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# Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

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Tuesday, April 30, 2024

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Chair: Mr. Ken McDonald





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• (1535)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 107 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans. This meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders.

Before we proceed, I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of witnesses and members.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mic, and please mute yourself when you are not speaking.

For interpretation for those on Zoom, you have the choice, at the bottom of your screen, of floor, English or French. For those in the room, you can use the earpiece and select the desired channel.

Please address all comments through the chair.

Before we begin, I would like to remind all members and other meeting participants in the room of the following important preventive measures. To prevent disruptive and potentially harmful audio feedback incidents that can cause injuries, all in-person participants are reminded to keep their earpieces away from all microphones at all times.

As indicated in the communiqué from the Speaker to all members on Monday, April 29, the following measures have been taken to help prevent audio feedback incidents.

All earpieces have been replaced by a model that greatly reduces the probability of audio feedback. The new earpieces are black in colour, whereas the former earpieces were grey. Please use only an approved black earpiece. By default, all unused earpieces will be unplugged at the start of the meeting.

When you are not using your earpiece, please place it face down on the middle of the sticker for this purpose, which you will find on the table, as indicated, where you're sitting. Please consult the cards on the table for guidelines to prevent audio feedback incidents. The room layout has been adjusted to increase the distance between microphones and reduce the chance of feedback from an ambient earpiece.

These measures are in place so that we can conduct our business without interruption, and to protect the health and safety of all participants, including the interpreters.

Thank you all for your co-operation.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted on June 16, 2022, the committee is resuming its study of the population sustainability of Yukon salmon stocks.

On our first panel today, we have, from the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation, Chief Pauline Frost. We also have the chair of the Yukon Salmon Sub-Committee, Mr. Tim Gerberding.

Thank you for taking the time to appear. You will each have five minutes or less for your opening statement.

Chief Frost, you have the floor first.

**Mr. Serge Cormier (Acadie—Bathurst, Lib.):** Mr. Chair...

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Cormier.

**Mr. Serge Cormier:** I have just a quick point of clarification.

Did the clerk receive any indication from the minister that she will be coming to the committee in the coming weeks or months? Did you have any conversation or receive any emails regarding this?

• (1540)

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Geneviève Dubois-Richard):** Yes, I have received communication from the minister's office. She will be available on June 6 for one hour and on September 26 for one hour.

**Mr. Serge Cormier:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** We will go back to you, Ms. Frost.

**Chief Pauline Frost (Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation):** Thank you for this opportunity. I appreciate presenting in person. I apologize for my last opportunity to speak to you, which was via Zoom. I was away at the international treaty discussions on the Yukon River salmon and I couldn't make the call.

I am the chief of Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation. It's a northern community in north Yukon. It's on the tributary of the Porcupine River and the Crow River.

We are the farthest-reaching community that the Yukon River salmon travel to. It's probably one of the longest migratory routes of salmon in the world. We are a remote nomadic people. We live solely on our subsistence way of life, although we are very progressive with respect to our interaction with the rest of the world.

As for my history, previous to this I was the minister of environment for the Government of Yukon. I've met numerous times with the federal fisheries minister, and I also have sat on the Yukon River Panel for many years. I sat as the chair of the Yukon Salmon Sub-Committee. I presented recommendations to the federal minister with respect to salmon sustainability. In 2013, the recommendations that came forward to the minister asked to cease and desist fishing on the Yukon River due to the decline and challenges then with seeing 30,000 chinook and not meeting escapement goals. It's critical to my community.

The community that I'm from is very small, with 250 people. We live in harmony with the environment. We are caribou people. You might have heard of the Arctic refuge, the 1002 lands and the protection of the Porcupine caribou. Salmon is no different. We have our obligation to protect the resources. It's fundamental to our very existence. It's defined in our self-government agreements, which Canada signed on to.

With respect to the protection of land and the environment and our due diligence and obligation to meet some of the climate strategies and climate goals, as the minister of environment for the Government of Yukon, I put forward our clean future targets for 2030, emissions targets, to assist Canada in its objectives. However, at the same time, we are talking about a potential species at risk. I will give you some numbers, because it's critical to my community.

Two years ago on the Porcupine River, we saw 349 chinook pass my community. We have in the last 10 years not met border escapement goals—it's more than 10 years, actually, a decade or more—for Fishing Branch River chum, yet we protected every bit of the habitat. Ni'inlii Njik, which is the headwater, is defined as a life-giving place. We protected it to allow the salmon to return to their critical habitat and spawning grounds.

If you want to look at the pristineness of environment and pristineness of water, you can walk down to the Porcupine River, dip your cup in it and still drink the water. We have done the due diligence on our part to protect the environment. The circle of life continues. It starts with us and it ends with us. We've spoken about the last salmon to reach the spawning grounds. Now every egg counts—not every salmon, but every egg.

We've met internationally to meet border escapement requirements as defined in the Yukon River Salmon Agreement. That has not been very effective because there are no tools or mechanisms in the agreement to allow us to have deliberations around coexistence and co-management, true co-management, of an iconic species that is at risk. My biggest concern is having a discussion in a year or two about a species at risk. How do we then bring the salmon back? Once you lose a wild stock, it's very difficult to bring that wild stock back to the tributary.

The population has declined. Climate change adaptation, over-harvesting, what we've seen in the pollock fishing industry and what we've seen with warming trends in the waters of the Bering Sea are affecting the salmon. We've seen ichthyophonous. We've seen the illnesses that the salmon contract, and obviously they don't make it to the spawning grounds.

• (1545)

We've studied this to death. I've been on the Yukon River Panel now for 20-some years. We have a restoration and enhancement trust fund for supporting the communities in looking at scientific analysis. We have a joint technical advisory committee. How good has that been? How effective has it been? I ask myself that often when I sit at an international table with my colleagues.

This is the first time in our history that we actually have an opportunity to speak about true stock sustainability, restoration and maintaining some form of support for the few fish that are swimming by our community.

**The Chair:** Okay, Chief Frost, I'm going to have to cut it off there. We have gone well over the five-minute mark.

**Chief Pauline Frost:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Hopefully anything you didn't get to say will come out with lines of questioning as we go.

We'll now go to Mr. Gerberding for five minutes or less.

Go ahead when you're ready.

**Mr. Tim Gerberding (Chair, Yukon Salmon Sub-Committee):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to talk to you.

As Chief Frost mentioned, the Yukon salmon are in critical condition. Chief Frost was speaking of the Porcupine, which is a major tributary of the Yukon. I was a commercial fisherman on the main stem for about 20 years, although there hasn't been any commercial fishing for 20 years, so this dates me.

As Chief Frost mentioned, the Yukon River chinook salmon and chum salmon are in absolutely critical shape. Last year, less than 15,000 chinook salmon reached the border. The target escapement at that time was about 55,000. That's just less than a third of the target. The new target escapement is 71,000. We're facing a catastrophic scenario.

To begin with, I want to say that it's not going to be easy to fix. Chief Frost mentioned climate change. That's a huge issue—maybe the most challenging.

You have hatcheries in Asia and North America that are pouring literally six billion pink and chum salmon into the north Pacific, which are then competing with wild Yukon River chinook for nutrients. That's a huge problem.

A huge number of our chinook are dying en route to the spawning grounds because they are simply not fattening up in the ocean. They are not acquiring the accumulated fats. They simply run out of gas on the way up the river. This is a huge problem. The salmon that do come are much smaller and less robust than they used to be. We used to have a huge contingent of seven-year-old and eight-year-old chinook that were some of the biggest in the world.

As Chief Frost said, it's one of the longest, if not the longest, migrations in the world. The salmon that are coming back now are about half the size of the salmon that returned 30 years ago. This is a real crisis.

There are numerous causes. Climate change and hatcheries are some of them. People sometimes throw up their hands and say there's nothing they can do about that. I don't buy that line. I do agree that it's going to be hard. I think Canada really needs to step up to the plate on the international stage and begin to lobby to reduce the number of hatchery fish being poured into the north Pacific and begin to take steps to arrest climate change.

I want to address certain things we can do.

As of April 1, the Government of Canada and Alaska, representing the U.S., signed an important international agreement to press the pause button on chinook fishing for seven years to begin developing a rebuilding plan, as required by the Yukon River Salmon Agreement. That agreement identifies a number of factors that have contributed to the decline. We have discussed some of those.

One of the factors is resource development in both Yukon and Alaska. Most of the resource development that threatens our salmon is mining. There are two hydroelectric dams in Yukon, both built 75 years ago. Neither was built with modern or effective fish migrating capabilities, such as fish ladders going up and fish out-migration channels going down. We have opportunities to fix things here.

I think one thing we have to do is clarify responsibility and coordinate action between the Government of Canada and the Government of Yukon because at this moment in time, the Government of Yukon more or less turns a blind eye to salmon. I'm not saying they do nothing, but they consider it Canada's responsibility.

Canada defers to Yukon when it comes to land management in the Yukon territory. I think it's very important for the Government of Canada to engage with their Yukon government colleagues and really get down to brass tacks on this chinook rebuilding plan. At this moment in time, the Yukon government isn't very actively involved in it. I think it's incumbent upon the government to engage with the Yukon government so that we have a multigovernment initiative.

We also have the first nation governments. Chief Frost was speaking about the Vuntut Gwitchin in Old Crow. There are 11 Yukon first nations living along the Yukon River. Each of them has self-government powers and authorities to regulate the harvest for their own citizens.

• (1550)

I think this is going to take a multigovernment, collaborative effort. It's not going to be easy. I think it will mean we'll have to change regulations. It's going to cost money, and it's going to mean sacrifice on the part of industry. However, unless we're prepared to make some sacrifices and to take some bold and decisive action, we're going to lose our salmon.

That concludes my opening remarks. Thank you for allowing me to speak. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

**The Chair:** Thank you for that.

Before I go to questions, I will remind members that it might be easier if you identify who you're asking your question of. It will make things go a bit more smoothly.

We'll start off with Mr. Arnold for six minutes or less.

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

I thank the witnesses for being here.

I will start off with Chief Frost. Thank you for bringing your vast knowledge to this discussion.

You spoke a lot about the size of the salmon that used to return up the river and said you're not seeing that size fish returning any longer. Are you aware of any steps that are being taken to preserve the genetic strains of the large fish that no longer seem to be appearing?

**Chief Pauline Frost:** What are we doing? We have essentially closed down salmon fishing in our communities. It's been 30 years in some communities. That's our strategy. We've seen the numbers returning, smaller returns, and the age class returning at four years, not seven and eight years. We've seen a drastic decline over the last decade or more, so we've essentially imposed rules on ourselves as first nations to not fish and not harvest. We allow the spawners to get to the spawning grounds with the objective that we will, in time, allow the salmon to return as larger, healthier fish.

As Tim indicated, we're small in comparison to the rest of the Yukon River. It's a huge tributary. There are 60-some communities along the river, and we only have a small number of communities in Yukon. There are 11 self-governing first nations. We control our own rules of law that govern us, so we impose restrictions on ourselves.

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** I believe you said that you were minister of environment with the territory. In that time, were you aware of any work between the territorial government and the Department of Fisheries or the federal government on preserving the genetics of the large fish that are so important to those strong runs?

**Chief Pauline Frost:** I would suggest the Yukon government and the Department of Environment are responsible for critical habitat and freshwater fish. The federal government has a responsibility for chinook salmon.

We have an international agreement. We have worked with the first nations. We've partnered with first nations on projects and initiatives to protect critical habitat, so I would say to some degree that we have. Did we go far enough? Maybe not. Maybe we could have done more. We need to bridge that relationship more now and into the future.

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** Thank you.

I'll ask the same question of Mr. Gerberding.

Could you provide any insight you have on that? We know those large fish are important because they not only produce more eggs, but produce larger eggs that have a better chance of survival all the way down the road. Are you aware of any programs or work that's been done to preserve those stocks?

• (1555)

**Mr. Tim Gerberding:** As Chief Frost mentioned, Yukon first nations have drastically reduced and in some cases ceased their fishing, for many years. Those at the headwaters have really taken the lead. The Teslin Tlingit Council at the upper end of the main stem are a particularly good example of that.

I will say this about the genetic stocks and preserving the genes: The only way to do that for Yukon River salmon—these big seven-, eight- and in some cases even nine-year-old fish—is to conserve the wild fish. I think there's a bit of a misconception about the ability of science, and in particular hatcheries, to preserve genetic stocks, but that really isn't the way it works, unfortunately.

There is a compensation hatchery attached to the Whitehorse dam. The Whitehorse dam is literally 3,000 kilometres up from the mouth—or maybe 2,800. It's a long way from where the salmon enter the mouth. There is a 75-year-old fish ladder there that isn't particularly effective. There's lots of mortality associated with it.

Yukon Energy, which operates the dam, harvests wild stocks, has an incubation facility and releases quite a number of hatchery fish into the river. When they release those fish, they clip the adipose fin so that they're instantly recognizable. However, what we have noticed is that the hatchery fish that return to the Whitehorse facility or beyond are markedly smaller and thinner than their wild cousins.

Hatcheries seem like an easy answer sometimes, and they may very well play a role in preserving salmon, but they will not play a role in preserving the genetics of the big fish. I think the only way we're going to preserve those genetics is to eliminate fishing and make it possible for those big fish to get back to the spawning grounds.

Yukon River salmon are unique. They're among the biggest chinook in the world. They have among the longest migrations. It's the wild fish that have the very precious and unique genetics. To preserve those genetics, we have to preserve the wild fish.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Arnold.

We now go to Mr. Hanley for six minutes or less.

**Mr. Brendan Hanley (Yukon, Lib.):** Thank you very much to both of you for appearing. It's really good to see both of you.

Chief, it's really nice to see you here in person. I'm glad that worked out.

I have a few questions for you all. I'll try to be fairly specific.

Chief Frost, You mentioned in your opening comments that 349 chinook passed your community on the Porcupine this last year. Can you compare that to previous years? What would a peak year have looked like in older days?

**Chief Pauline Frost:** Well, I'll age myself by telling you that I am 60 years old. I grew up on the Porcupine River. I grew up fishing, so I know what it was like when I was a child. We saw an

abundance of salmon compared to where we are now. As the minister responsible for that back in the day, and then as a chair of the Yukon Salmon Sub-Committee, putting restrictions on my people was probably one of the most difficult things I've ever had to do.

With regard to the number of fish we've seen historically, as the story goes—Tim just described it—they're the biggest fish in the Pacific stocks, and in the stocks the numbers are so small. The fish are returning smaller. We're seeing three- to four-year-olds. That's unusual. A fish doesn't leave its spawning ground, go off to the ocean and come back three years later. Historically we've seen them returning at seven and eight years old, which tells us a lot about the changing environments. There's no explanation. No one can explain that to us.

With regard to numbers, we fly in fish, unfortunately. Last year was the first time in our history we actually had to buy fish out of B.C. and fly them into our community so we can keep the culture alive. That's what we've done, and it's unfortunate, but we want to keep the salmon culture alive and keep educating our young people about the importance of preserving wild stocks and the genetics.

• (1600)

**Mr. Brendan Hanley:** I'm following up a bit on Mr. Arnold's question.

Tim, in his testimony, really laid the foundation for the idea that this requires collaboration and partnership among all levels of government. Given your previous role as environment minister, what would you see now as the ideal collaboration among the three—at least three—levels of government?

**Chief Pauline Frost:** You have an agreement. It's called the Pacific salmon agreement. Out of that derives the Yukon River Salmon Agreement. You have the self-government agreements and the Umbrella Final Agreement. Chapter 16 comes out of that. The Yukon Salmon Sub-Committee is the main instrument of salmon management in the Yukon.

However, we have an international agreement that is not flexible. It is not flexible to allow for a discussion or deliberations on effective co-management. It is very restrictive. Its only obligation is to meet the border escapement requirements.

Now that we have a partnership agreement through this international, political, diplomatic agreement, it allows Canada to fully participate in opening up the Yukon River Salmon Agreement. It allows Canada to participate internationally regarding the pressures of the Bering Sea, what's happening in Russia and what's happening with the harvesting and migration of the salmon further north. It also allows us to have discussions around how we, collectively, are responsible as three parties of government—self-governing first nations, the Yukon government and Canada—to collaborate in Canada on a stock restoration initiative.

We need the resources in the Yukon right now. There's \$654 billion allocated from Canada. Where does it all flow? It flows into B.C. for the Pacific salmon agreement. How much of that flows to the Yukon for restoration, enhancement and preservation initiatives? It's nothing. The first nations receive zero dollars, yet we put all of our efforts into protecting and preserving critical habitat. We do our part. We need Canada to participate effectively in an approach of building and bridging this relationship. It's critical. It's essential.

**Mr. Brendan Hanley:** Can we bring that one step further in terms of the mechanism? You're really talking about a broad engagement among Canada, the U.S. and self-governing first nations.

What would the mechanism be? Is this something like a summit or another agreement over and above the existing treaty? What form would it take?

**Chief Pauline Frost:** I would suggest that the tool is there. It's the new agreement that was just signed.

It's about stopping for a minute to think about what the seven-year moratorium looks like. That in itself won't return the fish to the spawning grounds. We have to have a broad discussion around the impacts and effects that we are seeing from climate, predation, illnesses, warming waters, warming trends—everything that's affecting the salmon. There's one opportunity and we have to get it right. What does that look like?

This is the first time we've ever pushed for a political agreement or diplomatic intervention like this. Now the window of opportunity is open for Canada. It's not restricted by the Pacific salmon agreement and the confines of the agreement that only allow you to meet a border escapement at the low end of the range, which is 42,500. That won't get the salmon to return to their original wild stock state.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Hanley.

We'll now go to Madam Desbiens for six minutes or less.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Caroline Desbiens (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here. They are very informative.

By way of introduction, I'm going to tell my colleagues about a film I saw on the weekend in Baie-Saint-Paul, *Ocean Seen from the Heart*. This amazing film, which I recommend to everyone, was directed by Marie-Dominique Michaud and Iolande Cadrin-Rossignol. It is originally in French, but subtitled in English.

According to the Quebec film, which is making the rounds internationally, humans should not think that their actions to improve the state of the oceans will be effective if they themselves do not feel personally involved with the oceans. Everything is interrelated.

Some leading Quebec scientists took part in the film. They include Mario Cyr, a diver originally from the Magdalen Islands whom I met when I went there and whom my colleague Mr. Cormier surely knows as well, Lyne Morissette, who has appeared before this committee several times, and Hubert Reeves, an astronomer with an all-encompassing view of humanity. All these people went to places around the world where initiatives were under way to restore the natural order.

Chief Frost, I know that what I'm saying resonates with you, because you have exactly that perspective. You talk about conservation, and we have two avenues for working to restore the natural order, which is a term I prefer to use instead of "stock rebuilding". It's more about restoring the natural ecological balance of the marine environment and improving the land-based human relationship with that environment.

With that in mind, two things must be taken into account: conservation and our relationship with fossil fuels. I'd like to hear your comments on the funding allocated to the recovery of endangered marine species versus the funding still being invested in fossil fuels today, in 2024. These fuels create more pollution and, by extension, contribute to climate change. Shouldn't we rethink the ratio of those investments, meaning increase investments to restore the natural order of things and reduce investments in fossil fuels?

• (1605)

[English]

**Chief Pauline Frost:** With respect to options and climate adaptation impacts and effects on the environment, Vuntut Gwitchin is sitting on the richest oil and gas reserve in North America. We're one of the nations in Yukon that has select lands called category A lands. We have surface and subsurface rights. You will never see any mineral development or any mining development on our category A lands. The elders have advised that we protect them.

You can look at your climate strategy and the goal of meeting your targets by 2030. Canada's specific agreements speak about the need, moving forward, to protect 30% of the land mass by a specified time. We have all of that in Yukon. It's protected. That will contribute to Canada's targets, and I think we are working collaboratively with Canada to address this.

We have pristine areas of protection already across the Yukon. I've highlighted and Tim has highlighted the pressures from the two hydro dams, but mining is also a huge pressure. We have legislation in effect in Yukon that's attempting to govern what a relationship looks like with the environment and protecting the environment. It's important that we look at land use plans, land use measures and outcomes in the Yukon, and that's a part of our agreement. Canada has a broader obligation to Yukon as well, to Yukon first nations, to effectively implement the land use strategies that will protect some of the areas that we speak about.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Caroline Desbiens:** Could we look to your land use system as a model and apply those principles to other regions of Canada where the oil and fossil fuel industries are likely to operate? Do you think we should do better?

• (1610)

[English]

**Chief Pauline Frost:** I wouldn't speak for the rest of Canada, but I will speak for the Yukon.

We are 11 self-governing first nations. We have fundamental rules and laws that apply to us, which govern our way of life. We have signed off on a 28-chapter agreement that clearly puts in place tools and measures that allow us to advance our interests. The interest we always hold first and foremost is protecting our way of life before anything else.

We see the Yukon River chinook salmon, the coho salmon and the chinook salmon on the Porcupine drastically declining. We are now having a discussion on the species at risk. That's a conversation we will have with Canada and with our partners. It breaks my heart to have to speak that way, but that's the reality. We have done absolutely everything, yet at the same time, climate is affecting our environment and our land.

If you look at Ni'inlii Njik park and look at the fishing branch wetlands, we have what is referred to as "the wandering". The salmon get to the spawning grounds, the headwaters, and the water disappears over the course of the winter. The salmon eggs and the fry do not spawn and return.

Climate is affecting us no matter how much we protect the environment or what we do. It's a reality we have to face collectively, and it's a conversation we need to have internationally.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madam Desbiens.

We'll now move on to Ms. Barron for six minutes or less.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP):** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

My first questions are for you, Chief Frost. I want to build off some of the things you were talking about.

You mentioned the decision by your community to close down fishing. You've spoken quite eloquently about the connection between salmon and the way of life of first nations and the 11 self-governing first nations within the Yukon.

I wonder if you could speak to the impacts on first nations' way of life that the closure of this fishery has had, and how that contrasts with what happened before that closure was necessary.

**Chief Pauline Frost:** Thank you for the great question.

Imagine taking a lollipop away from a child. You're taking something away from the community that they've enjoyed for millennia.

At the same time, we have put in place the tools that allow us to control the outcomes that are necessary for the better good of humanity, the better good of our community. We have been, in north Yukon, taking things to unprecedented levels. For the first time, last year we closed down all freshwater fishing, any type of gillnet fishing in our tributary.

That was not easy, I can tell you, as the chief. It was not easy for me to do that, but we also saw that the step we took set a precedent, because we used the tools in our self-government agreement that allowed us to put the laws into effect. There are sections in our agreements—16.4.2, 16.5.1 and 13.3.4—that are administration of justice tools for implementing measures to protect and conserve. Before anything else, conservation is of the utmost priority for my community.

This is about traditional knowledge, the practices of our historical people. When we speak of scientific knowledge and trends, we need to incorporate the knowledge of the people. It will resonate and go a long way, from the headwaters to the ocean, to the 60 or 70 communities along the river, to all indigenous people. It will resonate conservation before the rights of one individual, ensuring the rights of the people, so that we can, seven generations from now, still see wild salmon stocks returning to our tributaries.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Thank you so much.

There is a lot that can be learned from everything you just said and from all the practices as we move forward in protecting this vital, keystone species that is so important to so many.

You spoke in your opening testimony about the illnesses that salmon are contracting. I wonder if you could speak a bit more about what you're seeing as far as illnesses go in those washing up on the shores.

• (1615)

**Chief Pauline Frost:** I am not a scientist; I will tell you that now. I rely on my colleagues, who are all scientists, to give us the data and do the analysis for us.

I sit on the Yukon River panel, so we hear a lot of testimonials. We hear a lot of reports on ichthyophonus, which seems to be the new trending illness that the salmon contract on the way. It appears that it comes from the warming temperatures and the warming waters. It means they don't make it to the spawning grounds. It's not harmful to humans; the salmon are still edible.

We don't know a whole lot about this. What I can say is that scientific assessments are being done. Last year was huge for us in the Yukon because the United States decided they were going to take some 500 chinook out of the main stem tributary to do studies on ichthyophonus. The results of the studies will not bring the salmon back.

We cannot continue to do scientific analysis on salmon. I think this seven-year moratorium will allow us a huge window of opportunity to look at the trends we are observing, whether in illnesses, overharvesting or warming temperatures. We have data loggers all along the river. We have telemetry sites along the river. We have sonar along the river. That still does not give us the answers.

The question you asked is a question that I cannot answer because there are many factors implicated in the demise of the salmon.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Thank you. You provided a lot of really valuable information in that discussion. I appreciate that.

I'm going to ask my last question of Mr. Gerberding. Thank you for being here.

My question is perhaps a quick one. You were talking about the hatcheries and the fins being clipped, which makes the fish highly recognizable. Can you clarify, if you're aware, whether the fins of all the fish coming out of the hatcheries are clipped or it's just a certain percentage of the fish that are being clipped? How does that play into this?

**Mr. Tim Gerberding:** Not all of them are clipped, but a high percentage are. The concept is that you assume the clipped fish reflect the same characteristics as other hatchery fish, but not all of them are clipped.

If I could, I would like to take the opportunity to say something about climate change and efforts to conserve lands in the Yukon.

As Chief Frost said, Yukon first nations are really strong on conservation. They're trying to preserve their way of life. However, it has to be stated that in Yukon, only 8% of the land is settlement land. The other 92% is non-settlement land. The Government of Yukon is responsible for managing that 92%, and the Government of Yukon simply isn't doing a really good job of managing salmon habitat.

Somebody asked about climate change and efforts to reduce fossil fuels. The Government of Canada has a carbon tax, for example, and it's been very controversial. What happens in Yukon is that the Yukon government rebates to mining companies all of the carbon tax they pay.

I live in Dawson, Yukon, which is where the Klondike gold rush happened. Ninety-five per cent of the placer mining in Yukon happens in the Dawson region. Those placer miners are the biggest polluters in Yukon, at least on a per capita basis, yet they're paying ab-

solutely no carbon tax. It just doesn't make sense. They're releasing huge amounts of fumes—carbon—into the atmosphere.

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans is responsible for managing salmon, but they have delegated that responsibility when it comes to so-called Yukon placer authorizations, which give placer miners the rights to literally relocate a salmon stream, mine it out and then put it back where it was, on the assumption that it will continue to be good salmon habitat. That's never really been proven.

The point I'm trying to make is that DFO needs to start to get tough with the Government of Yukon. The Government of Yukon doesn't care much about salmon. I mean, they like to pretend they do, but they're not taking any action whatsoever.

As I said in my opening comments, if we're going to bring back the salmon, we'll have to start doing things differently. You cannot promote mining and then give the miners the carbon tax back so they can continue to spew all of this carbon into the atmosphere. It just doesn't make sense.

• (1620)

**The Chair:** Thank you. You've gone way over the time that Ms. Barron was allotted.

We'll now go to Mr. Small for five minutes or less.

**Mr. Clifford Small (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My first question is for Chief Frost.

The Yukon River is 2,300 miles long, with 1,400 miles of it in the U.S. territory and 900 miles of it in Canada. We have a quotation from the CBC:

Pauline Frost...said the agreement will only work if everyone does their part along the whole length of the river. If that happens, she said everyone will benefit.

Do you think you're going to have the agreement working on the whole length of the river?

**Chief Pauline Frost:** We have been doing this work now for well over 20 years. We have a relationship with the Alaska Association of Village Council Presidents. We have a relationship with the Tanana Chiefs Conference. We have built a relationship with the tributaries. In fact, this summer, we have a delegation coming to my community from the state of Alaska to see what it's like to come into an isolated community in the Yukon. It's an educational opportunity.

We have built regional salmon management plans that we've shared with the various communities along the way. I signed off on the inter-tribal fish commission as part of Canada's obligation in our relationship with the United States tribes.

We have a long way to go, but we also know that the tribes and isolated communities in the state of Alaska are identical to those in my community. Half of my community lives in Alaska. The numbers that we have for our self-government agreements.... Half of my citizens are across the border. They are United States citizens. They will comply. They will be advocates. They will advocate for closures. They have advocated for closures.

**Mr. Clifford Small:** How is the enforcement of the law on the Yukon River? Is there any IUU fishing or poaching taking place? How strict is compliance with the law on the river?

**Chief Pauline Frost:** On compliance, at least from my perspective, the first nations self-regulate. They have control.

With respect to enforcement, we have not one DFO fisheries officer in the Yukon, so we regulate and manage ourselves. They moved all of the enforcement agencies out of our territory. This morning, I requested from the regional director general a presence in my community.

**Mr. Clifford Small:** Chief Frost, going back to the statement you made that the agreement will only work if everyone does their part, we need that kind of enforcement on the U.S. part of the river, given that just about two-thirds of it runs through the U.S. What kind of commitment have you received from the United States that they'll watch the poaching that's happening on their side of the river?

**Chief Pauline Frost:** We have a commitment from Governor Dunleavy, and he signed off on the agreement. He negotiated the agreement in good faith with his colleagues at the Yukon River Panel, the tributaries.

We met just a month ago and we have full-on commitment from our colleagues across the way. We also have a commitment from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game to monitor and enforce, much like Canada's—

• (1625)

**Mr. Clifford Small:** Chief Frost, how was it in the past, leading up to where we are today?

**Chief Pauline Frost:** I will not speak to what happened in the United States. I will say that we understand there may have been pulse openings and closures in Alaska. There may have been fishing outside of the pulse openings and closures when there were salmon restrictions on fishing put in place.

**Mr. Clifford Small:** Thank you, Chief Frost.

I have a couple of questions for Mr. Gerberding.

I heard you mention that you were once a gillnet fisherman on the Yukon River. What do you think the effect of netting a river could be?

I'm from Newfoundland. It's unheard of to net a river in Atlantic Canada. It's just not done. What do you think the effect of gillnetting that river has been over the years? If the salmon returned, would you return to gillnetting?

**Mr. Tim Gerberding:** There's no doubt that gillnets select for the larger fish. The effect of gillnetting on the river—and I should say that it is the most common way of fishing, on both sides of the

border—has been to selectively weed out the larger fish, so that is a factor.

I don't imagine I'll ever return to fishing. It would be great if my kids would. I don't think gillnetting would be appropriate at this moment in time. It's too selective for large fish. I think it's probably going to take a generation or more to rebuild the fish.

To answer the question about gillnetting, it does take out the big fish, for sure.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Small.

We'll now go to Mr. Hardie for five minutes to finish out the first hour.

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

Thank you to our witnesses for being here.

Chief Frost, just to remind me, is your community on the Porcupine tributary?

**Chief Pauline Frost:** That's correct.

**Mr. Ken Hardie:** You're saying that obviously you've noticed the fish returning are smaller, younger and not as plentiful. Are there measurements being done at the mouth of the Yukon River, that is, on the Alaska side at the Bering Sea? Do those same kinds of phenomena exhibit at the mouth of the river—the size of the fish, age of the fish and numbers of the fish? Are the decreases and conditions you've seen fairly even up and down the whole system?

**Chief Pauline Frost:** I would venture to say no. If you look at the mouth, there are plenty of salmon and other species coming in, so there are huge opportunities.

The fish are managed in zones. They're managed through five different zones in the state of Alaska. They're regulated up the tributary, and they come in, in abundance, at the mouth of the river.

There's a target to reach border escapement. They will fish and fish until they hit a specific zone and pass the sonar that detects that the numbers are dropping, and then they'll cut off the fishing. Oftentimes, it's in the headwaters, the zone that starts to head up to Canada, Eagle River being the last sonar on the Yukon River.

To your question, we're seeing plenty early on, but of late I think we've detected that the salmon are just not returning as they have historically.

**Mr. Ken Hardie:** They're not making it that far, in other words.

**Chief Pauline Frost:** They're just not making it that far.

**Mr. Ken Hardie:** Okay. The new agreement is, what, a seven-year moratorium on fishing all up and down the river?

**Chief Pauline Frost:** That's correct.

**Mr. Ken Hardie:** Do you think that's going to make a difference?

**Chief Pauline Frost:** I think that in itself is not going to make a significant difference. I think there's so much more that we have to do in terms of co-management, collaboration and really clearly coming up with a stock restoration plan. How are we going to restore the stocks through traditional natural wild stock genetics? The seven-year moratorium itself is not the answer.

**Mr. Ken Hardie:** Mr. Gerberding, there is a Yukon-Alaska rebuilding plan in place. Is that correct?

**Mr. Tim Gerberding:** No, there isn't, but one is going to be developed.

The Yukon River Salmon Agreement, signed back in 2001, requires the parties to develop a rebuilding plan when stocks aren't meeting their escapement targets. That's happening now. The seven-year agreement that's being referenced requires the parties to develop a chinook rebuilding plan. That is not in place now.

I should add that, separately, there is a requirement in Canada now to develop a rebuilding plan. This is a domestic plan for chinook salmon, because the Yukon River salmon are in the process of being listed as a major species under the Fisheries Act and—

• (1630)

**Mr. Ken Hardie:** Sir, I'm sorry, but I have limited time here.

**Mr. Tim Gerberding:** I'm sorry.

**Mr. Ken Hardie:** Basically, until things get settled to the positive on the Alaska side of the border, anything we do upriver is going to be pretty darn limited in its effectiveness. Is that right?

**Mr. Tim Gerberding:** Well, yes, we can't do it alone. I think everybody has to work together. I think the Alaskans have certainly not been innocent, but I think they read the writing on the wall like all of us. They realize that we have to work together now, on both sides of the border, to save the salmon. We can't do it alone.

**Mr. Ken Hardie:** Chief Frost, you mentioned that the Porcupine River is basically pristine; you've not allowed development. Can you comment on the status of the habitat where it meets the Yukon River and through to the Bering Sea? Have there been challenges to habitat through the Alaska zone?

**Chief Pauline Frost:** Interestingly enough, as I sat on the Yukon River Panel, a question came up around mining and the impacts and effects of mining. If you do a Google search, all the evidence is there with respect to mining and the impacts and effects of the placer industry or quartz industry in the United States.

I would venture to say yes. In Yukon, we have the YESAA legislation, which puts in place some rules that apply to us. The United States may not have that.

**Mr. Ken Hardie:** I am out of time. Thank you.

**Chief Pauline Frost:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Hardie.

That concludes our first hour of testimony with the witnesses, but the two witnesses who are here now are willing to stay for the next hour as well.

We're going to suspend for a moment to do a sound check with the new witness joining us for this last hour.

• (1630)

(Pause)

• (1630)

**The Chair:** Welcome back.

Welcome, Chief Frost and Mr. Gerberding. Thank you for staying on for an extra little while.

We'll also welcome, from the Fédération québécoise pour le saumon atlantique, Myriam Bergeron, director general and biologist.

Thank you for taking the time to appear today.

Ms. Bergeron, you will have five minutes or less for your opening statement. You have the floor.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Myriam Bergeron (Director General, Biologist, Fédération québécoise pour le saumon atlantique):** Good afternoon. I'm happy to see everyone today.

I've been invited here to talk about Quebec's Atlantic salmon management model. It is a decentralized and asymmetrical management model that is primarily supported by non-profit organizations. It enables us to combine the economic benefits of Atlantic salmon fishing with salmon conservation. I think it's an inspiring model that all jurisdictions could learn from.

Under the model, the provincial government has an Atlantic salmon management plan based on scientific data that help determine the health of rivers. It then delegates the management of recreational fisheries to non-profit organizations throughout Quebec. This helps the organizations generate revenue, which is reinvested in protecting the area, and conserving and enhancing salmon habitats. It also helps the many organizations across Quebec that count salmon and collect samples, including DNA, to ensure sound management of the species. The entire network also helps support many activities that will build resilience to a changing climate. We know that caring for rivers also promotes healthier habitats and healthy ecosystem processes, and ensures the sustainability of drinking water sources and resilience to floods and other potential climate events.

This other management system could be used to implement various solutions in the Yukon and across Canada. In fact, the majority of stakeholders across the country who are involved in the sound management of Atlantic salmon and Pacific salmon are in contact. There is no doubt that the Canadian government has an extremely important role to play in supporting such a model, one based on decentralized decision-making and the participation of local people, first nations, fishers and a variety of organizations.

• (1635)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll now go to our first round of questioning.

Mr. Small, go ahead for six minutes or less.

**Mr. Clifford Small:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have another question for Mr. Gerberding to start off.

Mr. Gerberding, you mentioned you're not in favour of hatcheries for salmon enhancement. We have a river in Newfoundland and Labrador, called the Exploits River, that at one point in the early 1990s had a fish population of 5,500. Now it's back to 30,000 or 40,000 a year. That's proof right there that enhancement works.

The technology is out there and is proven. Genetics are being used in the hatcheries, especially in British Columbia rivers, and it's very high tech. Do you think the hatcheries just simply failed on the Yukon River?

**Mr. Tim Gerberding:** I'm not opposed to hatcheries. As I said, I think hatcheries may have a role to play. However, the Yukon River Salmon Agreement actually contains very clear direction to concentrate on the wild stocks. Artificial propagation is not an excuse for poor management.

From what I have observed, I'm not aware that hatcheries are particularly successful at producing large chinook salmon. Certainly the observations we've had in Yukon suggest that hatchery fish are considerably smaller. I'm not sure we're at a place where we have to revert to hatcheries. I think we're almost there, but per the Yukon River Salmon Agreement, first, efforts have to be made to preserve the wild stocks. If that doesn't work, then obviously we'll have to go to hatcheries.

**Mr. Clifford Small:** You mentioned the effect of mining on the rivers out in Yukon. Where would you place the blame and what would you like to see going forward regarding control over what's happening in the mining industry?

**Mr. Tim Gerberding:** I don't necessarily want to place blame.

The Yukon Placer Mining Act came into effect in 1906. It has essentially been unchanged since that time. Under the Yukon free entry system, miners can stake claims virtually anywhere—not on first nation land, but virtually anywhere else. There is a very strong connection between the right to work and the right to locate. In other words, once you stake a claim, you have very strong rights to proceed to mine that claim.

I think that arrangement has disappeared in many parts of the world. I don't think that's appropriate in 2024, in the 21st century. I think there is a lot of money to be generated from mining gold, but other than that, what benefit does it provide to society? I think if we're going to save our natural resources, we have to begin to prioritize conservation above making money.

● (1640)

**Mr. Clifford Small:** I'm sure, Mr. Gerberding, you have heard about the success that Washington and Oregon have had in bringing back steelhead and salmon populations in their rivers through the work they have done to create better access to waterways around hydro dams. The reports are coming out and they are pretty good. In addition, they have been harvesting some pinnipeds.

Do you think those two factors—the predation by pinnipeds and the hydro dams—could have quite a bit to do with the decline you've had there? Is there work that can be done by the hydro people to make things better?

**Mr. Tim Gerberding:** Absolutely, there is.

I'm not aware of really successful chinook salmon hatchery programs. Maybe I'm simply unaware. The Whitehorse dam was built 75 years ago. It's up for relicensing.

There's a similar dam on the Mayo River, which is an important chinook spawning river. The Mayo dam has absolutely extirpated all of the salmon that used to spawn above it, which I understand was quite a few, according to the Na-Cho Nyak Dun. There was no fish ladder built 75 years ago and no allowance for out-migrating. Of course, if the fish can't get up, they don't need to come back down.

I think there are definitely ways to improve those facilities. Hopefully, as part of the dam relicensing, that will happen. Is it going to be the panacea? I don't think so, but it can certainly help. My view of the world is that at this point we have to do everything we can to save the salmon, because they are disappearing before our eyes.

**Mr. Clifford Small:** It might be worth your while, Mr. Gerberding, to check out what's happened on the Exploits River. They have a big hydro dam there and they've made great leaps and bounds in the last 20 years to revive the salmon stocks, in addition to having a hatchery for a number of years.

Chief Frost, do you have anything—

**The Chair:** I'm going to cut you off there, Mr. Small, because you have eight seconds left. You're not going to get your question out, let alone get an answer. We'll go on.

**Mr. Clifford Small:** Can't I get a little time?

**The Chair:** No. There you go.

We'll go now to Mr. Hanley for six minutes or less.

**Mr. Brendan Hanley:** Thanks very much.

Tim, I'll go back to you. I'm going to try to be very short with questions and answers.

You mentioned improving the facilities when it comes to the dams. We know that this is under discussion, especially with the relicensing. When you say “improve” the facilities, could you give one or two examples of what you would recommend?

**Mr. Tim Gerberding:** Yes, and on that, the Yukon Salmon Sub-Committee hired expert assistance to help us. There's a certain design of turbine that has been shown to be less damaging for salmon. I think those could be replaced.

I think the spillway that exists right now just goes straight down, and I understand that you can build a graduated spillway that makes it easier for the fry to out-migrate. I also think the size and construction of the fish ladder can be substantially improved. As I said, that hasn't changed in 75 years.

There are technologies now that allow us to build a better fish ladder and a better spillway.

**Mr. Brendan Hanley:** To change the subject slightly to the ocean, you mentioned I think three important factors: hatcheries, ocean temperature, and the pollock fishery and, presumably, its by-catch, which you briefly mentioned. If you were looking at a rebuilding plan that's international, how would you address any of these ocean factors? Or could you?

• (1645)

**Mr. Tim Gerberding:** I think we can. I'm optimistic about that.

Like Pauline, I'm on the Yukon River Panel, and I can tell you that the Alaska members of the panel and the Canadian members are really speaking with a single voice when it comes to issues with hatcheries, climate change and the pollock fisheries.

I think we have a real opportunity for international co-operation through this seven-year agreement that's been signed. Maybe we have to task some of the ministers with doing international lobbying to reduce the number of hatcheries, for example. I think those are the steps that we have to take if we're going to save the wild chinook salmon.

**Mr. Brendan Hanley:** On that note, when I had the opportunity to go to Washington with members of the Yukon Salmon Sub-Committee, as you know, and with Chief Tom, I thought the discussions were very productive, and I really see opportunity for a collaborative international approach.

Chief Frost, as you said, this is the window of opportunity to build on the seven-year moratorium and get a rebuilding plan, so I have a couple of further questions for you. You mentioned the low water levels in the tributaries of the Porcupine. There was even an article about so-called dewatering. Can you maybe talk a bit about dewatering? What is that? What effect does it have? How can you address that?

**Chief Pauline Frost:** Already, the fishing branch, or Ni'iinlii Njik, park is unique. The river itself disappears for five kilometres and then reappears. It has high oxygenation. It has the headwaters, so it's a very unique ecosystem.

In that regard, the temperatures and climate are changing two times faster than anywhere else in north Yukon. In the north, we're seeing that on the river. We've seen low waters. We've seen more forest fires in the area. Last summer, we had 20 forest fires sur-

rounding my community. We had to evacuate, which is an indication of how low the water and the rivers were.

With dewatering, essentially the water disappears and the salmon fry are stranded and won't reproduce. Is that new? That's a new phenomenon. We don't have an explanation, but there's big work being done, thanks to Canada for sponsoring Vuntut Gwitchin. We'll see what the results are from that exercise, from doing some scientific analysis on that.

**Mr. Brendan Hanley:** Tim, I have a bit of time left, so perhaps I can ask you to make a distinction here. To my understanding, there are two basic types of hatcheries. There are commercial hatcheries and then there are conservation or community-based hatcheries. Is that valid? Can you briefly elaborate on that?

**Mr. Tim Gerberding:** I can. Thanks for that.

The hatcheries that are pouring billions of fish into the north Pacific are commercial hatcheries. Most of the salmon you buy in the grocery store these days is coming from fish that returned to those hatcheries. Pink salmon are especially prolific. They grow very fast, so they're a favourite. You also have what we refer to as a compensation hatchery at the Whitehorse dam, which is to compensate for the damage they're doing to the wild salmon.

Then there are conservation hatcheries. These are, generally speaking, small hatcheries that are very specific. They're focused on a single stock, you could say. I could use as an example McIntyre Creek near Whitehorse, a stream that at one time had a very prolific chinook salmon return. Now there are practically none. A conservation hatchery would seek to take brood stock, incubate them in a good place and then plant them into McIntyre Creek for a cycle, which we will call seven years, in hopes of restarting that run.

My understanding is that you have to be very careful with that sort of hatchery. The fish that are coming back from the hatchery have what are called epigenetic effects. The genes are actually affected. If those fish start to breed with the wild fish, over time and over several cycles, you can actually compromise the genetics of the wild fish.

Conservation fisheries can be, I think, very effective in restoring the runs over a short period, usually one cycle, for a specific stream. That's what I understand a conservation hatchery to be.

• (1650)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Hanley.

We will now go to Madam Desbiens for six minutes or less.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Caroline Desbiens:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm very pleased that Ms. Bergeron is with us today. I thank her very much for being here. It will give us an idea of what is happening in Quebec. She and I may actually be related, since my husband has Bergerons in his family. It's particularly nice to have Ms. Bergeron here today, since we have people from the other side of Canada as well. We'll be able to make comparisons.

Ms. Bergeron, earlier you were talking about decentralized decision-making. I would like to make a comparison with the situation of redfish, mackerel and herring fishers. I know that theirs is a commercial fishery, but they're concerned that they are not being heard by the government and that they can't contribute to the process even though they are very familiar with the situation on the ground.

If I understand correctly, it's easier in Quebec, probably because there is no commercial fishery, only recreational fishing. Is that correct?

**Ms. Myriam Bergeron:** As you say, there is no commercial salmon fishery in Quebec. As a result, fisheries management was established with a focus on recreational fisheries and traditional indigenous fisheries. However, the framework that applies to the province as a whole helps us classify all the rivers, identify the outlines that apply to all of them and establish a decision-making framework based on data specific to each river.

Since management powers are delegated to established local organizations, these bodies are able to generate revenue and have an organizational capacity that enables them to work very democratically with local communities to give them a say in decision-making. It also enables them to collect and understand scientific data, and share them with other delegated organizations and the provincial government.

As a result, there is a lot of flexibility which makes it possible to adapt specifically to the situation of a particular river. This is very important in the context of restoring or conserving wild populations, because each river has its own characteristics and each community may also have its own projects. We talked about mining and aquaculture, for example. The economic aspect is always important to communities, but we must also ensure that decisions are made in a way that is consistent with the conservation of our ecosystems. As a rule, it is a factor that contributes to their resilience.

**Mrs. Caroline Desbiens:** I find what you are saying interesting because it helps us understand that the closer management is to the ground, the more skills people have to manage on a case-by-case basis.

**Ms. Myriam Bergeron:** Absolutely. That is in the recommendations, especially in terms of all the challenges we are facing, such as climate change, sound management and problems related to wildlife and the environment. This type of model ensures a balance specific to each region. It's really important.

In that sense, we have incorporated land management philosophies into our way of doing things. It certainly reflects the major recommendations, not only to make decisions in the right place, but also to ensure more consistency overall.

**Mrs. Caroline Desbiens:** Thank you. What you are saying is very interesting.

What are your thoughts on aquaculture? How can aquaculture change the dynamics of your management of salmon rivers? What is the main threat to salmon right now in Quebec?

• (1655)

**Ms. Myriam Bergeron:** I found the testimony from Dr. Tim Gerberding on aquaculture to be very interesting. He's right, a distinction must be made between food aquaculture and conservation stock aquaculture.

In Quebec, there is no food aquaculture. It's a big problem in eastern Canada because it has a very significant impact on wild fish populations, not only salmon but also a host of other species. Therefore, we focus on the development of land-based closed containment commercial aquaculture.

In terms of conservation stocking, I think it's really important, again, to have structures that allow for decentralized decision-making, because the results are extremely variable from one place to another. The success factors are difficult to establish and are specific to each river. Sustainability factors to support a salmon population through conservation stocking are also specific to each river and are very difficult to maintain over time. We are really talking about habitat health and connectedness in time and space. We have to make sure that each salmon life cycle takes place in a suitable habitat.

Earlier, we talked about genetics. There are conservation stocking methods that mitigate the risk of genetic modification in a given population.

Regarding the main threat—

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madam Desbiens. Your time has gone over.

We'll go to Ms. Barron for six minutes or less.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our newest witness here today.

Madam Bergeron, I'll give you the opportunity to finish your sentence and what you were trying to say there, and then I'll go to my first question. If you want to finish what you were saying, I'm perfectly happy for you to do that.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Myriam Bergeron:** Thank you, Ms. Barron.

What I am going to say is quite straightforward and will not come as a surprise: The main threat to salmon populations is without a doubt climate change.

[*English*]

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Thank you.

Madam Bergeron, are you noticing any particular viruses? What are your observations regarding what you're seeing in salmon? Are you seeing the sizes decreasing? Are you seeing viruses? What information can you provide to us on what you're seeing at your end for us to compare to the Yukon River?

[Translation]

**Ms. Myriam Bergeron:** If it is specifically related to aquaculture, it is well documented in eastern Canada. There are indeed certain diseases and parasites associated with aquaculture, such as sea lice. Other diseases associated with it include infectious salmon anemia, which is a very difficult viral disease to contain, more so than parasites. These problems are also being observed in eastern Canada.

[English]

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** I'll loop back to Chief Frost, if Chief Frost is still here. I think she is. This is also for Mr. Gerberding.

A theme in some of the testimony you provided today is the problematic ways in which decisions have been made in the past and continue in many ways today. It's about the siloing of responsibility among different levels of government, which perhaps are not taking into account first nations' rights, knowledge and traditional ways of being. As Mr. Gerberding mentioned, we have to be doing things differently.

Chief Frost, can you provide some further information about the importance of having all levels of government—in particular the Government of Canada—looking at fewer silos and more interconnected responsibility to ensure we are addressing the emergency at hand?

• (1700)

**Chief Pauline Frost:** What a great question.

If you look at the mandate letter of the Minister of DFO, it talks about the mandate to look at better integration of traditional knowledge in planning and policy decisions. It speaks about the collaboration of fishery arrangements. As indigenous knowledge-keepers, we speak about meeting climate obligations. That relationship has to be built, and it's a gap that has been missing historically. It's truly an obligation to develop a collaborative conservation strategy.

A lot has been done already. We have our agreements. We celebrated 30 years since signing our self-government agreement and 50 years of our Umbrella Final Agreement. We've set the high-water mark. This is a huge opportunity for us to continue to collaborate with the minister. The mandates in the minister's mandate letter are the same as those in the context of our self-government agreement and the international agreement. Now we have this moratorium and the political agreement.

It's a huge window, as I said. We have to look at it all, make it work and take on best practices. We have not done that historically, so now is the time for us to do that.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Thank you, Chief Frost.

Mr. Gerberding, do you have any additional thoughts to add to this topic?

**Mr. Tim Gerberding:** Well, yes, I have a few.

I worked on the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Final Agreement. A number of cases about land use have gone to the courts, but the Supreme Court has confirmed that one of the major intents of the Yukon land claim is providing Yukon first nations people with meaningful participation in the management of public resources. Of course, that includes fish. I think the words we often use are “co-government” and “co-management”.

I think it's very critical that first nations values come to the fore here and are respected. Again, this means elevating conservation above economic interests.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** I notice I only have 30 seconds left. I'm trying to think of the most important question to ask in 30 seconds.

I can't agree more about the importance of conservation being taken before economic benefits. I noticed this continues to be a theme in many areas. I think it's about addressing how profits are not going to provide us with the sustainable marine ecosystems we require to ensure that first nations' rights are upheld, that coastal communities are thriving and that we have these stocks for generations to come. I can't agree with you more on that.

With that, I took up my 30 seconds without a question, but I want to thank all of the witnesses for being here today.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Barron.

We'll now go to Mr. Perkins for five minutes or less.

**Mr. Rick Perkins (South Shore—St. Margarets, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, witnesses.

My first question is for Chief Frost.

I was shocked when you said that DFO's C and P—conservation and protection—enforcement is not on the river. How long has it been since there was any DFO enforcement on the river?

**Chief Pauline Frost:** I can't answer that question, but I know they've not been there for a number of years. They moved their enforcement agency to B.C. We have no presence on the Porcupine or Yukon main stems.

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** While we've seen a dramatic decline over the years in the Pacific salmon stocks and their returns, that obviously didn't alarm DFO enough to put some resources into enforcement.

**Chief Pauline Frost:** I would say not. You're seeing all of the however many billions of dollars going into B.C. and not going into the Yukon. We have no enforcement in the Yukon.

The decisions about the closure are left up to the indigenous communities to implement. We are left to implement the enforcement measures ourselves, which is not fair because the self-government agreement sets parameters. It is also Canada's obligation to participate equally in effective co-management.

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** What level of enforcement resources have you asked for and would you like to see this committee recommend in its report?

• (1705)

**Chief Pauline Frost:** For a presence on the ground, you need to look at collaboration among the Government of Yukon, Yukon first nations and Canada. We all have an obligation.

Taking a softer approach to management rather than an enforcement approach will get us a long way to collaboration, and then we need to allow our participants in our communities to do their part to preserve, protect and conserve the few salmon that migrate by their communities.

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** Thank you.

Mr. Gerberding, where are the pink and chum commercial farms you speak of located?

**Mr. Tim Gerberding:** There are some in Canada, some in the United States and many in Asia. I understand that Japan and Korea have a number, and so does Russia.

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** How would the treaty that's been signed and the moratorium address that issue? If all other things were fixed—and as Chief Frost alluded to, it's not enough just to have a moratorium—how would that fix things, when they're not included in that issue?

**Mr. Tim Gerberding:** Well, that's an excellent point, and I think that has to be addressed.

I sent you a copy of that seven-year agreement, and I know that at one point someone mentioned that it needed to be translated into French. I hope that has been done.

There are sections in that agreement that speak specifically to the rebuilding plan. There are factors that have to be addressed. Climate change is one of them. Resource development is another. Again, that is on both sides of the border. There's also marine interception, the pollock fishery and hatcheries. Hatcheries are specifically mentioned.

There is no blueprint for how this is going to happen, but at the adviser level, where Pauline and I sit, I think we would very much like governments to collaborate. We would like to begin to approach all governments, including those of Canada and the United States, and raise the issue to see if we can begin to at least moderate the number of fish that are being poured into the north Pacific, because it's not an infinite system and the competition is definitely affecting the wild strains.

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Chair, with your indulgence, I'd like to move a motion that we now resume debate on the elver fishery motion that I moved at the last meeting, on April 18, obviously in addition to the debate on the amendment of MP Kelloway.

**The Chair:** All right. We have a motion by Mr. Perkins. It's on resuming debate.

I'll ask the clerk to do a recorded vote.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

**The Chair:** I'm going to say thank you to our witnesses for today. Thank you to Chief Frost and Mr. Gerberding for staying for a full two hours and to Ms. Bergeron for joining us in the last hour. We'll let you sign off now while we go into debate.

If there's anything you think you didn't get to say or put forward, you can certainly send an email to the clerk. We'll make sure that's included in your testimony.

• (1710)

**Chief Pauline Frost:** Thank you.

**Mr. Tim Gerberding:** Thank you.

**Ms. Myriam Bergeron:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Where that leaves us right now is that we have to debate the amendment by Mr. Kelloway on the motion.

Ms. Barron.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Mr. Chair, I move that we go to a vote on this motion.

**The Chair:** You can't go to a vote on the motion. There was an amendment made to the motion, so we have to—

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Then it would be on the amendment to the motion.

**The Chair:** Okay.

**Mr. Serge Cormier:** Before that, can you read back the motion and the amendment—everything that was said? It was two weeks ago.

**The Chair:** Mr. Perkins, do you want to read your motion aloud?

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** Should I read my original motion, and then Mr. Kelloway can read the amendment?

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** I have the amendment here too.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Ms. Barron.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Mr. Chair, just to clarify, I was speaking to the amendment made by MP Kelloway. I believe that's where we are currently in the debate.

**The Chair:** All right.

Mr. Kelloway, can you read your amendment again?

**Mr. Mike Kelloway (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.):** Yes. I just have to get a copy of it. I don't have one.

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** I know that MP Barron wanted the amendment, but I think MP Cormier wanted to know both. In the interim, I can read the motion, and then MP Kelloway can read the amendment. That's what the first vote will be on.

The original motion I moved, which Mr. Kelloway wants to amend, is as follows:

That, regarding Minister Diane LeBouthillier's decision to close the legal elver harvest of 2024, the committee finds that:

(a) banning legal fishing does not stop poaching;

(b) closing the elver fishery has not decreased criminal activity and violence in Nova Scotia as evidenced by the witnesses who have come forward to the committee to detail continued violence and lawlessness in their communities, including arson, assault, and attempted murder;

(c) closing the elver fishery has resulted in 1,100 job losses, harming rural Nova Scotian communities and the fishing industry as a whole, when Canadians are struggling with a cost of living crisis created by this government; and

(d) current DFO and RCMP enforcement efforts allocated by the minister remain insufficient and have not put a halt to the violence or the poaching;

and, given these findings, the committee therefore agrees to report these findings to the House, and call on the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard to immediately reopen the elver fishery.

I believe Mr. Kelloway, some way through, had an amendment to that.

**The Chair:** Go ahead when you're ready, Mr. Kelloway.

**Mr. Mike Kelloway:** I'll discuss the changes. Do you want me to read the whole amendment as is? Okay.

Number one is that we delete (a) and replace it with the following: "the elver fishery is a unique public safety and law enforcement environment with considerations including Indigenous treaty rights to fish that complicate attempts to stop unauthorized fishing".

Number two is that we delete (b).

Number three is that we delete "created by this government" in (c).

Number four is that we delete (d) and replace it with the following: "the federal Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, and the provincial ministers of public safety, justice, and fisheries and aquaculture, are working hard and in collaboration across jurisdiction to ensure that public safety is maintained in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick this elver season".

Number five is that we delete "call on the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard to immediately reopen the elver fishery" and replace it with the following: "calls on the government to accelerate the adoption of new regulations for the elver fishery so that the 2025 season can open as scheduled".

I'll read the full motion with the amendment:

That, regarding Minister Diane LeBouthillier's decision to close the legal elver harvest of 2024, the committee finds that:

(a) the elver fishery is a unique public safety and law enforcement environment with considerations including Indigenous treaty rights to fish that complicate attempts to stop unauthorized fishing;

(b) closing the elver fishery has resulted in 1,100 job losses, harming rural Nova Scotian communities and the fishing industry as a whole, when Canadians are struggling with a cost of living crisis; and

(c) the federal Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, and the provincial ministers of public safety, justice, and fisheries and aquaculture, are working hard and in collaboration across jurisdiction to ensure that public safety is maintained in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick this elver season;

and, given these findings, the committee therefore agrees to report these findings to the house, and calls on the government to accelerate the adoption of new regulations for the elver fishery so that the 2025 season can open as scheduled.

● (1715)

**The Chair:** Mr. Morrissey.

**Mr. Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.):** Mr. Chair, I was in the discussion when this adjourned the last time. From a layman's perspective, observing from a distance, the steps that are currently being taken by DFO and the minister—

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** I'm sorry. I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

With all respect to my colleague, I believe I did call for a vote on the amendment to the motion. I believe that means we move to a vote.

**The Chair:** All right, we'll suspend for a moment. The clerk wants to advise me.

*[The meeting was adjourned at 5:17 p.m. See Minutes of Proceedings]*





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