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## **Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans**

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**EVIDENCE**

**Thursday, March 9, 2017**

—  
**Chair**

**Mr. Scott Simms**



## Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

Thursday, March 9, 2017

• (0850)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.)):** I call the meeting to order.

Welcome, everyone, to the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans. We have on the docket today supplementary estimates (C), pursuant to Standing Order 81(5). We also will be discussing the main estimates.

I want to welcome our guests. We have a long list of people here. I'm going to try to get through it.

First of all, from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, we have Catherine Blewett, deputy minister; Tony Matson, assistant deputy minister and chief financial officer; Jeffery Hutchinson, commissioner of the Canadian Coast Guard; and Philippe Morel, acting/senior assistant deputy minister, ecosystems and fisheries management. From DFO as well, and certainly no stranger to this particular committee, Trevor Swerdfager has been here quite a bit over the past little while; he is senior assistant deputy minister, ecosystems and ocean science. Also from DFO, we have Sylvie Lapointe, acting/assistant deputy minister, ecosystems and fisheries management.

We also have with us Mr. Terry Beech, the MP for Burnaby North—Seymour, who is also the new parliamentary secretary.

Last and by no means least, returning to us once again is the Honourable Dominic LeBlanc, Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard.

The schedule today requires you to be here. You said you were going to be here for an hour, but I'm going to let you start with the news to the committee. There's a change in that, I believe.

Minister, please proceed with your opening comments.

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard):** Yes, and the change is not that I'm here for 15 minutes.

Thank you, Mr. Chair and colleagues.

I know how important these meetings are. I always want to be available and will be available any time that I or my colleagues at the table, whom the chair generously introduced, can be here. I am happy to stay until 10:15 for 90 minutes with my colleagues, if it's the desire of the committee, to answer questions. If not, I'm also happy to come back at another moment. Really, I'm in your hands. We can extend that one hour by another half-hour if that's the desire

of members, but we can play it by ear, Mr. Chair. As always, we're in good hands when we're in your hands.

I won't introduce my colleagues at the department. You, Mr. Chair, did that. I'd just point out that you have met many professional women and men here who serve in our department, and I continue to be inspired by their work every day that I have the privilege of working with them.

Terry Beech is new to his particular function. You know him as a colleague in the House of Commons. I feel privileged to have a British Columbian and somebody of his experience and his insight working with me. I was very happy when the Prime Minister made that decision. It's the first time we have the chance to appear together at a committee table like this, and I'm very happy to be here with Terry.

Also, Mr. Chair, you referred to Jeff Hutchinson as the commissioner of the Coast Guard, and this is his first appearance at a standing committee as the new commissioner of the Canadian Coast Guard. The Prime Minister made that appointment some weeks ago. We lost a remarkable woman, Jody Thomas, who has gone to a role at the national defence department, where I'm sure she'll continue to serve in an extraordinary way, but we're very lucky that Jeff accepted the Prime Minister's offer and will be leading that critical national institution. Jeff, in your new role as commissioner you have more gold on the uniform, a few extra stripes, and it's the first time that he and I will be together at this table. I wanted to just highlight that.

Mr. Chair, we are here, as you noted, to talk about estimates and supplementary estimates (C). That's a fundamental part of the work of Parliament, so it's a privilege and it's something I take very seriously.

Before we talk a bit about supplementary estimates (C) and the main estimates and any issues that members would like to address in their questions, I want to thank you for the work you have done, particularly with respect to the review of the Fisheries Act. We have followed your work, and I know thousands and thousands of Canadians have followed your work very closely.

We have your report. Under the rules, we have a certain number of days to provide a government response. However, as I said to you the last time I was at this table, we recognize the urgency of moving properly but expeditiously. It is very much my hope that we will not take that full amount of time, so we are working diligently and expeditiously to respond to your recommendations in your report. My commitment is to try to get back to you and to Parliament in a period of time that is significantly less than the time that the rules might prescribe, because I think it recognizes and validates the great work that all of you have done.

I also note that you're going to be doing some work on marine protected areas, again something that is critical for us as a department and a government. I look forward to collaborating with you and I thank you for working on that.

I also note that Pat Finnigan would be happy to see your work on Atlantic salmon. In my province of New Brunswick that is critical, but also across the region, in every province including Quebec. It's an issue that economically and from an ecosystem perspective has huge potential and huge concerns.

Again, thank you for that work. We will take your report seriously and endeavour to carry on an ongoing dialogue. I'm certainly very happy with the work that all of you have done. For us, as a department and as a government, it's hugely valuable, and I want to thank you at this table.

● (0855)

[Translation]

I wanted to talk mainly about the department's spending plans. As I said, one of Parliament's essential duties is to hold the government to account for the taxpayer dollars it spends. That is a responsibility our department takes very seriously. There are never enough resources to do everything we would like to support Canadians.

Our department received voted appropriations from Parliament, and we strive to manage those funds in the best interests of Canadians and to provide an official accounting of how we use the money, as we are doing today. This is a tremendous privilege for us.

Supplementary estimates (C) contain key items that will allow us to deal with vessels of concern, notably, \$17.7 million to address the threat of pollutants from the *Kathryn Spirit* near Montreal, and to undertake vessel life extension and refit work on the CCGS *Hudson*, the offshore oceanographic and hydrographic survey vessel of the Canadian Coast Guard.

[English]

Mr. Chair, in the main estimates 2017-18, a total of \$2.2 billion is proposed. The main estimates total approximately \$40.1 million less than last fiscal year. They reflect new funding announced in budget 2016, such as the investment in ocean and freshwater research in Canada. The slight reduction is due mainly to the conclusion of funding for temporary programs and planned funding variances for ongoing programs, and obviously if people want specific details on any of these we're happy to provide them. The chief financial officer and my colleagues at the department would do so.

As members of this committee know, our government has made a historic investment in aquatic sciences. I talked about this at this

table the last time we were here; it was in this very room, actually. It's the largest investment in over a generation. Trevor and his colleagues at the senior level of the department have been doing a fantastic job at building what I hope will be world-class scientific capacity from the investment that Parliament gave us in aquatic sciences.

As an example, Mr. Chair, of the tremendous value we place on science, we hope and believe the \$197-million allocation of last year's budget over five years can rebuild the ocean and freshwater science capacity of the department. It will strengthen evidence-based decision-making and also establish Canada's scientific leadership on a global stage.

[Translation]

We are well into the process of hiring 135 new biologists, oceanographers, and other highly skilled scientific staff. Their work will help us better understand Canada's aquatic ecosystems and what we can do to protect them. Re-establishing our capacity for science and research is going to serve all Canadians because the more we understand our oceans and ecosystems, the better placed we are to protect them and create sustainable economic opportunities.

[English]

It's not only about investing, for example, in scientific capacity for pure research in and of itself, which has a lot of merit; it's also about, as you know as members of Parliament better than anyone, making the right decisions and managing public resources for the economic and social future of the country, because so many of the communities that we represent at this table depend on the successful ecosystem management of these resources for, frankly, their successful economic future as well. We recognize the link there.

Colleagues will also know the Prime Minister announced in November—I was doing an announcement on the opposite end, Mr. Chair, in your province of Newfoundland and Labrador, and you were there with us that evening—what we believe is also a very significant investment in ocean protections of \$1.5 billion to create a world-leading marine safety system. Transport Canada, the Canadian Coast Guard, and Fisheries and Oceans will obviously benefit from this investment, but the main beneficiaries we hope will be Canadians, the environment, and the Canadian economy. We think there will be far-reaching benefits to this investment.

• (0900)

The Coast Guard is an institution that Canadians care deeply about. It needs to be strengthened. It needs to be rebuilt. The women and men who serve in the Coast Guard do so in remarkable circumstances, with great courage and dedication, and I think we owe it to them collectively to give them the most modern, well-equipped, forward-looking institution that we can build for and with them. We think that this investment will be a key part of that. I will conclude here, because I want to have a chance for us to exchange and have dialogue after the chief financial officer gives some precise and brief comments.

Indigenous reconciliation for us is also a key priority. The Prime Minister said it. Other ministers have said it. Colleagues in Parliament in every corner of the House of Commons have talked about this, as well as in the Senate. We are really trying to up our game as a department and as a government in how we build a day-to-day, hour-by-hour relationship with indigenous peoples.

Our department is very much at the front line of managing one aspect of the federal relationship with indigenous peoples on all three coasts, but this needs to be nourished and strengthened and renewed. We think that these increased investments, including the oceans protection plan, will allow the Canadian Coast Guard to better partner with indigenous coastal communities.

I look to my colleagues from British Columbia, who see this reality in a way that I'm beginning to learn about. They are often the first responders, and these indigenous coastal communities in British Columbia are the best examples.

They inhabit a rugged, remote coastline. I had the privilege of meeting with representatives of the Heiltsuk Nation, who responded to the completely unacceptable circumstance that happened near Bella Bella with the tugboat and the spill of diesel fuel. The best way we can serve Canadians and protect marine ecosystems is to better partner with many of these communities. I hope and believe that a good portion of this investment will go a significant way to doing exactly that.

By way of conclusion, our department is an economic department for the Government of Canada. We make decisions hopefully in partnership with the fishing industry, with other Canadians, and with indigenous peoples to encourage and improve economic growth for Canada. We're also an environmental department, with huge responsibilities as stewards of Canada's oceans to better manage marine ecosystems and to provide the services and the remarkable work that the Canadian Coast Guard can offer Canadians and our partners globally.

Those are three areas we think about and worry about every hour of every day that we have the privilege of holding these jobs.

It will be a privilege for us to answer your questions and continue to work with all of you as we make an effort to contribute to something that Canadians care deeply about.

[Translation]

Now, with your permission, Mr. Chair, I'm going to ask the chief financial officer to provide details.

[English]

Then I'm happy to continue the questions.

Tony, do you want to...?

**Mr. Tony Matson (Assistant Deputy Minister and Chief Financial Officer, Department of Fisheries and Oceans):** Thank you, Minister Leblanc, Mr. Chair.

Hello. *Bonjour* to you, committee members.

[Translation]

My name is Tony Matson, and I am the chief financial officer at Fisheries and Oceans Canada and the Canadian Coast Guard. We are pleased to be here this morning to provide the committee with an overview of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans' supplementary estimates (C) for 2016-17 and main estimates for 2017-18.

• (0905)

[English]

I've prepared very brief remarks. This should allow plenty of time to go through any questions the committee members may have.

For the 2016-17 supplementary estimates (C), we are seeking Parliament's approval for a total of \$17.7 million. This would bring our approved voted authorities to date to \$2.624 billion, as \$2.607 billion has previously been approved by Parliament through the main estimates, supplementary estimates (A), supplementary estimates (B), and transfers from central votes carried forward from last year.

This funding summary is presented on page 2—22 of the supplementary estimates (C) publication.

[Translation]

It is on page 2-50 of the French version.

[English]

To summarize, we are seeking \$7.2 million in operating expenditures, \$7.9 million in capital expenditures, and \$2.6 million in grants and contributions.

As highlighted by our minister, the majority of our new funding requirements will be spent by the Canadian Coast Guard to address the threat of pollutants from the *Kathryn Spirit* and for vessel life extension and refit work for the Canadian Coast Guard vessel *Hudson*. These items are also presented on page 2—22 of the publication.

DFO is requesting \$10.7 million to proceed with removal of the derelict cargo vessel *Kathryn Spirit*. This is a controlled, on-site dismantlement to completely remove the vessel from Lac-Saint-Louis. The department is requesting \$7.3 million to extend the life of the *Hudson* to ensure the service gap is managed until the completion of the new offshore oceanographic science vessel, ensuring that programs continue to be delivered.

The remaining items listed on pages 2—22 and 2—23 of the supplementary estimates publication

[Translation]

or pages 2-50 and 2-51 of the French version.

[English]

are largely technical and routine in nature. This includes accessing revenues received from polluters for cleanup costs, seeking internal vote transfers to properly align existing reference levels, and transfers to other departments such as Shared Services Canada, which has been tasked to modernize our network connectivity. DFO is a geographically dispersed department, so network performance has a direct impact on productivity and mission-critical applications.

I would like to fast-forward to 2017-18. The Honourable Scott Brison tabled the 2017-18 main estimates on Thursday, February 23, on behalf of all organizations. The main estimates include all those items for which DFO has received previous approval or changes to funding profiles for multi-year initiatives where relevant.

With regard to numbers, we are seeking Parliament's approval for \$2.081 billion. The breakdown of this amount is presented on page 98 of the publication,

[Translation]

or page 2-10 of the French version.

[English]

Under vote 1, operating expenditures, we are seeking approximately \$1.3 billion. I would note that \$749.5 million of that is for salaries.

Under vote 5, capital expenditures, we are seeking \$752 million. I would note that the majority of this capital funding is for limited one-time investments, and that only about \$134 million of that is ongoing funding.

For vote 10, grants and contributions, we are seeking \$71 million.

The remaining amounts presented in our estimates are contributions for the department as a whole for employee benefits and the minister's salary and car allowance. They are presented for information purposes only, as they have their own separate enabling legislation.

Considering our net decrease year over year is only about \$40.1 million, I will highlight quickly a few adjustments that are part of the delta.

[Translation]

As the minister pointed out, the biggest increase is tied to the funding announced in Budget 2016 for ocean and freshwater research in Canada. The main estimates include funding in the amount of \$41.3 million.

[English]

The next big-ticket item is funding to address, again, the threat of pollutants from the *Kathryn Spirit*, and \$20 million is included in these main estimates to ensure the successful and complete removal of the derelict vessel from Lac-Saint-Louis.

Let me now shift to key examples of reduced funding profiles when compared to 2016-17.

The largest decrease is a scheduled funding profile change of \$43.6 million for the construction of three offshore fishery science vessels. With regard to infrastructure investments, at this point there is \$40 million less in our opening reference levels because of the successful completion of 2014 federal infrastructure initiatives.

Funding related to the most recent budget 2016 announcement for further investments in maintaining and upgrading federal infrastructure assets is included in these main estimates and is for the most part progressing as planned.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for allowing me to complement Mr. LeBlanc's opening remarks on our final supplementary estimates for this year and for main estimates for 2017-18. My colleagues and I would be happy to entertain any questions you may have.

● (0910)

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** Mr. Chair, thank you for allowing us to do that. I saw your face as we talked about the *Kathryn Spirit*. I could sense in your heart that you were wondering about the *Manolis L*. We're using this as an example of the whole issue of derelict vessels, and I'm happy to talk about it, but one of the critical ones is the *Manolis L*, and I don't want you to think that we have forgotten about that. A couple of weeks from now my colleague, the Minister of Finance, may have something to say, and I hope that we're able to continue the work on that one.

I've pre-empted your question. I didn't want you to look all dishevelled for the next hour.

**The Chair:** I didn't realize clairvoyance was one of your best assets.

Thank you for that. It's an answer to a question I have not asked, as you pointed out, but it's an answer that I truly appreciate. As you know, my own abandoned derelict vessel at the bottom of the ocean is causing me problems, and I thank you for your intervention on that. Thank you also to the commissioner of the coast guard.

Moving right along, folks, we go to the question-and-answer session. We go to the government first, for seven minutes, then we go to the opposition for seven minutes, and then finally to the NDP.

First we're going to turn to Ken McDonald for seven minutes.

**Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I'll be sharing my time with my colleague, MP Pat Finnigan, so I'm sure you'll watch the clock for us.

Thank you again, Minister, for appearing before committee. I think between you and the former minister, this makes the fourth time that the minister has appeared before this committee, which I think is unprecedented for any department thus far in our term of office.

If I could get precise and short answers so that I can get through as many questions as possible, I'd appreciate it. I'm sure you're good at that.

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** It'll all be reflective of the questions, right? The length of the answer will be reflective of the length of the question too.

**Mr. Ken McDonald:** When you talk about length, the chair grew six inches when you made that comment about the *Manolis L.*

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** He can't ask questions about shrimp. We skated him off the ice on the shrimp issue.

**The Chair:** We're on television, ladies and gentlemen, just as a reminder. Thank you very much.

**Mr. Ken McDonald:** First, Mr. Minister, we've heard quite a bit recently about aquatic invasive species. What is the government doing to combat the rise of aquatic invasive species—more specifically, the Asian carp in the St. Lawrence River and the Great Lakes?

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** As I've said to colleagues in the House of Commons, we recognize the importance of aquatic invasive species. The Asian carp has come up in Parliament a number of times. It represents a very significant threat and challenge.

We know that investing in science is part of the answer. It's not a perfect answer, because to understand and anticipate what these invasive species mean and can do and the threat they represent is only part of the answer. We need to make investments in infrastructure and other methods that will, in fact, reduce and or eliminate the threat.

Mr. Chair, through you to Ken, provinces have a key role to play in this area. We have been very encouraged by our discussions with the Province of Ontario and the Province of Quebec. I spoke with the Manitoba minister with respect to Lake Winnipeg. They will work with us and are anxious, frankly, to partner with us, because they recognize the impact this can have on their fisheries as well.

The other thing that is of considerable importance for us is to work with the United States. Over the years they have made historic investments, particularly in the Great Lakes context, but as you have noted, Ken, the St. Lawrence system is hugely impacted by this. We will continue to work with the United States.

I'm hoping that we're in a position to announce increased investments in multilateral or binational organizations like the Great Lakes Fisheries Commission and in working with a number of governors from the Great Lakes states who also have, frankly, very innovative and very forward-looking research solutions that not only monitor but counter the effects of invasive species. It's all hands on deck for us, but we're prepared to allocate additional resources, and the Government of Ontario, frankly, has been one of our best partners in this regard.

The minister and I issued a statement recently that talked about our commitment to work together on this. and we will be there

• (0915)

[Translation]

to the extent possible

[English]

with what is possible financially, because we recognize the priority this has for the long-term economic and environmental viability of so many ecosystems.

**Mr. Ken McDonald:** You referenced in your comments the Fisheries Act review. Of course, you mentioned the document that's in your hands now or in the department's hands. What is the government's next step toward implementing changes to the act and reinforcing protections lost in 2012?

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** Again, through you, Mr. Chair, Ken, thank you for the work that you have collectively done.

Right now we are going through every one of the recommendations, obviously, and preparing a detailed—and I hope you'll find compelling—response to the recommendations. At the same time and on a parallel track, we're consulting with provincial partners. Now that we have the benefit of your report, the provinces and indigenous groups will have, from our perspective, a key role to play in offering advice and guidance as we ultimately prepare government legislation.

I will go to cabinet to get the authority to introduce government legislation. I hope and believe you'll find, based on a lot of the work you did as a committee, that legislation then will ultimately go through the normal legislative process. I hope I'll be back at this table to discuss it with you. It will be drafted in such a way that if this committee and the Senate have suggestions for better ways to do it, we will be open, as we always should be, to amendments and suggestions on how we can get this right.

We're going to proceed expeditiously. It's a mandate requirement the Prime Minister gave me. It's also important to note that this review of the Fisheries Act is also part of our broader government agenda, which includes, for example, reviewing the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act and the Navigable Waters Protection Act. We have different reviews going on across the government.

I seem to be the first one out of the gate, thanks to your work in terms of the Fisheries Act, but we're going to be expeditious and rigorous, and we look forward to a continued interaction with all of you as we prepare government legislation.

Have I ragged the puck on your question, Pat? Go ahead.

[Translation]

**Mr. Pat Finnigan (Miramichi—Grand Lake, Lib.):** Thank you, Minister, for being here today. I am always pleased to see a colleague and neighbour, whose riding is just south of my own.

I would like to discuss owner-operators. They weren't mentioned much in the report because the matter fell somewhat outside the scope of the study. Things aren't the same on the east and west coasts. It is accepted practice on the east coast for a fish harvester to own the licence and the catch, particularly in the case of lobster.

The late Christian Brun, the former executive director of the Maritime Fishermen's Union, did a lot of advocacy on that front, with the support of the region's fish harvesters. The risk of licences being transferred to outside interests still exists.

Do you have any plans to review the matter and take more than just policy measures?

It could be codified in legislation, in which case, I would suggest naming the act after Christian Brun.

I will now turn the floor over to you, Minister.

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Finnigan, for the question.

Like my colleagues here today, I was saddened by the tragic passing of Christian Brun. As I have said publicly, he was a friend of mine and a source of great inspiration. Later this morning, in fact, I am meeting with Melanie Sonnenberg, president of the Canadian Independent Fish Harvester's Federation. Discussions between the organizations and the Maritime Fishermen's Union will continue.

• (0920)

[English]

I took note of the evidence that you received at your committee hearings. I took note of the expression of support on the east coast and from some people on the west coast, but I recognize the different culture and the different management regimes that exist there. It's not the same context at all.

I have thought for a long time—and I've shared this with my colleagues, the deputy minister, and our other colleagues here at the table—that we need to strengthen our own application of this policy, whether it's PIIFCAF or other instruments, when we as a government, as a department, say this is a sacred management principle for the fishery on the east coast. We all have in our constituencies, or certainly on the east coast, anecdotal examples of where we looked the other way or we weren't as rigorous as we could or should have been in enforcing a policy that is foundational to the management of the inshore and midshore fisheries on Canada's east coast.

I will be working with my colleagues in the department, and ultimately with my colleagues in the cabinet, to see if and how we could strengthen our government's ability to enforce that policy. There are different ways to do it. You can legislate it and you can do it by regulatory instrument, and all of those are certainly under active consideration.

I will come back and talk to you once we have arrived at sharper decisions, but this is something that I will move on. I will move on it aggressively, and I will be thoughtful and rigorous in raising our game in enforcing this policy, as well as in making it endure and protecting it perhaps from different winds of the future.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

As the committee has probably noticed, I was rather generous in my time there. It's no reflection on you, Minister. What can I say? We're all impressed by what you were saying. Since we have a question from the Conservatives and then the NDP, I will be equally generous on these next two questions.

That said, and not to cut into your time, Mr. Doherty, but I want to start by saying congratulations on the passage of your private member's bill last night, Bill C-211, on post-traumatic stress disorder. It's not very often that these are successful, but you

certainly were last evening, so congratulations on behalf of the entire committee.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Now seven minutes are yours.

**Mr. Todd Doherty:** You know what? Yesterday was a shining example of what we can do when we put aside partisan squabbles and get to work, working for the greater good. Now the heavy lifting begins, and I look forward to working with our government partners on that.

That said, Mr. Chair, I hope you'll give me just an extra minute. While not under our purview and not the responsibility of any of our witnesses or guests who are here today, Canada lost one of our serving members yesterday. Master Corporal Alfred Barr died during a training accident on Wednesday. He was with 435 Transport and Rescue Squadron and was based in Winnipeg as a search and rescue technician. I know that Canadians from coast to coast to coast are watching today, and I think we would be remiss if we didn't mention that. Our thoughts and our prayers go out to his family and his friends. I just wanted to make that mention.

Mr. Minister, thank you for being here today.

I want to focus my comments and questions on the marine protected areas. As you mentioned in your opening speech, the government is committed to increasing the proportion of Canada's marine protected areas fairly aggressively. We've heard testimony previously that they're aggressive targets: 5% by 2017, 10% by 2020.

I have a few questions. First, when marine protected areas are designated and regulated, do they apply to everyone?

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** Thank you for the question, colleague, and, by the way, I add my voice to your comments with respect to the tragic passing of the SAR tech. These are remarkable women and men who do unbelievable things, so I think it was appropriate to acknowledge that sad news.

On the question of whether they apply to everyone and all concerned, it would depend on how they are drafted. There are a number of ways and a number of measures that can collectively constitute a marine protected area.

I'm not trying to weasel out of your question. They could, and in some cases may, apply to everyone; however, in a number of other cases, based on scientific evidence and complete transparency in terms of what that means, there perhaps are some people who would be less impacted or who would see a marine protected area apply to them differently

• (0925)

**Mr. Todd Doherty:** Minister, I appreciate the comment.

Would it be fair to say that you would acknowledge that the designation of marine protected area could have an economic impact on coastal communities, indigenous and otherwise, as well as commercial? They would be impacted by those areas.



**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** I see where your line of questioning is going.

Again, we will and are determined to meet the targets, as you noted, but we're conscious that they can sometimes have an economic displacement. At all times, any government would want to maintain that to the most modest level, the most minimum level possible.

**Mr. Todd Doherty:** Has that economic impact been studied?

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** It will be studied each time one of these things is done.

It's a collaborative process, Mr. Chair, in the sense that with the consultations that happen with the fishing industry, with indigenous groups, with provinces, one of the main things that we discuss is exactly that. However, I would also offer the hypothesis that if we don't do this properly for Canada and for the world, there will be a long-term economic impact too if we mismanage species and marine ecosystems. We see the successful implementation of these marine protected areas as a very important economic policy as well.

**Mr. Todd Doherty:** With your very aggressive.... Again, I'll also hearken back to our Conservative government. We were in favour of increasing our MPA targets, but also wanted to do a measured approach, not as aggressively as what you've set out.

My question would we this. We want to make sure that those economic impacts are studied prior to announcing anything. On your 5% target by 2017, is the plan in place today on how you're going to achieve that? Have the funds been allocated to mitigate any negative economic impacts, and if so, in which budget?

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** Yes, we have a plan to meet those targets, obviously. We're on track and believe we will even hopefully exceed the target for 2017 and work toward 2020.

**Mr. Todd Doherty:** Have you announced that plan?

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** No, because it's part of an ongoing conversation that we're having on every coast with partners, indigenous groups, provincial governments, provinces. I'm seeing the Premier of Nova Scotia this evening. He'll want to talk about one that we're working on with him. We can't announce the plan until we have the elements nailed down.

With respect to your question, though, Todd, and through you, Mr. Chair, on whether we have allocated the funds around the economic impact, Fisheries and Oceans Canada will not and cannot allocate individual funds to anticipate what may be claimed as a particular economic impact. It's one of the struggles we need to reflect on. We are conscious of economic impacts. These areas will be created in a way that minimizes those impacts.

We will endeavour to offer other economic opportunities where there is a displacement. To achieve this, people have a responsibility, and it's not reflective of anybody sitting at this table, but with respect to one particular case in British Columbia—maybe it was our first exposure to fake news—I saw some people offering an economic impact analysis that was totally and completely disconnected from the evidence we had and that our partners had. Part of arriving at a consensus that Canadians want us to achieve with respect to these areas is to be as responsible as we can. As I said, I'm not speaking to anybody at this table today in this room, but we need to be careful

not to imagine or exaggerate the economic disruptions. We are working all the time on those issues, and try, with our partners, to agree on a very precise set of facts.

Mr. Chair, the deputy would like to add something very briefly.

**Ms. Catherine Blewett (Deputy Minister, Department of Fisheries and Oceans):** Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

Just to augment a little bit, the minister is quite right; there is a very active plan engaged, as you might imagine. I just want to let you know that earlier this week I had a call with all of my provincial and territorial deputy minister colleagues—all provinces and territories—and walked through the plan and approach. We're actively sharing the material, because it is an ongoing dialogue. The consultations are going on.

Just to tilt this a little, if I may, away from a strictly economic focus, this is a science-based approach. We're looking at the identification of these areas from a science context. We are very carefully looking, though, at the implications of that science and have been fairly direct with industry. We completely understand industry's need for predictability and certainty. I talked to my provincial and territorial colleagues about our role in helping the conversation with industry so that they understand where we're going. We're going to be transparent.

• (0930)

**Mr. Todd Doherty:** I appreciate that, and I really appreciate your entering into the conversation.

The challenge we have is that to reach your target, you would have to assume—and you get into trouble when you assume, but it's fairly straightforward to assume or to see—that the north coast of the Pacific is going to be one of the areas that will probably be the hardest hit. The Pacific coast will be the hardest hit area in British Columbia, but it's also in the north. Those are areas where there's shipping, where there are coastal communities that depend on fisheries for their livelihoods.

The concern we have is whether that study been considered. Disproportionately so, British Columbia and northern Canada are going to be the areas facing the hardest impact.

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** Todd, I may characterize it differently. You may see it as hardest hit; I may see it as receiving the greatest benefit. We really do believe that there are huge economic and environmental benefits to doing this properly, and obviously our intention is to do it properly.

Colleagues, as I noted in my opening comments, you're going to be doing work on this particular issue. I would hope and believe that we could have senior officials who can go coast by coast to provide you with the kind of insight that we're developing with our partners, just to remove that confusion.

**Mr. Todd Doherty:** I want to add to that, though.

Would the minister today, then, commit to allowing the committee to commence the study of MPAs prior to making any further announcements on MPAs on the west coast or in northern British Columbia? Allow us to do that study, because you have to admit that doing the study while the government is going ahead with your MPA program and with announcements would make the study redundant.

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** Would I “permit the committee”? I wouldn't have used those words, Todd. The government doesn't “permit” the committee to do anything; we look forward to your work and would work with you in any way we can. I don't propose to determine or permit or deny permission to any work you're going to do.

I will meet the targets. We committed to Canadians in an election campaign very solemnly that we would achieve those targets. We won a historic number of seats, including in your province, and won every seat in Atlantic Canada, so there should be no ambiguity as to our desire to meet the targets we have set. There should equally be no confusion around our commitment to work openly and transparently with provincial governments, indigenous groups, and this committee.

I can't say that we're not going to proceed to do the work we were elected to do because a committee is or isn't doing a piece of work. We will benefit from your work, and I would be happy to collaborate with you as you do it.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

I'm going to go to Mr. Donnelly for a seven-minute-plus intervention.

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

Minister, I thank you, your parliamentary secretary, and your department officials for being here today. I appreciate you coming to the committee to answer our questions.

I want to talk first about salmon disease. Earlier this week, I had an opportunity to ask you how you were planning to protect wild salmon now that the deadly disease of HSMI has been confirmed in B.C. salmon farms.

Minister, you responded, and I quote:

The member knows that we believe that middle-class economic opportunities on both coasts depend on aquaculture and wild fisheries, and we think the two can coexist safely together.

The Cohen commission and numerous studies, including a recent study and a study published in *Marine Policy*, concluded that B.C. salmon farms present a greater than minimal risk of serious harm to wild salmon due to the transfer of sea lice and disease. Both of these studies confirm the findings.

I have a few questions for you.

Do you really believe that wild fisheries and aquaculture can coexist safely when the science has proven time and again that they can't?

What is your plan to protect the wild Pacific salmon industry from this deadly disease, which has the potential to destroy not only farmed salmon but the wild salmon economy?

Will you heed the advice of salmon advocates like Alexandra Morton and scientists like Dr. Kristi Miller, who are asking that this research team be allowed to continue their important work?

Do you agree that they must do this work and that it must be continued in the interest of all Canadians?

● (0935)

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Fin, for your questions. I'll offer a few brief comments, and then I think Terry wants to add something. Trevor is in the best position to provide specific answers for you and for the committee with respect to the scientific aspects of the disease concerns you raised in the House of Commons.

You asked if I believed that wild fisheries and aquaculture can coexist safely. My view is yes.

Some people disagree with that. I respect that and understand that, but that is not our position. That's certainly not the position of our government.

We recognize that for every scientific voice that raises concerns, we need to double down and do the research in a transparent and open way that is accessible to Canadians to ensure that the protections and the measures in place are in fact effective.

I note some of the scientific advice or comments you referred to. We also have others who have a different perspective. We'll continue to be guided by the best scientific advice we can get, and to share it with Canadians.

I fundamentally believe that middle-class economic growth depends on successfully managing both aquaculture....

Over 50% of the fish and seafood consumed in the world comes from farmed operations. It's farmed fish, and it comes from aquaculture. We need to do it in the best way possible. We need to be global leaders in doing this safely. We can be inspired by the work of other countries that have frankly, in our view, done a good job at it.

We'll continue to do that—to be transparent and open, and to make changes as needed to ensure that we're reaching the level of safety and rigour that Canadians expect.

With respect to Ms. Morton herself, there's an ongoing litigation case that is yet unresolved, so I don't want to comment specifically on her views or her specific issue, but I recognize that she represents a perspective shared by many others.

Terry—

**Mr. Fin Donnelly:** Minister, I appreciate your answer.

I would like to ask a few questions that I would like to go to you, if I could.

Just in terms of—

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** I did not answer your specific question with respect to.... I don't want on the record to have a specific—

**Mr. Fin Donnelly:** You did say they could coexist safely, and that's my point.

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** But then you went on to talk about a specific disease concern you have with Pacific salmon, and I just wanted Trevor at least to be able to—

**Mr. Fin Donnelly:** Right, and it is associated with almost every jurisdiction around the world that does salmon farming, including the world leader, Norway, which is moving to closed containment. I think you've answered the question—

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** No, actually, I don't think I answered it at all.

I was offering Trevor up to provide a very concise and specific answer to that question, if I may, Mr. Chair. We did not answer that at all. I'm proposing that Trevor do so, quickly.

**Mr. Trevor Swerdfager (Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Ecosystems and Oceans Science and Oceans Protection Plan, Department of Fisheries and Oceans):** I have a couple of things, I guess.

First, we have a comprehensive risk assessment under way in British Columbia to look at these very issues. It's in its infancy. It is continuing. The new resources that we have through budget 2016 are to augment and expand the disease risk assessment work that's under way now.

The second point is that the level of unanimity in the science community around these issues is, at least in our view, quite low. There is a great deal of debate as to how and when disease arises and how it transmits, and specifically with HSMI, there is quite a bit of controversy and debate in the scientific community about its origin, its passage from farm to wild, or vice versa, and the extent to which it is implicating the industry.

The third point I would make is with respect to the global situation. The strains that we have found in British Columbia of HSMI are genetically different from those in Norway and other European waters. We are very confident that the two disease situations are quite different and we do not have an emphatic conclusion about the future transmission and/or impact of HSMI in British Columbia. We have not detected it anywhere else in Canada.

• (0940)

**Mr. Fin Donnelly:** Thank you for that. I hope the department is correct about their assumption on that for the sake of both industries, both the wild and the farmed salmon.

Minister, through the chair, what funding has been specifically committed to implementing the Cohen inquiry recommendations?

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** Again, the last time I was here the committee told you about the discussion I had with Justice Cohen,

which I thought was inspiring. I had talked about the occasion that I had in Vancouver to talk about what specific Cohen commission recommendations our government had already responded to and what our plan was to ensure that we continue to do that.

In terms of the specific funding elements around different Cohen commission recommendations, I'll offer a brief comment, and Trevor or somebody else might perhaps be able to delineate it more sharply than I can.

One of the things that I mentioned in my opening remarks was that a significant and historic investment in marine science is a key part of being able to respond to the rather thoughtful elements that Justice Cohen raised. We recognized that the department did not have the necessary capacity to do the full scientific analysis that Canadians expected of us, recognizing the iconic nature of those salmon species on your coast, Fin. That was part of our answer, and part of Justice Cohen's report is found in the ongoing and weekly work that the Pacific region and others are doing in our department.

Trevor, do you want to add on the specific funding piece?

**Mr. Trevor Swerdfager:** Just a bit, Minister.

For us, we don't tag various program activities specifically related to a particular Cohen commission recommendation. Many of the programs—indeed, the vast majority of them in British Columbia—touch on multiple elements of the Cohen commission, so it's difficult for us to say that action X, Y, or Z and dollar A, B, or C tag to Cohen, and therefore to total it. You won't easily find from us a specific “here's the investment in Cohen” implementation per se; rather, it's across the suite of our programming, with some obvious exceptions.

However, for the most part, the pan-DFO program in DFO Pacific region and in DFO headquarters contributes to various elements of Cohen.

**Mr. Fin Donnelly:** Thank you.

The Pacific Salmon Foundation is calling for a modest adjustment to the cost of the recreational fisheries conservation stamp, from \$6 to \$10. The additional funds will respond to additional demand for Pacific salmon conservation, restoration, enhancement, and science through the Pacific Salmon Foundation's community salmon program, consistent with a long-standing contribution agreement with Fisheries and Oceans Canada.

Therefore, Minister, I ask if you support the Pacific Salmon Foundation's call for an adjustment to the cost of the recreational fisheries conservation stamp from \$6 to \$10.

I'd like to ask another question as well, and preface it with some work that the Pacific Salmon Foundation is doing. They have proposed a renewed commitment to community-based salmon conservation, restoration, enhancement, and science supported by the Pacific salmon endowment fund, an independent non-profit organization. These funds would be allocated to the following activities of the Pacific Salmon Foundation, which would enable collaborative science and restoration with DFO and others to preserve and restore vulnerable coastal marine ecosystems—

**The Chair:** Mr. Donnelly, I'm going to have to ask you to hurry this up, please.

**Mr. Fin Donnelly:**—related to the oceans protection plan, work with first nations, the Yukon River chinook, and the work with the provincial government on the Water Sustainability Act.

Will you commit to an investment of \$30 million in the Pacific salmon endowment fund?

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** There are a number of questions, and they're very good questions, Mr. Chair.

I have met with representatives of the Pacific Salmon Foundation. I share your view that they do great work. This is a group of remarkable Canadians—and partners, in fact, from other countries—who contribute in a phenomenal way.

I find it inspiring when they come and ask us to raise a user fee. Their conservation stamp is an inspirational or a very creative and positive instrument that has, for a very modest amount of money, done a lot of great work.

I personally would love to be able to find a way to raise it to \$10. It is more complicated than that, because it's caught in things like the User Fees Act, which was passed in a previous Parliament. There are issues around federal government revenues and the consolidated revenue fund.

Again, I'm not trying to be evasive at all, Fin. I totally get and share the benefit of that, but I am working with my colleagues and groups like the Treasury Board to find the best way to do it. It's not a simple yes or no. If it was, the simple answer would have been yes. I hope that we can quickly get to that place where the answer is yes. It will be a convoluted process, but I think we'll quickly get to an area where we all can—

Mr. Chair, I see your light is on. I'm leaving on the table a pile of questions that Finn had, so I'm in your hands how you want me to do this.

• (0945)

**The Chair:** Unfortunately, due to the Standing Orders, you're just going to have to leave them there for now, and perhaps work them in at some point later on. I've been rather generous thus far on the first round of questioning.

You have to leave here in about 30 minutes, so I'm going to say to my colleagues that we're going to have to be a little bit more strict on the timing.

Go ahead, Ms. Jordan, for seven minutes.

**Mrs. Bernadette Jordan (South Shore—St. Margarets, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I will be sharing my time with Mr. Finnigan as well.

I have one question and one comment.

First of all, Minister and officials, thank you very much for appearing today.

I'm particularly happy to see the *Kathryn Spirit* and the *Manolis L* rather interestingly worked in there. As you know, I have an interest and passion in what's going to happen with abandoned and derelict vessels. I did see that it's been included in the oceans protection plan.

Can you tell me how much funding will be allocated for addressing the issues of abandoned and derelict vessels, when it's going to be rolled out, and when we can get rid of the *Farley Mowat*?

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** I had the experience of seeing the *Farley Mowat* in your community with you last summer. If you ever need a reminder of why this is a problem in so many communities, that is one of the gruesome ones that Shelburne is facing.

I share and understand your passion and I salute your work in Parliament on this issue. I know my colleague, the Minister of Transport, shares my view that your interventions and your work have been hugely constructive. They, frankly, convinced us, in the oceans protection plan that the Prime Minister announced last fall, to really try and up our game with respect to this scourge that affects so many communities and represents such an environmental and in some cases navigational concern.

The oceans protection plan will allocate some funding. We have not yet had the actual Treasury Board approval for the specific amounts of money. Once that is completed—and it's coming soon; it's not months away—we'll be in a position to offer much more precise information. Suffice to say that we will be taking our responsibility within the funding that we have to deal with the most critical issues.

More importantly, and perhaps in terms of looking ahead, Minister Garneau and I will be looking at legislative changes. If we all say and believe the polluter pays principle is fundamental to many of these conversations, it does seem strange that you can't abandon your car on a four-lane highway in New Brunswick, take the licence plates off, and just say, "Look, I don't need that car anymore" or "It doesn't have any value and it's too expensive to tow it", and just ditch it on some shoulder on a highway, yet people get away with doing that in rivers, lakes, and marine ecosystems to the extent they do.

It's a global problem, but we think the owners of these vessels have to be held to account and have to pay the bill. Canadian taxpayers can't fund every single one of these, which in many cases have been existing for decades. This is a horrible problem that we have arrived at after many years of abusive practices by the owners of these vessels.

We're going to be doing two things. We're going to be dealing with the most urgent ones the best way we can, recognizing that public funds can be part of that solution. I'd be happy to provide details as we have them. More importantly, we're looking at changing both the legislation and the authority of Transport Canada and the Canadian Coast Guard to hold people to account at the time these horrible incidents are created, and not 10, 20, or 30 years out, when we say, "Oh, geez, that's a problem, isn't it?" Taxpayers are then on the hook for a huge amount of money. That is unsustainable.

Jeff, do you want to add something specific on that point?

● (0950)

**Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson (Commissioner of the Canadian Coast Guard, Department of Fisheries and Oceans):** Good morning, Mr. Chair and committee members.

I'll pause for a moment and thank you for the very warm welcome earlier this morning and tell you that it is an honour to be in this position.

To what the minister has said, I would simply add the point that the work to move that legislative piece forward is ongoing. I wouldn't want anyone to leave the room thinking that's a future piece of work. We have people working on it. We're sitting at the table with justice drafters as we speak.

Where issues come up, I get myself involved personally to resolve them. We're moving this expeditiously. If we face a challenge in doing it, it's to ensure that we have comprehensive coverage and that we're ambitious in the scope rather than restrained because, as the minister has already referred to, it's a national problem, and it's an international problem. We want to have the tool set that will allow us to deal with it most effectively when that legislation is passed.

**Mrs. Bernadette Jordan:** I'm going to make a quick comment, and then I'm going to pass it to Pat.

Small craft harbours are extremely important in my riding. There was a great investment last year. I hope that you recognize that these harbours are economic drivers in small communities and that you will continue to fund small craft harbours and wharfs.

That's my comment on small craft harbours, but I am going to turn it over to Mr. Finnigan.

**Mr. Pat Finnigan:** Thank you, Bernadette.

Thank you again, Mr. Minister.

[*Translation*]

Minister, having you here, I can't pass up the opportunity to discuss the Atlantic salmon issue, particularly as it relates to my region, Miramichi. The industry there is in crisis; it is really struggling. Over the past two years, fish harvesters have been subject to catch and release measures, and many in my community are finding that the measures have not had the desired effects, especially when it comes to the daily limit of one grilse.

I have often heard people say that, if more energy were spent on enforcing the rules and making sure enough officers were monitoring the rivers, we would see the same benefits. I know your management plan, in connection with first nations and all stakeholders, is on its

way. Could you tell us a bit more about your vision for Atlantic salmon going forward?

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Finnigan. I wholeheartedly share Ms. Jordan's concerns when it comes to the large investment in harbour infrastructure. We are going to continue making those investments a top priority. I want to make that clear.

On the Atlantic salmon issue, Mr. Finnigan, I appreciate how important the sector is economically and culturally in a region like yours, along the Miramichi River. I also realize the value the Government of New Brunswick places on the economic activity generated by the industry. As you are well aware, a scientific assessment of the 2016 stocks is under way. We are eagerly awaiting that science advisory report. Our discussions with indigenous communities, as well as individual and group stakeholders, are ongoing. The issue is of particular concern to the province of New Brunswick.

I must commend you, Mr. Finnigan, for your—quite frankly—relentless efforts to maximize the opportunities afforded by this species, which is so important to our province.

I would also welcome any suggestions from my fellow members at the table. We have not yet finalized our management plan for 2017, so we would be delighted to receive any proposals you or your colleagues might have, Mr. Finnigan. We realize how important this resource is, as evidenced by our upcoming investment. In the next few days, I will be making announcements about possible investments to give the Atlantic fishery, the Atlantic salmon fishery, an economic boost. I am hopeful that the recreational fishery will be an important part of that discussion. We have some good news coming and some good years ahead. That is our hope, and we are working on it.

● (0955)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Minister. That will have to be it for now.

Mr. Sopuck, you have five minutes.

[*English*]

**Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC):** Thank you.

Regarding the Fisheries Act review that we did, I would like to make a couple of comments. Manitoba Hydro was one of our witnesses. They are proponents in projects all the time and deal with the act on a regular basis. They were very clear in their testimony when they said that evidence for loss protections is not apparent. A proponent who dealt with the old act and the new act, then, was very clear that they were still rigorously required to protect fish habitat.

As well, the 2009 report of the commissioner of environment and sustainable development, which looked at the work the DFO did in habitat protection under the old Fisheries Act, concluded that DFO could not demonstrate that it adequately protected fish habitat and, by extension, the fisheries.

One question we asked many of our witnesses was whether they could prove any damage to the fish populations as a result of the changes that were made to the act in 2012, and not a single person could provide any quantitative estimates, other than mere opinions.

Having said that, the exercise of reviewing the act was a very positive one for me and for all of us on this side. I think we worked well together with all parties. We had very intense discussions and I think came up with a report that you will find quite useful.

I'm not expecting you to make any comments on the recommendations, because I know it's under review, but I want to emphasize that one area the committee was fairly strong about was the protections for farmers, agriculturalists, and rural municipalities.

I don't have to tell you, minister, what it was like under the old act: the so-called "fish cops" descending on prairie communities and looking at drainage ditches and so on. We would hope that your department and you will take those recommendations on dealing with the rural municipalities and farm communities extremely seriously, and I'm sure you will.

One of our recommendations—we also made recommendation 15—was that there be a widely representative advisory board set up to advise DFO on the implementation of the Fisheries Act.

There is a precedent for this, minister, as you know, under the Species at Risk Act: there is an advisory board. In fact, the individuals who are on that Species at Risk Act advisory board would be ideal for an advisory board under the new Fisheries Act.

I would like to ask a question, though, about the research science program. One of the recommendations we made in the Atlantic salmon report, which was a unanimous report and one that all of us are very proud of, was that a number of these new scientists be assigned solely to the management and conservation of Atlantic salmon.

Would that be a possibility? We declined to put a number down, but we would like to see a sufficient cadre of scientists dedicated full time to the Atlantic salmon resource. Would it be a possibility?

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. Sopuck.

You asked a number of questions. You went from the Fisheries Act to salmon science. Let me try to cover it briefly. With respect to the salmon science, Trevor or others might add some precision.

I hear what you're saying. We've had this conversation at this table before. I think you and I have, in many cases, more of a common understanding than perhaps people would imagine.

We don't see restoring loss protections in the Fisheries Act as the best instrument to cancel country and western music shows. There may be other reasons to cancel country and western music festivals, but the Fisheries Act isn't the best one.

We've all heard the horror stories, but some of them may be fake news and some may not be. It doesn't really matter, other than that it reminds us to be conscious that small rural farming communities, including some that I represent in my own riding, will not want to see what is a legitimate exercise that we committed to Canadians in the election to undertake.... We made a precise commitment in the

campaign that we would restore these loss protections, so we will do that, with your help and with the help of Parliament, obviously. In no way is it intended to traumatize people who are conducting otherwise responsible and sustainable agriculture or rural community development.

However, we do believe—and this is where we may differ—that the changes made some time ago had a negative impact or an unfortunate impact. I don't want to characterize it, because it will then engage a conversation between us. One reason we think it was hard to get quantitative analysis is that there had been a significant reduction in scientific assets, so we think the conversation around what the impact in fact is will be a lot better if we have transparent, open, robust, and globally credible scientific evidence.

That's a perfect bridge to your specific question around Atlantic salmon. I share your view that this has to be a priority, and I salute the work your committee did on it. It's critically important for a number of communities.

You asked a specific question about a specific, dedicated science asset. You also recognized that we won't respond at a committee on estimates to a report that we will be thoroughly and properly responding to in the parliamentary process.

Trevor may want to add a specific comment on the scientific—

• (1000)

**Mr. Robert Sopuck:** You've answered my question. You're open to the idea of dedicated science.

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** Again, I want to be careful. Dedicated? There may be a leading global expert on this particular issue working at a facility in my own province of New Brunswick—the Huntsman Marine Science Centre in St. Andrews, New Brunswick—but that person may also have an expertise that could be valuable in looking at an aquaculture project or something. I wouldn't want that person to have five minutes of idle time because he or she was solely allowed to focus on Atlantic salmon. They may have a remarkable piece of insight into Atlantic halibut.

**Mr. Robert Sopuck:** That's a fair comment.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Sopuck. I have to end it right there. I'm having to be a bit more strict now.

Now, of course, it's Mr. Hardie, for five minutes, please.

**Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and welcome to everybody. It's nice to see the west coast representative in the person of your new parliamentary secretary.

On the west coast there are actually good stories to tell about the ocean protection plan. The more we unbundle it, the more people seem to agree that it's going in the right direction.

As well, we can't forget the impact of reopening the Kitsilano coast guard base. Training those community-based first responders is a huge value to the west coast, and I think that has to be recognized.

I want to get back to giving you, Mr. Minister, an opportunity to finish the answer you started briefly to Mr. Donnelly's question. Then I want to talk about MCTS for a minute as well.

To address the issue of aquaculture, one reason these questions keep coming up—to my mind, anyway—is what I consider the troubling lack of transparency from that industry. They do not work well with their critics, the advocates. They hide information, it seems.

On the immediate issue of the HSMI disease, although Mr. Swerdfager gave some information on it, did you want to complete your thought on it first?

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Ken, also, for the question.

One of the challenges we're having in getting a broader consensus around the co-existence of aquaculture with wild fish stocks is exactly what you identified. We can find anecdotal examples of particular operators who perhaps were seen to have or were believed to have not been transparent or open, or there's a claim that some particular group or person did something and what the facts were never flushed out publicly. The lack of transparency or the resistance to transparency becomes a proof point for those who assert other particular circumstances.

I share your view: we can work with them. I have instructed our department to be absolutely rigorous in enforcing and applying the rules and the regulations and the conditions of these licences, obviously, but also in compelling those operators to be open and transparent with Canadians around these issues. I share your view.

Terry wanted to add something with respect to the aquaculture piece, Mr. Chair, so if you don't mind, Ken, I'd ask Terry to add a particular piece. Then we can get back to MCTS, if we're able.

**Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard):** Hello, committee. It's a pleasure to be here in my new role, and certainly, Ken, I won't take too much of your time away from the minister.

I would just like to say that meeting with each of you personally has been fantastic, and not only in my legislative role in supporting the minister. I have a personal mantra, which is that politics is for elections. I think there's a lot of good work that we can do together, and the Prime Minister and the minister as well have stated that one of the value points of my being in this role is to provide a west coast perspective.

I share a border with Fin, and we have similar constituencies and similar concerns. I'm taking my role very seriously. In B.C. it is obvious that this is a key issue that has many parties concerned. Already last week I visited the biology station where Dr. Miller works. I visited with representatives from the Wild Salmon Forever Foundation. In fact, I'm going back this week to visit a fish farm and to see it on the ground, and I'll be reporting all this back to the minister.

I'm glad to bring this west coast perspective, and certainly from our work in the Pacific caucus you know that the Pacific caucus is engaged in this as well.

• (1005)

**Mr. Ken Hardie:** Thank you, Terry.

Now for MCTS.

There were 490 outages between August and November. There are discussions suggesting that one day MCTS could actually be like an air traffic control for marine traffic.

With that number of outages and the difficulties with the third party supplier responsible for about half of those outages, how are we doing? You know that we were not entirely happy with the decision to close Comox. I'm just wondering how satisfied you are with the state of that operation.

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ken, I share your view of the importance Canadians place on marine communications and the critical role of the Coast Guard for the safety of Canadians and visitors to our waters. Not for one minute do I underestimate or fail to recognize the reliance that people have on this infrastructure, the importance of ensuring that the investments allow for redundancy systems, and the need for the latest technology that is accessible to people in a way such that they can use it safely, with the appropriate backup system in the event of outages. The oceans protection plan and the money that the Coast Guard will receive will allow us, I think, to up our game in a significant way and reassure people that those redundancies exist and that the modern technologies that can offer world-class best coverage will exist.

Jeff, the commissioner of the Coast Guard, may provide some precise answers.

Again, Mr. Chair, for any of these questions, if colleagues would like us to provide more and specific detail in written answers, we would be happy to come back on specific points with written precision, if that's the desire of members at any time, not only at the committee but at any other moment.

Jeff, do you want to add something?

**Mr. Jeffery Hutchinson:** I would. Thank you.

Within that number, as you know, you see that MCTS isn't a system but a system of systems. How satisfied I am, as the commissioner, with the progress we're making depends a little bit on a breakdown within that larger number. I'll give you an example of what I'm talking about.

For the technology that was consolidated, the trend line is moving in the right direction, and it's moving fairly quickly. The number of problems we had with the system last summer, when compared with the fall, has fallen by about 70%. I think that's the right direction. The folks I'm talking to through the management structure are telling me that we continue to deal with those problems. They're raised, they're put to the committee, the right escalation or right resolution is being brought to bear.

That said, MCTS is supported by a series of towers and also by other information systems. Within the OPP you'll recall that the Prime Minister announced a reduction in the number of blackouts. He was referring to some of the investments that can be put into the other parts of that system. When we're talking about towers or AIS—the way ships often communicate with each other—in a move from radio-based to satellite-based AIS, those systems are imperative if we're going to be on a world stage. Cutting-edge—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Mr. Hutchinson. I have to cut you off right there.

We have time for one more question for the minister. We will continue after that with the officials, if that's the wish of the committee.

I'm seeing that it is the wish, so we'll carry on with this.

We'll go to Mr. Arnold for about five minutes.

**Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm trying to keep you honest on your questioning time here.

• (1010)

**The Chair:** You'll have more than that, then, probably.

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** I appreciate the minister's being here today, with his parliamentary secretary plus all his staff.

I want to get back to the question that came from Mr. Doherty on the MPAs and whether you would be willing to slow down the process to make sure that those MPAs aren't negatively impacting other sectors.

I was at a meeting and witnessed senior staff within your department stating that they're scrambling, actually, to try to meet these targets. Your Prime Minister has stated on other issues that he's not going to do something simply to check off another box on an election promise list, if it's not right for Canadians.

Would you consider slowing down this process to make sure that these MPAs are put in place in a responsible manner, instead of simply trying to meet a targeted number?

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** Mr. Chair, thank you.

Mel, thank you for the question. I might disagree with your characterization of “scrambling”. I haven't seen, in my discussions with my officials, people scrambling. I've seen them working effectively and diligently.

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** That was a statement from one of your senior staff at an event I was at. They were scrambling to meet the MPA targets.

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** Yes, and that may have been that person's view; I don't think it's the view of the people, certainly, in the senior leadership of the department. If that particular person is forced to scramble, then we'll make sure that he or she has the resources needed so that the scrambling can conclude.

I'm trying to be as elegant as possible with respect to your very precise question. “Am I prepared to slow down the process?” were your words, Mel.

The very direct answer is no, because I don't believe that we can't achieve these targets responsibly and in partnership with provincial governments and indigenous groups and the fishing industry. If I thought there wasn't a way that we could responsibly and properly achieve these targets in the environmental and economic interests of Canadians, I would then go to the Prime Minister with the unhappy task of telling him that I didn't think I should or could keep one of the commitments we made to Canadians.

That is not my position now. I think we can and will keep these commitments, and the Prime Minister is enthusiastic about the work we've done so far.

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** Thank you for that, but I think that simply stating that no, you're not willing to slow it down states something pretty clearly here—

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** But, Mr. Chair, I want the record to—

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** Thank you, Minister—

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** I get the tactic of coming back and putting the words in my mouth with the characterization—

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** Excuse me, Minister; I'd like to move on to the next question, please—

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** The only point is, the reason I said no is that we have a different characterization of how—

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** There was consultation—

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** —we would arrive at that process.

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** Excuse me, Chair—

**The Chair:** Ladies and gentlemen, colleagues, I'm going to ask that we put some decorum back into the questioning. I'm very flexible on time. I'm also very flexible about the way we conduct ourselves within the time we are given. I am asking the questioner to get to his point, but I'm also asking him to be diligent. He is not in a rush.

Pardon my using this word, but there is no need to scramble. You have several minutes left, and I don't think scrambling is necessary. Let's try to keep this on an even keel, if we can.

Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Arnold.

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I believe the question has been answered. I'd like to move on to the next question.

There was a Government of Canada web page providing information for indigenous Canadians interested in participation in the consultation sessions on the Fisheries Act review. I quote from it:

Fisheries and Oceans Canada and Transport Canada representatives will be available to consult directly with indigenous organizations, groups and communities, to seek their views to inform the committee's work.

Further on, it says that indigenous people were invited and funded to participate in the government's consultation sessions on the Fisheries Act review and were told that their input would inform the committee's work in reviewing the Fisheries Act.



Minister, DFO officials did not deliver the input from these consultation sessions to the committee for the review of the Fisheries Act. Do you know why this is?

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** Again, thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mel, for the question.

The deputy minister just informed me with respect to your previous question that we apparently have an email from the deputy minister from your province thanking us for the diligent work we're doing and commending the department on the work we're doing around marine protected areas. We'd be happy to share that with you and the committee, if it's of interest.

With respect to the consultations around the Fisheries Act, we recognize the importance of a nation-to-nation relationship with indigenous people based on the recognition of rights. That's something that our government is working on, we think in an unprecedented way, and it requires us, frankly, to consult and to understand the opinion of indigenous peoples.

• (1015)

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** My question was, why was the information was not provided to the committee as it was indicated to the groups it would be?

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** So—

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** And time is of the essence here, I see from my timer, because—

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** Yes, and I wouldn't want anybody to scramble.

We are receiving in real time, Mr. Chair, hundreds and thousands of interventions and thoughtful contributions from people, not only from indigenous communities but from Canadians across the country. I have offered to share, as we compile and as we receive this information—

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** This information was to be provided to the committee for their review. We have finished our review and provided the report. The timeline is up. Why did the committee not receive the information it that was indicated it would receive?

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** Again, the deputy said to me that if in fact there was a commitment to receive the information we had in a way that could properly be presented to your committee—because it's important to receive emails on a website or to have somebody's working notes from a meeting—common practice would be not to turn it over to a parliamentary committee until it was in the appropriate form for you to receive it.

However, I would be happy to look into the specific circumstance you've provided, Mel. The deputy said the same thing. I want to maintain a very collegial and transparent relationship with this committee, so if there was some confusion either around what we committed to doing or a failure on our part to deliver a commitment, not only will we regret it and apologize for it, but we'd be happy to correct it to ensure it doesn't happen again.

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

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

**The Chair:** Minister, thank you very much, and the parliamentary secretary as well.

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** Are there no questions from you, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** I think you answered my first question, and if memory serves, I don't think I even asked it. Nevertheless, kudos to you, sir, for pre-empting my question; I appreciate your answer at the beginning.

That said, we thank you for your time. It was generous. You gave us 90 minutes, and we appreciate that, and the time of the parliamentary secretary as well.

We're going to have to ask the officials stay around, because we have 30 minutes left. We're going to go to our next questioner shortly, but in the meantime, would you like to sum up with a few comments, Minister?

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** I won't sum up, Mr. Chair, because I wouldn't want to waste your time in summarizing the comments that I have—hopefully constructively—offered your committee.

I want to say thank you. It's a privilege to be here. Many of you have been friends of mine for a long time, and many of you have become new friends of mine. This is an industry and a subject that I care deeply about, as I know all of you do. A chance to work with you constructively in the interest of Canadians is something that's a privilege.

Mr. Chair, I am always available and enthusiastic to come back at a time where you and your colleagues see fit. I hope that between now and June we can have a chance to interact on a number of other subjects, on your reports or any other matter that's of interest to you. As I said, I am literally going to meet the Canadian Independent Fish Harvesters right now; Melanie Sonnenberg is waiting with her colleagues in my office on the fourth floor upstairs. I will be excusing myself, as they have been waiting 15 minutes already, but the officials and the parliamentary secretary are happy to stay for the next 30 minutes, if we can provide additional insight.

At any time, Mr. Chair, if you or your colleagues would like specific written information or something the department can provide, not only for your work as a committee but also for your work as members of Parliament in your constituencies, it would be a privilege to get you that information.

[*Translation*]

Thank you.

I look forward to meeting with the committee members again whenever they deem it appropriate.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister. Some of the participants in your next meeting have been texting me as well, so off you go. Thank you for your time.

We're going to take a break for just a minute or so, and then we'll come back with Mr. Morrissey and our officials who remain. Thank you.

• (1015)

(Pause)

• (1020)

**The Chair:** I'd like to ask all our participants to please come back.

My apologies, Mr. Beech; I thought you were departing as well, but it looks like you're still here. I'm not saying that as a negative note but as a very positive thing. It's great to still have you here.

I'll get everyone to come back. I appreciate that. Thank you very much.

Moving right along in our schedule, we're going to Mr. Morrissey for five minutes.

Mr. Morrissey, go ahead.

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

I would like to return to a question that was asked earlier by my colleague, and it relates to small craft harbours. There's a decrease of \$64 million in the estimates. Who could elaborate on that a bit more? Please be brief, because I have some other questions and I have only five minutes.

**Mr. Tony Matson:** Do you mean with respect to small craft harbours specifically, or is it with respect to the federal infrastructure initiative? Our funding for the federal infrastructure initiative has gone down, but that's only reflective of the fact that our funding for FII-1 is expired, and we're now into FII-2. With respect to small craft harbours, the funding has gone down slightly between the two initiatives, but there is ongoing funding for small craft harbours.

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** One of the issues I hear from regional managers in small craft harbours is that the maintenance allocation of their budget has not increased in years and years and years, which obviously means they can do less and less and less. Could one of you speak to that? Do you think it's adequate? Obviously, as a parliamentarian, I do not think the funds dedicated to small craft harbours maintenance is adequate. It's not even keeping up with the cost, and it's leading to significant increases in capital repairs when they finally have money to do it.

**Mr. Terry Beech:** I could certainly start with that, and we can get into more specific numbers.

Obviously there was a long period of neglect for individual small craft harbours and there was a need for a major investment. There aren't enough funds, of course, to fit that need; however, there is a very specific method under which the department prioritizes how these funds are utilized, between demonstrating need, the productivity of the harbour, and of course any risk to structural integrity. In terms of any of the numbers questions, I'll certainly throw it to the department.

•(1025)

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** I'd like for you to focus on the maintenance side, which has been at a similar amount now for years and years.

While you're thinking about that, then, as you obviously do not have the answer...

You have it?

**Mr. Tony Matson:** With respect to maintenance specifically, we have a budget set aside and we recognize that more investment is required in small craft harbours. That's reflected in the infrastructure funding that was provided. We received some \$288 million over the last two years out of FII-1, and we received an additional \$148

million for 2016-17 and 2017-18. That reflects the fact that with respect to our base budgets—this is temporary funding—there is additional funding required if you wanted to maintain what we call an “adequate refresh cycle” of our small craft harbours.

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** How much of that money is going to be addressed to increasing the maintenance portion of small craft harbours' budget?

**Mr. Philippe Morel (Acting/Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Ecosystems and Fisheries Management, Department of Fisheries and Oceans):** The A-base budget of the program is \$95 million, but every year for the last five years we have received money from infrastructure from a budget that supports more than the creation of new small craft harbours: all the moneys we receive from the FII-1 or FII-2 are dedicated to renewing or restoring existing harbours, or divesting them, in some cases. There is no decrease in the investment in maintenance. The full money is used either for new facilities in the same harbour, if there's an increase of the need for the fishery industry, or to renew or renovate some aspect of the harbour.

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** I just want to leave on the record that I feel we should be looking at the maintenance part of the budget for small craft harbours under DFO and increasing it.

I have a question. Some port authorities have told me that governments in the past—and I won't attach it to any particular government—have had a habit of announcing projects years out. They would announce them over and over again, and the money didn't show up for years and years down the road and was simply never spent. It left the illusion that there were major investments going into small craft harbours, whereas in reality they did not occur.

Is any of the money that is now allocated to small craft harbours on a yearly basis carried forward, or is it all appropriated within that year and utilized within that year? As well, if it cannot be so utilized, how is it managed on a go-forward basis?

**Mr. Philippe Morel:** We plan to spend 100% of the money we receive from the A-base budget and also for the FII initiatives.

It happens sometimes that because of weather and contracting issues, some of the project spending has to be delayed—a very small portion—to another year, but the budget of the small craft harbours program is spent at 100% of what we plan every year. Usually the difference between what we plan at the beginning of the year and have spent at the end of the year is less than 1%. The reason is that we can reallocate between projects to make sure that we spend all of the money that is allocated to us.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Morel. Thank you, Mr. Morrissey.

I want to go now to Mr. Donnelly for three minutes, on a day in which I'm feeling rather generous, so go ahead.

**Mr. Fin Donnelly:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thanks to the parliamentary secretary for being here.

During the last federal election, the Liberals committed to supporting the independence of our Atlantic inshore fisheries by committing to the fleet separation and owner-operator policies, under the policy for preserving the independence of the inshore fleet in Canada's Atlantic fisheries, or PIIFCAF, and ensuring that any remaining controlling agreements are investigated thoroughly to bring to account any who may be undermining the principles of PIIFCAF.

I'm wondering when the government is going to deliver on this promise to fishermen to eliminate controlling agreements in the Atlantic fishery.

**Mr. Terry Beech:** Thank you for raising this question. It is something that the minister addressed earlier.

The PIIFCAF regime is a reflection that our government recognizes that small-boat independent owner-operators are really the backbone of fisheries and coastal communities on Canada's east coast. One thing I've discovered in this new role is the fundamental differences that occur in the ways the different regimes are set up between the west coast of our country and the east coast.

There is certainly a commitment by the minister and this government to ensure that the principles of PIIFCAF are upheld. I'm happy to go into any further details on that on any specific question that you might have.

• (1030)

**Mr. Fin Donnelly:** The specific question was just when you are going to address the controlling agreements. That's the concern they have.

I have a short time to ask questions, so I want to get in a second question on first nations co-management. Again in the election, the Liberals promised to do a better job of co-managing our oceans by working with indigenous peoples, and I have a couple of questions.

Will you include guiding principles of reconciliation that allow for and promote consent-based, shared decision-making processes—for example, of co-management or co-governance with first nations—that have the flexibility to reconcile pre-existing sovereignty in first nations jurisdictions with authority in the Fisheries Act?

The second question, if there's time, is this: do you recognize first nations' right to commercial trade and barter opportunities under the Fisheries Act?

**Mr. Terry Beech:** Thank you very much for the question.

Reconciliation is something that I personally am quite interested in working on, certainly working with you as well as other members of this committee.

I believe, and I stand to be corrected, that this government has invested about \$50 million in co-management since November 2015. We've seen the recent announcement with PNCIMA on the west coast that the minister made a number of weeks ago, and of course we're working on similar agreements with indigenous communities right across from coast to coast to coast, including the Inuit in Nunavut. It's something that we're committed to.

Something that I have also learned in this new role, in the short four and a half weeks that I've been here, is how central fish are to

indigenous communities. The fact that any reconciliation conversation will have to involve the minister and the fact that the Prime Minister put a new committee together to deal with aspects of that conversation I think shows our government's commitment to moving forward on that file.

**Mr. Fin Donnelly:** Can I have a quick question?

**The Chair:** It has to be a very quick one. Go ahead.

**Mr. Fin Donnelly:** PICFI, the Pacific integrated commercial fisheries initiative, is generating good jobs in communities, and obviously we need them. While they're fostering environmental and economic sustainability, first nations are looking for long-term renewal and expansion of the program. Our caucus, the NDP caucus, has been calling for its renewal and expansion.

Is this something that you're considering? Will there be an announcement of this important initiative?

**Mr. Terry Beech:** You know as well as I do, Mr. Donnelly, that I'm waiting for the budget, just as you are.

However, I can say that I share your sentiments that the program has been fairly successful in making sure that indigenous communities not only have access but have the equipment to exercise their access. I think that the minister is looking at ways that we could potentially grow the success of this program, but I don't have any details with me today.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Donnelly. We appreciate it.

Thank you to everybody.

That concludes this meeting, as far as the witnesses are concerned. Again, I'd like to thank the department officials for being here, including Ms. Blewett; Mr. Morel; Mr. Swerdfager; the parliamentary secretary, Mr. Beech; and Commissioner Hutchinson. Thank you, Mr. Matson and Madam Lapointe. Thank you so very much for being here, all of you. In absentia, I say thank you to the minister as well.

Before everybody leaves, of course, we have to do the business of why we're here, which is the estimates. We're going to start with supplementary estimates (C) from 2016-17.

DEPARTMENT OF FISHERIES AND OCEANS  
Vote 1c—Operating expenditures.....\$13,170,350  
Vote 5c—Capital expenditures.....\$7,540,606

(Votes 1c and 5c agreed to)

**The Chair:** Shall I report the votes on the supplementary estimates (C) to the House?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Now we move on to the main estimates for 2017-18.

DEPARTMENT OF FISHERIES AND OCEANS  
Vote 1—Operating expenditures.....\$1,258,375,596  
Vote 5—Capital expenditures.....\$751,805,774  
Vote10—Grants and contributions.....\$70,969,884

(Votes 1, 5, and 10 agreed to)

**The Chair:** Shall I report the votes on the main estimates 2017-18 to the House?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** It will be done at the earliest possible moment, which will likely be tomorrow.

Once again, committee, thank you so very much for this. Again, thank you to our parliamentary secretary and the officials at DFO.

The meeting is adjourned.

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