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Chair: Mr. Ken McDonald



Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

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• (1725)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 118 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 the witnesses and members. Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those in the room, you can use the earpiece and select the desired channel. Please address all comments through the chair.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), section 92 of the Fisheries Act, and the motion adopted on February 8, 2024, the committee is commencing its statutory review of the 2019 Fisheries Act.

Welcome to our witnesses from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

We have Madam Ladell, Mr. Ruseski, Ms. Jennifer Buie and Mr. Waddell. I believe all of you have been here before.

Go ahead, Mr. Arnold.

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

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

I would like to move a motion that's very relevant to our study of the Fisheries Act. I will read it out for discussion.

The Chair: Can I finish with the witnesses?

Mr. Mel Arnold: If you'd like to finish the introduction....

The Chair: Thank you, witnesses, for taking the time to appear today.

When we get through the motion or some delivery from Mr. Arnold, I believe we'll have Mr. Waddell up for your opening statement of five minutes or less.

Mr. Arnold.

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

I think it's very relevant that this committee be well informed in order to do a comprehensive review of the Fisheries Act as we've been directed.

I move the following motion:

That following the committee's completion of its studies of Abandoned and Derelict Vessels, Northern Cod, and following the Minister's appearance on October 9, 2024; and that in order for the committee to conduct a comprehensive review of the Fisheries Act; that the committee will not begin the Fisheries Act review until it has received from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) comprehensive briefings updating the committee on the actions and work completed for implementing recommendations the committee provided to the Government in the following reports:

- (a) "Closure of the Comox MCTS Station of the Canadian Coast Guard" (tabled May 6, 2016);
- (b) "Wild Atlantic salmon in Eastern Canada" (tabled January 30, 2017);
- (c) "Review of Changes Made in 2012 to the Fisheries Act: Enhancing the Protection of Fish and Fish Habitat and the Management of Canadian Fisheries" (tabled February 24, 2017);
- (d) "Newfoundland and Labrador's Northern Cod Fishery: Charting a New Sustainable Future" (tabled June 19, 2017);
- (e) "The Oceans Act's Marine Protected Areas" (tabled June 11, 2018);
- (f) "Atlantic Canada Commercial Vessel Length and Licensing Policies" (tabled June 19, 2018);
- (g) "Current State of Department of Fisheries and Oceans' Small Craft Harbours" (tabled June 20, 2019);
- (h) "Regulation of the West Coast Fisheries" (tabled February 8, 2019);
- (i) "Impact of the Rapid Increase of the Striped Bass in the Miramichi River and the Gulf of St. Lawrence" (tabled May 28, 2019);
- (j) "Aquatic Invasive Species" (tabled June 17, 2019);
- (k) "Migration of Lobster and Snow Crab in Atlantic Canada and the Impact of Changes to Lobster Carapace Size" (tabled June 17, 2019);
- (l) "Implementation of Mi'kmaq Treaty Fishing Rights to Support a Moderate Livelihood" (tabled May 13, 2021);
- (m) "State of the Pacific Salmon" (tabled June 21, 2021);
- (n) "Traceability of Fish and Seafood Products" (tabled June 15, 2022);
- (o) "Marine Cargo Container Spills" (tabled October 6, 2022);
- (p) "Science at the Department of Fisheries and Oceans" (tabled March 9, 2023);
- (q) "North Atlantic Right Whale" (tabled April 8, 2023);
- (r) "Allocation of Resources to the Great Lakes Fisheries Commission" (tabled November 29, 2023);
- (s) "Foreign Ownership and Corporate Concentration of Fishing Licenses and Quota" (tabled December 13, 2023);
- (t) "Ecosystem Impacts and Management of Pinniped Populations" (tabled December 13, 2023);
- (u) "Plans to Prevent Violence During the 2024 Elver Fishing Season" (tabled May 23, 2024).

I will ask if the interpretation was working adequately for our Bloc member and if she was able to grasp all of the motion.

I don't hear any opposition.

Mr. Chair, I make this motion because this committee has done tremendous work in the nine years that I've been involved in it. You've been involved on this committee with a number of others, including Mr. Hardie and Mr. Morrissey. We've spent nine years on this committee providing recommendations to a department.

I believe it's the senior head of the department who has not responded to these reports and recommendations in an adequate way. There are many of these reports where the responses have been.... Basically, we felt they were dismissive to this committee and our work.

More than dismissive to the committee members, the department was dismissive to the fisheries community, the harvesters and the first nations—the people who came in and took time out of their lives to participate in our meetings and testify. Some of them were testifying to the point that they were so emotional that we had to take a break. They had tears in their eyes. Some of them were concerned for their livelihoods and for their families. Some of them were concerned for their communities that rely on the sustainable management of Canada's fisheries.

The reason some of these reports have been done.... I will say that a lot of these reports were put forward by members of the Liberal Party because they identified issues and concerns.

The commercial vessel length study was put forward by you, Mr. Chair. We spent time on that. We heard about the problems it was creating and the safety issues it was creating for the harvesters. They were basically trying to find a way to survive in an industry that has been put aside for too long.

There were lists of recommendations in these reports. Some were minimal, with six or 10 recommendations. Other reports contained 35 or 40-plus recommendations for a department. These were not just for a department, but for a minister.

In this case, there were six different ministers to respond to. I don't know of any other department that has seen such a turnover in ministers. I can't say that it's gotten any better with time. It simply hasn't gotten any better with time.

It's not just this committee that's been raising the concerns. There have been reports from the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development. In 2016 there was a report that the department had not developed fisheries management plans. That had been a promise from the department from the 1990s. The department's response to the commissioner's report was that it would commit to developing a plan to develop plans. These are plans that should have been developed more than a decade earlier.

I'll quote from a 2023 report that said, "Overall, Fisheries and Oceans Canada remained unable to collect the dependable and timely catch data that it needs to sustainably manage commercial marine fisheries and protect Canada's fish stocks."

Those aren't my words. Those are the words of the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development to the Parliament of Canada, whose job it is to audit the government and the government department on what it says it's going to do. We heard that from the commissioner when she testified to this committee. Many

members in this committee may, and should, remember that. The commissioner only audits the government on what it says it is going to do and what it commits to do.

● (1730)

That report I just read saying that the department doesn't have the timely catch data that it needs to sustainably manage commercial marine fisheries and protect Canada's fish stocks was from 2023. The audit goes on to say that, "The type of data collected includes the quantity of catch and the bycatch species and the biological characteristics (length, weight, or sex) of the fish harvested."

It goes on to say that, "We audited this area in 2016, and 7 years later, we found that Fisheries and Oceans Canada has yet to deliver on most of the corrective measures that it committed to in its response to our recommendations."

I will say that those recommendations were from 2016. This report, seven years later, said that the department had not followed through on those measures. It goes on to say, "For example, while the department now has the Fishery Monitoring Policy, the policy was not supported by plans or resources, and it has not been implemented. Many important monitoring requirements that would improve the timeliness, and dependability of catch data remain absent or incomplete."

Mr. Chair, I'll speak again about the reports and the witness testimony that we've heard many times that the department doesn't know what the biomass is out there, what the catch data is and what the returns are. They cannot manage what they have not been able to measure. They have not put the measures in place to measure what is out there. I will go on to say and quote from this 2023 report. It states:

On the modernization of the department's information management systems—also a commitment made in 2016—progress has been slow. The department has spent some \$31 million to improve its outdated system to have one that would integrate all of the regions and provide ready access to catch data, but the department has delivered only the initial modules of this new system and has pushed its timeline for delivery across all regions from 2020 to 2030.

That's an additional 10 years' time. Moreover,

As a result, the department still does not have a complete picture about the amount of fish harvested and their biological characteristics to make informed decisions.

Without dependable and timely catch data, the department does not have the important information it needs to support sustainable management of fisheries, and it runs the risk that fish stocks are overexploited. The collapse of the Atlantic cod in the 1990s—with its far-reaching economic and social impacts—has shown that the recovery of fish stocks is far more difficult and resource intensive than keeping any species' numbers at a healthy level.

Mr. Chair, I did not tally these up, but it has to be 20-plus reports that we have completed in this committee in the nine years that you and I and others have been members of this committee. Most of those reports were unanimous. It's gotten to the point now where there have been supplemental reports because even those reports were not as critical of the government and the department as other parties thought they should be. The responses to those reports have not been comprehensive. They've really been just a matter of passing the buck or shuffling it down the road hoping that we would not come back to it.

● (1735)

Early in this Parliament, I believe it was Mr. Hardie who put forward a motion that the committee undertake quarterly briefings from the department on previous reports that had been submitted and the recommendations. I believe it was supported by all members. It was certainly supported by all parties.

The first one of those we did—I believe it was the first one—was on the corporate concentration of vessels on the west coast. If I can just take a second, I can find that report. I believe it was on the regulation of west coast fisheries, tabled on February 28, 2019. I believe that was the one.

Then we had to come back and look at that, because we heard from the fisheries sector on the west coast that virtually nothing had been done. The department had assigned one person to try to determine who owned what in the quotas and licences on all of the west coast of B.C., an insurmountable task for one individual to be assigned to.

What they found was that the department does not know who owns what licence, who owns what quota or who has beneficial ownership of basically anything on the coast. This should have been a lesson for the department to respond to, and it should have been something that was addressed much earlier. I believe that to know what actions the department and the government actually have taken on that should be a comprehensive part of the review of the Fisheries Act. The regulations that are required to be adjusted, adopted and developed to do that will take a significant amount of time, and time has now passed—a number of years—since we did that first report in, I believe, 2019.

Then we restudied the issue in 2023, only to find that so little had been done that harvesters and others—the communities that depend on those harvesters—were feeling absolutely forgotten. That is not the role of this committee, nor should it be the role of the government or the department. The well-being of Canadians, the communities they live in and the people who rely on them should be the responsibility of the members of this committee, as elected members, and of a department that they hinge their lives upon. They're not allowed to fish unless the department says they can fish. They can only fish when the department says they can fish. They can only fish under the regulations that the department develops. The department can only develop those regulations under what is permitted within the Fisheries Act.

There are so many pieces that have not been completed or completely answered for us, as elected representatives, to be able to do a comprehensive review of the act without having those questions answered.

The 2016 report, “Sustaining Canada's Major Fish Stocks—Fisheries and Oceans Canada”, was the one that I first quoted regarding the department's response to the commissioner saying that they would “develop a plan” to develop “Integrated Fisheries Management Plans”—integrated fisheries management plans that were committed to more than a decade earlier. This is a 2016 report from the commissioner.

● (1740)

Now, eight years later, going on nine years later, we still don't know if the department is able to develop those integrated fisheries management plans under the auspices of the Fisheries Act, an act that was revised in 2018, I believe it was, which should have provided all the tools for the department to get the job done. I would hope, and I believe, that the individuals working in that department really would have liked to get that job done.

● (1745)

Mr. Mike Kelloway (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I'll be brief. With respect to the member opposite, it seems to me that this is filibustering, which is fine. The filibuster is almost as long as the last meeting. The hope and the intention here was to focus on what most, if not all, of the stakeholders—at least in my riding, and I would assume in everyone else's—want, which is to get to it and get at it: the review the Fisheries Act. I can't help but think that we're pushing this today because there may be a hidden agenda. I'd like to think there's not, but there seems to be some type of hidden agenda here. I have to say that if we are here until about 7:20, hopefully we can get to it.

The Chair: There's a point of order.

Mr. Perkins.

Mr. Rick Perkins (South Shore—St. Margarets, CPC): With regard to that point of order, I think that was more commentary, Mr. Chair, not a point of order. I didn't hear a rule reference there, so I would appreciate, if you're going to do a point of order in the future, that members point out what rule they are raising it under.

The Chair: We'll go back to you, Mr. Arnold.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Even though it was not a valid point of order, I will respond to Mr. Kelloway's assertion that there may be a hidden agenda.

We question whether there isn't a hidden agenda from the government's side on this, receiving only 24 hours' notice of a change in meeting. We had four other items on our FOPO work plan before this was to take place, and then to receive only 24 hours' notice and no notice of which officials would be appearing today.... We received, just a short four hours ago, the notice of which witnesses are appearing on behalf of the ministry. It takes us a certain amount of time to prepare questions depending on who we see on the witness list. I spoke with other members of the committee yesterday, and that was a concern of theirs as well. Without knowing which officials were going to be here today it was very difficult, if not impossible, to prepare adequate questions for the witnesses here at the meeting today. I take offence to Mr. Kelloway's thinking that there may be a hidden agenda here. I believe the hidden agenda is on the government's side in trying to push this through, making sure we get this done for some reason, but I don't know what that reason may be.

I go back to some of the recommendations we made in reference to "Foreign Ownership and Corporate Concentration of Fishing Licences and Quota". This is in regard to our west coast fisheries. I'm just going to read recommendation 2:

That the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard make it a condition of licence that the licence and quota holder be the licence owner with "boots on the deck" and that, before such licence is issued, it is proven that the licence holder is a Canadian citizen and/or a 100% Canadian-owned entity; that the proof of beneficial ownership be the responsibility of the licence holder in full, and that this policy be fully implemented within two years of the establishment of an independent fishery finance agency.

The government's response was:

The Government acknowledges the committee's recommendation.

The Government recognizes the importance of having Canadians benefit from Canadian fisheries, which is why these are key principles in the Atlantic inshore fishery.

That's a positive sign. Canadians benefit from Canadian fisheries. They have those principles for the Atlantic inshore fishery, but they took little or no action to implement the same principles on our west coast.

It goes on:

Regular administrative reviews and enforcement actions allow DFO to ensure that licence holders are compliant with the inshore regulatory requirements under part III of the Atlantic Fisheries Regulations, 1985 and part I.1 of the Maritimes Provinces Fishery Regulations (referred to as the "inshore regulations").

Atlantic midshore and offshore fisheries, as well as Pacific fisheries, each have different features. Where Atlantic inshore-style policies, Canadian ownership requirements on licence eligibility criteria, or beneficial ownership transparency requirements in commercial fisheries do not already exist, the Government must adequately consult and engage with all implicated fishery participants on the potential risks and benefits of any significant changes to the licensing regime. With this in mind, DFO is engaging on foreign ownership and the concept of owner-operator requirements as part of its work on West Coast Fisheries Modernization in 2024-2025.

• (1750)

We're now in 2024 and coming near the end of it. We have no idea what actions have been undertaken by the department to implement what they say here.

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Speed up. You're putting us to sleep.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Take a drink of water.

Mr. Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.): We have officials here; we want to hear from them.

Mr. Rick Perkins: If you want the floor, put your hand up.

Mr. Mel Arnold: If you have a point of order....

I'll go on to recommendation 3 from that report. I'm referring to west coast fisheries policy. I'm from the west coast. I'm sure if our members from the east coast were commenting, they would have the same concerns.

We have seen the concerns that have been raised by this committee. We've seen recommendations made and no action by the minister.

I'll refer briefly to the situation on the east coast with the elver fishery and the lobster fishery right now, where we have fisheries officers concerned for their safety.

My esteemed colleagues, Mr. Small and Mr. Perkins, have raised these issues that are in their provinces. For Mr. Small especially, it's been on the recent changes to the cod fishery, which have impacted the inshore fishermen there so drastically.

We could go back to the cod report, which was one of the first reports this committee did. Believe it or not, it was in 2017. The report, "Newfoundland and Labrador's Northern Cod Fishery: Charting a New Sustainable Future", was tabled on June 19, 2017. There are recommendations in that report for actions by the department and by the government. We should have a report on what actual actions have been taken.

Has the minister responsible directed the ministry to take actions to—

[Translation]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, BQ): Excuse me, Mr. Chair. The interpreters are asking us to mute our phone notifications, because the beeps are bothering their ears.

[English]

The Chair: The sounds of dinging when someone is speaking into a microphone gets highlighted that much louder. Could we put them on vibrate or turn them off—one or the other?

Thank you for that, Madame Desbiens.

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

I will make sure that my phone is on vibrate so it doesn't interrupt.

I don't believe it was mine. It may have been Mr. Small's. If you could put your phone on vibrate, Mr. Small, that would be great. Thank you.

Thank you for bringing that to my attention, Madame Desbiens.

As I was saying, my colleagues from Atlantic Canada would share the same concerns I have about the recommendations that were made. I won't put anybody on the spot from the Liberal side, but in casual conversations, it has been indicated that even Liberal members have not been satisfied—in fact, they have been somewhat dissatisfied—by the government responses, and not just the written responses we're receiving but the actual lack of action that has been taken by their Minister of Fisheries on reports they felt were incredibly important to the people in their ridings.

Mr. Chair, I want to carry on with recommendations in this west coast fisheries report. As I said, I'm a west coast boy, or close to the west coast. Our fisheries out there are incredibly important to me.

I'll go on to recommendation 3. It states:

That, given the flaws in Fisheries and Oceans Canada's Beneficial Ownership Survey, Fisheries and Oceans Canada provide a detailed update and projected timeline for establishing the Canadian ownership criteria for holders of licences and quota. The timeline for the full transition to Canadian ownership should be seven years or less, as recommended in the 2021 Gardner Pinfold Consultations Inc. report entitled *Comparative analysis of commercial fisheries policies and regulations on Canada's Atlantic and Pacific coasts*.

Again, the government's response is relatively dismissive:

The Government acknowledges the recommendation and action is ongoing.

The Government recognizes the value of the Committee's recommendation to limit license eligibility to Canadian citizens and remains committed to continuing research efforts into license and quota leasing practices and the discussion of foreign ownership during the West Coast Fisheries Modernization engagement discussions.

There's no substance to this. What action is actually coming out of remaining "committed to continuing research"?

On "the discussion of foreign ownership during the West Coast Fisheries Modernization engagement discussions", we've seen how these engagement discussions take months to take place. We hear from the fish harvesters, individuals who are having to pay, believe it or not, as I heard this year, for licenses to catch prawn on the west coast, which were going for \$110,000.

Some hon. members: Wow.

Mr. Mel Arnold: That was before the harvester even fuelled and put gear on his boat, found a crew, paid for insurance or got his boat moored. All of those costs were on top of the \$110,000 it was costing him to get a prawn license to go out for a 34-day prawn fishery, and they didn't know how successful it was going to be.

This is driving away any young entrepreneurs who would love to take over their family's operation, or a neighbouring operation, and operate a fishery to sustain their family. It's \$110,000 just for the permission to be able to get out there.

• (1755)

The worst of it is that nobody seemed to know, within the department, who owned that licence—well, they may have known who owned it; it may have been a company—or if there was any beneficial ownership to Canadians. That was the big piece that came out of the west coast studies, both the 2019 study and the 2021 study, when we found that so little had been done.

Nobody really knows who the beneficial owners are of all of those licences and that quota on the west coast. I want to thank my

colleague, Mr. Hardie, for putting that study motion forward back in.... I'm not sure whether the motion came forward in 2018 or 2019. The report came out in 2019, so it was probably months in the making.

The recommendations go on in that report:

Recommendation 4

That an independent consultation and support office for fishers be established so that owner-operators have a forum where they can speak freely and consult, sheltered from pressures placed on them by markets and by foreign companies.

It's a simple call for an independent consultation and support office—not a DFO office but an independent office. The government's response, again, was that "[t]he Government acknowledges the recommendation and challenges the Committee faced when seeking input from witnesses whose livelihoods could be negatively impacted for speaking openly about their concerns." I believe that was the study where we had to have witnesses testify in camera with their witness names completely kept out of the report because they were afraid of retaliation by other entities that could affect their ability to operate. That was one instance of that. We had another instance when we were doing the study on the elver fishery where witnesses, again, were to testify anonymously because they were absolutely concerned about their own personal safety, the safety of their families and the safety of their possessions back home.

Those concerns have only amplified over the last few months because recommendations were made. There were tools that the minister could have used to address the lawlessness that's taken place, the imposition of what apparently is organized crime into the operation; that was the elver fishery. We've heard allegations of the same thing happening in the lobster fishery. There are tools within the Fisheries Act that the minister could have used to address the recommendations made by committee members. The minister apparently disregarded the recommendations from the committee members and didn't use the tools that are provided in the act to do her job, as the previous five ministers under this government have failed to take the steps required to deter illegal activity or unregulated activity. We've almost completed a study on illegal, unreported, unregulated fisheries, and some of the testimony we heard in that study was alarming as well.

• (1800)

Canada has sent huge resources offshore and partnered with international agencies to counteract illegal, unreported and unregulated fisheries elsewhere in international waters, but we heard from witnesses who were quite capable of undertaking work within Canadian waters who had not been contacted by the department or the minister about using those tools within Canadian waters.

Those recommendations will come out in the report. I hope that the department takes this intervention today seriously to heart so that the witnesses here today can go back to the minister and let the minister know how disappointed the members around this room are with her ministry's response to witness testimony and to strong advice from these committee members, which in most cases is unanimous. These are unanimous recommendations from all parties that the department and the minister take action. Without knowing if the department—

• (1805)

Mr. Patrick Weiler (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Weiler.

Mr. Patrick Weiler: First, it's a pleasure to be joining the new standing committee of Fisheries and Oceans.

I have to say that Mr. Arnold spent more time filibustering than the Harper government spent consulting before they absolutely gutted the Fisheries Act, so what I want to know is—

Mr. Rick Perkins: It's not a point of order, Mr. Chair; it's a point of debate.

Mr. Patrick Weiler: —are the Conservatives planning on gutting it again? Is that why they're filibustering this study to look at what is the most important piece of legislation for this committee?

Mr. Rick Perkins: It's not a point of order. If we want the floor, he can get on the speakers list. He has to wait his turn unless he has a true point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Well, maybe the only way he can get to speak is to interrupt on a point of order.

Mr. Rick Perkins: That's not the way to get on the speakers list. You should know the rules, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: He was on the speakers list before, and I haven't recognized you at all.

Mr. Arnold has the floor. Mr. Arnold has the floor. Mr. Arnold has the floor.

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

I will carry on, but I have to carry on by responding somewhat to Mr. Weiler's accusations.

We've had witness after witness appear at this committee, and when they're asked if they have been consulted, they say, we have been told. Or if they were consulted and provided information, that information was taken back and basically disregarded.

The biggest concern right now is the marine protected areas and the northern shelf bioregion off British Columbia's coast. The industry members got together and put together a plan that would have basically reduced job losses, reduced economic losses, combined with providing protection for areas off B.C.'s coast. They provided something that was very workable. They were actually trusting enough of the department that when they were asked, can you provide us with where the best areas or most productive areas are—so that they could supposedly avoid shutting those most productive areas down—they provided all of that information to the department. Then, when they got the results back of what was go-

ing to be closed down, lo and behold, their most productive areas were the targets of those closures.

When I was out meeting with them this summer they indicated that they feel so betrayed that they would now simply refuse to provide any data to the department. Basically, they got neutered, so they're going to neuter the department by not providing the department with any information. That is not a workable partnership, by any means.

The fisheries sector, the harvesters, could provide so much information to the department. Again, we've heard witnesses time and time again saying that they would like to provide the information to the department, but the department either refuses or is unable to accept it.

We have a shrinking shrimp fishery fleet off B.C.'s coast. One of the shrimp boat captains went for a trip on the research vessel and identified that the research vessel had their net set up completely wrong. He spent some time on that vessel, looked at how it was set up and advised them how to set it up. I don't know whether it was that vessel or one very similar that went out and did a test fishery with totally different results. He was told that they could not use the results that showed higher abundance and a much higher biomass and smaller bycatch, basically because that wasn't the way the department had been doing it for the last 30 years, so they couldn't change. They could operate only under the same system; otherwise, the data would not be reliable.

It simply doesn't make sense to me, and I don't know who that would make sense to.

These are just a couple of examples of what's taking place between the department and the harvesters. If we're going to revise the Fisheries Act— and nobody is even talking about revising an act—according to the section in the Fisheries Act, it is to be reviewed five years after implementation.

• (1810)

I hear Mr. Morrissey.

Yes. That's what we're trying to do.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

That literally is what we're trying to do tonight. We want to strengthen the owner-operator. It seems to me there's a hidden agenda—

Mr. Rick Perkins: On a point of order, that's not a point of order. That's debate.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: —to absolutely slash the—

Mr. Rick Perkins: That's not a point of order.

Mr. Chair, could you ask him what rule he's referring to? You've lost control of the committee.

The Chair: No, I haven't.

Mr. Rick Perkins: You've lost control of the committee. That's not a point of order.

The Chair: The only person speaking who hasn't been recognized is you.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: How could you lose the meeting when he's been talking for 50 minutes?

Mr. Rick Perkins: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: When you stop talking.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Do you know what a point of order is, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: When you stop talking.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Can I ask you that?

The Chair: When you stop talking.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Clearly, there's an agenda here to gut owner-operator model. Let's strengthen the owner-operator. Let's get to work.

Mr. Rick Perkins: That's not a point of order.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Let's get to work. To quote a leader, it's just common sense. Let's get to work.

An hon. member: You forgot to bring it home.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: We've got to bring it home.

Mr. Serge Cormier (Acadie—Bathurst, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I also have a point of order.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Cormier.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Mr. Chair, I have two things.

Look, I'm not sure if the Conservatives will talk all meeting long, but we have four officials at the table here. The Conservative members are asking for all sorts of information on the recommendations of the report. If they're going to talk all night, I think we should let the witnesses leave the room.

The second thing, Mr. Chair, is that Mr. Perkins is not the chair of this committee. It's you. If Mr. Perkins is trying to intimidate anybody, you have the opportunity to kick Mr. Perkins out of this meeting. I hope we can have respect around this table, because we're not going to solve any problems when it comes to fisheries by yelling at each other in this committee and trying to tell you how to do your job.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Bragdon, a point of order...?

Mr. Richard Bragdon (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Yes. On the point of order, I don't think anyone would have any objections if the witnesses would like to leave, but maybe they also want to hear what Mr. Arnold is talking about. I think it's very important. I think everyone in this committee, on this point of order, has a desire and a right to hear what Mr. Arnold is laying out.

I don't think anyone would dispute that report after report after report has gone in, many times unanimous, and that we've had very few updates and absolutely very little action done on the reports that have been brought forward. That is what Mr. Arnold is laying

out. He has every right to do that, because that is the business of this committee.

Why would we get to amending the Fisheries Act when so much should have been acted upon long before this? Why don't we deal with what's already been authorized to be dealt with under the existing Fisheries Act?

Mr. Ken Hardie: [*Inaudible—Editor*] afraid of the Fisheries Act [*Inaudible—Editor*].

• (1815)

Mr. Clifford Small (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, CPC): I have a point of order.

The Chair: Mr. Small.

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

On Mr. Cormier's point of order, I'm sure that Mr. Cormier must be feeling the frustration of the fishermen up in his area who asked for some extra bait mackerel to catch. I'm sure the request ascended to the high heavens from his fleet there, out there in New Brunswick.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Mr. Chair, the last time I checked, the member opposite was not Kreskin. He cannot go into people's minds and know what they're thinking.

But if he has supernatural powers, can he let us all know?

An hon. member: I don't think he has a mustache.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Small.

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

Mr. Mike Kelloway: What card do I have?

The Chair: That's a head you might not want to get into.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: [*Inaudible—Editor*] and, quite frankly, the trivial manner in which their industry has been treated by the Conservative members here.

The Chair: I have a point of order from Ms. Barron first and then Madame Desbiens

Mr. Mel Arnold: Are these points of order, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: I don't know what they are until they tell me.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Well, if they're not points of order, I have the floor.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): I'm pretty sure I have the floor. The chair has just acknowledged me.

The Chair: Yes. Exactly, Ms. Barron.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

Chair, I would like to ask you, with much respect, to please find a way to cut off members who are clearly not following the rules. None of these have been points of order, on both sides. As frustrating as the situation is, Mr. Arnold has the floor. I completely understand that the chair is the person to lean on here, but right now I'm seeing point of order after point of order after point of order called when not a single one of them has been a point of order.

Secondly, is there a way for us to be able to allow the witnesses, who have been so patiently sitting and watching all of this unfold—which is quite embarrassing, to be honest—to leave so that they can do this important work that we're asking them to do?

The Chair: I'll go to Madame Desbiens first.

Madame Desbiens.

[Translation]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: With all due respect, Mr. Chair, this is a sorry spectacle for the four people we have invited here and who are sitting in front of us. They would probably have taught us a number of things and given us some answers to Mr. Arnold's questions. I don't know if you'll use your position to get us out of this deadlock.

I understand that we were rushed into this study and that we weren't prepared to look at it today. However, we must not go to the other extreme and abuse our position to waste the time of all these people who work for the taxpayers and have a job to do.

We should make it our priority to show the utmost respect.

[English]

The Chair: On that note, Madame Desbiens, I will ask members whether they're in favour of allowing the officials to exit the room if they want to. It's not looking as if we're going to get much done with the officials today. We'll have to try at another time.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Mr. Chair, before that, can we call the vote now on Mr. Arnold's motion?

The Chair: Mr. Arnold is not finished, to my understanding.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Unless there's a point of order, I believe I have the floor.

The Chair: Well, I recognized Mr. Cormier.

I mentioned to the officials...if they wanted to stay or go. It doesn't look as if there's going to be any interaction with the officials today. I don't want to waste their evening. It's bad enough for us to be out here wasting our own time.

An hon. member: I have no interpretation.

The Chair: No interpretation....

I just want to know whether the officials can go.

Is everyone in favour?

Mr. Mike Kelloway: I'm not. I still think there's an opportunity to—

The Chair: It's up to you guys. If you want to give up on this evening, by all means—

• (1820)

Mr. Mark Waddell (Director General, Fisheries Policy, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): We're in your hands, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: No, it's up to you now. I'm saying you have the freedom to leave now, or you can wait until the meeting ends at 6:30, 7:30 or whatever time it has to end. I don't think we're going to get too much in the way of hearing from officials, or getting questions

to officials. As chair, I give the four of you permission to leave. Hopefully, we'll get back to it again down the road, and we'll invite you back to do your presentation. I hate wasting people's time just staring into your gaze to understand what's going on here.

It's up to you guys. You're free to go. I appreciate the fact that you showed up. Hopefully, we'll get you back in the future and listen to what you had to say.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Mr. Chair, can we suspend the meeting?

The Chair: For a moment....

Mr. Mike Kelloway: For a moment....

The Chair: Okay.

An hon. member: No.

The Chair: What do you mean, “no”?

Mr. Mike Kelloway: If you don't want us to do that, we'll remember it.

The Chair: We'll suspend for a moment.

• (1820) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1820)

The Chair: All right, nobody left, so I'm going to tell the officials this: We're not going to get any testimony from you tonight. I'm going out on a limb saying that. I'll say that you can leave now, and we'll get back in touch when we're ready to do the study again down the road. I don't want to waste any more of your time. I think that's exactly what we're doing now—wasting your time with the four of you being here.

Mr. Mel Arnold: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Mel Arnold: I take offence to you saying that we are wasting their time. I think they are hearing honest words from this group.

The Chair: They can leave if they want to. I'm just saying they were invited here for a purpose.

Mr. Mel Arnold: My point of order is that you're putting words—

Mr. Rick Perkins: In the committee's mouth....

Mr. Mel Arnold: —in the committee's mouth.

The Chair: In the committee's mouth....

Mr. Mel Arnold: Yes.

The Chair: No, I'm putting words into the people down there. As chair, I can ask witnesses if they're up for leaving. They can leave.

A voice: [Inaudible—Editor]

The Chair: Exactly.

Again, if you stay, you stay. If you go, it's up to you. I just feel bad wasting your time.

Mr. Rick Perkins: There you go again with that commentary—that little speech you gave.

The Chair: It's my commentary. You have yours and I have mine. You haven't been recognized.

We're back.

Mr. Arnold.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you, Mr. Chair. That was refreshing.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: “Re” what...?

Mr. Mel Arnold: It was refreshing.

The Chair: Okay. I didn't get the full word.

An hon. member: Mr. Chair, could he start from the top?

The Chair: Oh, I don't care. We're done at 7:30 regardless, because we don't have any—

An hon. member: It's 6:30.

The Chair: It's 6:30, is it?

No.

An hon. member: Well, you have to respect the interpreters. They have to go home and feed their kids.

The Chair: We have two hours, yes. We started at nine minutes after.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The scheduled time is when the committee ends. You need unanimous consent to go past the scheduled closure. You can check with the clerk if you'd like.

• (1825)

The Chair: Okay. Obviously, I'm not getting unanimous consent to extend. Okay. The meeting started at five.... No, I have to go back to 4:30, the original time, and to 6:30.... Okay. I think we're pretty well at 6:30 now, aren't we?

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

Could we get clarification from the clerk on the timeline of the committee? The committee is scheduled for two hours, but it was delayed by a vote in the House of Commons. I would like a clarification on when the clock starts.

The Chair: Okay. We started at 5:22. We get two hours from that.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: We do not need unanimous consent to move beyond the two hours. We would need it only to move beyond the two hours from the time the meeting started. Is that correct?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Rick Perkins: On that point of order, the way I understand how the rules always work on the timing is that it isn't because it's delayed. We have a scheduled time for the start of the committee, and it ends at that scheduled time because members have other duties that they have to attend to. That's why it always ends at the scheduled time unless you have unanimous consent. Those are the rules in the big green book.

The Chair: The clerk told me that when we start the meeting, it is delayed due to votes. People didn't get here until the votes were over. The meeting started at 5:22 and the committee gets the full two hours to go to 7:22.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I challenge the chair on that ruling.

The Chair: I put faith in the clerk—

Mr. Rick Perkins: I challenge the chair on that ruling.

The Chair: You can challenge the clerk if you'd like.

Mr. Rick Perkins: No. I'm challenging the chair, which requires a vote.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

Mr. Rick Perkins: You can't. I just challenged the chair. It's not debatable.

The Chair: Okay. Let's do the vote on the challenge to the chair first.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Geneviève Dubois-Richard): If you vote to sustain the ruling of the chair, you say yes, and if you say no, you oppose the chair.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Mr. Chair, before we begin, I need a clarification.

The rules adopted by the House allow the chair to conduct a meeting for two hours from the time it starts—

Mr. Rick Perkins: I have a point of order. It's a challenge of the chair and a vote has been called. It's not debatable.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: What we're voting on has to be clear.

Mr. Rick Perkins: It's not debatable.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: It has to be clear what we're voting on, Mr. Perkins.

Mr. Rick Perkins: The clerk just clarified it. You can ask the clerk again. If you vote yes, you're supporting the chair's ruling. If you vote no, you're opposing the chair's ruling. It's a pretty simple concept.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: The chair's ruling was to uphold the rules of the House of Commons.

Mr. Rick Perkins: The chair's ruling was the adjournment time, which is wrong.

The Chair: We'll see.

We'll call the vote.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Mr. Chair, first of all, I'm sorry. There was a lot of talking. What are we actually voting on right now, okay?

I'm not sure if I'm the only one. Maybe it's because we're virtual, but I see Lisa Marie just.... Maybe she's asking herself what we are voting on right now. I'm not sure, but please....

The Chair: Mr. Perkins is challenging the chair on my decision to say that the meeting ends at 5:22. According to what the clerk has advised me, it's 5:22, so Mr. Perkins is challenging the chair's ruling on this.

An hon. member: It's 7:22.

The Chair: It's 7:22, yes. It started at 5:22.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Mr. Chair, overtime works.

The Chair: What?

Overtime works?

Mr. Serge Cormier: Just to clarify again, Mr. Chair, because in some committees we have a problem with this: If we vote yes, we support the chair's decision, and if we vote no, we don't support the chair's decision.

Is that right?

The Chair: Yes. That is correct.

Mr. Serge Cormier: That's perfect.

The Chair: Okay, I'll ask the clerk to record the vote.

(Ruling of the chair sustained: yeas 6; nays 4)

Mr. Robert Morrissey: To be clear, Chair, does that mean we're going to 7:22 p.m.?

• (1830)

The Chair: Yes, it means we're going to 7:22 p.m.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Thank you. Those are the rules of the House of Commons.

The Chair: Mr. Arnold, you're up.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Again, that was refreshing.

I will comment on a couple of comments that were made in that roundabout.

Mr. Kelloway said, "We're trying to get this done, so let's get to it and let's get it done." Let's get it done efficiently and effectively. There was less than four hours notice given of who the witnesses were going to be here today—and I thank the four for being here today; we appreciate your work. I took offence to the chair saying that we're wasting your time, because I think it's valuable that you hear from us as well; it's not just our questioning time.

We need to do this efficiently and effectively. To review an act of Parliament, we deserve, and Canadians deserve, that it be done efficiently and effectively. To rush through something and not have questions prepared.... We didn't believe this study was coming up until, I believe, November, which would have given us a lot of time to review the current act and to hear from witnesses who may or may not want to appear. I spoke earlier about witnesses who did not

want their names mentioned when they appeared at this committee for fear of retribution.

If we're going to review the act and, as Mr. Kelloway said, get it done—I would say "Let's bring it home"—we owe it to Canadians to do it efficiently and effectively. Mr. Kelloway's approach was to just plow through this. We've seen the results of decisions of the successive ministers to just plow through a process while not taking the time to look at questions, look at answers and look at reasons. We've seen cases where the decisions have been challenged in court. Decisions of this government's ministers have been challenged and they've lost, or the decisions have had to be stepped back. If we're going to review an act, let's do it effectively and efficiently. To plow through and rush through something—

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

I never said "plow". I said, "Let's get to work." Parliamentarians do that. I know maybe some wanted the day off, but just for the record, no one said, "plow", so let's stick to the facts and stop the hyperbole, please.

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

I hope that goes both ways, because I was a little offended hearing that we were wasting someone's time here. I prefer not to waste anyone's time, especially my own time, at this committee. That's why we have, as members, typically focused on the reports. I've heard from members in this room—and previous members—how they appreciated that I did my homework on all of these reports, each and every time we've done a report. They've said, "You've done your homework. You've come prepared. We thank you for your thoughtfulness and your work in producing recommendations and in finding what needs to be pointed out while we're doing these reports." That is why I'm very focused today on making sure we do an efficient and effective job of reviewing the Fisheries Act.

As I stated, we've put out numerous reports. I'll go back to the May 28, 2019 report on the impact of the rapid increase of striped bass in the Miramichi River and the Gulf of St. Lawrence. There were recommendations in that report to address the rapidly increasing populations of striped bass because of the impacts they were potentially having on Atlantic salmon. We toured Atlantic salmon hatcheries. We toured Atlantic salmon rivers where the salmon are basically non-existent. We heard how the striped bass populations have exploded in the Miramichi. From what we heard, they are gobbling up all the fry and smolts as they migrate out. We've seen pictures of striped bass full of salmon fry and small lobsters.

The department took drastic measures to reduce the harvest of striped bass years ago, and took them in a fairly short time frame. I believe I said that report came out on May 28, 2019. We're now five years past that and still hearing about a striped bass problem on the east coast, especially in the Miramichi River—five years to take action. While there has been moderate action taken, it's still a problem for that fishery and for the recovery of Atlantic salmon in that river. Reports of the abundance of striped bass in that fishery are incredible. Recreational fishermen have no problem catching them, and I'm glad to see that the department and the minister have decided to look at increasing opportunities for indigenous harvesters to harvest some of those striped bass.

That is why we need to know what actions have and haven't been taken. Those actions should have been taken under the sections of the act that allow them to be taken. Were they taken? If they weren't, why not? If the actions that were taken weren't effective, why not? If the actions weren't able to be taken because of something in the act, why not? We heard that multiple times.

We just finished hearing witness testimony about the Yukon River salmon situation and the actions local members have taken. Local first nations and indigenous on both the U.S. and Canadian sides of the border have curtailed all their fishing for seven years.

● (1835)

However, we heard that this is only in the non-tidal areas of the river. The government has not undertaken the diplomatic work to address bycatch or the potential interception by other fisheries or international harvesters that may be taking those fish before they ever get a chance to return to the river.

Again, this is not a new problem with the Yukon salmon, both chinook and chum, that are especially valuable to the people there. These issues have been going on for years, yet after nine years, we see very little action taken by this government.

We did a report on west coast salmon. I believe it was Mr. Hardie who put forward that motion to take a look at west coast salmon. A lot of the issues and the recommendations in that report could also be applied to the Yukon salmon. Why weren't actions taken?

We've heard that the Marine Mammal Protection Act has an effect on actions that Canada might be able to take on management of pinnipeds within Canada. Our U.S. counterparts have managed to work around the issue and restore the Columbia River salmon runs—not all of them, but a large number. They have steelhead returning in the Columbia River system in the U.S. because they've done hatchery work down there. They've done enhancement work. They've also done targeted, very specific management measures of pinnipeds at the pinch points along that river and the results have been amazing.

However, Canada hasn't taken those actions. We can only assume that it's because either the minister or the Prime Minister's Office doesn't want those actions taken or there may be items in the act that are preventing those actions from being taken.

I had a pretty good review of the act when it was revised years ago. That was in my first years, in the 42nd Parliament, I believe. I don't recall anything in there that prevented the minister from taking action. The only thing may have been the precautionary principle.

We have salmon stocks declining, we have southern resident killer whales that are supposedly at risk because those salmon stocks continue to decline, yet the government has not used the precautionary principle to manage pinnipeds on the west coast or the east coast and we hear from fishermen on both coasts describing how many fish those pinnipeds are taking.

We go back to a fairly recent report that was tabled on December 13, 2023. It's called "Ecosystem Impacts and Management of Pinniped Populations". There were a number of recommendations in that report.

I want to credit my colleagues, Mr. Perkins and Mr. Small, who are both from Atlantic Canada, and my colleague from New Brunswick. They heard from the fishermen there. They brought those harvesters in to talk about the number of fish that the pinniped populations are taking out of the biomass. The numbers are reportedly nine or 10 times or greater of what the total commercial catch is.

● (1840)

We heard that even the health of some of those pinniped populations is suffering because of lack of food, because they have basically out-eaten their food sources. Now they're moving on to other food sources and impacting those.

Recommendations from those reports went to the government. The reports requested a comprehensive response. The response is, again, as many have been, very lacklustre.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: I have a point of order, just for a moment, MP Arnold, through you, Chair.

I'm just wondering—and then we can pick up right away. We have about a half an hour left. If it's okay with the rest of the committee, I think we should excuse the witnesses, if that's possible. Can we do that?

Some hon. members: Yes.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Okay.

Please feel free to leave. I think you've done good service for tonight, but it's respectful to you and probably to anyone else watching that you go. I don't think we're going to get to you. We'll pick it up at a later time, if that's okay with the committee.

Sorry, MP Arnold, for interrupting. I just feel like, with a half an hour left, we should tell them, "Go home to your loved ones." I appreciate it.

The Chair: By all means. If I were in your place, I'd leave.

Mr. Mark Waddell: Mr. Chair, if you're asking us to leave, we will leave, but otherwise we will stay.

The Chair: Okay, I'll ask you to leave.

● (1845)

Mr. Mel Arnold: If I can, Mr. Chair, I really want to express appreciation to the witnesses, the department officials, for being here today, for listening.

I hope you will take at least some of what you've heard back to your bosses and especially your main boss, the minister.

I'm speaking from what I've heard, not just from myself, not from just members on the Conservative side, not just from members on the opposition party side but from members of all parties. The members here have been unimpressed by the responses from the department on the number of reports that we have submitted and the number of recommendations we've submitted.

Thank you for listening. We appreciate the dedication you have to the resource. Canada is better for your work. Thank you.

The Chair: Please, giddy up.

Mr. Mark Waddell: Thank you so much. Thank you for your time.

The Chair: Thank you.

Just give it a second.

Okay, Mr. Arnold, when you're ready.

A voice: You only have 32 more minutes now.

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

Thank you, Mr. Morrissey, for keeping track of the clock. I appreciate it.

Mr. Chair, this study is important to us as well. I think that it's very important that we review the act. It affects so many people on all of the coasts, coast to coast to coast and our fourth coast, our Great Lakes, as well. We deserve to do this. We don't deserve it for ourselves, but Canadians deserve for us to do this right. We won't do it right if we're rushed into meetings when we don't know who the witnesses are until just hours before they appear. We have had a work plan that this would take place in November, and we were beginning the prep work for that, but we need to do this correctly. I want to caution or remind all members of that.

We've done some incredible work as members of this committee.

Mr. Morrissey, do you have a point of order? No, I guess not.

Again, we have made many recommendations over the years, and I'm not going to name names. I certainly wouldn't do that, but they have been around the table. We've been unimpressed with the responses we've had on actions we recommended that this government has failed to deliver. The items that I talked about earlier, the reluctance of the minister, the department or the PMO to take actions that are enabled by the act is frustrating. It's frustrating not just to us, but it's frustrating to the harvesters, the recreational fishermen and to the communities that rely on their activities. We see tackle shops and sporting goods stores that are barely hanging on. Some of them have hundreds of thousands if not millions of dollars worth of inventory tied. They were expecting seasons to open, and seasons didn't open.

I recall when the sockeye fishery in 2010 in 2011 was so strong—

• (1850)

The Chair: Excuse me for a second.

I'm still hearing phones ding. I think Madam Desbiens brought up that it's interfering with the interpretation. Could everybody put their phone on silent or vibrate instead dinging?

Thank you.

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

As I was saying, I recall, long before I came to this committee, back in 2010 and 2011, the sockeye fishery on the Fraser, up into the Thompson River and into the interior was so strong that the fish were lined up head to tail, three feet off the riverbank in clear water, three and four abreast as far up and down the river as you could see. Our local sporting goods store brought in all the gear that he could possibly get. He was selling salmon fishing packages—\$69 for a rod and reel—and then bottom-bouncing weights and gear. You could easily be set up for \$100, go down and fish that river, but he sold out every piece that he had. Then, when the salmon declined, he had all that inventory left. It sat there for years on the shelf. He had no way of selling it because there was no opportunity for harvest.

Actions could have been taken under the Fisheries Act as it existed, possibly. However, we've seen recommendations from the west coast salmon study that Mr. Hardie put forward. We've seen other recommendations over the years that would have helped not just the commercial fishery but the recreational fisheries as well—actions that weren't taken. We need to know why, and that's why I've put this motion forward that we hear from the department on the actual actions and work completed, because if the department hasn't taken action or completed the work that was enabled by the changes that were made the last time around, why would we look at making changes again?

If the department hasn't been able to train enforcement officers and give the tools and resources to those who are out there to serve and protect the resource—the C and P officers we hear about in Nova Scotia, who are saying they're not going to work because of lack of support from the department—what is it in the act that prevents the minister or the government from giving those officers the resources they need so that they can do the job they were trained to do, are passionate about and want to do but don't feel they can because they don't feel safe?

The Fisheries Act, as we heard in a lot of testimony, pertains to activities in the marine environment or fish habitat protection. Once the fish reach the dock, then it becomes provincial jurisdiction or responsibility. What actions has the government taken that are allowed within the current Fisheries Act to bridge that gap that seems to happen where the tracking, whether for elvers or lobsters, disappears when it reaches the dock, and that is there because someone wants to say, "Well, it's not my jurisdiction, it's your jurisdiction." From provincial to federal government, federal to provincial government, we hear this going back and forth. In fact, we saw a letter that was released, just in the last few days here, of the federal minister shirking responsibility...back to the province, stating that the sale of lobsters is provincial jurisdiction. How are those lobsters harvested and tracked to get there?

• (1855)

Those are the pieces we need to understand. We also need to know what actions the ministry or the minister or the PMO have taken to address those gaps. Are there actual gaps in the act or are there gaps in the actions? I would suspect there are gaps in the actions or there are roadblocks being put up. Until we hear from the department on these issues, I would be hesitant to make any recommendations from a review that this committee does without knowing if the department has taken actions on the recommendations that have been made.

Another study we've done, Mr. Chair, was on the traceability of seafood products. We saw there was a commitment from the government to build a boat-to-plate traceability program. I don't recall whether that was a platform commitment, but it was certainly a statement from this current government that they would develop a boat-to-plate traceability program so Canadians could know where their seafood is coming from, how it was caught and how it was processed. Interestingly enough, when we heard of the review of the Fisheries Act coming up, we started to see stories of the untraceability of fish and seafood products. We heard about how there are basically what some have called, I believe, slave operations on the squid boats, on vessels supported and resourced by the Communist Party of China. We heard about their impacts on people. There are people who have been basically dropped off on shore when a vessel made a quick stop and have died shortly afterwards because of poor living conditions on the vessel. Some of these people are stuck on these boats for months, if not years, at a time. Yet there seems to be a gap in this.

Some of these issues were dealt with in the report on traceability of fish and seafood products tabled June 15, 2022, and recommendations were made. We also heard there was a lot of passing of the buck between DFO and what they're responsible for.... They're only responsible for fisheries in Canadian waters and they do participate in some international fisheries monitoring, but we heard very little of actions dealing with the bad actors. They report it to the country of origin of the vessel, but it sounds like there was very little that ever came back about what actions were taken.

Then we heard about the passing of the buck between DFO, CBSA and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. One said, we only determine that product coming into Canada is allowed to come into Canada. We don't check it for food safety. We don't check it for origin or how it was produced. The other said, we don't check where it came from, we just check that it is safe for Canadians to consume. There were recommendations in those reports.

If there need to be changes to the Fisheries Act, then what actions has the department or the minister or the PMO taken to address what has taken place?

• (1900)

How do we bridge those gaps so that they aren't gaps anymore so that Canadians can feel confident when they go to the grocery store to buy seafood—something specific, such as cod—that they're not going to be sold cheap pollock or something from somewhere else that can't be traced because it came in from overseas? We don't know what takes place because fish that is caught in Canada is quite often either sold or transferred offshore to be processed. There

is no tracking of it offshore, so when it comes back to Canada, is it truly what it says it is?

We heard from Oceana, I believe it was, which did a test of supermarket off-the-shelf seafood in Canada and found that up to 78% of the seafood that it purchased off of grocery store shelves was not what it was supposed to be, not what was indicated on the label. In fact, even Mr. Perkins brought in some pictures of some samples because he went shopping in the supermarkets. That's how efficient and effective the members of this committee are. We'll spend our own dollars to go out and see what's out there, to see how legitimate it is.

What actions has the department taken to address the recommendations in that report? One of the more current ones is the allocation of resources of the Great Lakes Fishery Commission, tabled on November 29, 2023—quite recently. I think almost all members of this committee were here for that one, with the exception of Mr. Weiler.

Welcome to the committee, Mr. Weiler. It's good to see you here.

That allocation of resources.... We've recently seen indication that the machinery of government would be moved from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to Global Affairs Canada. This sounded like fantastic news, but what we've recently seen are appointments to the Great Lakes Fishery Commission that may make the conflict of interest even worse than it was previously, appointments that are very concerning to the Canadian members of the commission.

What recommendations did the department and all the way up to the Prime Minister's office—because we know that decision went that far up, right to the PMO's office and sat there for months...? What actions were taken within the act to enable that transfer?

Mr. Chair, I wish I would have had time to count up the number of recommendations that this committee has made and then tally up the ones that have been ignored or basically passed off or not completed. That's what we're asking for in this motion that says:

that the committee will not begin the Fisheries Act review until it has received from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) comprehensive briefings updating the committee on the actions and work completed....

When we see responses saying that consultations have begun—planning to plan, as I mentioned, the integrated fisheries management plans—and when an entire department has an answer to a commissioner's, instead of saying, “We are going to implement these integrated fisheries management plans, and here is a timeline,” their response was that they would develop a plan to develop the integrated fisheries management plans. They had no timelines, dates or commitments.

• (1905)

Speaking of commitment, that's one thing I've seen continuously in the response to the recommendations. There have been no time commitments and no commitments to finding a resolution for the stakeholders: the first nations, and the harvesters in communities that are so heavily impacted. Some of them are impacted the moment a decision or an announcement is made, and then it's years down the road before an implementation plan is developed or a draft is even produced for the actions identified in the announcement.

It's this lack of adequate response.... I guess that's what I'll call it. There are a lot of names or acronyms that could be provided. Again, the overall actions and how the department has delivered on recommendations are appalling to me, as a member. I think it's appalling to many of the members around the table. The process by which we get some of these responses.... They are slow. They are written in bureaucratic language. To tell you the truth, I'd feel better if somebody just told me to my face, “We're not going to do what you said we should do”—

A voice: Exactly.

Mr. Mel Arnold: —because then I could ask them, “Why not?” To simply say, “The government acknowledges this recommendation” basically says, “Yes, I received your email. Thank you very much.” That is not an adequate response or action from a recommendation, nor is it telling me why that recommendation is not going to be acted upon.

The process of reviewing the Fisheries Act is one this committee should not take lightly. I don't take it lightly. That's why I've put forward this motion. It's so we can all be well prepared to ask questions of the department officials when they come in and get comprehensive information from them so that we can make recommendations. I hate to use that term, “make recommendations”, because we know what the response to recommendations has typically been.

We deserve.... I keep saying “we”. Canadians deserve to see a job done right. I was trained to do that by my first employer, and it's something I strive to do in all of my careers, especially this career, because we have so many Canadians who...such as the indige-

nous and non-indigenous harvesters, the tackle shops, the fishing guides, the bait suppliers and the trap-makers. All those people rely on us to do it right. Therefore, we're not going to rush into this or be rushed into this. They deserve much better.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1910)

I'll move that we adjourn the meeting.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: I don't think anyone's going to argue with that.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: To clarify, it's called a move to adjourn, so it should go to a vote.

Mr. Rick Perkins: It's not debatable.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: I'm not debating. I have a question. It's just for clarification.

Where does it leave us as to the status of the agenda here today?

The Chair: Basically, I think the—

An hon. member: Call the vote to adjourn.

The Chair: There's a motion on the floor to adjourn.

An hon. member: When will we pick it up again?

The Chair: Monday is a holiday. If you want to come and sit in the committee room, you can, but I won't be here. I think most others won't be here either.

That would be Wednesday, wouldn't it?

[Translation]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Excuse me, Mr. Chair.

I'm sorry, but I don't understand what's being said, and I have a right to understand.

Can we have interpretation? Don't talk over each other either, because I don't understand a thing, and I think what's being said today is important.

[English]

Mr. Rick Perkins: On a point of order, there is no discussion and no debate once it's been moved.

The Chair: A motion to adjourn is non-debatable. We have to go to a vote.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 9; nays 2)

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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