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Chair: Mr. Ken McDonald



Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

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• (1105)

[*English*]

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

Welcome to meeting number six of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted on January 18, 2022, the committee is meeting on its study of the traceability of fish and seafood products.

This meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the House order of November 25, 2021. Proceedings are available via the House of Commons website. The webcast shows the person speaking rather than the entirety of the committee.

Interpretation services are available for this meeting. You have the choice, at the bottom of your screen, of either floor, English or French audio. Please inform me immediately if interpretation is lost, and we'll ensure it is restored before resuming the meeting.

The “raise hand” feature at the bottom of the screen can be used if you wish to speak or to alert the chair. If you're in the room, wave, shout or do something to get my attention. Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. For those who are here by video conference, please click on the microphone icon to unmute yourself before speaking. When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute. I will remind you that all comments by members and witnesses should be addressed through the chair.

I now would like to welcome our witnesses for today.

From the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, we have Mr. Adam Burns—no stranger to this particular committee—senior director, Pacific salmon strategy initiative, Pacific region. From the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, we have Tammy Switucha, executive director, food safety and consumer protection directorate, and Kathy Twardek, senior director, food program integration division.

Before I go to the witnesses' opening statements, I will remind members that when you're asking a question, it's much easier if you identify who the question is for. I did say that at the last meeting. Sometimes a question gets asked and everybody just kind of stares into space, wondering who the question was headed for. Perhaps you could keep that in mind.

As well, I now see that Dr. Hedy Fry has joined us. She is substituting in for Mr. Cormier.

As for our witnesses, we will now go to—

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tina Miller): I'm sorry, Mr. Chair, but Mr. Arnold has his hand raised.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Arnold.

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): I have just a quick question, Mr. Chair. I believe you mentioned that Mr. Adam Burns has a role with the Pacific salmon strategic initiative. Could you repeat that? It's not in the notice of meeting we received.

The Chair: Okay. We have Adam Burns, senior director, Pacific salmon strategy initiative, Pacific region. That's the information I have.

I see that Mr. Burns has his hand up to respond. Maybe it's wrong here.

Mr. Adam Burns (Director General, Fisheries and Resources Management, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Unfortunately, Chair, you were provided the wrong information. I apologize. I'm the director general of fisheries resource management and based at national headquarters in Ottawa.

The Chair: Thank you for that clarification, Mr. Burns.

Now we'll go to our presentations by witnesses, for five minutes each, or less.

I believe, Mr. Burns, that you will go first.

Mr. Adam Burns: Thanks, Chair.

I'm here to speak at the committee's request in relation to the catch certification office and the functions that DFO serves in that manner.

The Canadian seafood industry has undergone significant developments in the area of traceability over recent years. Much of this development has been largely driven by various market access requirements, many in the form of barriers to trade resulting from requirements of other countries. Other incentives that have led to developments in this area are purely consumer- and market-driven, such as eco-labelling.

[*Translation*]

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans' catch certification program is an example of how Canada has adapted to respond to ever-evolving market access requirements, which require components of product traceability from Canadian seafood export products.

[English]

In 2009, the European Union introduced a new regulation that established market access measures as a means to prevent, deter and eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated—or IUU—fishing. The first regulation of its kind, the EU IUU regulation, requires all exporting countries of fish and seafood product to provide, on a consignment basis, catch certificates that attest to the legality of the products as determined by the competent authority, which is the authority of the flag state that manages and enables harvest activities.

The EU's catch certification scheme is intended to improve the traceability of most fish and seafood products destined for EU markets, at all stages of the production chain. The catch certification program was created in 2010 to position the Canadian industry to be able to respond to international rules such as the EU IUU regulation, and to support Canada's role in preventing, deterring and eliminating IUU fishing.

Concern for the environment has translated into requirements for evidence, through product traceability along the entire value chain, that fish and seafood are caught legally and in an environmentally sustainable manner. The onus of this proof, with supporting evidence, is now on the exporting fish and seafood industry and the government departments that regulate and enable their activities.

• (1110)

[Translation]

DFO's catch certification program has, since 2010, responded to multiple other international requirements for catch certification, and they currently provide certification for exports destined to the EU, the United Kingdom, Ukraine, Japan and Chile. They are preparing for implementation of catch certification requirements for additional export markets.

[English]

It is important to note that industry participation in the catch certification program is voluntary and market driven, which means that entire sectors of the Canadian fish and seafood industry have not participated in this program. The program gives certification only to fisheries products for which it is required, based on foreign requirements, and to date this includes only products derived from marine wild-capture fisheries. Having fisheries products certified by DFO is not required under Canadian legislation, but companies choose to participate in the certification process based on which markets they are targeting for their product.

[Translation]

The catch certification program does not provide any level of validation or verification for foreign-sourced product that is imported into Canada. For product that was imported into Canada and subsequently re-exported, Canadian importers must receive product certification from the country of origin for the product. The program can then issue the required re-export certificate which links the product moving through the Canadian supply chain to the certificate from the country of origin.

[English]

While DFO has developed the tools necessary for Canadian industry to obtain electronic certification for their export product,

DFO does not prescribe the mechanisms by which industry physically track the product while it is in their custody. Industry must remain proactive in developing and maintaining their own tracking systems to allow them to accurately identify and differentiate between batches of product, and, using this tracking system, accurately report in the fisheries certificate system from where the product was received and to whom it will be sold.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Burns. There's a bit of time left, which is always appreciated.

We now go to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. I believe Tammy Switucha is going to speak on behalf of that group.

Ms. Tammy Switucha (Executive Director, Food Safety and Consumer Protection Directorate, Canadian Food Inspection Agency): Good morning, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak with committee members today on seafood traceability.

My name is Tammy Switucha and I'm the executive director in the policy and programs branch at the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

Before I begin, I'd like to acknowledge that I am addressing you from Ottawa on the unceded, unsundered territory of the Anishinabe Algonquin nation.

I will address the committee in English, but I invite members to raise their questions or share their comments in the official language of their choice.

I have my colleague Kathy Twardek here with me today. She is the acting director in the policy and programs branch.

Mr. Chair, today I'm going to provide an overview of seafood traceability in the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's regulatory framework and tell you about the agency's work to prevent fish mislabelling and the ongoing work with respect to the Minister of Health's 2019 mandate commitment for boat-to-plate traceability.

Canada is recognized as having one of the best food safety systems in the world and has implemented robust food safety traceability requirements under the safe food for Canadians regulations, or SFCR, which came into force on January 15, 2019.

Traceability requirements under SFCR support food safety in Canada and apply to businesses, including fish and seafood processors that import, export or trade within Canada. These requirements are consistent with standards set by the international food standard-setting body, Codex Alimentarius.

There are two main components to traceability: document and labelling requirements. The SFCR requires food businesses that import, export or trade within Canada to keep records that allow food to be traced—one step back and one step forward—to the point of retail. This enables faster removal of unsafe food from the market during a food safety investigation, a recall and fraud-related investigations.

For labelling, most consumer prepackaged foods in Canada, including seafood products, must have a label with information necessary for public health or consumer protection, such as the common name, name and place of business, and lot code or unique identifier. Companies can also voluntarily add information to the label, such as the scientific name, the location of the catch or the type of fishing gear used. All information must be truthful and not misleading.

There is growing global attention on seafood mislabelling and misrepresentation. Food safety and consumer protection are Government of Canada priorities, and I'd like to share how CFIA works to protect the health and safety of Canadians when it comes to seafood misrepresentation.

CFIA verifies labelling and species authenticity of fish products as part of its regular compliance monitoring and inspection activities. Additionally, budget 2019 introduced a food policy for Canada that included an investment of \$24.4 million over five years for the CFIA to expand its capacity to detect and take action against food fraud.

As part of the food fraud initiative, in 2019-20 CFIA prioritized and carried out inspections targeting fish mislabelling and substitution. CFIA sampled and tested fish using DNA analysis collected at retail stores and at manufacturers and importers, and found that 92% of the samples were correctly labelled. The CFIA took appropriate action on all unsatisfactory results.

It's important to note that compliance is ultimately the responsibility of companies. To promote compliance, CFIA works with industry and provides various compliance tools, such as the CFIA fish list, which links fish species to common names, and the industry labelling tool.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to talk about the boat-to-plate traceability for fish and seafood, which was included in the Minister of Health's mandate letter in 2019. CFIA is leading this work in collaboration with the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada. To date, CFIA, DFO and AAFC have engaged extensively with stakeholders to gather information and perspectives related to seafood traceability and labelling in Canada.

An online 120-day consultation was launched in August 2021 to seek the views of stakeholders on various aspects of boat-to-plate traceability. Feedback has been received from respondents, and the analysis is currently under way. The CFIA will publish a "what we heard" report this spring.

In conclusion, Canada has a robust regulatory foundation and inspection system that supports food safety and consumer protection. The CFIA values engagement and collaboration to continuously

improve and address issues related to seafood tracing and mislabelling.

● (1115)

Once again, I thank you for this opportunity and look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

We'll now go to our first round of questioning, for six minutes or less.

Mr. Perkins, go ahead, please.

Mr. Rick Perkins (South Shore—St. Margarets, CPC): Thank you, witnesses, for being the leadoff for this important study.

In 2019, the executive director of the food safety and consumer protection directorate of CFIA, in speaking to the safe food for Canadians regulation, said that we require all businesses, including importers, to be licensed, to have traceability records in place and to have a preventative control program, and that this is how businesses are ensuring that their labels are truthful and not misleading.

You also said in your testimony that in your audits, you have found that 92% of the food labelling in seafood is correct.

I made my weekly trip to the grocery store to look at what is on some of the seafood that's available in the store. I'd like your opinion on some of these. I can share with the committee, if you want, the photos of some of the products at the appropriate time.

I'd like you to please define for me what "organic Atlantic salmon" means.

● (1120)

Ms. Tammy Switucha: Mr. Chair, not seeing the actual label itself, I will try my best to provide the answer.

In Canada the safe food for Canadian regulations require that most prepackaged food be labelled with specific information to help consumers make informed purchasing decisions. This is consistent across all foods. They have to include the common name of the food, ingredients, nutrition information, best before date, net quantity and the company name and address. Other labels, such as "organic" and other such claims, are applied on a voluntary basis.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I appreciate that. I'm sorry but I have limited time.

I'll ask you about a couple more definitions. I guess we don't know what that is; that's a definition created by the company and not by the government.

How about “Pacific salmon prepared in Canada”?

Ms. Tammy Switucha: Food must be labelled with the origin of the food. That's required in our regulation. The use of the word “Pacific” and other denominators or originators like that is, of course, voluntary and not prescribed within our regulations.

That information can be applied, as long as it's truthful and not misleading.

Mr. Rick Perkins: The Pacific's a big ocean, so what you're telling us is that we're not sure where it's coming from.

“Haddock made in Canada from domestic and imported products”: I don't know how you make haddock from domestic and imported products, but I wonder if you could clarify that labelling.

Ms. Tammy Switucha: Unfortunately, I don't have access to the product that you're referring to. It's difficult for me to answer that question.

Mr. Rick Perkins: This took me about 10 minutes at the grocery store, so I presume the inspections, which you said were 92% accurate, would have looked at some of these things.

With respect to shrimp rings, we all know they are very popular. A lot of people get them. There are a lot of different brands of them in the grocery store. One of the most famous brands that we know at a big store here is labelled “product of Vietnam”. What does “product of Vietnam” mean? Is it caught, processed, shipped? What is it? What does “product of Vietnam” mean?

Ms. Tammy Switucha: The requirement with respect to country-of-origin labelling is that a product be labelled as coming from the country in which the food has undergone the last substantial processing step that has changed the nature of the food. This is consistent with the international standards set by Codex Alimentarius.

Most foods in Canada must have a country-of-origin claim on them if they are imported, so not seeing that product—

Mr. Rick Perkins: I'm sorry. I have only limited time.

“Product of Vietnam” doesn't tell me where it was caught or where it was processed, so you can see why consumers are confused. Obviously, if we're trying to strive to meet only international standards, we're not actually protecting our consumers and doing what's right.

You mentioned in your testimony that we cover only “one step back and one step forward”. That doesn't seem like ocean-to-plate traceability. Can you tell me why we don't know more than “one step back” what we're receiving when something arrives in Canada and what Canadians are eating?

Ms. Tammy Switucha: The rules around traceability pertain to food safety and not necessarily the method or location of the catch. The traceability requirements in the safe food for Canadians regulations were quite clear that each exchange of product, of food, along the supply chain must keep documentation records as to who received the food and where the food came from.

While we don't prescribe how that's done, we know from experience at the CFIA and in our verification of industry's compliance with traceability that these records are very closely tied along the supply chain, up until retail.

Mr. Rick Perkins: The answer is that, no, you don't know what any of the department—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Perkins. Your time is up.

I have a just a quick reminder for those in the room who are asking questions. Be sure your mike is off before a witness or anybody else tries to respond.

As someone who is doing this “hybridly”, I'm getting a lot of feedback as well if I key up my mike and there are two mikes on in the room. Try to be a little more conscious of that, please. It will make for a much smoother meeting.

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

• (1125)

Mr. Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.): My questions are directed to the CFIA. Either one of you can answer. I want to follow up on the line of questioning from Mr. Perkins.

Under your notes, you state that “CFIA verifies labelling and species authenticity of fish products”. Going to the case of the product Mr. Perkins identified, how would that have been labelled by CFIA without knowing exactly what the origin of the product was? The reference was to “haddock” and then something else that may be in it. How would a label like that be approved in Canada?

Ms. Tammy Switucha: I believe you indicated how CFIA would label the product. It's up to the company responsible for producing or selling that product to make sure that—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: My question was about how CFIA verifies the labelling of species authenticity.

Let me go to the question this way. When you referenced that 92% of the samples that you analyzed were labelled correctly, what would 92% of the samples you monitored represent in the overall seafood that would be available? Was it 92% of 5% of the product or was it 92% of 100%? Statistics are statistics, but they tell a different story. Could you elaborate?

Ms. Tammy Switucha: Yes. Thank you for allowing me to elaborate on that particular study.

That study was done as part of our fraud initiative to gather more intelligence with respect to the extent and scope of misrepresentation in Canada. We targeted specific species in this study. We looked at nine different species that we knew had a history of misrepresentation in the marketplace.

While that's not fully representative of the entire fish and seafood product availability in Canada, it did give us a sense of the amount, generally speaking, of the misrepresentation, so when we point to the 92% compliance or the 8% for non-compliance, that's specific to that study and the parameters of that study and not necessarily representative of the entire marketplace and the entire supply chain.

We know through our studies, however, that along the supply chain the rate of compliance is very high at the production and processing stage. As you get further down the supply chain, into retail and the restaurant level, then the level of non-compliance is higher than that.

We appreciate the questions here. It's important to understand the parameters under which the study was undertaken, because the methodology was quite specific.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: You targeted areas that have a history of misrepresentation of species. Could you advise the committee what species they fall under, or what category?

Ms. Tammy Switucha: We targeted butterfish, cod, halibut, kingfish, sea bass, snapper—red and other, sole, tuna and yellow-tail. As I said, these are known to have a higher likelihood of being misrepresented in the marketplace.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: How would they be misrepresented?

Ms. Tammy Switucha: In this particular study, the ability to identify something as being misrepresented was based on the regulatory requirements and the fact that these common names did not match with those on our fish list, which matches the scientific name with the common name. In this instance, again, it was specific to verifying whether the guidance we provide to industry was being followed with respect to the scientific names and the common names.

• (1130)

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Have there been charges laid as a result of the investigation on the 8% that were labelled incorrectly?

Ms. Tammy Switucha: We took follow-up enforcement action on all of the non-compliances, and the actions we undertook ranged from letters of non-compliance to fines. There were other enforcement actions. All of those were followed up by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: In the misrepresentation on the labelling, was the origin in Canada or from outside the country of the product that was misrepresented on the label? If you don't have the information, could you provide it to the committee? I would like to know of those that were not in compliance that were mislabelled.

Did the product originate in Canada? Was it caught in Canada or processed in Canada, or did it enter Canada? If you could provide that information, I would appreciate it.

Ms. Tammy Switucha: Mr. Chair, if you'll allow me, I can provide that information now .

The unsatisfactory results that we discovered as part of this surveillance study revealed that around 12% were misrepresented in grocery stores. That included fish that was packaged at the fishmonger itself within the grocery store, followed by a 5% rate for imported products and a 4% rate by domestic processors.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

We'll now go to Madame Desbiens, for six minutes please.

[*Translation*]

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

I am very pleased to begin this major study on the labelling and traceability of our seafood products.

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

Since this is my motion, I'm very moved. I must say that my father was a cod fisher and worked in the hotel industry for a large part of his life. I have a quick little anecdote to tell you about that.

My father liked to buy products from Matane, including cod from the St. Lawrence. One day, a distributor who came to see him told him that his seafood products came from Quebec and that they had been fished in the St. Lawrence. When my father opened the box, inside there was a little note that said it was Russian cod. You should have seen it: the box of cod flew right into the garbage can, because my father was so angry.

During the last federal consultation on vessel-to-table traceability, which was launched last August, 44% of samples had misleading labelling in the restaurant and retail sector. But you're telling us, Ms. Switucha, that 92% of the samples are properly labelled.

How do you explain the discrepancy between these two percentages?

[*English*]

Ms. Tammy Switucha: I believe you're referring to the studies that were conducted by non-governmental organizations such as SeaChoice and Oceana. Is that correct?

It's certainly understandable that there may be questions with respect to the differences in the amount of misrepresentation or non-compliance that's seen in both studies. First, I would like to point out that it's important to keep in mind the methodology that was used for both studies. While I don't have information on how those studies were conducted, what their sampling size was or what their overall target was, these are very important parameters to keep in mind. How the sampling was designed can influence the results.

The CFIA understands that the samples collected by Oceana and others were taken from restaurants as well as retail, whereas the CFIA samples were collected from retail stores as well as at the domestic processing and importing levels. We focused our work in the upstream part of the supply chain, while Oceana and others focused their efforts at the other end of the supply chain, so you can see there could also be some differences there.

How they also determined non-compliance needs to be understood. While I don't have that information, from the CFIA's perspective, the non-compliance was based on our regulatory requirements in comparison to our guidance in the fish list. There may have also been different testing used. We don't know what testing methods were used in all of those studies, though the use of DNA testing is currently the gold star that many use. It's important, from a regulatory perspective, to ensure we're comparing apples to apples.

• (1135)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Thank you. That's very interesting.

Does that mean that there could be a gap between the department's studies and the reality in the field?

Is the problem that the two can't be combined in a more comprehensive study, in other words, monitoring the entire chain?

[*English*]

Ms. Tammy Switucha: We've really valued Oceana's and Sea-Choice's studies. We've met with them several times over the past several years to further understand their research and look at their data. We have worked with them to update and change a lot of the guidance we have available to stakeholders to make sure they use the labelling guidance properly.

There has been quite a bit of collaboration between Oceana, Sea-Choice, universities and other academic studies, because the problem of fish misrepresentation in Canada really requires a collective effort, and we need to all work together as we all collect data and understand the problem further and share that information. I'm pleased to say we've been doing that quite regularly. Oceana has been very forthcoming in sharing its information. We benefit from that, and vice versa. There is a good amount of collaboration, ensuring we cover those gaps.

While it's not perfect, you may not be aware that it's the responsibility of municipalities and provincial governments to undertake that level of surveillance in restaurants. CFIA doesn't have the authority to be there. That's why working with all of our partners helps us develop the full story.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

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

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Thank you very much, Ms. Switucha.

[*English*]

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Thank you to those who have brought forward information today. I appreciate this information.

I'll get right to the questions, but thank you to the witnesses who have come here today. Some of the questions I asked were very similar to Madame Desbiens' question. I wanted to build off some of those.

We saw it highlighted in a 2020 study from Oceana and the UBC Fisheries Economic Research Unit that our poorly regulated supply chains are accounting for an estimated loss for Canadian fishers of about \$379 million, and for \$93.8 million in lost tax revenue. Why aren't we taking more action to ensure our fishers aren't being undercut by illegal, inferior products?

Ms. Tammy Switucha: I don't believe that question falls within CFIA's mandate. I don't know whether my colleague from Fisheries and Oceans has a response to that.

Mr. Adam Burns: If I understand the member's question correctly, it relates to products that are being imported into Canada that

are incorrectly identified as a particular product. DFO's jurisdiction relates to the harvest of Canadian fish and seafood. We do not regulate the importation of seafood products into Canada.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

Currently, we are seeing the country of origin labelling standard requiring only that products be labelled with their last place of "transformation", rather than their actual origin. I wanted to ask if that is correct.

If a consumer buys a seafood product labelled "product of the United States", for example, we know that.... The example I was given was that if a fish is caught in China, then shipped to the United States and breaded in the United States, it's labelled as a product of the United States. I'm wondering if you can confirm that this information is correct and if you have any thoughts around how to best move forward with this information.

• (1140)

Ms. Tammy Switucha: You are correct. The Codex Alimentarius standard, which many countries follow—the EU, the United States and Canada included—with respect to country of origin and that declaration on a label, signifies where the food underwent the last substantial processing step.

Now, as part of this inquiry into the country of origin, it's important, and I'd like to share that at the CFIA we have undertaken significant consultations over the last five years to modernize our food labelling requirements. The country of origin was one area where we undertook quite a bit of study. We were prepared...and are still looking at making future regulatory changes in that area. The regulatory process has been somewhat delayed because of the COVID pandemic, but it is an area that we have received quite a bit of feedback on and will continue pursuing as part of our ongoing look to modernize our labels.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you very much. I apologize. I have so many questions I want to ask that I'm letting myself get too excited about questions, but I appreciate that information.

One thing that has come up is an area that I'm hearing there's a struggle around: how we label fish with a common name. The government has a mandate to lay out a better boat-to-plate process, but why are we letting multiple species get labelled as the same fish? For example, I'm learning that common names are often used to identify seafood products, and that they're too broad, making it difficult for consumers to understand what they're getting. "Sole" and "snapper", for example, are common names that have huge sub-species that qualify under that name, which, as we can see, can cause issues in many different ways. Saying that seafood is "sole" when in fact it is another species cheats us all.

I'm wondering if you can speak to that a little further.

Ms. Tammy Switucha: You are correct. Keeping a list of common names is a tool that many countries around the world use to help food processors and production companies ensure that they label the product accurately. In many instances, a scientific name can carry various common names. It is a challenge to continuously keep that information up to date, but that's why our partnerships with academia and with non-government organizations have been so important as of late, to make sure we are providing the best information to industry to keep their labels accurate.

I'll remind the member that it is industry's responsibility—that it is companies' responsibility—to make sure the labels they put on their products are truthful and not misleading, and CFIA will take action if there is an issue in that regard.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Barron. Your six minutes are up.

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

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you to the witnesses, and thank you to Madame Desbiens for putting this study forward. It is of great value to Canadian consumers and Canadian fish harvesters.

Ms. Switucha or your colleague, developing seafood traceability was included in the mandate letters of three ministers—agriculture, health and fisheries—more than two years ago. Could you provide us with what progress has been made since then?

Ms. Tammy Switucha: Following the 2019 mandate commitment to the Minister of Health, the CFIA, along with Fisheries and Oceans and Agriculture and Agri-Food, began our engagement with stakeholders, with academia and with non-government organizations to get a better understanding of the issue. We spent a bit of time undergoing discussions to further our knowledge.

Last year, in 2021, in partnership with those other departments, we launched an official consultation along with a discussion paper to gather consumer and industry feedback on three areas related to fish traceability. This issue covers the mandate of all three departments. CFIA's role pertains to food safety, whereas for the Department of Fisheries and Oceans we had some questions related to sustainability. For Agriculture and Agri-Food there were some points related to trade and market access and the branding of Canadian products.

Our consultation concluded at the end of 2021. We're currently analyzing the feedback received from that consultation. We hope to be able to—

• (1145)

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

With regard to current Canadian traceability standards, you indicated that not all seafood is tracked under that. For the seafood that is tracked, are there digital records of point of origin, species and harvest method, to verify that the seafood was legally caught? Are they maintained all the way through the supply chain?

Ms. Tammy Switucha: I believe questions with respect to catch and sustainability fall to my colleague.

Mr. Adam Burns: Chair, I can respond to that from DFO's perspective and our jurisdiction, which is up to the wharf.

Certainly, we have a robust enforcement regime that's in place to ensure that harvesters are operating within the authority of their licence. They would be authorized to harvest only the specific species they are authorized to harvest. Our fishery officers would be enforcing those conditions of licence.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Developing this program is a complex initiative involving multiple government departments and agencies. How is the development being coordinated between those government entities? How closely have the different departments been working together on the traceability file since receiving the mandate in 2019?

Ms. Tammy Switucha: There's been good collaboration between the three departments. During our investigative and consultation period we organized and participated collaboratively in various stakeholder meetings. Prior to the pandemic, we held a few rounds of face-to-face meetings. During the pandemic we have had joint meetings with various stakeholders. The development of the consultation paper and the analysis of the feedback have also been done in close collaboration between all three, and the report that will be published will be under the banner of all three departments.

Mr. Mel Arnold: What is the timeline for getting boat-to-plate traceability in place, or at least developing a framework for it?

Ms. Tammy Switucha: As I mentioned earlier, we will be publishing a “what we heard” report in the spring of this year, whereby we'll be looking at and determining whether there was consensus from Canadians, consumers, industry and others with respect to the approach.

There are various options available, both regulatory and non-regulatory, and while there was no real consensus from some of the early feedback that we got from Canadians, I think they are mainly concerned about making sure the fish and seafood they are eating is safe to eat. We are exploring but have not yet landed on specific options, whether regulatory or non-regulatory.

Industry is conscious of the additional regulatory burden that they might face. The exploration of non-regulatory opportunities to put in place a framework is available, but I'd like to remind the member that we already have very good food safety traceability measures in Canada. The expansion of that will need to be taken into close consideration with our mandate and that of our partners as well.

Our work to date—

• (1150)

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arnold. Your time is up. You've gone a bit over, actually.

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

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

When we do traceability, Ms. Switucha, it seems that the primary focus of the CFIA is food safety. What makes a food unsafe, particularly when it comes to fish?

Ms. Tammy Switucha: You are absolutely correct. Our focus, from a traceability perspective, is food safety and ensuring that when a food is prepared, manufactured, labelled, packaged and put up for trade in Canada, or imported or exported, it meets food safety requirements. That means it's prepared in conditions that are hygienic, that there is no risk of contamination, whether that be microbiological or chemical, that producers follow all the food safety rules that are laid out in our regulations and—

Mr. Ken Hardie: I know there's a very long answer here, Madam. I don't really have time for long answers, but I get the picture.

If somebody presents a truckload of fish caught in the Wabigoon River—I don't know if you're familiar with that, but mercury contamination is a pretty big deal up in the Dryden area—would anybody know? Would anybody check for mercury contamination on a fish caught in Canada, or anywhere in the world?

Ms. Tammy Switucha: CFIA does extensive testing on fish products on an annual basis. We test approximately 4,000 samples every year for chemical and microbiological contaminants. We have a fairly robust surveillance program that tells us if fish are safe to eat in Canada.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Would that be for both domestically caught and imported?

Ms. Tammy Switucha: Yes. That is correct.

Mr. Ken Hardie: When we deal with traceability, it should be a process by which we look for fraud; somebody's passing turbot off as halibut, let's say. There's also unfair competition. Are there situations where our market is being damaged because somebody somewhere else is literally scooping up everything from the ocean using very poor or unsustainable fishing habits?

There's the destruction piece of that, and then there is fish laundering. A species at risk caught in one part of the world passes through maybe one or two processes here in North America and we think it's just ducky. It's just fine, but it doesn't sound like anybody is in a position to really follow that. Is that true?

Ms. Tammy Switucha: The CFIA has a mandate for ensuring that food that is imported into Canada or food that's produced here is safe to eat. When it comes to catch practices or other issues that you mentioned, we don't have the mandate, but we are—

Mr. Ken Hardie: Who does have a mandate there, Madam? Who has the mandate in Canada?

Ms. Tammy Switucha: I'm sorry. I'm not in a position to answer that question. I'm not—

Mr. Ken Hardie: I understand that, but I just needed to know. This is not an indictment of CFIA, but if you knew, it would be helpful for us to know.

Once a fish is caught, and particularly if it's caught offshore, do you know how many hands, how many processes, how many shipping legs it goes through, before it ends up in my local grocery store?

Ms. Tammy Switucha: Not offhand, but I can say that the fish supply chain is a complex one. The path that's taken in the supply chain, from the time it's caught to the time it lands on a consumer's plate, could go through many hands. It depends from where it origi-

nates, of course, but it is a very complex supply chain. I agree with you.

• (1155)

Mr. Ken Hardie: That suggests, then, that the one step back review is woefully inadequate in terms of keeping in touch. Has there ever been any serious audit of a whole supply chain to, in fact, see where something came from that ends up in the fishmonger's section of our grocery store and how many times it crossed the ocean, going back and forth to various processors? Has an audit ever been done, to your knowledge? Again, this isn't an indictment of you if you don't know.

Ms. Tammy Switucha: Our regular surveillance and verification activities demonstrate that there's a very high level of compliance. Fish has been regulated in Canada for quite a long time, even before the safe food for Canadians regulations came into being in 2019, and is probably one of the most stringently regulated of all the foods out there.

While I can't speak for other departments, I can certainly reassure you that fish is highly verified by the CFIA for its food safety risks. We follow up on investigations as required, when that intelligence or a complaint is made to CFIA.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hardie, your time is up.

We'll now go to Madame Desbiens, for two and a half minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

It's very interesting. Again, I thank the witnesses very much for being with us.

I'd like to come back to the last consultation between Fisheries and Oceans Canada, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, where the European Union and the United States were seen to have better ways of assessing the safety and traceability of food and seafood.

How is Canada not catching up with the requirements of other countries, according to this consultation?

[*English*]

Ms. Tammy Switucha: I can speak from the food safety perspective. The United States, the EU and Canada all have very similar food safety traceability requirements. I understand that their work related to fish and seafood traceability specifically, and their programs for those, was done with the objective of sustainability and conservation under those mandates.

From CFIA's perspective, we are very much on par with the EU and the United States in ensuring that for food safety purposes, food can be traced back to its origins if there's a foodborne illness, or if there's a fraud investigation. As is done by the EU and the U.S., we all follow international standards with respect to document maintenance and traceability for the purposes of food safety investigations.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Thank you.

Earlier, you said that your work reverberated, to some extent, down to the provinces and municipalities. I have difficulty seeing how a small municipality like Isle-aux-Coudres, for instance, can control the arrival or cod from Russia in one of its restaurants.

Where does all this start and where does it all end? In Quebec, for example, does it go through the Quebec ministry of agriculture, fisheries and agri-food?

[*English*]

Ms. Tammy Switucha: We really work closely with all of our provincial and territorial colleagues, especially MAPAQ. The CFIA works closely with MAPAQ, which follows up within the province of Quebec to verify local establishments and works with the municipalities. Food safety has a multiple jurisdiction responsibility, and we work very closely with all levels to ensure that consumers are protected from end to end in the supply chain.

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Desbiens.

We'll now go to Ms. Barron for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Following up on my previous question, I have another question about the industry. I believe this should be directed to Ms. Switucha, but correct me if I'm wrong.

Many in the industry want to build increased accountability and a responsible supply chain. There are environmental, economic and health reasons for doing so, which we are all aware of. Most don't want to sell a bad product, but unfortunately there's no way for them to know. I'm wondering, beyond consultation, how we're bringing together partners to collaborate and find solutions around this issue.

• (1200)

Ms. Tammy Switucha: I can certainly speak to your question from the food safety perspective.

We collaborate and engage with the food industry on a regular basis, even when we're not in consultation, whether it's on a policy or on regulations. We use industry input and feedback all the time. I'm not sure I can answer your question from the perspective of sustainability and environmental reasons, but from a health and safety perspective, the industry is very committed to ensuring it sells safe product. The high compliance rates in Canada can point to that, but we—

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: I appreciate that information. Thank you. I'm sorry, but I just want to make sure I get my other question in.

You also mentioned that companies can voluntarily add information to the label, such as the scientific name, the location of the

catch or the type of fishing gear used. You also said all this information must be truthful and not misleading. We know that global supply chains are incredibly opaque and complicated.

Would most importers even have access to this information? Even if they wanted to label the product with more details, wouldn't they just be opening themselves up to increased liability by doing so?

Ms. Tammy Switucha: One of the requirements in the regulations is that every food processor or manufacturer have a preventative control plan. That plan also includes all the information related to how they're labelling their product. It is their responsibility under the law to make sure they can demonstrate that they are labelling their products truthfully and not in a misleading way.

Importers, under the new law, which is a new tool kit that's been given, are under very specific requirements with regard to what they must have to enable compliance. It ultimately rests on them to ensure that for whatever they're importing, they work with their supplier to make sure that information is accurately displayed on the label and the food is safe to eat in Canada.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Barron.

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

Mr. Clifford Small (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, CPC): My question is for Mr. Burns with regard to DFO's catch certification program.

I refer to your remarks regarding concern that fish be caught in an environmentally sustainable manner. Determining the degree of environmental sustainability of certain seafood must be quite the process. You rely on science, stakeholder input and input by ENGOs to formulate what sustainability means.

Mr. Burns, can you tell me what percentage of the input into an environmental sustainability label comes from ENGOs?

Mr. Adam Burns: With respect to the comment I made in my opening remarks around environmental sustainability, I was speaking about the foreign countries that have imposed these certification requirements. The requirements speak specifically to the flag states certifying that products are regulated. These certifications do not delve deeper into an individual flag state's regulation of the fishery to make a determination as to whether that regulation achieves sustainability. That was the origin of the comments I made.

For Canada as the flag state in the case of, for example, EU certification, there is no requirement beyond certifying that a product has come from a regulated fishery. All Canadian fisheries are regulated.

Mr. Clifford Small: I'll tell you what led me to this. In Atlantic Canada, a lot of attention is being paid to right whale protection, which of course is very important. How much consideration is given to stakeholders like fish harvesters, for example, when breaking mechanisms are now required for fishing gear and haul up lines? Fishers say this will result in lines often breaking needlessly and fishing gear being unretrievable, resulting in ghost fishing gear.

Mr. Burns, how wise is it to force this breaking mechanism requirement on fishermen in terms of determining sustainability labelling if we're going to leave fishing gear on the bottom in areas where right whales aren't even prevalent?

• (1205)

Mr. Adam Burns: That is indeed within the area of my responsibility as well, so I can speak to that.

Currently, there is no requirement for breaking points in the lines for fixed gear in fisheries—crab and lobster primarily. Those requirements are not yet in place. The minister has indicated that whale-safe gear requirements will be in effect in licences issued as of January 1, 2023.

We're currently engaged in significant consultation with the fishing industry to explore the unique nature of the particulars of individual fisheries and which types of whale-safe gear contrivances would be most appropriate in those fisheries. We're engaged in trials of various types of gear configurations that may generate a greater degree of whale safety for the gear.

At this time those requirements are not yet in place. Indeed we are working directly with the fishing industry to try to find ways to avoid exactly those issues. That's why, when the department hosted a gear innovation summit in Halifax in 2020, just before the pandemic, it was focused on two things: whale-safe gear and ghost gear. We know we need to address both of those issues simultaneously. We're looking to avoid, to the maximum extent possible, unintended consequences from whale-safe gear requirements.

Mr. Clifford Small: In your opinion, on the east, northeast and Labrador coast in the Newfoundland region, where right whales are known to be very infrequent visitors, do you think being practical has a role to play in the sustainable aspect of labelling?

Mr. Adam Burns: I'm sorry. I'm not sure I follow the question in terms of the link to sustainable labelling.

Mr. Clifford Small: I meant, how much onus do you put on practicality in terms of, firstly, where right whales are prevalent, and secondly, how much fishing gear could be left on the bottom and continue fishing because of this breaking technology?

It's very important and very timely. Fishers in my riding and in my province are very concerned about this.

The Chair: Mr. Burns, if you could you provide an answer in writing, it would be more appropriate. It's gone well over the time allotted for the questioning.

We'll go on now to Mr. Hanley for five minutes or less please.

Mr. Brendan Hanley (Yukon, Lib.): I'm sorry. I got caught off guard. I thought I was coming in later on.

Mr. Burns, given that the boat-to-plate requirement was in three mandate letters in 2019 and this is clearly a work in progress, yet it is not in the 2021 mandate letters—that I can see anyway—I wanted you to talk about how much of a priority is being placed on carrying on with this work among your many other priorities.

Mr. Adam Burns: I can begin, although I will note that while DFO is actively engaged in this work, CFIA is leading on this, and certainly I can say that the work continues. We've just wrapped up consultation with stakeholders related to the boat-to-plate element. My colleagues from CFIA can probably speak better to next steps moving forward on that.

• (1210)

Ms. Tammy Switucha: Yes. While the boat-to-plate traceability item was not listed in the Minister of Health's latest mandate letter, it very much falls within CFIA's priority under the food policy and the funding we've received with respect to food fraud.

We continue to undertake our work to prevent and detect fraud in Canada, which includes fish and seafood but also focuses on many other foods that are subject to fraud and misrepresentation in Canada. As my colleague noted, we continue to analyze the feedback from the consultation and we'll be reporting on that in the spring.

Mr. Brendan Hanley: To go back to Mr. Burns, in your presentation you talked about the voluntary and market-driven industry participation in the catch certification program and said that "entire sectors of the Canadian fish and seafood industry have not participated in the program".

I just wonder if you could elaborate and give me a bit of a deeper understanding of that and the significance of it.

Mr. Adam Burns: What I was referring to there is that the catch certification office is in place to respond to other countries' import requirements related to certification that seafood products are not IUU. Only those sectors of the fishery that export to countries that require such certificates participate in the program, although given that the EU and other significant markets now require it, I would say that essentially all of the marine wild-capture fishery is participating.

I certainly wouldn't want the committee to think that every harvester is engaged in this, but there would be significant exports from most of our significant fisheries that would be going to third countries that require this certification, so the participation rate would be very high. However, it's not a mandatory certification, in the sense that it is not currently part of any sort of Canadian traceability system.

Mr. Brendan Hanley: I have another question for Ms. Switucha. I'm still grappling with what I think reflects Madame Desbiens' question around the gap between the upstream study and the downstream study, the difference there and the implications for the consumer.

I wonder if you can help me with the next steps to address that global picture of what really, when it comes to the consumer level, is that 50% or that 40%-and-something discrepancy, which is somewhat concerning.

Ms. Tammy Switucha: [*Inaudible—Editor*] and I certainly appreciate the challenge this poses to the members of the committee, and to average Canadians as well, in terms of understanding whether the food and fish they're eating are accurately labelled and, if they order something, if that is what they're getting.

I can state quite clearly that from a CFIA perspective we have a very good understanding of where along the supply chain—for which we have the mandate to regulate—there are non-compliances. Through partnerships, as I mentioned earlier, we can enhance our knowledge and ability to take additional steps in partnership with regulatory agencies in the provinces to undertake any necessary follow-up. It's not perfect, but it's the system we have, so I think it's incumbent on all of us to work together to be able to deal with this issue of misrepresentation in food.

• (1215)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hanley.

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

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): I hope I say your name right, Ms. Switucha. I have a simple question on the consultation you referred to earlier, the 120-day one on this specifically. How was it conducted? Who was invited to participate? Was it in person or was it via Zoom? I know that's a lot to answer in 60 seconds, but do your best.

Ms. Tammy Switucha: The consultation to which I referred, in August 2021, was an online consultation that was open to anyone to participate in. There was a discussion paper that was prepared between all three departments. This was posted online on all of our websites as well as the Consulting with Canadians web page for the Government of Canada.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: How many actually participated?

Ms. Tammy Switucha: We received a total of 150 submissions, some of them using the questionnaire that was provided in the consultation paper. Others were provided more generally, by email to us.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: I'd like a detailed synopsis of what that looked like, if you could provide that to the committee.

I'll pass the rest of my time to Mr. Perkins.

Thank you.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Again, thank you, witnesses, for this very interesting testimony.

I'd like to follow up quickly on the excellent questions from Mr. Hardie and Mr. Morrissey.

You mentioned that the CFIA—or the government—is sampling 4,000 products a year. Is that where you got the 92%?

Ms. Tammy Switucha: No. This is the regular surveillance that we undertake to ensure that fish are not contaminated with either pathogens or chemicals. It's not related to the targeted study we did in 2019-20 for misrepresentation. That was a very focused study on a particular issue, versus our regular responsibility for monitoring the safety of fish that's eaten in Canada.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Okay, so that's not a regular study. Thank you.

Of the nine species that you mentioned you sampled in that study, you might be surprised to learn that in the Oceana report they found that escolar, which is a difficult fish for humans, was often sold as butterfish; fish sold as cod was actually haddock or pollock, which is much cheaper; halibut—my personal favourite—was haddock, flounder or turbot, which is much cheaper; and, unbelievably, wild-caught Pacific salmon was actually farmed Atlantic salmon, not even the same species and not even wild. Is that the same type of finding your team got?

Ms. Tammy Switucha: I'm not surprised at all by Oceana's findings. They have done some very good work in terms of looking into this problem.

As I mentioned earlier, we have to keep in mind the parameters of our study and the parameters of that done by Oceana. While the differences seem very stark, there are probably some differences in the way we did our studies and how we compared the results.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Oceana found—probably similar to you—that about 22% of retail was actually mislabelled. They used your standards of the fish classification—with 200 species, for example, classified as snapper, which seems confusing to me. It was all DNA-tested at an independent lab, so I think it's a pretty valuable study.

Has the government ever considered labelling for farmed salmon and aquaculture fish and also the distinction between those farmed in Canada and those farmed abroad?

Ms. Tammy Switucha: The method of that falls within the area of sustainability and is not something the CFIA has an authority to do, but we do absolutely require origin to be indicated on products that are sold in Canada, and that falls within our mandate.

Mr. Rick Perkins: [*Inaudible—Editor*] some of those confusing origin things earlier, and you said there was a high degree of compliance, but you could not answer what the origin of any of these things was, and you only go back one.... I don't know how you get a high degree of compliance when you don't go through the full international supply chain. Can you help me understand that?

• (1220)

Ms. Tammy Switucha: When I speak to a high degree of compliance, I'm speaking about compliance with the regulations and the law in Canada. Currently, the law specifies that there are specific things for the health and safety of Canadians that must be on a label. Some of those other items are voluntary claims, and that is not something that there are currently requirements for, but they do, under the Food and Drugs Act and the regulations, still need to be truthful and not misleading.

The Chair: Thank you.

Your time is up, Mr. Perkins. Actually, you've gone over.

Mr. Kelloway, you have five minutes.

Mr. Mike Kelloway (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses today. There are some great questions and great dialogue.

I'd also like to thank Madame Desbiens for putting forward this study and Mr. Morrissey for his work on this topic in the last session. I know it's important to him as well.

Throughout this conversation and some of the research I did... I understand that CFIA did its own study of fish misrepresentation in 2019. Can you unpack what you found?

I'm also interested to know if you're planning to do more studies, so I have two questions: What did you find? Take some time to unpack that, if you'd like.

Further to that, are you planning to do more studies?

Ms. Tammy Switucha: As I indicated earlier, in 2019 and 2020 we undertook our first look into fish misrepresentation using the funding that we were provided in the food policy. We took a very targeted approach, looking at these nine species that we knew had a high likelihood of being misrepresented. We undertook sampling at various levels along the supply chain, so we took samples of foods that were imported and we took samples of fish that was domestically produced. We also went into retail and sampled fish that was packaged in the stores, as well as the fish sold in stores that came from processors. As I mentioned, in that particular study, we found that 8% of those samples were non-compliant.

We have continued doing that work. In the past year, we have followed up with additional sampling and testing, using the same parameters, and we're finding almost identical results. Domestically processed foods are mislabelled at around 4%, imports at around 5%, and at retail it's approximately 12%. This has been consistent over the past few years.

We'll continue to monitor this through our targeted projects as we move forward, because we're very concerned about misrepresentation. With the help of these other organizations, we can add to our intelligence to further investigate the problem.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Throughout this meeting, I've heard in one form or another from a variety of folks from different parties about authenticity and determining authenticity. Can you walk through what happens when tests show that a product is misrepresented or mislabelled?

Ms. Tammy Switucha: We undertake testing through DNA analysis to determine the species of any animal-based product, fish included, and when we find non-compliance, CFIA inspectors have a tool kit of actions available to them to use. Depending on the history of the specific company or client in a case, if they have a history of non-compliance, the inspectors have a variety of actions available to them. They can seize the product; they can detain it, and they can require that the product be relabelled. In very serious situations, when there's a long history of non-compliance, we now have the ability under the safe food for Canadians regulations to seize their licence, causing them to cease operation. As always, we have the mechanism to be able to prosecute as well.

• (1225)

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Do you have stats in terms of someone who doesn't comply? Do you have yearly stats that are accumulated to determine what measures were taken, what percentage of people were offside and who faced accountability measures as a result of being somewhat of a bad actor?

Ms. Tammy Switucha: At the CFIA we publish all of our enforcement decisions on our website, and that information can be easily found there. Yes, we do.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kelloway.

We'll now go to Madame Desbiens for two and a half minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

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

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being with us for the two-hour meeting. It's a lot, so we appreciate it very much.

I would like to talk about a concrete reality on the ground. There is the entire Canadian fisheries economy, but there are also authentic values and identity values. This is something we know well in the St. Lawrence River. The river and its estuary are important elements and an incredible resource bank.

However, because the opening dates of the fishing season are not in line with reality, we are in danger of losing certain ways of fishing, such as our capelin fishing. Weir fishing is a traditional way of fishing that requires expertise. We are very concerned about losing that tradition. There are still two weir fisheries, one of which is in the Maritimes, I believe.

How can DFO decentralize part of its exercise?

I think my question is more for Mr. Burns.

[*English*]

Mr. Adam Burns: I'm sorry. I'm not sure I quite follow your question in terms of decentralizing.

[Translation]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Under the legislative process, you have the right to fish capelin in June, whereas in reality, capelin can be fished in the St. Lawrence River in April. Since this is a federal jurisdiction and there may be a lack of understanding of these two realities, we aren't in a position to give a fishing licence at the right time to this small, very targeted category of fishers who use an authentic fishing technique that we want to preserve. It is local and economical.

[English]

Mr. Adam Burns: I'm sorry that I didn't understand your question the first time; I understand it now. Unfortunately I don't have the capelin scientific survey information readily available right now. This is something I think we'd have to follow up with you on.

[Translation]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: I appreciate it very much, Mr. Burns.

I'll ask you one last question.

Quebec is willing to share in the management of its marine and biomarine resources. Is DFO open to that possibility?

[English]

Mr. Adam Burns: That would not be a question that I would be able to speak to as an official. My role is to administer the fisheries management framework in the manner it's currently structured.

[Translation]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: I understand.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Desbiens. Your time is up.

We'll now go to Ms. Barron for two and a half minutes, please.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you. Following up on Mr. Perkins' question to Ms. Switucha, I'm wondering if you can expand a little on the 4,000 seafood items you said are tested each year. Can you give us a sense of the total volume of fish we're talking about that are coming into Canada, so we can get a sense of the scale and also how this compares to other food items that CFIA inspects?

Ms. Tammy Switucha: I can't speak to the volume, I'm sorry. That's information I don't have available at the moment, and in terms of our sampling of other food products, that's something I will have to follow up with the committee on with further information.

• (1230)

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, because for me it's just out of context, so having some further information would be really important in helping me to understand what we're talking about.

My next question could go either to CFIA or DFO. To my knowledge, the USA has a secretariat set up for 19 different agencies to help enforce traceability standards.

It's great to see the CFIA and DFO here together today. Can you speak to other departments that would need to be involved in

Canada throughout the supply chain to make sure we get this right, and do you think we would benefit from a secretariat similar to the one we see in the U.S.?

Ms. Tammy Switucha: I can start that answer. I would ask my colleague to follow up if there's something else.

To my understanding, that secretariat in the U.S. was struck under the leadership and mandate of fisheries management in the United States and pulled in agencies and departments from across the spectrum.

It's difficult for me to comment further, but from CFIA's perspective, we appreciate the participation of our colleagues from DFO as well as Agriculture and Agri-Food. I think we could potentially benefit from the participation of Environment, maybe, but for the most part, I think you have the partners that are needed to be able to work with us—in addition, of course, to the other levels of government that are equally responsible for parts of this issue.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

I'll see if I have time for one last question.

The Chair: You actually don't. You're out of time, Ms. Barron. I'm sorry.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Okay. Thank you. It was worth a try.

The Chair: Oh, definitely. If you don't try, you'll never know.

Mr. Perkins, you have five minutes or less, please.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Again, this is for the CFIA. You mentioned that you have this escalating form of sanction or penalty when companies aren't complying. It goes from a stern letter, I guess, up to licence seizure, if I heard you correctly. How many licences have you seized?

Ms. Tammy Switucha: It's my understanding that since our safe food for Canadians regulations came into force, there have been multiple for all foods. For fish and seafood specifically, we have had 20 licences either suspended or revoked since 2019.

Mr. Rick Perkins: As part of your consultation, obviously you're studying all the various different forms of boat-to-plate systems around the world. We have talked a lot about the EU and their systems. What do you think are gaps in our system that the EU does much better and that you think should be considered here?

Ms. Tammy Switucha: I can speak only from the perspective of my expertise, which is for food safety. When we compare the food safety objectives and requirements between Canada and the EU, they are very similar. We both follow the international standards of Codex Alimentarius. We both have relatively new and modern food safety requirements for foods that are imported, exported and traded within our country. We align very closely from a food safety perspective.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Is it part of your study, if we are expanding the boat-to-plate system and the recommendations that you will make, to understand the financial impact on each part of the supply chain of implementing a higher level of traceability from harvesters through to processors to retailers?

Ms. Tammy Switucha: That's certainly a very interesting part of the issue. From a CFIA perspective, when we develop any sort of regulatory proposal, we are required to look at the cost benefit of any new regulatory proposal. Beyond that, for non-regulatory proposals, or ones that are done through policy, that's why we work very closely with our colleagues from DFO and Agriculture and Agri-Food: to understand the economic benefits as well as the impacts on the industry.

• (1235)

Mr. Rick Perkins: I'm still trying to understand how far back in the chain we go now. If we as a committee are going to recommend improvements to the system, it seems, if I'm understanding right, that DFO is looking only at certain aspects of both domestic catch and origin authenticity, and only a very few specific countries, and CFIA's not looking very far back in the supply chain—back only one.

Is it fair to say that you're really focused just on testing the quality of what's coming in as opposed to the authenticity back?

Ms. Tammy Switucha: No. In fact that's incorrect.

If I could correct that statement, the CFIA's responsibility goes all the way back to where the food originated within Canadian jurisdiction. In the context of fish and seafood, traceability has to occur all the way, as the boat, because they are subject to licensing. For a company, to put it plainly, that is licensed with CFIA for its activities, we have the responsibility for that oversight.

When I refer to—

Mr. Rick Perkins: I have limited time.

You have no way to audit beyond the Canadian company, going back. You're not auditing regularly to see whether what's being told to us, or Canadian consumers, is true, from the origin.

Ms. Tammy Switucha: We do foreign country audits on an annual basis. Those are always based on various factors.

Legally, we cannot take action against any company outside of Canada. That's why we work closely with the foreign competent authorities, the other governments, to share that information, so that they may consider whether they need to take action.

We do foreign audits in all types of foods around the world.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Perkins. There were only about 80 seconds left.

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

Mr. Ken Hardie: I'll take the 80 seconds, then. How about that?

Ms. Switucha, your last answer confused me a little. I asked earlier about auditing back, and you said well, no, that should happen someplace else. Now you're telling me you do it.

By the way, you've had the enormous good fortune to be first among our witnesses, so you've had a lot of questions that probably don't land appropriately at your feet.

Who else has a piece of this in Canada? Who else should we invite to these hearings to get the complete picture? We either need to identify gaps, if they exist, or see if it's simply a lack of coordination. It's one of the two. I'm not comfortable so far that we have the full landscape covered properly. Who else should be here?

Ms. Tammy Switucha: I think the confusion may lie in the use of the word “audit”. It means something specific to CFIA. In the context of your line of questioning, perhaps I misunderstood your intent.

Mr. Ken Hardie: The real substance of my question is, who should we be talking with to get the full picture here?

Ms. Tammy Switucha: Industry is very much a player in this conversation. I would recommend that the national associations representing the fishing industry participate in these hearings.

Mr. Ken Hardie: We'll do that, but this is all about ensuring that we're getting honest products properly labelled. I don't necessarily see a voluntary process through industry groups as being the assurance we need.

What other government ministries should we be talking to? Maybe I should be more precise.

Ms. Tammy Switucha: You have before you the two main players in this issue related to the management of the fisheries in Canada, ensuring that Canadians are protected against misrepresentation and have food safety.

Mr. Ken Hardie: You mentioned that other levels of government have a role. Do provincial or municipal governments have a role? If so, what are they and how are they coordinated?

• (1240)

Ms. Tammy Switucha: I can't speak to how they're coordinated, but I know they are very important players for us at the federal level. The food safety mandate and the responsibility rest in all three levels of government.

Mr. Ken Hardie: That's back to the food safety angle, but there are other angles here that we need to also be satisfied about.

Mr. Burns, we saw in British Columbia over the last few years a major processor closed in Prince Rupert and moved to Alaska. I'm wondering in your observation whether the loss of processing capability or capacity opens the door for a higher risk of misrepresentation, mislabelling, etc. Do you know where our catch is going that's landed at a dock somewhere in B.C.?

Mr. Adam Burns: The DFO's jurisdiction ends at the wharf. As I'm certain you're aware, we have dockside monitoring activities and a variety of measures to ensure compliance from the boat to the wharf.

After the wharf, our jurisdiction ends, so I wouldn't have any information at my disposal to assist in responding further to your question.

Mr. Ken Hardie: It would appear, then, that we've identified, even in our first session here, quite a number of gaps where we need to do a deeper dive. I would like to thank Madame Desbiens for suggesting this, and the number of meetings, because it looks like we're going to need them to get to the bottom of what's going on.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hardie.

We'll now go to Mr. Arnold for five minutes, please.

Mr. Mel Arnold: This is going to be for both witnesses, Mr. Burns and Ms. Switucha.

It seems there are gaps here. The DFO does not monitor or regulate seafood coming into Canada. The CFIA only samples, or does random audits. There doesn't seem to be a sense of establishing any traceability system to support conservation or labour conditions in other countries off our waters.

Do you see how eliminating IUU—illegal, unreported and unregulated—fisheries through traceability could benefit conservation and mitigate unacceptable labour conditions in how Canadians buy their food?

Ms. Tammy Switucha: Mr. Chair, I think the information the member is seeking falls outside of CFIA's mandate.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Whose mandate would that fall under?

Mr. Adam Burns: Mr. Chair, I can speak to the area of DFO's responsibilities that touch on what the member is asking, but don't respond directly, admittedly, to DFO's work through international bodies and regional fisheries management organizations to address illegal, unreported, unregulated fishing activities.

For example, in the Pacific, DFO has significant assets that are engaged in the governance within these international bodies to make sure the rules are such that illegal activities are being addressed.

Mr. Mel Arnold: I think most of the members are aware of DFO's and Canada's co-operation with international organizations to try to stop IUU, but will a traceability program prevent IUU-caught fish from reaching Canadian dinner tables or Canadian markets?

Mr. Adam Burns: The products coming into Canada are outside of DFO's area of jurisdiction, so I couldn't speak to that. Our activities, in our FMOs, reduce the amount of—

Mr. Mel Arnold: Whose jurisdiction is it for those seafood products coming into Canada?

Ms. Tammy Switucha: The CFIA has the responsibility to ensure that any food that's imported into Canada meets Canadian requirements for food safety.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Safety, but what about conservation, labour standards, and so on? Whose responsibility would that fall under?

• (1245)

Ms. Tammy Switucha: I can confirm that those two areas of marine conservation and stewardship do not fall within CFIA's mandate.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Nobody knows? I find that mind-boggling.

I'm going to move on to another question.

Ms. Switucha, sorry to target you, and it's not targeting you; it's the system. On the sampling focus you mentioned, where you found 92% compliance, or only 8% sampling, I'm just questioning why you would sample at the leading end of the system.

It seems like you would be sampling the top end of a river system, where the water is quite pure, but when you look at the Fraser River, after it's passed municipal effluent, outflows, and so on, it's not so pure. If you started at the tail end, would you not be able to trace back to where the problems were much better than sampling at the top end, where it's actually quite pure still?

Ms. Tammy Switucha: I don't disagree with your observation. I think, though, the answer lies in the jurisdiction that CFIA has and in our ability to do that oversight and surveillance, so our mandate is focused—

Mr. Mel Arnold: Excuse me. Do you not have the ability to sample near the final end of the supply chain?

Ms. Tammy Switucha: Our authority for sampling lies within the responsibility to ensure that food that is traded between provinces or exported or imported is safe to eat, so it's difficult to say whether we would or wouldn't, depending on the destination of that product. However, from solely a conservation area, no, we would not.

Mr. Mel Arnold: I have one quick question here before I run out of time.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Arnold. You are out of time,

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

Mr. Robert Morrissey: My question is for CFIA. In the areas of wholesale processed product, retail and food services, which of those categories would experience the most misrepresentation of the product?

Ms. Tammy Switucha: I can answer that question only based on the recent study we conducted. As mentioned, the samples we picked up at retail, foods that are actually packaged in the store, had the highest level of non-compliance.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: My understanding is you do not do food service.

Ms. Tammy Switucha: We do in certain circumstances, depending on the level of trade that the food service undertakes. Generally speaking, no, we don't, but there are very small examples of some food service businesses that trade interprovincially that we would have jurisdiction for. However, those are very limited.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Okay. You referenced that 20 licences were revoked or suspended. Could you give us an example of the size of the operation? What would it be doing? Just pick an example. I'm curious.

Ms. Tammy Switucha: I'm sorry, Mr. Chair. I don't have that information at hand. We would need to follow up on the question.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Could you provide the committee with a breakdown or define who the 20 licences were? What would be the face of that identity?

Ms. Tammy Switucha: We'll do our best.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: I believe my question is for DFO. It is in follow-up to some of the questions by Mr. Perkins and Madame Desbiens.

How could you explain to the committee the situation whereby somebody purchased what was labelled as local cod and then found out when they got inside that it was sourced from Russia?

How did it get missed? That's a fairly substantive difference.

I'm going to direct the question to DFO. If DFO does it only from the boat to the wharf and then CFIA goes in, how would a situation like that occur? Please explain.

Mr. Adam Burns: In that instance, I believe it is a food labelling issue. My colleagues from CFIA could probably respond to that question.

• (1250)

Ms. Tammy Switucha: This is a problem. We don't dispute that. Within the authorities that we currently have, the CFIA monitors and does very specific oversight of importers of fish and seafood products. We use all the tools that we have under the law to be able to do that regulatory oversight and take enforcement, but we can't be everywhere all the time. Therefore, a lot of our work is risk-based and based on intelligence—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Then it would be fair for me to conclude that there are gaps in the system that are allowing this, and it is a substantive gap that would allow that misrepresentation.

Mr. Burns, you referenced a robust harvest enforcement regime under DFO from catch certification. Could you elaborate and describe to us what that robust harvest enforcement regime is that ensures that all the product is what it's supposed to be?

Mr. Adam Burns: I think you are referring to the enforcement and the post-certificate auditing routine. We have a specific team of conservation protection officers whose role is to perform an audit and verification function, which occurs after the certificates have been issued. It is intended to assess the chain of custody within that entity to ensure it is indeed a fish product that has come from the particular vessel and licence identified, that the licence was valid and active, that there was quota available and all of those sorts of things that ensure it was indeed sourced from a regulated fishery.

That audit and verification process occurs on a regular basis following the issuance of the certificate. In some instances, those certificates need to be issued within two hours because of the live nature of some of the products that are being exported.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Morrissey.

We'll now go to Madame Desbiens for two and a half minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

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

I'd like to thank my colleagues who have taken over my examples. It means a lot to me. It's very relevant.

Earlier, you said that you rely heavily on the various infrastructures of each province and Quebec, such as MAPAQ and the municipalities.

Do the various bodies know exactly what role they play through your department? Has that been communicated to them? Do they receive directives? Do you have specific directives to give them regarding food traceability? When do you stop your work and when do they start theirs?

[*English*]

Ms. Tammy Switucha: For any food safety investigation, which includes misrepresentation as well, we have very good co-operation with our provincial and territorial colleagues.

When we're part of an investigation, we share information between each level of government on a regular basis. Many of the recalls and notices that you see are the result of inter-jurisdictional co-operation, because we're all working together for the purpose of protecting Canadians and public health.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: We're getting to the end.

What are you missing in this context? Have you identified any gaps? How do you plan to address them? Are you short of resources or labour? Should scientists be approached more? Should you do better sampling?

In short, what do you think could improve things?

[*English*]

Ms. Tammy Switucha: As I mentioned earlier, it's fair to say that CFIA cannot be everywhere and everything all at once, so we do rely on those partnerships. It's a complex waterfront—excuse the pun—of the issue. I can't speak to the funding for the gaps, but the funding we have received through budget 2019 has allowed us to expand and enhance our activities for investigating misrepresentation and fraud.

• (1255)

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now go to Ms. Barron for two and a half minutes, please.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: I always appreciate a good pun. Thank you for that.

To my knowledge, one-sixth of food illnesses in Canada are traced back to seafood. Has the CFIA looked at other jurisdictions, such as those in the EU, to see how food illnesses from seafood have changed as they implement stronger regulations?

Ms. Tammy Switucha: Information like that is always used by CFIA as part of our risk analysis. We always look at findings and results from other jurisdictions to inform our risk analysis when it comes to the protection of Canadians and food safety.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: I have a follow-up to Mr. Arnold's question. It sounds like Canada is willfully providing a market for illegal products due to these jurisdictional gaps.

Can you confirm how much money DFO is spending each year to support international partners to address illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing?

Mr. Adam Burns: The specific funding amounts aren't something I could speak to directly. We're engaged in a variety of international fora, both, as I say, from a policy perspective, making sure the rules are tight, and from an enforcement perspective, with fisheries officers and the Canadian Coast Guard playing a role in ensuring that those IUU activities are being stopped internationally.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Mr. Burns.

Do you think we could get this information in writing?

Mr. Adam Burns: I can't commit that we'll be able to provide you with the specific amount. It's not necessarily something that is tracked specifically in that manner, but we will provide you with what we can.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Barron.

That concludes our rounds of questioning. We have about two minutes left, only enough time to really say thank you to our witnesses, Mr. Burns, Ms. Switucha and, of course, Ms. Twardek, who had very little to do in the questioning round. That's probably a good thing; nobody was tormenting her.

Thank you again to our witnesses.

Thank you to the clerk and members of the committee, our analysts and, of course, the wonderful people doing the translation services here today.

We'll see you all again at the next FOPO committee meeting.

Have a good day.

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