues. We're dealing with Alaska and Oregon. Salmon don't know national or international boundaries. We have to work collaboratively so that the salmon can have a fighting chance.

The Minister of Fisheries has to show leadership and courage, and be able to hold back the line and hold salmon as the priority, not only the economic interest. That approach and that business model has not served us well. It's been 100 years, and we have seen an absolute destruction of salmon.

We have over 20 salmon-bearing rivers in our territory, and last year we had six salmon return in one river. It's just like when the inshore cod fishery was saying in the Atlantic, “There's no cod here,” but DFO was saying, “No, our computer-generated model says that there's this biomass.”

The people who are living there, the local knowledge keepers, are the ones who should be advising this process. That's the point.

Mr. Gord Johns: I appreciate that.

Ms. Lem, I really appreciate all of your testimony. There's a new mandate letter that just came out on January 15. It directs the minister to “Work in close collaboration with relevant ministers, as well as with First Nations, provincial and territorial authorities, fishing and stewardship organizations”—which I would identify as you—“and implicated communities across the Pacific Region to bring forward a Pacific Salmon Strategy and deliver on our commitment to conserve and protect wild Pacific salmon and their habitats and ecosystems.”

I believe that we're in a wild salmon emergency right now, and we haven't heard the minister come out and call it that. We need to hear that.

Maybe, Ms. Lem, you could talk about what resources you are getting now. You've cited the importance of your management tables. We recognize that. What is needed?

Right now we have a B.C. salmon restoration fund of $142.8 million, literally a drop in the bucket for what's needed. People are saying we need that every year, not over five years. Can you speak about what resources are necessary? What do you see in that mandate letter that you could bring forward?

They're now saying that your groups would be identified in this. What resources would you need to be able to advance this?

● (1650)

Ms. Tawney Lem: Thank you very much for the question, Mr. Johns.

I think, from an intangible standpoint, from the federal we need that commitment that's communicated throughout government to improve their participation, foster development and remove any barriers that are there for collaboration. As I had mentioned before, it's building that culture.

From a tangible standpoint, it's making sure there is integration within the federal structures so that they can support that ability to work across branches and departments. As mentioned before, it's to invest in that jointly developed research and science that supports these tables, and to seek input from those who are in a collaborative process, asking what they need for their development and success.

I appreciate the commitment of government for collaboration, but in part where we see the most success at these tables is coming from where the need for the table has been identified by those directly affected. It's coming from those internal to the issue, not mandated from an external source.

Collaboration is a choice. There has to be that willingness there. We need to be able to give space to local groups to build a process that really works for them. In essence, it has to be emergent for a group to have that best opportunity to develop that localized solution of how they're going to work together, and to have those groups identify the resources that are needed to support the work that they're doing together.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Johns.

We'll now go to Mr. Calkins for five minutes or less, please.

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

If I may, can we just use first names? It would make it easier for me.

I am going to start with you, Frank, if you don't mind.

Bev, please feel free to add in if you like.

I want to talk to you a little bit about these weirs and pound traps or the technology that first nations used to use. You mentioned, Frank, the ability to do very selective fishing. Could you comment on how selective weir fishing or pound trap fishing can be?

Mr. Frank Brown: The weirs are ingenious in their simplicity. As we know if we're coast dwellers, the tide rises and falls every six hours. As the tide rises, those rock weirs catch the salmon. They come in and they get stuck in there and our people used to go and get them.

We had a very sophisticated governance system. The chief was the one who did the oversight in managing the salmon. That was one example of how this could be done.

Also, the Coast Salish on the Salish Sea had the reef net fishing also for weirs. There were weirs in the rivers that would guide the salmon into a certain area and they'd go and pick out specific pieces of salmon. That ancient technology and that sustainable technology still exists today.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: I visit the coast all the time. You can tell by the wall behind me that I like going fishing and hunting and doing some of those things. I've been a fish counter before for fish and wildlife here in Alberta. I've seen fish counting stations on the weirs and these diversion channels, so I know that you are able to count pink salmon and sockeye as they come through. The ability for selective fishing is there.

I know there are lots of partnerships with first nations in the hatchery processes. Would first nations communities care if they were allowed to use selective fishing techniques if the salmon they were keeping for food, social, ceremonial or even economic considerations were from a hatchery, thereby being able to leave wild fish to continue on up the streams to spawn?

Would that be something of interest?

Mr. Frank Brown: I don't have any authority to speak for all first nations, first of all. I can speak for myself and I am a leader of my nation.

I think we have had a salmon hatchery for well over 30 years. All of the other systems are basically barren. We would get a little bit of recruitment from our salmon hatcheries, but there is a conflict with this idea of hatcheries because it's the whole issue of the genetics and the monoculture of the hatcheries. For some reason the salmon enhancement program has not been supported. I have talked to many fishermen who have advocated for ocean ranching—

● (1655)

Mr. Blaine Calkins: I'm not going there, Frank. Let me maybe be just a little bit more specific.

If there were some hatchery fish coming back, first nations would have the ability to actually collect and select all of the hatchery fish out so that they don't get back necessarily into the breeding stock, leaving the wild ones to go back and actually do the breeding. Therefore, you'd eliminate the genetic drift that a hatchery is alleged to cause, but you still have more access to salmon without going to the extreme of ocean ranching. I don't think anybody in Canada wants to go there.

I'm talking about mark-selective fishing. This works for recreational fishermen. Would it work as well for food, social, ceremonial and even some type of economic catch for people for when the salmon return to the rivers?

Right now when I go out there, I see nets being used in our flowing waters and some of them get caught up—sturgeon and bycatch. Fish are caught that are not necessarily wanted. I'm wondering if there would be a consideration for how effective a new technique or a selective technique might be to satisfy everybody's needs including the longevity of wild salmon.

Mr. Frank Brown: We have a doctrine of priority. Conservation comes first. We are going to have to do everything in our power to save wild salmon. That's number one.

Number two is with food, social and ceremonial. I get coho from our hatchery and smoke them and they are great fish. It's the same thing with dog salmon; it's a great fish.

I draw the line with finfish aquaculture because of the method and the health of those fish. I personally can't support that, but I have eaten hatchery salmon.

If I could, I have to say that in the last few years, when we were getting those coho, there were these little white pellets inside the meat of the coho. We have never seen that before, and I think that's something that's going on out in the ocean.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Calkins.

We'll now go to Madam Gill, for two and a half minutes or less, please.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In fact, my question about sources was answered earlier. I would like to thank Mr. Brown for his answer.

We are talking about a document, but I am well aware of the importance of oral culture among first nations. I wonder if there are other people from the communities who, like Mr. Brown, could testify.

What is the state of this knowledge? We wouldn't want it to get lost either.

Perhaps Mr. Brown can answer me.

[*English*]

Mr. Frank Brown: We have an oral history. That's how our knowledge has been transferred intergenerationally for 700 generations for the Heiltsuk people.

We are at risk of losing our language, but our young people are stepping up and they're taking responsibility to learn the language. As I said earlier, that's where the knowledge is, because there are certain things you could say in our language that you can't say in English or in French.

We are working to decolonize. First nations people have been the most marginalized people in Canada because of the desire to have access to our resources. On the coast, it's been fish, salmon, timber. However, our people never gave up on our commitment to our place and our values and our system, even though we've dealt with the forces of colonization.

If you don't mind, I'm going to pass it over to Bev, because I've more or less monopolized the comments.

Ms. Bev Sellars: I just want to say that the knowledge is there. In my territory, we have a group of elders, the Secwepemc elders, who before the pandemic got together every month and talked about things. As an example, Mount Polley is in our traditional territory. When Mount Polley happened and the disaster came down, our elders told the scientists who were working there that there were certain fish—bottom fish—in the lake. The scientists had no knowledge of that, and when they went to check, they found out that this was true. That knowledge is there, but you don't see scientists coming to talk to our elders or have anybody seeking their input.

They're teaching the younger people. They're passing it on, so yes, it is there.

● (1700)

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Gill.

I have to apologize to my colleague, Mr. Hardie. I jumped over him and went to Madam Gill first.

I'll go back to Mr. Hardie now, and, of course, I apologize.

You're up, Mr. Hardie, for five minutes or less.

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I was wearing my blank look, so I can understand that.

Is it too simple to ask of all the witnesses whether there is a plan. Is there a plan to restore abundance in salmon? Is there something that glues together all of the issues affecting salmon stocks beyond just managing how many fish are caught, which seems to be the main thing that DFO and others do? Is there something to deal with habitat? Is there something to deal with predation, with disease, with the herring, etc.? Is there a master plan? Is it possible to have one, or does it have to be sort of broken down by region or river?

Frank, we'll start with you.

Mr. Frank Brown: I think that Tawney has the right idea with what they're doing at West Coast Aquatic. The Delgamuukw decision said that we are all here to stay. We need to work together. We need to set the arena so that we can put our interests forward.

This isn't unprecedented. We have been in this process, in particular with the coastal first nations and the War in the Woods, where we had loggers and other governments and the first nations come together to come up with a more sustainable development around forest management. So I think—

Mr. Ken Hardie: I'm sorry but I'm going to have to cut this fairly short, because I don't have a lot of time.

Let me go to Ms. Lem and ask that same question.

Who owns the plan? Who has the master plan that says, “Look, these are the things we have to do, so now let's get together and figure out who's going to do what”?

Ms. Tawney Lem: Some of those plans are in development. I think what we need to remember is that it really is a question of scale. You asked whether it is river by river, province-wide or coast-wide. It's all of those things. There is work that has to happen at a watershed level. There's work that has to be done at a subregional or sound level. There's work that needs to be done on a south coast basis and then a coast-wide or province-wide basis. All of those also have to come together in an integrated way.

We're looking at the west coast of Vancouver Island chinook recovery plan that is under development right now—as a result of COSEWIC listing west coast chinook as threatened as well as the Bill C-68 requirements. The plan that's being worked on there is for the integration of hatchery, habitat and harvest: what fish in what amount in what systems for what purpose, and how do we get there? Enhancement is a tool. Habitat is a tool. All of those things have to come together. We need to be talking among those different scales to make sure that what's happening in one area is complementary and assisting the work that's happening in another area.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Can we see that plan?

Ms. Tawney Lem: We have terms of reference, if you will, and the table of contents is being developed.

The COSEWIC listing came out just in November, so that starts a two-year clock ticking. That group is working on that integrated plan for the west coast of Vancouver Island.

● (1705)

Mr. Ken Hardie: This is a problem, and I don't know the way out of it.

Bev was saying that they noticed 40 years ago that there were problems. Here we are, 40 years later, fighting over who gets to catch the last fish. We've seen industrial development, deforestation and the effects of climate change. What we haven't seen is a plan. I applaud the efforts under way right now, but by gosh we should have had this 30 years ago.

Ms. Tawney Lem: I agree, and the best time other than yesterday is right now.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Yes, it's right now.

What don't we know enough about in order to really complete or complement a plan to get something? Again, the idea is to restore the abundance that our indigenous people certainly celebrated and worshipped spiritually over so many millennia. What is missing in our knowledge base? We need to get back to that.

Ms. Tawney Lem: I think there are probably a number of things. Certainly in the work that's happening on the west coast those data gaps are being identified and filled.

The folks at the table, as opposed to me as the facilitator, are really the ones to answer that for you. Some of the unknowns do come down to those marine conditions. That's a place where certainly more work needs to be done and more needs to be understood.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Frank, I have a quick question—

The Chair: I know Ms. Sellars was waving her hand there, Mr. Hardie. I'll give her a few seconds to give a quick answer.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Yes, please, Bev, go ahead.

Ms. Bev Sellars: I just want to say that's the problem. Today we're looking at salmon, but there is so much more to it and that's what we need to get away from. It's all connected. It has to be looked at as a whole. What happens in my territory is going to affect what happens in the ocean. What happens in the ocean is going to affect the salmon that come to my territory. We need an equal basis of indigenous people and all the science together, making decisions together. Until that comes together, we can't have a plan. There isn't going to be a plan that's going to work.

Mr. Ken Hardie: I appreciate that. Thank you very much, Bev.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hardie.

We'll now go to Mr. Johns for two and a half minutes or less.

Go ahead, please.

Mr. Gord Johns: Thank you.

Chief Brown, I'm going to have to ask two questions right now, because of time.

Do you believe that a federal-provincial-first nations leadership table steered by salmon rehabilitation and restoration is a good idea and one that is supported by an engagement process with all user groups at a round table to make recommendations on priorities? Would this help begin a reconciliation process at a societal and user level that could assist in rebuilding wild salmon and salmon allocation?

Also, I'd love to get your comment on whether you think the minister should declare a wild salmon emergency.

Mr. Frank Brown: They're both kind of leading questions. How could I say no?

We do need to collaborate—the province and the feds and first nations—in a respectful, tripartite manner. It goes back to that issue of respect. Absolutely, salmon are in crisis. There are no ifs, ands or buts. This didn't just happen. When I was in the Fisheries Resources Conservation Council 20 years ago, the sockeye salmon were outside of the Fraser River—and this is to support Bev's point—and the water was too warm to go up the river. We just dealt with a mountain pine beetle epidemic. The trees are dead. They can't hold the soil, and there's all of that silt in the Fraser River. Those are just examples of what she's saying and of how everything is connected.

Once we get our own house in order, like you say—first nations, B.C. and Canada—then we have to have those transboundary conversations with our neighbours because they're having the same problem we are.

Mr. Gord Johns: I talked about the $142 million that's allocated for B.C. salmon restoration funds. I know your nation has been raising a lot of concerns around stock assessment and resources for monitoring and science. Can you speak about the lack of resources?

Bev, thank you so much for talking about how we have to pull money into it because of the importance of it, but it does require resources now. Can you speak about the need for resources?

I also just want to say that my mom grew up in Ocean Falls. She shows the photos of the big salmon and how many, the abundance. Maybe I'll let you speak about that.

● (1710)

Mr. Frank Brown: Sorry, you're going to have to ask that first question again.

Mr. Gord Johns: Are the resources that the government's investing to support your needs adequate right now?

Mr. Frank Brown: No, they're not. The reason why they're not is that a lot of times the money gets used up in administrative processes. Honestly, there's not enough money in the treasury to do what we need to do. There is absolutely not.

However, through a collaborative approach, working with first nations through indigenous guardians out on the land who are in connection with those resources—whether it's salmon or caribou—it makes sense to work with the local people because Canada doesn't have enough money to put people out into these rural locations. Build capacity locally. Provide the financial resources to train our people to be the eyes and ears on the land, to do the work for all Canadians and British Columbians. It's to our benefit. It makes a tremendous amount of sense.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Johns.

We'll now go to Mr. Mazier for five minutes or less, please.

Mr. Dan Mazier (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

You've all noted the importance of indigenous-created and developed programs and having to achieve success. As a rural Canadian, I understand the negative impacts that occur when a government takes this one-size-fits-all type of approach and doesn't consider the local knowledge.

Could you share some examples—and I'll start with Ms. Sellars—of how the current government has failed to consult and incorporate local first nations knowledge in restoring fisheries?

Ms. Bev Sellars: My example of seeing the changes 40 years ago is one example.

In my territory, we have mining. We did this map. Our department of two did a map of all the mining in our territory: placer mining, big mines and smaller mines. There's little or no regulation on placer mining. All of this is coming into the streams. That's where they're doing the mining. It's getting into all the waterways, so guardians and indigenous people.... Like I say, my sister is out there. She's an informal guardian, but she keeps an eye on what happens in the territory.

It's about listening to indigenous people and getting people out there with authority. This is not to say that what we say goes in the territory, but it's working with parks and with other people to make sure that the environment stays healthy.

Mr. Dan Mazier: That's good. You answered it well.

Mr. Brown, do you believe there's been enough collaboration? Building on what Ms. Sellars had to say, have you noticed if it's harder to work with this government in the last, say, four to five years? Have there been things turning for the better or for the worse? If so, what are your opinions on that?

Mr. Frank Brown: I think the intention is good, the mandate letters and commitment to reconciliation, but sometimes.... The government is big and it's a challenge, but the intention is good. Everybody's experience is different. We've been fairly aggressive as a nation to advance a reconciliation agreement with Canada and British Columbia, and in that context, it's served us well.

I want to speak to the question that you asked Bev about examples. The whole thing is the example, that's why we're having this conversation, because salmon is so abysmal currently. I remember my brother talking about Rivers Inlet sockeye. He was fishing with my grandpa and the Rivers Inlet sockeye were hitting the net and the net started to sink and my grandpa told my brother, this is the last time we're going to see this.

There was a sea of boats on the water, and that was a gross mismanagement of those fish. We thought it was going to go on forever, and it isn't and it hasn't. Now here we are in this situation and that's the absolute example of how it hasn't worked, because, I'm going to say it again, it was disrespect to our people when we tried to have a view and they just totally disregarded what we were saying. Now people are recognizing there's validity and there is value in local knowledge to inform western science. Forty years of scientific data extrapolated out has gotten us to this position.

● (1715)

Mr. Dan Mazier: Thank you.

Ms. Lem, all of you have talked about this commitment and it's good we're seeing some promises and we're seeing some mandate letters. There was something you said about the integration across departments. For this two-year plan that you're starting to embark upon, have you seen those departments? Have you seen any specific changes that this government has done so this plan can all of a sudden become a reality that you're starting to develop, or is Mr. Brown going to be sitting here in two years' time saying, look, here we go again, now we have 42 years?

What changes have you seen to have that plan be enacted?

Ms. Tawney Lem: Certainly, locally at the salmon round tables what we're seeing from DFO, as an example, is that they're bringing resource management, they're bringing the salmon enhancement program, they're bringing science—restoration biologists, stock assessment—they're bring all of those branches to the table where they're needed, and bringing in aquaculture as well. There is a recognized conversation about the need to also be calling in the province and making sure that those relationships are there. They're bringing all of those groups to the table.

You asked Frank about what's being witnessed with the government, and I really wanted to emphasize that government isn't one entity or one unit. We are seeing evidence of that cultural shift more and more, of government not coming to a group and saying, “Here's our decision. What do you think?” but instead saying, “Here's the problem. How do we figure this out together?” There's more initiation and support for collaborative tables to form. I want to acknowledge where those shifts and improvements are happening.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Mazier.

We'll now go to Mr. Morrissey for five minutes or less, please.

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

I have a question for Chief Brown.

In your opinion, Chief, is a managed harvest of seals on the west coast essential to the rebuilding of salmon stocks?

Mr. Frank Brown: I believe that things are out of balance and there are too many seals. You can see it when they go to feed on the herring and the salmon in the river systems. There's a massive amount of seals and sea lions, and I believe there does need to be a culling program, but it has to be managed properly to maintain the balance.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Thank you, Chief.

We seem to be able to quantify what is happening in the rivers and the systems that is leading to the loss of habitat or deterioration of habitat for salmon.

Chief, collectively, do DFO and the indigenous knowledge keepers have a good understanding of what is happening at sea?

Mr. Frank Brown: I don't believe we do. I believe it's getting better. I'm not sure if you're familiar with Dick Beamish, who used to be the head of the Pacific Biological Station in Nanaimo. He's an Order of Canada recipient scientist and it was his passion to go out. He raised money to go out, and I think they're now going into their second or third year of research in the north Pacific, where the salmon are going. I don't believe we do know exactly where they go. That's the challenge.

Of course, the two big blobs that we had in the north Pacific, El Niño and La Niña, and the ocean acidification are obviously going to make things more challenging for the salmon to survive.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Thank you, Chief.

I have a question for Ms. Lem.

This is an issue that has been ongoing for some time. In fact, the reduction in salmon stocks on the east coast has been an issue various governments have been attempting to deal with. I genuinely believe that ministers, regardless of political stripe, attempt to make the right decision on issues. I genuinely do believe that.

In that view, could you sum up what DFO has gotten consistently wrong over the last period of time and what they have to get right to change this?

● (1720)

Ms. Tawney Lem: Thank you for the question.

Again, this requires that integration. What we do see from time to time are those increased efforts and then some waning. Recently, the provincial government had a B.C. salmon strategy and a group that they were putting together. In taking a look at that, we took a look at some historical documents that showed agreements and protocols, for example, between the federal government and the provincial government in order for them to connect and work together on salmon. Some of those groups started, and then, for whatever reasons, became stalled or stopped.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: The lack of continuity on planning between both levels of government is a [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] got it wrong. Could you then identify the one thing that is essential to getting it right and keeping this iconic fishery from being lost?

Ms. Tawney Lem: I think it's just the commitment that we're in this together. No one party has the knowledge or the resources to do this on their own. We need to commit in the long term to develop the plan, implement it, monitor its effectiveness and iterate as we need to.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: With that, you made a comment that—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Morrissey. I believe Mr. Brown had his hand up to give a response to that question.

Mr. Frank Brown: One of the issues is the fettering of the minister's authority. Every time we develop a plan and move forward, we always get pushed back in that regard. You don't have any decision-making authority. There needs to be power-sharing with the local communities living in those regions, because it's all centralized power out of Ottawa. If there was a way to share decision-making power through this mechanism you've talked about, by creating a collaborative governance process, I think that would be a solution.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Morrissey.

We'll now go to Mr. Bragdon for five minutes or less, please.

Mr. Richard Bragdon (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, honoured guests and panellists. We appreciate hearing from you, your invaluable insights and perspectives and the passion you bring to this very important challenge that we're all facing together.

Obviously, we've been hearing from each of you this evening—and hearing throughout this study—about the challenges we're facing with the lack of coordination. It seems that everyone has the same objective. We want to see the salmon restored to healthy stock levels and to be there for future generations.

I want to ask you what you think should be done that isn't being done by the current government to help with the Pacific salmon in particular. I know that we've heard several thoughts about that tonight in certain veins and on certain aspects. I'm trying to break it down into what are the actionable steps that you would recommend need to be taken right away to get to a solution as quickly as possible.

I will start with you, Chief Brown, and then go to the other guests.

Mr. Frank Brown: I think we need to come up with a plan, as your colleague said. Honourable Mr. Hardie spoke about a "master plan". I think that's the idea. That needs to be put together, and then there need to be adequate resources to do the work, simply at a high level.

I also think—not to be critical—that DFO is conflicted. They're supposed to be managing by the precautionary principle, especially during these critical times of the biomass decline of wild salmon, yet they're investing in finfish aquaculture. When I was on that fisheries conservation council, $75 million annually was being invested into finfish aquaculture while they were supposed to be protecting and managing wild salmon.

● (1725)

Mr. Richard Bragdon: Thank you.

Do you have anything to add to that, Bev?

Ms. Bev Sellars: Yes. I think the environmental assessment process that happens needs to recognize the jurisdictional authority of first nations, and we also need to get the information that they get. It has to be a neutral, independent body, not one that seems to focus on business development goals more than the environment.

There should be no go zones, absolute no go zones. Also, it has to deal more effectively with cumulative effects, not just one project here and another there. It has to be looking at the whole process, and until we get there, you know.... It absolutely has to happen. Of course, it all needs to be consistent with UNDRIP, because if indigenous people are making decisions, it's good for all of Canada. If we're on a equal basis, it's good for all of Canada. Some people may not like it, but the decisions will be better.

Mr. Richard Bragdon: Thank you.

Ms. Lem, quickly, do you have anything to add on that one?

Ms. Tawney Lem: Thank you.

Just in summary, we need integration within the federal government, a really close connection with the provincial government, particularly forestry, the meaningful involvement of communities and that commitment, as Frank has said, to resource the plan beyond just this budget year or beyond this government.

Mr. Richard Bragdon: Thank you.

This is one of the things. Whether it's on the east coast fishing crisis that we've been through recently, and now with the west coast Pacific salmon crisis that we're in, it seems that from coast to coast there is a recognition and a growing desire to see a collaborative, comprehensive approach that engages all pertinent stakeholders. Obviously, our indigenous peoples would be very much a big part of this, as well as folks from the local communities, the communities that are going to be affected by this, including the fish harvesters who have been doing this for many years—all stakeholders.

In order to get to a comprehensive solution, it's going to take everyone being at the table in a transparent way. It seems that the challenge—I believe Mr. Hardie alluded to this, and Mr. Arnold as well—is that everyone seems to be operating in silos. We have a kind of disjointed approach. We're not getting that singular focus, with all key stakeholders having buy-in and feeling that they are part of the solution. Oftentimes, we're seeing one pitting blame against the other, and that's never productive. If we can get to something where we have a shared value—that we all want to preserve the salmon species—and we're working together in collaboration, I think we'll get there.

Are there any final thoughts you would like to offer on this?

My time is probably just about up.

The Chair: Yes, you're over your time.

Mr. Richard Bragdon: I apologize.

Thank you, folks.

The Chair: You don't realize how much time a little speech will chew up before you get to any answers.

We have about three minutes left.

Mr. McKinnon, could you close this out, please?

Mr. Ron McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question would be to Chief Brown. At the outset, you indicated a perspective based on the north coast and Skeena river system. I have a riding that is on the Fraser. I'm going to try and find out if there are similar problems in the Skeena water system as well.

Over the years, we've lost habitat. We've destroyed habitat. In my own community, a dam was built across the Coquitlam River over a hundred years ago. It killed the sockeye run. It was the same story with the Alouette River right next door. Up and down the Fraser in the lower reaches, there are flood control gates that are fish hostile. There is a loss of marsh lands along the river, so that the smolts can't acclimate properly before they hit the sea. This is potentially one of the major factors in the massive die-off when they reach the sea. Of course, there's also pollution, as Ms. Sellars mentioned.

What kind of environmental habitat destruction is there? What kinds of massive changes to the Skeena habitat are there? I suspect it's less developed than down here. I've never been up there. Nevertheless, that could be very significant. Of course, the Skeena is really the other great river system in our province.

I would welcome whatever visibility you could give to that.

● (1730)

Mr. Frank Brown: It's complicated as we've said. This is going to be my concluding comment here. I want to thank you for listening to what we had to share about the salmon. I hope you can do some good work to create the changes that are necessary.

To the question, whether it's the Skeena, the Fraser or the Nass, all of these systems are the same because there are other things outside. We have river valley systems that are completely intact, but the salmon aren't going back there because it's such a large issue we're dealing with.

To the parliamentarians who aren't familiar with British Columbia, we are non-treaty natives. We still own title to the lands and waters in which we live. That's why we set up the different initiatives to deal with these questions of lands and resource titles. That has to go on the record.

There was a reference to our being stakeholders. We are not stakeholders. We are title holders. We own this land, the water and the resources. However, we also recognize we have to work collaboratively, and we're willing and able to do that. This is such a large issue. It's time sensitive. We have to do something in short order.

As one of your colleagues said, I don't want to be back here in two years, but I appreciate the invitation to come and to share a local insight. I wish you well in doing the work on behalf of all of us to save our salmon.

Walas Gixiasa. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you. That clews up the session for today.

I want to thank our witnesses for a very informative hour and a half of testimony. Hopefully, we can write some of that information into the report at the end.

I want to apologize to committee members who are not getting more questions in, but I've been told that on Mondays, it's a dead stop at 5:30 eastern standard time. On Wednesdays, we do have some leeway so that we can have some continuation when votes cut into our session.

I'll bid everybody farewell for today, and safe travels wherever today may bring you.

Thank you to Mike Kelloway for being such a great participant today, substituting in for Mr. Cormier.

Goodbye, everyone. We will hope to see you all on Wednesday.

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