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Chair: Mr. Ken McDonald



Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

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• (1535)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 41 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans.

This meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of June 23, 2022.

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

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

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

Please address all comments through the chair.

Finally, just as a reminder, taking screenshots or photos of your screen is not permitted. The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website.

In accordance with the committee's routine motion concerning connection tests for witnesses, I am informing the committee that all witnesses have completed the required connection tests in advance of the meeting. We're still trying to reach one witness who is not online. The test will be done when he gets in touch, or when they join the meeting.

Before we begin hearing from our witnesses today, I would simply like to get one item of committee business out of the way.

Yesterday members received two draft budgets for review. One was for the study on the closure of mackerel fishing and the other was for the study on the impacts of the climate crisis.

Does the committee agree to adopt both proposed budgets?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.): They're going to take my lunch back.

The Chair: They'll take more than that back.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted on September 20, 2022, the committee is resuming its study on the closure of mackerel fishing in Atlantic Canada and the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

I would like to welcome our first panel of witnesses.

Representing the Maritime Fishermen's Union, we have Louis Ferguson, assistant director, Homarus, and Martin Mallet, executive director. Representing the P.E.I. Fishermen's Association are Melanie Giffin, marine biologist and industry program planner, and Nathan Cheverie, fisher and co-chair of the mackerel advisory committee.

We're still missing Mr. Hubley.

Thank you for taking the time to appear before the committee today. You will each have up to five minutes for an opening statement.

I'll invite the Maritime Fishermen's Union to begin, please. I don't know if you're sharing your statement or if one of you is doing it alone.

You have the floor for five minutes or less, please.

Mr. Martin Mallet (Executive Director, Maritime Fishermen's Union): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the committee for allowing us to present today.

My name is Martin Mallet. I'll be sharing my time today with Louis Ferguson, the assistant director of our R and D branch, Homarus Inc.

I'll be speaking in French.

[Translation]

The decision to completely close the mackerel fishery affected our members, both commercial fishers and bait fishers. Once again, very little notice was given even though our fishers were preparing for the upcoming season.

In the last assessment of the mackerel stock in 2020, according to DFO's science sector, instead of imposing a complete moratorium, reducing the contingent by 4,000 tonnes for 2022, a 50% drop from the previous year, would still have allowed for a 79% increase in the spawning biomass. That would have been a significant reduction, but not a complete moratorium. It would have reflected the socio-economic value of this resource for the entire Atlantic region.

The complete closure of the mackerel fishery was an extreme and unwarranted measure. It was announced at the last minute, without any regard for the fishers who had incurred expenses to get ready for the start of the 2022 season. Moreover, the mackerel stock is shared with the United States. Even to this day, there is no joint management plan with the Americans, who continue to fish the same mackerel stock while we have to sit on our docks and watch them.

Here are a few recommendations for the committee.

First, we think a joint management agreement with the U.S. should have been developed before deciding on a complete closure of this part of the Canadian fishery. Such an agreement is necessary for the sustainable management of this resource in its entire distribution area.

Second, the MFU has made various recommendations in the past to better protect the resource and optimize mackerel spawning, but to no avail. In our opinion and that of other inshore fishers' associations, the gradual decline of this resource can in large part be attributed to the increase in seine fishing, and not inshore gillnet and handline fishing. With this type of gear, the fish are not selected by size and the small fish cannot escape to continue growing and reach the minimum size for spawning. If we want to continue seine fishing, the fish quotas have to be adjusted since this catching method is not selective. The reopening of this fishery will have to emphasize sustainable catching methods.

Third, climate change results in weather extremes and variations each year. Our fishers see the effects of these changes in variations in time and location of the species they fish, to which they must adapt in order to catch the fish. We also have to bring our scientific stock assessment into line with the schedule of the species we wish to study, and not the bureaucrats' schedule. Climate change is changing the marine ecosystem. These considerations must be included in the scientific analysis and stock assessment of all our species.

Fourth, we recommend an in-depth study of the predator-prey relationship among the various seal species and mackerel. For example, current studies on the stomach contents of seals are conducted in the winter, although mackerel is not even in the Gulf of St. Lawrence at that time. Any additional information gathered would be useful and would allow us to better understand the issues in the mackerel population.

Fifth, any reopening plan must also include the development of a sustainable seal hunt. The loss of the seal hunt culture and the shortage of hunters in our communities are among the main obstacles to resolving this issue. We must at least address the regulatory obstacles, and support and promote the training of new commercial and recreational hunters, and seal products in Canada. That would be a good opportunity to include the first nations and to build partnerships with them.

Sixth, fishers are facing huge increases in their operating costs as a result of inflation. These increases are also the result of the additional inflation attributable to the closure of the fishery, in terms of their traditional bait. For example, the price of bait mackerel purchased from international markets has risen by 32% this year. We

want bait fishing by handline to be reopened for 2023. That fishery would also serve to restore part of the science dependent on the fishery that was lost this year owing to the moratorium.

Seventh and finally, a number of fishers rely on pelagic fishing for their livelihood and are seriously hurt by the moratorium. Establishing a program similar to the sustainability measures program for the Atlantic lobster fishery, namely, the integrated fisheries management plan, which was quite successful in the early 2010s, would help restructure and rationalize this sector of the fishery. It would also support the related science in order to gain a better understanding of the species in the context of climate change, and support the creation of bait alternatives.

● (1540)

Thank you for your attention.

We will be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you for that.

We'll now go to representatives of the P.E.I. Fishermen's Association for a statement of five minute or less, please.

Ms. Melanie Giffin (Marine Biologist and Industry Program Planner, Prince Edward Island Fishermen's Association): Thank you very much. I will be giving the opening statement and Nathan will be available for comments.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, and members of this committee for the invitation to speak to you today.

The P.E.I. Fishermen's Association was created in the 1950s to approach the federal government with one united voice. The PEIFA has evolved alongside the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to create the well-established working relationship we still maintain today.

Our goal in being here today is to focus on mackerel science and therefore management measures as they relate to Prince Edward Island.

The PEIFA would first like to thank the department and the minister for taking steps to try to rebuild the stock. Although we all have different opinions on the method, we all agree that we need to work together for a sustainable stock in the future.

It has been made clear over the last few years that simply decreasing the TAC is not a solution for rebuilding the stock. It's time to start thinking outside the box for new management measures that allow a fishery while also increasing the biomass. Numerous recommendations have been submitted by multiple fishing organizations during the Atlantic Mackerel Advisory Committee meetings, but these recommendations consistently seem to fall on deaf ears.

Originally, the PEIFA sent a formal letter containing our recommendations to the chair of the advisory committee, but soon changed this practice. It now sends them straight to the minister to ensure everything being recommended during AMAC actually reaches the minister. There is no transparency back to the members of the AMAC table regarding what is shared with the minister.

The following is a summary of some of the key recommendations the PEIFA has made at AMAC over the past 10 years.

In 2012, the PEIFA recommended the establishment of a small fish protocol, an increase in minimum size—specifically noting this was for protection for future generations—and a decrease in TAC.

In 2014, decreasing the TAC, increasing the minimum size, minimizing the seining fleet, a mackerel working group, additional research and a hailing system were all recommended.

In 2018, an increase in minimum size, an increase in dockside monitoring, increased enforcement and increased mesh size were included in the recommendations.

In 2019, all previous recommendations listed continued to be submitted, but a better understanding of the predator-prey relationship with seals was also added to the list of recommendations from the PEIFA at AMAC.

As was stated by DFO at the 4RST Groundfish Advisory Committee meeting, a grey seal reduction greater than 65% is required to witness any rebuilding of the southern cod, hake, plaice and other groundfish stocks in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Based on a literature review done by the PEIFA, it appears there are numerous biases in the work being done on seal diet. Some studies are done during winter, when mackerel have left the gulf. Other studies are done when seals are not eating, during haulout periods.

It is recommended that these biases be addressed in proper spatial and temporal studies and these data be included in the mackerel stock assessment to better understand the predator-prey relationship between seals and mackerel.

In 2020, again all previous recommendations listed were submitted to the AMAC table, but a graph, which is included in the document, became available to the PEIFA from DFO that prompted the addition of a recommendation for a moratorium on the seining fleet until mackerel stocks recovered to the healthy zone.

This was based on evidence presented by DFO, which stated that up to “the early 2000s, gillnets, jiggers and traps accounted for the majority of Canadian mackerel catches. The majority of catches from the mid 2000's on have been by small...and large seiners...which were used primarily in Newfoundland. Between 2002 and 2007, small seine landings ranged from” about 11,000 tonnes to 30,000 tonnes, and large seine landings from about 6,000 tonnes to 15,000 tonnes. DFO noted that, “In more recent years, small

seiners...have landed the majority of the catch in the commercial fishery.”

This paragraph clearly identifies the gear type that is capable of the highest catch rates and therefore the starting point for effective change in this fishery. The graph clearly shows this, if you take a look at the colour version.

It is important that members of this committee see that industry has been making recommendations related to the protection of the stocks annually for at least 10 years. Although the recommendations listed here are only from the PEIFA, other organizations also made recommendations during the same timeline.

The last key issue we want to shed light on is how the American fishery affects the Canadian biomass.

The northern contingent of Atlantic mackerel spawn in the gulf, but then go to the U.S. over the winter, where there is no minimum size during the fishery. As long as there is a fishery happening in the U.S., decreasing the TAC in Canada does not aid in rebuilding the stock.

To add insult to this scenario, fishers in Canada are then forced to purchase undersized mackerel from the U.S. to use as bait in their own fishery.

The PEIFA is aware that this is a complex issue. We want to work with DFO to find a solution, but members of the mackerel industry are left asking what they have to do to reopen the fishery, considering that the recommendations being made are not being addressed.

● (1545)

Members of the PEIFA would love to see either the minister or deputy minister of Fisheries attend the next AMAC meeting to hear the issues directly from the harvesters.

Thank you for your time.

The Chair: Thank you.

I see that Mr. Hubley has joined us from the Prospect Area Full-Time Fishermen's Association.

For your opening statement, sir, you have five minutes or less.

Mr. Scott Hubley (Fisherman, Prospect Area Full-Time Fishermen's Association): I'm here representing PAFFA, which stands for the Prospect Area Full-Time Fishermen's Association. I just want to see what's going to be done here.

I'm good. I'll talk to you later. I'm just listening.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you for that.

We'll go right to our rounds of questioning. I'll remind members to please identify who the question is for, instead of just staring at the screen.

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

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

Thanks to the witnesses for taking the time to be involved in our valuable study.

I have a question for Mr. Mallet on co-management. I heard him mention co-management with the United States. Could you give a brief outline in 30 seconds or less of what you mean by that?

Mr. Martin Mallet: Very briefly—and I think Ms. Giffin also alluded to the same idea—there should have been some kind of co-management structure with the U.S., so that if there are any measures taken in Canada, some similar measures are taken in the U.S. so that we can tackle the same issues at the same time. This was mentioned by Ms. Giffin.

If we support or invest in measures here protecting, say, a small fish, and they are taking the fish out in the U.S., we're making all of these sacrifices here in Canada for nothing.

Who's paying for this at the end of the day? It's our inshore fisherman fleet. It's nobody else.

• (1550)

Mr. Clifford Small: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, my next question is for Ms. Giffin.

I just received some information that the United States has increased their TAC by an extra thousand tonnes. What do you think of that, Ms. Giffin? Why do you think the United States would increase their mackerel quota mid-season? Do you think they found that there are more mackerel than they originally estimated?

Ms. Melanie Giffin: Thank you for the question.

I can honestly say that I did not hear that they had increased their TAC during the season. I can't pretend to understand why they would.

The scientists from the U.S. are involved in the Canadian stock assessments, as the Canadian scientists are involved in the American stock assessments. Both have seen an extreme decline in previous years.

I don't want to venture a guess as to why they would feel it was acceptable to increase their TAC during this season.

Mr. Clifford Small: Again, this question is for you, Ms. Giffin.

We've had numerous accounts of how plentiful mackerel are. That's coming from all over Atlantic Canada. I don't know if you've seen those accounts in P.E.I., but I know P.E.I. has some of the warmest waters in Atlantic Canada. That's for sure.

If there's a warming of the water and the mackerel shift their migrations, would it be an area with much warmer water that was impacted the hardest by that, such as P.E.I.?

Ms. Melanie Giffin: It's a possibility.

If anecdotally we hear there are increased numbers of small fish, the key here is that in Canada, we can't fish those small fish. We protect them. When they go to the U.S., if there are anecdotally more fish—maybe that's what they are seeing as well—in the U.S., there's no minimum size. They can take those small fish before they ever have an opportunity to spawn.

The Chair: Before you go on, Mr. Small, I have stopped the clock. The lights are blinking. There's a notice of a vote that will be taking place. I don't know if it's a 15-minute bell or a 30-minute bell.

Is the committee okay with continuing on as normal until we get to the actual vote, and then take a few minutes so that we can all do it electronically, instead of leaving the room?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay.

You can continue, Mr. Small.

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

Mr. Mallet, what have you heard coming out of areas in Atlantic Canada as to the plentifulness of mackerel this year? Have you heard any contradictory observations that there are a lot more mackerel than the DFO is estimating?

Mr. Martin Mallet: I may share this answer with Mr. Ferguson here, but we've heard reports all across the spring and the summer and especially fall where there seem to be shifts in the patterns of distribution. Small mackerel are seen in some times of the year where we're not used to seeing them at that time, but also much larger mackerel schools are coming in close to shore later in the summer, especially in late fall.

Louis, do you want to add something there?

Mr. Louis Ferguson (Assistant Director, Homarus, Maritime Fishermen's Union): No. Mr. Mallet did actually cover what fishermen have observed on the water.

As for the other part of the question—to compare with what DFO science is seeing—it's hard to say, because it's in the water. It would have to be broader scientific modelling to see that.

Mr. Martin Mallet: I would just add that without any fishing activity on the water, we've lost a significant amount of science capability just this year. What we're seeing are observations, but at the end of the day, that's not a science protocol. We would need to have people on the water full time to do an actual study of what we're seeing and what changes are going on in the ecosystem around climate change.

• (1555)

Mr. Clifford Small: Then, Mr. Mallet, without that harvester logbook information, there's a big part of the science missing.

How much did the DFO put into stock assessment? With regard to the information, how much of that logbook information actually went into stock assessment? Correct me if I'm wrong, but was it 2019 when we had the last egg survey in the gulf? However, since then, we've had a lot of logbook data, so is the DFO evaluating this properly?

Mr. Martin Mallet: Who wants to take that one?

Mr. Louis Ferguson: I can take it.

Yes, 2019 was the last season that they did the egg survey. In 2020, due to COVID, they were not able to go and do the survey. As far as the logbooks go, I know some of them are completed. Some of them are missing key parts of information that could not be inputted fully in the scientific assessment, but I do believe that the logbooks from the previous years were used. To what extent, I don't know.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Small.

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

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

My first question is for Mr. Mallet.

You said that reopening will need to take into account the conservation risk, and also, in answering a previous question, you referenced the shifts in patterns. As well, you said that fishers need to restructure and rationalize.

Martin, could you expand briefly on what that would look like?

Mr. Martin Mallet: Well, I think I've used the comparison to the ALSM program, which was a success in our lobster industry a few years back. I think there is potential to maybe look into some parts of our fleet that may need some rationalization, so maybe making less effort and leaving more fish to the others who are remaining in the industry.

In our case, with the MFU, we have a small percentage of our fleet, of our membership, that is dependent on pelagics, so moving ahead, we're trying to focus on having our members be multi-species fishermen so that they have a larger spectrum of licences that they can survive on.

The second thing is that all in all, I think there's a need, as was mentioned earlier, to look into what has brought us to where we are today, and reference was made to the seiner fleets that have had a huge impact over the last 20 years on our stocks. There is very little selectivity designed into the seine technology. I mean, it's a very harmful method of fishing, and if we are to keep them in our fishery as a whole, if we need to keep a place for them, then we need to take into account that they fish very small fish that don't have any chance of survival and reproduction.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: I have a question again to Martin and Ms. Giffin.

It would be fair to assess that the biomass has tumbled over the past decade. Would you agree with that, Martin?

Mr. Martin Mallet: Yes, there are—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: There's some dispute on where we're at, but the biomass has tumbled.

Mr. Martin Mallet: Yes.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Melanie, would you agree?

Ms. Melanie Giffin: Yes.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Then the biomass is tumbling, and everybody agrees on that, but they continue the fishery.

Ms. Giffin, could you comment? Often we'll get the comment, and Martin alluded to it briefly, from fishers whose sightings are contrary to what's said to be the state of the biomass. They're saying that there are ample fish out there. Could you briefly comment, as a scientist and from a science perspective? How do you rationalize the difference between what fishers are seeing...? The biomass, everybody agrees, has tumbled, so the stock is not there, and the science is saying that if specific action is not taken, this is a fishery that could be close to being wiped out.

Ms. Melanie Giffin: I think the key there is they do an egg survey. Science does egg surveys so that we have a better understanding of what's happening with the eggs. The next round of sampling they do is from the landings.

There's never any data collection or research done on prerecruits. Those prerecruits leave the gulf and head to the U.S., and there's no minimum size there. We're definitely missing data from that perspective on those prerecruits, and I believe it's normally, anecdotally, what fishers are reporting when they say they're seeing schools of fish in some cases. Again, that's anecdotal, and we do have a fisher here from P.E.I. if you want to direct the question towards him for the actual sightings.

• (1600)

Mr. Robert Morrissey: I'll get back to that in a moment, but I want you in the time remaining.

A lot of the focus in this study has been leading in the direction of how best do we recommend the reopening of a fishery, or what should that fishery look like? If the Americans do not reduce their effort, what does Canada do in that position? Do we simply ignore the health of the stock and take a risk, or do we continue attempting to rebuild a stock in Canada?

Could you comment briefly?

Ms. Melanie Giffin: Yes, on the second part of the question, thank you.

Basically, my understanding of the way the U.S. works is they set an overall TAC based on the stock assessment from Canada and the U.S. Once that overall TAC is set, then they subtract the Canadian TAC. If there are 4,000 tonnes that Canada will fish, then that's 4,000 tonnes that the U.S. will not fish. Then if we don't fish it, the U.S. will.

From my perspective, unless both sides are doing something to protect the stock, there's no reason we can't open the fishery again in Canada for a small portion that will be taken out anyway by the U.S. if Canada is not fishing it.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: That's the first time that the interrelation between the U.S. and Canadian fisheries has been clarified.

I would like to go to the fisher in my time left.

Could you comment on why fishers see a different perspective from what the science is telling us?

Mr. Nathan Cheverie (Fisher and Co-chair of the Mackerel Advisory Committee, Prince Edward Island Fishermen's Association): I don't know if we see a perspective different from the science. We do see fish everywhere in the ocean. I know I was just out tuna fishing this year, and there was nowhere that I went where there were no mackerel available. Size is definitely an issue sometimes. Usually it's very location-dependent. If you go to the right structure, you're going to find the right fish.

Is it commercially viable? I think on a large scale with seiners involved, no, I do not believe it is, but as far as a bait fishery is concerned, there's definitely room for a bait fishery there.

You're always going to have somebody seeing fish, and they'll look at it differently from the next person as being viable or not viable. The mackerel in the southern gulf waters in the summertime have been fished since before any of us were around.

I have a dime here from the Canadian mint from 1967. It has a mackerel on it, so it's pretty important to our communities and it's pretty important to the inshore fishing sector that this government promised to protect. To have a closure when there could have been a reduction in the fishery is just hard to believe.

The Chair: Thank you.

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

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you also to all the witnesses who always provide valuable input.

Mr. Mallet, the biomass is moving. That is what we have been hearing. You said fish are being seen where they didn't use to be.

Since no data has been collected this year, what will be missing from the decisions that are to be made for the coming months or for next year? What is planned to make up for the lack of data?

Mr. Martin Mallet: When fishers are on the water, they can observe when the fish are close to our shores, throughout the year. That is one of the greatest benefits. This can also indicate the abun-

dance of fish, and also gives us an idea when the fish will be leaving the shores.

Right now, we have no idea what is happening on the water, except for what we hear from fishers who are on the water fishing for other species. For instance, we heard that a fisher who went tuna fishing saw fish in his fishing territory. We observed the same thing during other fishing excursions. That is the case for herring in the fall and lobster fishing throughout the year.

We no longer have that source of information. If bait fishing for mackerel had at least been left open, that could have helped us, with minimal impact on the resource. That would have enabled us to have biologists on the water. As I said, having boats on the water gives the biologists a free platform.

The moratorium has deprived us of much of our ability to collect data.

• (1605)

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: So that is a major loss of information for short-term decisions.

To your knowledge, has DFO taken any steps to establish joint management with the United States?

Mr. Martin Mallet: That is an excellent question. I will ask my colleagues to answer that as well.

From what I know, there were some meetings after the fact, after the moratorium was announced, in March. There were discussions between senior officials from Ottawa and their counterparts from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, or NOAA, in the United States.

Yet it should not take the closure of a fishery to get to that stage. Before any radical decision is made, as was the case this spring, the two countries need to work together and reach agreements on catch and fish preservation methods.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Do the other witnesses have anything to add?

Mr. Cheverie or Ms. Giffin, do you have anything to add?

[*English*]

Mr. Nathan Cheverie: The main thing I would like to state here is that at the AMAC meetings there's a large representation of the seiner fleet. At the AMAC meetings, many of the people representing the seiner fleet are also wearing the hat of an international company that can import the bait or the fish from other places, such as Europe, that are having stellar years in their fishery. They actually quite possibly could have gained from this closure. These groups are the only groups that supported a closure unless they could have an extremely large fishery in Newfoundland with double the tonnage for themselves over what we had.

I have a feeling that there was consultation done. It just wasn't done in the right places. The inshore fishery has not been protected.

In the hook-and-line fishery, it is impossible to clean out a species. With a gillnet fishery, it is impossible to clean out a species. For the hook-and-line fishery, the fish has to bite the hook. With a gillnet, you'll only catch a certain size of fish. When you take a seine and you go around the school of fish, that school is gone: There are no fish from that school left to replace themselves. That is what we're up against. Also, they use methods like mid-water trawling in the wintertime off the U.S., and that basically has the same level of destruction towards a species.

There's no respect for the species in these higher levels of catch rates.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: I'm hearing that the U.S. is very happy to know that there is no fishing in Canada and in the gulf because that increases their market. Is that correct?

[*English*]

Mr. Nathan Cheverie: This is what I'm hearing, as well as that many of the large companies based in Newfoundland and some of the larger companies in the Maritimes that are doing the importing of fish from the U.S. or from Europe to replace our local supply are now profiting from the loss of our fishery.

• (1610)

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Desbiens. We'll now go to Ms. Barron for six minutes or less.

Go ahead, please.

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

My first question is for Ms. Giffin.

Ms. Giffin, you said in your testimony that the Prince Edward Island Fishermen's Association is recommending a moratorium on the mackerel and herring seining fleet across the entire Atlantic region until the mackerel and herring stocks recover to the healthy zones. Please correct me if I got that wrong.

You went on to say that from the mid-2000s, small and large seiners used primarily in Newfoundland have accounted for the majority of Atlantic mackerel catches.

I'm wondering whether you think a moratorium on a particular type of fishing gear would impact the recovery of the Atlantic mackerel stocks.

Ms. Melanie Giffin: Thank you for the question.

The information that I passed along in my opening remarks is an actual quote from DFO, so it's not research I did; it's DFO work.

I do believe that in the immediate future, the moratorium on the seining fleet wouldn't make a whole lot of difference considering how low the tack is. But as we start getting up a bit higher and we're trying to grow that stock back to a healthy zone, those fish need an opportunity to get to that healthy zone and it's going to be much more difficult to achieve that when the seining fleet is out there, as Nathan said, taking everything in a school of fish.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: What are your thoughts on how small and large seiners compare to other methods such as gillnets, jiggers and traps when fishing for Atlantic mackerel?

Ms. Melanie Giffin: We talk a lot about gear selectivity and the importance of gear selectivity. The hook and line and the gillnets, as Nathan pointed out, are much more selective than a seiner is. Also, with the hook and line, if you drop your hooks and you're in a school of small fish, then you can move very easily without harming that school, but with a seine fishery, the requirement is to actually encircle the fish, catch the fish and check them. It may cause harm in that case, beforehand, but all of those fish are ultimately taken anyway.

I think there's a lot to be said about focusing on gear selectivity when we're talking about rebuilding the stock and aiming towards those gear types that do less harm.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Just so I understand, do you think that would be a more effective method than a moratorium? What are your thoughts on that?

Ms. Melanie Giffin: That brings into play the moratorium on seiners to focus on the inshore fleets that have hook and line and gillnets, which can cause less damage and allow the stock to rebuild while still allowing a small fishery.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: This question is for Mr. Mallet.

You'd spoken about the little notice that was received around the moratorium and around the mackerel. We know that the closure of the commercial Atlantic mackerel fishery has had an impact on communities. I'm wondering if you can speak on whether any compensation arrangements were made for the commercial harvesters who were impacted by the closure or any consultation conducted. Can you expand a little bit on that?

Mr. Martin Mallet: That's a good question. There was absolutely no consultation in terms of what kind of aid program could be put in place.

The Maritime Fishermen's Union, along with our colleagues from the PEIFA and other associations, met with the minister's office—with the minister herself and with higher DFO officials as well—to talk about getting this closure at the last minute. When I say “last minute”, a few months before the start of the fishery for us is last minute. Our fishermen start preparing their gear well in advance, sometimes over a year ahead. They're also planning their business model in terms of having access to the bait fishery for their bait access for lobster fishing. Also, in the case of the fishermen who are more dependent on the pelagics, they have nowhere else to go. The herring stocks are going in a bad direction, as well, for the fall. In the herring fishery, we're seeing the same issue with seiners.

At the end of the day, there was not much consultation and no aid package. This is why I've been talking about the ALSM program that was put in place for lobster back in the early 2010s as a model that's been used and that has had huge success as maybe a way to move forward.

• (1615)

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

Building off the topic of bait, I know Ms. Giffin talked about purchasing mackerel as bait from the U.S. and some of the implications around that, and I'm wondering if you could speak to the cost for harvesters of using local mackerel instead of imported mackerel as bait.

That would be to you, Mr. Mallet.

Mr. Martin Mallet: The cost is very significant when you buy mackerel from international markets. I mentioned in my presentation that just over the last year, we've seen an increase of about 35% in the cost of bait in terms of mackerel, and this was with the freezers already full this year from mackerel from last year, so what is it going to be next year when our local mackerel stocks are not used to replenish these local freezers?

I'm really fearful that the increase in price is going to be huge next year. It is fundamental for us that we at least reopen the bait fishery moving forward for 2023 and, through an investment program in the whole sector, look at other alternatives to supply our bait market with, for instance, some invasive species like Asian carp.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Barron.

We'll go to Mr. Perkins now for five minutes or less. Then we'll proceed to a short recess to do a vote.

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

Thank you, witnesses, for appearing.

My question is for Mr. Hubley.

Mr. Hubley, you represent the Prospect Area Full-Time Fishermen's Association. Can you briefly describe the range of species that the fishermen in your association catch?

Mr. Scott Hubley: It's everything from lobster to all groundfish, but there are a lot of mackerel around the bay this year, everywhere you could see, right from mid-May until now. There's still mackerel there.

Mr. Rick Perkins: My understanding is that it's to ensure the bait fishery, but also the larger mackerel generally come by in the spring in sort of three waves. That's the really important fast season that I believe some of your members... Lobster fishermen stop lobster fishing to go out to catch that. Is that correct?

Mr. Scott Hubley: Yes, the lobster guys will quit a month before the season's over in the spring to go mackerel trap fishing.

Mr. Rick Perkins: When they're out there, they see it come by in two- or three-week waves of these larger fish, about two or three of them. Is that true?

Mr. Scott Hubley: Yes, in mid-May for a couple of weeks, there are the largest fish. Then they get progressively smaller for about six weeks. As the summer progresses, they get larger again, but they're not schooling then.

Mr. Rick Perkins: The last couple of years before the moratorium, when your members were out, what were they seeing in terms of their ability to catch their TAC within the spring season?

Mr. Scott Hubley: The season before, as soon as the mackerel arrived, the minister shut it down for a week, and there were mackerel that whole week, all large mackerel. It would have been a bumper season if it weren't for that week. It really hurt.

Mr. Rick Perkins: The year before that, when the minister... I think it was Minister Jordan who interrupted the season, but what was the season like the year before that?

Mr. Scott Hubley: It was a good one.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Did you catch your TAC?

Mr. Scott Hubley: Fisheries had the numbers. Yes, I believe so, yes.

Mr. Rick Perkins: In the absence of being able to catch them this year, your members have been out on the water fishing other species. In LFA 33, they're getting ready for the lobster season. What are they seeing?

Mr. Scott Hubley: Do you mean mackerel?

Mr. Rick Perkins: Yes.

Mr. Scott Hubley: Well, you just see them on the sounders. They've been here all summer, and they're still here. You're not allowed to fish them, so we don't know. You can set the hooks down to get some for supper every night, no problem.

• (1620)

Mr. Rick Perkins: Are you really seeing them on the acoustic sounders? We've been told by some officials in DFO over other studies that you can't actually see mackerel on a sounder.

Mr. Scott Hubley: In the late evenings or early mornings, if they're there, you'll see them.

Mr. Rick Perkins: What are your members who are fishing lobsters or getting ready for the season doing for bait, since mackerel and herring are their primary species? I think herring has been cut as well.

Mr. Scott Hubley: I don't know about the herring being cut. I bought some herring earlier this summer.

I bought mackerel from Ireland. That's where my last stock of mackerel came from.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I have a question for Mr. Cheverie.

Mr. Cheverie, can you describe this? I think you also said that your fishermen are seeing mackerel on the waters.

Mr. Nathan Cheverie: Yes, we've seen them on the waters. It's hard to know the size, because we're not fishing.

As far as being able to see mackerel on a sounder goes, that's how I made my living for the last seven years. Quite frankly, mine will even tell you the length if you want to dial it in and turn that feature on. I find that idea that they can't be seen on a sounder just staggering.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I'm running short on time.

Ms. Giffin, I have a quick question. In your opinion, what does the stock have to rebound to for it to allow the catch to begin again?

Ms. Melanie Giffin: I would have to defer to the DFO standards that are set up for that. They have "critical", "cautious" and "healthy" zones. I think we would just go along with those zones, but ultimately, if the U.S. is fishing, then the mackerel are coming out of the water anyway. As long as there's a fishery going on in the U.S., I see no reason why there can't be one in Canada as well.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Perkins.

I'm going to ask our witnesses to be a bit patient with us as we recess for a couple of minutes to do a vote in the House of Commons.

We are suspended.

• (1620)

(Pause)

• (1630)

The Chair: We're back.

We'll find out what the tally of the vote is later. There may be a recount if it's that close.

We'll now proceed with Mr. Kelloway for five minutes or less, please.

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

Hello to the witnesses. I've seen many of you before, and I'm grateful that you're here for this study today.

The first couple of questions will be for Ms. Giffin, and then we're going to transition, if I have time, to Martin Mallet, on a particular question I have for him.

Ms. Giffin, I wonder if you could speak briefly—I think it's important—about the overall health of mackerel over the past couple of years. The second question is on testimony we heard in our last meeting that cited clear evidence of the stock.... We talked about that today. Would you agree with this trend?

Ms. Melanie Giffin: Thank you for the questions.

From a science perspective, all the science is pointing to obviously the decrease and the decline in the stock. I don't think there's any disputing that. I think there's more data that we can collect to get a more thorough picture and integrate that into the model. That would be, as I referred to earlier, the prerecruits that we're missing completely, and we do that with a number of other species. The trend has clearly been dipping downward over the past few years that I have been involved with the science of the stock.

I hope that covers it.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: I appreciate that.

I have a question for you on the role that mackerel plays in the overall food chain. If it were to disappear, what impact would that have on other stocks?

Ms. Melanie Giffin: That is a loaded question.

Small pelagics are definitely on the bottom end of that food chain, so everything larger is basically reliant upon them. We could definitely anticipate some negative effects to our ecosystem, but I would not be able to pinpoint exactly what those would be. It would be too much of a guessing game, and I really don't have a crystal ball to predict that. Sorry.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: That's no problem at all, nor do I.

My last question is for you, and then I'll transition to Martin.

We've heard a lot about the age structure of mackerel, that the older they are, the better for the species and its long-term health. Can you explain why?

Ms. Melanie Giffin: I don't know whether I have enough time to explain it all. Right now we're really only seeing up to five-year-olds, if that, and there are very few of them in our population. The requirement is that the larger, healthier fish are producing larger and healthier eggs. We're missing those from the population as well.

As we've seen with other species, we try to pump more eggs into the system to increase stocks. We don't have the capability to do that with the mackerel stock, because the age structure is geared towards the smaller, younger fish that in some cases have not had an opportunity to reproduce yet.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Thank you for those answers, Ms. Giffin. I appreciate it.

I want to transition to Martin Mallet. I'm looking at my notes here.

Martin, you mentioned a model—I hope I have this right—of the ALSM, the lobster model you talked about. I wonder if you can unpack in greater detail that model and how it worked for the lobster industry.

Mr. Martin Mallet: Sure. In a nutshell, I guess there were three prongs to it.

One is that back in the day in the lobster industry in the southern gulf, there were too many participants in the lobster fishery for the amount of lobster available, so there was a need to reduce the number of active participants. In our case, in New Brunswick, for instance, about 20% of our fishermen were bought out and retired. That also had a role to play in the effort on the actual lobster stock; it helped it repopulate.

At the same time, part of the program looked at what else we can do in terms of conservation measures to increase the reproduction of lobsters and in that way increase the numbers of adult lobsters that could then be available for the fishery. For instance, we looked at the minimum size for lobster, which back in the day was around 72 millimetres—68 millimetres, actually, before 2000—so you only had about 15% of lobsters that could reproduce at least once before being fished. Now we're up to about 85%, which is a huge increase in reproduction.

On the last thing, there was some extra money put in to work on different types of research projects to try to get a better understanding of the lobster fishery, but also as a species and the interactions with other ecosystem participants, other species.

All in all, it was a successful program. As the data today shows, our lobster industry in the southern gulf is a success. This has been the case for the past five or six years, in large part because of this program.

• (1635)

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Thank you very much.

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.

Mr. Mallet, you talked about the program that worked very well for the lobster industry. Are you thinking of a similar program for pelagic fish?

Mr. Martin Mallet: Definitely, to the extent that it is possible to rationalize part of the fleet and the fishing effort. In my opinion, it is the seiners that should be rationalized. As Ms. Giffin said a few minutes ago, in my view, the fact that part of the fish stock is very small fish indicates the direct impact of seine fishing on it. It means that the small fish are caught before reaching spawning age.

Further, investments should be made through that kind of program to increase scientific knowledge related to what DFO is already doing. That would increase our general knowledge of the species and its place in the ecosystem. It would also help us better understand the impact of ongoing changes in the ecosystem on this resources, and other important resources.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Your seventh suggestion is to implement a program similar to the one established for the lobster fishery. That involves investments. Those investments were made by the lobster fishers themselves in the lobster industry. They invested a great deal since they are the ones most interested in preserving that resource. That must not be overlooked.

How do you see the funding for the approach you suggested?

Mr. Martin Mallet: At the time, under the Atlantic lobster sustainability measures program, the federal government provided a third of the funding and the industry provided the remaining two thirds, thanks to loans from the provinces involved, in some cases, depending on the regions where the program was in place. In New

Brunswick, for instance, approximately 160 lobster fishing licences were removed at the time. The program cost about \$20 million.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Desbiens.

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

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you again to the witnesses.

Mr. Mallet, I want to continue on with some of the points you were making in my last line of questions around bait. I'm so curious to hear a bit more around options that you feel might be an effective way to move forward. I'm thinking about, for example, green crab, seal or artificial substitutes. Do you think these are appropriate alternatives to mackerel, and do you think this a direction that should be looked at?

Mr. Martin Mallet: I think we can get back to a small-scale bait fishery for mackerel or herring. The amount of effort is very limited compared to some of the effort that's being put in place by the seiners, so some of that needs to come back online.

It's also having more access to different alternatives. In some cases, it's processed fish. Eventually, the offal from the redfish industry, when it starts rolling, will be a significant source of bait for lobster, for instance.

Now there are better alternatives. You mentioned green crab. That's another invasive species. Some fishermen have had success using that a bit, but also there's a huge problem in some areas across Canada. You asked about some invasive species within the rivers and lake systems, and I mentioned the Asian carp as an example. There's a huge amount of that fish out there. Right now I guess there are some regulatory hurdles for us here in Canada with the CFIA being involved and making it difficult for us to try using it at least as an experiment, and if it works, moving ahead and using it full scale. It would, at the end of the day, reduce the problem that we have with inflation right now in our bait access.

• (1640)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Barron. There are only 15 seconds left, so there's hardly time for a question or even part of an answer.

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

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

Thank you to the witnesses.

I'd like to start out with all three fishermen's associations.

In the past year, Mr. Perkins and I have written to the fisheries minister asking for transition supports for Canadians whose jobs have been cancelled by decisions of the department or the Minister of Fisheries. The minister's response was that the Government of Canada offers a suite of supports for workers and communities.

I'm concerned that the ministry may be directing fishermen out of their traditional lives and occupations. What do the harvesters you represent prefer? Would they want to work for their living or prefer to see government support programs?

Perhaps we could start with Mr. Mallet.

Mr. Martin Mallet: Fishermen prefer to work. Fishermen are fishermen. They fish. That's what they do. I think that in some cases we do need support programs to get us through a rough patch, but I think in this case, we need a little bit of both.

We need to let fishermen with low-impact fishing practices go out there and continue fishing. We talked about getting that bait fishery back online. If the Americans are, for instance, at 4,000 tonnes of quota, we should be at least at the same level. They wouldn't expect less from us in the North Atlantic right whales file.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

Ms. Giffin, if I may, I'd like to hear from each of you.

Ms. Melanie Giffin: I'd actually prefer to hand this to Mr. Cheverie, if that's okay, as he's a fisherman from our association.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Mr. Hubley, would you comment?

Mr. Nathan Cheverie: Melanie ceded her time to me.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Yes. Would your harvesters prefer to be fishing or on government support?

Mr. Nathan Cheverie: Absolutely, we'd prefer to be fishing every day of the week.

It's been a major strain on me, my family and my circle of peers to not have a job to go to every day. That's how we have spent our summers and our falls since I bought in seven seasons ago, and now I have nowhere to turn to; there's nothing left in the industry for me to turn to, and it's very disheartening.

My grandfather spent his summers mackerel fishing out of a dory. I've done a bit bigger version, but it's still nothing compared to what others are doing in the industry. To lose that financially, there's no way to describe it, and emotionally there's no way to describe it.

I'd prefer to be able to go fishing even if there isn't enough to make it commercially viable. Just to be able to get out on the water for my personal bait fish would be good, as it would for everybody else in the community as well.

• (1645)

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

It's an interesting response that most would rather be working.

Ms. Giffin, how do they know the age structure of the stock when they sample only eggs and larvae for the stock assessments?

Ms. Melanie Giffin: They don't sample only eggs and larvae. That is one section of the stock assessment. The other major section

is that they do take landing data. I've done a sampling for them in the past.

We'll do a sample of approximately 200 fish. We measure all 200 fish, and then from those 200 we do a subsample, in which we keep two fish from each half-centimetre size class, and those fish are shipped off to DFO so that DFO can evaluate the age structure from that subsample of fish.

Mr. Mel Arnold: But if there's no catch, then there's no data for that portion of it. Is that correct?

Ms. Melanie Giffin: That's 100% correct.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Okay.

What percentage of Atlantic waters are surveyed or sampled for the stock assessments?

Ms. Melanie Giffin: When there is a commercial fishery going on, there is a wide array within area 4T, which is all of the gulf, involving numerous provinces, so they all pitch in.

I know that last year with no commercial fishery—I believe it might have been from the MFU, but they can correct me here—there were only a few samples submitted by the MFU to DFO. P.E.I. did not take part in sampling last year because the cost was too high to send fishers out on the water for such a small amount of fish and no reward.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arnold. You were almost dead-on on the time. Good for you.

We'll now go to Mr. Morrissey to finish off our first panel. You have five minutes or less, please.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll go to both Mr. Mallet and Ms. Giffin.

Ms. Giffin, do you, as a biologist I respect, recommend to this committee that we recommend a structured bait fishery opening for the 2023 season?

Ms. Melanie Giffin: I would, yes.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Good.

Martin, would you?

Mr. Martin Mallet: Same here.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Briefly, and if you could maybe follow up in writing to the committee, how would you manage a bait fishery in 2023? Could you provide that recommendation to the committee? Can you comment briefly on what type of a fishery you would visualize, beginning with Melanie and then Martin?

Ms. Melanie Giffin: I think there would be a number of management measures that could be considered, such as a lower TAC, an increased size. However, ultimately I would feel more comfortable talking to the mackerel advisory group here on P.E.I. and submitting the comments in writing to your committee, rather than making any commitment on my own right now.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Okay. Thanks, Ms. Giffin.

Mr. Martin Mallet: I'll repeat what Melanie just mentioned there. A few other options would be to have an e-log program or a paper log program with some dockside monitoring, since it would be a very limited fishery and it would have to be monitored.

Louis, do you want to add anything there?

Mr. Louis Ferguson: I think everything has been said.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Mr. Cheverie, as a fisher, could you comment? What type of enforcement or regulations would you suggest, from the fisher perspective, would be needed to have a limited bait fishery next year?

Mr. Nathan Cheverie: I would expect something along the lines of a weekly TAC per individual. There would be no sale of the fish. It would be just fish for personal use. Obviously, it would all be 100% monitored. Maybe there'd be limitations on gear.

Currently in the commercial fishery, we were allowed to run 100 hooks when we had the closure. Then for the bait fisheries open before, the number of hooks was usually less. Then there would be a weekly allowance for what we would be allowed to go for.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Thank you.

Mr. Nathan Cheverie: It would be things like that.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Good. I appreciate your candidness.

Martin and Melanie, you both reference that a recovery plan needs a seal hunt. I believe that was your comment, Martin. Then, Melanie, you referenced that a grey seal reduction plan needs to be put in place as part of this.

Could you elaborate? How do you accomplish that without having the Americans focus on Canada?

• (1650)

Mr. Martin Mallet: I may start there and mention that there is a grey seal and harp seal quota every year, but it's not being met because we don't have enough hunters out there. We absolutely need to find ways to train new hunters and also maybe subsidize the hunt in different ways so that it's feasible to go out there and actually hunt seals and make a little bit of profit from it while at the same time developing the personal-use or recreational seal-hunting culture across the Maritimes. I think that would be a good step forward.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Melanie, could you answer briefly? I have 80 seconds left.

Ms. Melanie Giffin: Briefly, I can just say that I agree with Martin and his approach. I think the PEIFA feels the same way the MFU does on this topic.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Morrissey.

That concludes our first round of testimony and questioning for this particular meeting.

I want to say thank you to the witnesses who have appeared, albeit virtually, sharing their valuable information with the committee on this very important study that we're in the middle of right now.

We'll suspend for a moment while we change out the panels and get ready for the last 45 minutes.

• (1650)

(Pause)

• (1655)

The Chair: I now call the meeting to order.

I'd like to welcome our witnesses from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

We have with us in person Marc LeCouffe, regional director, fisheries and harbours management, gulf region, and Mr. Todd Williams, senior director, resource management. Online, we have Jean-Yves Savaria, regional director of science, Quebec.

I apologize if I didn't pronounce names anywhere close to right.

Welcome.

We'll now start off with a five-minute opening statement from the department officials.

Mr. Todd Williams (Senior Director, Resource Management, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Thank you very much, Chair.

My name is Todd Williams. I'm also the acting director general of fisheries and resource management at Fisheries and Oceans.

I'm joined today by Marc LeCouffe, regional director of fisheries and harbour management in the gulf region, and Jean-Yves Savaria, regional director of science in the Quebec region.

On March 30 of this year, the minister communicated her decision to close commercial and bait fisheries for Atlantic mackerel. This decision was based on the most recent and best peer-reviewed scientific assessment of the stock. That assessment determined that the Atlantic mackerel biomass is at a historic low. Further, the assessment indicated that overfishing has led to a collapse in the age structure, with relatively few productive fish remaining in the population.

This was the continuation of a worrying trend that has persisted for a decade. It confirmed that reductions in total allowable catch and improvements to monitoring and reporting—though significant—were not sufficient to rebuild Atlantic mackerel to sustainable levels.

[Translation]

In making that decision, we had to strike a fair balance between the economic and cultural importance of the Atlantic mackerel fishery in eastern Canada and the viability of the resulting stock. It was of course an incredibly difficult decision to make, considering the livelihoods that were directly and indirectly affected. The decision was also science-based and made in the interest of responsible management of the resource.

[English]

Mackerel is fished mainly as open, competitive commercial and bait fisheries. A number of methods are employed throughout eastern Canada, from gillnet and handlines to trap nets and purse seines. In addition to the commercial and bait fisheries, catch also occurs recreationally as bycatch in other fisheries and in food, social and ceremonial fisheries.

In 2021, Canada's landed value of Atlantic mackerel was \$8.6 million. Out of about 10,000 enterprises in Atlantic Canada and Quebec, 753 took part in mackerel fishery. Out of these 753 enterprises, it was estimated by the department that about 15% of total revenue was derived from mackerel fishing.

In the five seasons from 2009 to 2013, Atlantic mackerel catches fell from approximately 42,000 metric tonnes to about 8,000. The total allowable catch at the beginning of this period was 75,000 tonnes and was reduced to 36,000 by 2013. The numbers clearly indicated difficulty in exploiting the resource.

From 2014 to 2021, the total allowable catch was set between 10,000 and 4,000 tonnes.

[Translation]

In eastern Canada, this pelagic forage fish plays a vital role in the ecosystem and in the fishing industry. It is an important food source for other species, including tuna and Atlantic cod, and is a traditional bait in certain commercial fisheries, such as the lobster and snow crab fisheries.

[English]

The need to make concerted efforts to rebuild the mackerel stock is clearly demonstrated by a decade of assessments that represent the best available science. The department's commitment to such action is reinforced by recent amendments to the Fisheries Act that mandate a rebuilding plan for major stocks like this that are below their limit reference points, which is also referred to as the critical zone. It is a level below which serious harm to the sustainability of the stock occurs.

Small pelagic fish like Atlantic mackerel are good candidates for rebuilding, however. These species grow relatively fast and mature young. The department is optimistic that this stock could rebuild with the continuation of strong management measures. Increasing spawning stock biomass and protecting fish until they reach more typically productive older life stages would have a positive effect on recruitment and would promote rebuilding of the stock.

Looking forward, we continue to work to ensure that a resumed fishery will be improved with better monitoring and managed in a way to optimize spawning potential.

We have also been engaging with our colleagues in the United States to promote complementary actions that serve the interest of harvesters in both countries as well as the transboundary mackerel stock. These efforts, while painful at this time, are intended to restore the essential role of mackerel in the ecosystem.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

● (1700)

The Chair: Thank you for that.

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

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for joining us today in this important study.

In your opening statement, you mentioned that only 15% of fishers fishing mackerel derive their income from it, but most of the mackerel is a bait fishery and is therefore the most important part of the \$4-billion lobster fishery. Is that correct?

Mr. Todd Williams: Yes. It is a critical part of that fishery. There's no doubt.

Mr. Rick Perkins: The integrated fisheries management plan on the DFO website for Atlantic mackerel—it's from 2007, but it has been periodically updated—says that the spawning temperature begins at 9°C for mackerel and the maximum is between 10°C and 12°C.

Is that correct?

Mr. Todd Williams: I'll defer to Jean-Yves Savaria to field that question.

Mr. Rick Perkins: All right.

Dr. Dominique Robert, who appeared before this committee and who participates in a lot of your studies, admitted in his testimony that quite often DFO has been going out when the water temperature is lower than 9°C. It's been doing that quite frequently. The water is sometimes as high as 14°C, which is too hot.

When DFO was doing spawning science on mackerel and you no longer had the catch data, which was a critical part of your science, you lost half the science. The other half of the science was being done at a time when the water temperature was too cold for mackerel to spawn. Are you surprised that it shows that the spawning biomass is too small, when you're sampling when the spawning biomass isn't there?

Mr. Todd Williams: I'll defer to Jean-Yves Savaria to answer the question related to the spawning issues and the temperature.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I didn't realize. I'm sorry.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Yves Savaria (Regional Director of Science, Québec, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Thank you for your question.

Yes, the temperatures you noted are correct. In some years, it is not possible to conduct the surveys at the right temperatures.

To ensure that we take the samples at the right time, we rely on analysis of fish gonad samples that have been taken to assess spawning during the year. When those samples indicate that it is not the spawning period, the data gathered is simply removed from our analysis for the current year.

That said, since the data is collected every year, we have time series that are long enough to serve as a basis for our analyses, even if we are occasionally unable to conduct the surveys because of the temperature.

[English]

Mr. Rick Perkins: I appreciate that. Thank you.

Half of the data is gone because you used catch samples, and they're no longer there. The heat mapping work that we've done, looking at the Gulf of St. Lawrence where you do this, shows that on average it's 8°C and sometimes it's as cold as 6°C when you go out. You're telling me that when you did the science in the last 10 years, those years are eliminated.

How many years of science when it was in the 9°C to 12°C sample size do you have in making this decision that the spawning biomass is too small?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Yves Savaria: I don't have information about the specific years for which we did the sampling with me, but I can guarantee you that almost all were successful.

[English]

Mr. Rick Perkins: I'll pass until the next time.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you for this.

I'll start by asking a question of both of the officials. Does DFO have stock assessments in place for the mackerel stocks that have been closed to harvest?

Mr. Todd Williams: Yes. We will be having stock assessment science advice provided to the department in the first quarter of 2023.

Mr. Mel Arnold: How recent is the information used in that assessment?

• (1705)

Mr. Todd Williams: Perhaps Jean-Yves could speak to the information that's coming from that. I haven't seen it yet.

Mr. Mel Arnold: I'm running short of time.

I would ask DFO if they have stock rebuilding plans in place for the mackerel stocks that have been closed. They can answer in writing.

I'd also ask if DFO resources and actions have been prioritized and increased to restore mackerel stocks closed to harvest by the moratorium.

I think I'm out of time. Oh, I have one minute left.

Are any of the answers to those questions available now?

Mr. Todd Williams: Sure. I can speak to the rebuilding plan.

We do have one in place. In fact, we also do have a rebuilding plan working group with DFO officials, fisheries management, science, as well as industry, other harvesters and first nations. We are looking at that rebuilding plan.

Unfortunately, the objectives to date haven't been met and we haven't seen the rebuilding that we had hoped for initially, so there is a meeting next month with this working group with industry to develop better objectives for that rebuilding plan.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Are there indications of why the rebuilding plan has failed?

Mr. Todd Williams: Indications point to overfishing as the dominant factor in why it hasn't rebuilt yet.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Is natural mortality a part of that as well?

Mr. Todd Williams: I would say so, yes.

Mr. Mel Arnold: What type of natural mortality might that be?

Mr. Todd Williams: I think there could be some seal aspects to this and there could be some other from larger predators in the food web.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arnold. You were a few seconds over, but that's okay.

We will now go to Mr. Hardie for six minutes or less, please.

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

I think we will give the first question to Mr. Kelloway.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Thank you, Mr. Hardie, for that.

I have just one question. In the last session, MP Small mentioned that the U.S.A. increased its TAC by 1,000 tonnes. Can you speak to whether or not that has happened?

Mr. Todd Williams: That was something that was just brought to my attention as we came into this session this afternoon. I will have to go back and verify that information.

I do know that I personally and other senior officials within the department have engaged the United States at senior levels as recently as last month. Two months ago the minister wrote to her counterpart at NOAA, again pressing the case. We would like to see a formal bilateral relationship to manage this fishery.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's over to Ken.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Thank you, Mr. Kelloway. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Along that same line, we have heard testimony this evening that it's almost a zero sum game. If we don't catch them, the Americans will.

When you are speaking about some sort of a management arrangement with the United States, are you maybe seeking some different arrangement so that in fact stocks can be rebuilt without one partner poaching from the other?

Mr. Todd Williams: I think that's exactly what we would be hoping for, sir. It is a model that we use with the United States on other stocks on the Georges Bank, groundfish stocks, as well as on the west coast with respect to some groundfish and salmon as well.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Okay. There would be some questions, I suppose, about how it came to be as it is right now, but we will leave that for the time being.

It was 30 years ago on July 2 that the cod moratorium was put in place. We have had 30 years to try to rebuild those stocks, but in evidence in past hearings we have heard that, again, they are not seeing the large fish. There are disagreements, of course, with the fishers about the state of the cod stock, but the fact is that 30 years later, the DFO isn't necessarily satisfied that we have brought our cod back to abundance. Now it appears we're seeing the same sort of thing with mackerel.

Is that a fair assessment at this point?

Mr. Todd Williams: It might be too early to speculate if this is a similar situation. As I noted in my opening remarks, mackerel is quite a bit different from groundfish, and we are hopeful that it can rebuild if given the time and with the proper measures in place.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Again, in some of the earlier testimony in these hearings, there's quite a difference between what the DFO says it observes—and we presume that there are observations—versus what the fishers say. The fishers, particularly in the more northerly sections of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, are saying there are lots of fish there.

Of course, fishermen are always going to go to where the fish are, so maybe they are getting a warped view of the actual state of the stocks, or maybe they are just seeing something that the DFO isn't.

What do you think?

• (1710)

Mr. Todd Williams: I will start and perhaps Jean-Yves Savaria can add.

I think first and foremost we take the input provided to us from harvesters very seriously. We do have the Atlantic mackerel advisory committee process, which is a very formal process, but also throughout the year we meet with the FFAW, and when we met with them just recently, two weeks ago, this very issue came up and we discussed it. We take that into consideration in terms of developing our recommendations to the minister.

Perhaps Jean-Yves can add to that with respect to some of the science collaboration.

Mr. Ken Hardie: I don't know if Mr. Savaria is tuned in.

You're on mute, sir. That much I can tell you.

The Chair: You're still on mute, sir.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Savaria: I didn't hear the question, because there was no sound. Sorry.

[*English*]

Mr. Ken Hardie: Just briefly, what we heard was that there's quite a difference between the observations of fishers and those of the DFO. The fishers are telling us there's lots of fish, particularly in the more northern areas of the Gulf of St. Lawrence. The DFO doesn't observe that.

What's going on? Is it that somebody's right and somebody's wrong, or what is it?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Savaria: It's hard to say whether anyone was at fault.

The difference may be related to the fact that it is a migratory species that tends to travel in schools. It's possible to see fairly large schools even when the population within the ecosystem is low. That means that fishers may have seen lots of fish as they group together during numerous migrations.

As for Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and...

[*English*]

Mr. Ken Hardie: Do you do the stock assessments in the same place every year? Is there an impact, then, from climate change on the shifting populations of these fish?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Savaria: We are in fact always very interested in keeping track of climate changes, by means of monitoring programs.

At the moment, we are sampling eggs found in the southern part of the gulf. As other witnesses have mentioned, we also take samples of fishers' catches. There are various different inputs that can be used to model populations.

We have also established a scientific committee made up of industry representatives to take the various data reported to us into account. Efforts may also be made to sample the population elsewhere, when relevant. That gives us an overall picture and leads to the best scientific advice.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hardie.

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

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being here. We are very grateful.

I'd like to return to the testimony we heard two weeks ago from Mr. Collin and Mr. Lelièvre. The latter is a fisher who was directly affected by this unexpected situation. He was forced to do nothing when his boat was ready to head offshore. For these fishers, this is of course a situation that can't last. They have to reorient their careers or review their living as fishers. And, of course, they want financial compensation.

What will happen if we are unable to restore the resource by 2023 or 2024 and these people can no longer fish? Is there a way of keeping them going?

As Félix Leclerc so often said, it's better to teach people to fish than to give them money. It's an important principle.

Do you have a solution for these people?

The testimony we heard two weeks ago was really very distressing.

• (1715)

Mr. Todd Williams: Thank you for your question.

[English]

Indeed, there are 89 mackerel harvesters who are largely dependent on this fishery, and that's determined by the landings: Basically, 50% or more of their landings are related to that.

It's something that we take very seriously. At this year's advisory committee meeting, I made it very clear to all the members, all the associations and all the participants that we did have all options on the table, including and up to the closure of the commercial and bait fisheries. It was something that we did reiterate, and we certainly tried to ensure that people weren't being caught off guard. I certainly empathize very much with these harvesters.

On the particular question of whether there is assistance, the short answer is that my mandate is as a fisheries manager. I have a number of tools to work with: the sustainable fisheries framework, the precautionary approach, the fish stocks provisions. Unfortunately, nothing in my tool box includes assistance for harvesters in the manner that you described.

[Translation]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Our understanding is that these fishers have nothing to look forward to, even for next year. They told us that they were the only ones to be required to provide an exhaustive measurement of the resource when they fished. These fishers out on the water are invaluable. We heard about that earlier. Now that they are no longer able to measure the resource, what other tools do you have for that?

[English]

Mr. Todd Williams: There are a number of tools. As noted, we do collaborate with industry, and there was some sampling done last year in other fisheries that have faced closures. We have also launched index fisheries. We have an index fishery in redbait and similar fisheries in cod. Those things are possible from my tool box as a fisheries manager, but the situation that presented itself last year was unfortunately that the stock was in such bad shape that we felt that this was the decision that needed to be taken.

[Translation]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: In coming to a decision, do you think a distinction could be made between seine fishing and traditional bait fishing, which is considered sustainable?

That would have given us some tools, through the bait fishers who take appropriate measures, and it would even have considerably limited aggressive fishing of the resource.

Could a distinction have been made between these two types of fishing?

[English]

Mr. Todd Williams: I think there are a number of possibilities that we could have looked at. It is very difficult to manage it in every single case. Certainly, as part of our ongoing consultations with industry, we'd be looking for more ideas and suggestions and advice to take into account and to provide to the minister as advice and recommendations. I wouldn't want to rule anything out, but it was the nature of the stock at that time that led the minister to the decision for complete closure commercially, and for bait.

[Translation]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Do you think there are other important factors affecting the resource, seals for example? Is that a significant factor in your data?

• (1720)

[English]

Mr. Todd Williams: We certainly have information that seal predation for some stocks is the determinant factor in their levels and rebuilding. For mackerel, I might turn to Jean-Yves Savaria. Perhaps he has more information on the seal predation question. We do know they're an opportunistic predator.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Yves Savaria: Yes, absolutely.

I can confirm that seals eat mackerel. Current data would not appear to indicate that it represents a significant portion of mackerel mortality. However, more studies would have to be conducted to confirm this.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Desbiens.

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

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

I'm trying to put together all of the information that we've heard so far. Ultimately, my goal when I'm listening is to try to figure out what pieces of information are most important and relevant to come forward as recommendations, based on what you and others are saying, for government on how best to move forward in light of the circumstances.

The differences that we're hearing, depending on who we're talking to, on the circumstances we're in can't be denied. I'm trying to understand how that could be. I'm not an expert in this area.

There seems to be a theme, though, on some gaps in communication and in consultation. It seems to be that there's information that's very real in front of one person and real in front of another, but there seem to be gaps in people talking to one another—at least, that's my perception. You can correct me if I'm completely wrong on that.

I'm happy to hear that you'd spoken with FFAW, because this is an organization that came as a witness earlier and attended one of our meetings on this issue. I'm curious to know what came from that meeting, because when FFAW was here, I quoted something from the FFAW magazine because I feel like it so succinctly describes what it is that they're seeing. Dr. Erin Carruthers was talking about the harvesters' observations of mackerel abundance and distribution being so widely different from the observations of DFO. She went on to say that:

a long-term commitment to document the abundance, distribution, extent, timing, and age of mackerel in NL waters is needed. Until we bring more observations and data from NL into the mackerel stock assessment, I do not see how we can reconcile these widely different assessments of the health of the mackerel stock.

Now, I hate to repeat in a setting when we have such limited opportunities, but I feel that it really highlights an issue. I was wondering if you can respond to that quote and let me know your perspective on that, please.

Mr. Todd Williams: Sure.

I actually might turn to Jean-Yves Savaria for the question with respect to what Newfoundland harvesters were seeing and the assessments that we have in place in that case.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Savaria.

Mr. Jean-Yves Savaria: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As I was saying earlier, as part of our scientific committee work, we regularly have discussions with various industry representatives, including people from the Fish, Food and Allied Workers Union, the FFAW. Mr. Williams mentioned that at the outset.

From the scientific point of view, everything indicates that there really is a very serious mackerel stocks problem. In the critical zone, our temporal egg surveys are very low. There has also been a modification in the age structure, indicating overfishing. This modification is associated with periods of large landings.

We also work with our colleagues in the United States, who are also evaluating stocks. Our evaluations of stock trends match.

However, as I mentioned earlier, we want to continue with scientific work in collaboration with various industry associations and to take their observations and their work into consideration to improve our own sampling, as well as provide the best possible advice for departmental decision-making.

• (1725)

[*English*]

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

A group has come up a few times, and I forget the actual name of it. Who participates in that Atlantic mackerel group that you're saying comes together?

Mr. Todd Williams: It's the Atlantic mackerel advisory committee. This is a committee that we have for every major stock that we manage. Everyone has their own component by species, and it is composed of DFO officials, of course, and fisheries managers. I chair it, and we have around the table harvester associations—including some of the ones who testified here, like the FFAW, the MFU, PEIFA and others, and first nations and indigenous groups and environmental non-governmental organizations as well. In large part, if anyone has a large stake in the fishery, their members are represented at the table.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

What do you see as the gaps in communication? Is there anything you're seeing in your role? Clearly, you're in the middle of it. Are you seeing any gaps in communication, and if so, are there any recommendations for improvements in that communication?

Mr. Todd Williams: I certainly tried at the Atlantic mackerel advisory committee meeting to present the position of the department, based on the science advice and based on what we felt, as fisheries managers, could be an appropriate approach with respect to the fishery. All options were indeed on the table as a result of the science that we had before us.

Interestingly, the immediate response from some harvester associations with respect to that recommendation for a total allowable catch was for a considerably higher TAC, in some cases, than the previous year, so I do question whether my messaging was succinct enough. However, it was. I can provide you with my speaking notes, which I read verbatim, so I'm not sure about the disconnect with respect to that particular meeting.

We do encourage informal conversations all the time, and in fact we meet frequently with the major harvester associations. There's that type of communication. There's ongoing work with respect to science, and where we can find more ways to collaborate, we do have tools for that. Whether it's section 10 under the Fisheries Act or some of the sampling programs that science has, we do have tools to really collaborate with industry there. That's certainly ongoing.

We're going into the next AMAC meeting in the first quarter of 2023. I really hope industry will come forward with ideas. In the event this fishery doesn't reopen, do they have ideas with respect to further collaboration around science and that type of thing?

There is the possibility that we may be in that situation. Again, I don't want to prejudge. We haven't seen the science assessment yet, nor have we consulted, but there is that.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Barron.

That went way over. I'm going to have to get a bit tight around my timeframes to save time.

We'll no go to Mr. Small for five minutes or less—and not a second more.

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

Mr. Williams, everyone who has taken to the water in Newfoundland and Labrador this year has experienced catching mackerel. They've seen them. Is it possible that DFO science has it wrong? Can you say with all certainty that these people who have observed mackerel in large quantities, historic quantities, are wrong, yes or no?

• (1730)

Mr. Todd Williams: I don't think I can answer that with a yes or no. I'm not doubting what they say— absolutely not. However, the science that we have to make the decisions can also be correct.

Mr. Clifford Small: People in your capacity are paid to make very important decisions. If you have it wrong, if there's a massive bloom of mackerel and you've missed them somehow, what will be the implications on the year-classes of cod, herring, crab, lobster? All these species lay their eggs, and the larvae float up through the water column. We know mackerel don't have an air bladder. They have to swim so that they don't sink. When they're swimming, they're eating. If you have it drastically wrong, what will be the implication on the species that mackerel are foraging on?

Mr. Todd Williams: I'll turn to my colleague, Jean-Yves Savaria. That's a science question.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Yves Savaria: Of course I don't have an answer for you now, because that's not the situation that has been observed in the ecosystem.

Nevertheless, I could point out that before the fisheries as such, there was a balanced situation. It would therefore probably tend to return to what it was before, if we got it wrong.

I want merely to reiterate the fact that the best available science being carried out by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, and corroborated by our American colleagues, shows very clearly that there is a major problem affecting mackerel at the moment.

I would also refer back to my earlier comment about the large percentages of mackerel...

[English]

Mr. Clifford Small: I'm satisfied with the answer so far from this witness.

In the Gulf of St. Lawrence in the last number of years, we've seen a lot of right whales. We don't deny they're there; we see them, right? Is that correct?

Mr. Todd Williams: That's correct.

Mr. Clifford Small: So if you see a lot of mackerel, how can you say there are no mackerel?

Mr. Todd Williams: I think it's correct in that they were seeing a lot of mackerel in those areas at that time, but we also know that this particular species is highly migratory, and it schools in small

areas, so it's quite possible, and no doubt they witness that, absolutely.

Mr. Clifford Small: I'm just going to go back to a previous witness, Ms. Giffin, who admitted that her claims on year-classes aren't based on any science, because there haven't been any mackerel taken and you just haven't sampled them physically to know what the year-classes are. How can you have science making claims, talking about year-classes and biomasses, when there's absolutely no science to back it up? The science is absolutely so weak.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Yves Savaria: The samplings have been done since last year. We are now analyzing the data. Thanks to the collaboration of fishers, we were able to get samples and to determine the egg structures. This work is ongoing.

[English]

Mr. Clifford Small: What are you proposing to improve mackerel science? Can you tell the committee? You must care enough to want to improve your science. What steps are you taking to have a more extensive scientific approach and to have a better assessment of the mackerel biomass?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Yves Savaria: That is definitely of interest to us. As I mentioned on several occasions in my testimony, there has been collaboration from the outset with industry to look at the observations and corroborate the various factors.

We have also been working with the Americans. We do so in various ways, including data sharing. It's important to know that northern mackerel stocks go into southern waters. Data exchanges and assessments that include several inputs used in our models are exceedingly useful to us.

Owing to the blending of stocks between the northern and southern contingents, genetic analyses are currently being done to see what impacts there might be for the United States fishery during the winter, when the northern contingent heads south. Those are the kinds of things we observe.

Of course, the various forms of collaboration introduced over the past year with fishers need to continue. We are going to continue sampling to get on with our scientific work. Everything being done at the moment, including the basic survey work and the historical data series, will continue.

In accordance with the priorities determined in collaboration with the Americans and the industry, research could be funded on an ad hoc basis. The criteria could be based on the importance and the need for research findings to enhance our scientific analyses, with a view to providing better advice to our resource management colleagues.

• (1735)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Small.

Ms. Barron has a point of order, I believe.

Mr. Small, I know you wanted to ask another question, but you were about a minute and a half over at least, and we just don't have the time, unfortunately.

Go ahead, Ms. Barron.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Chair.

I want to ask, through you, that we please maintain respectful dialogue around the table, in particular when we are corresponding with our witnesses. I'm noticing a pattern of accusatory language being used when we are speaking with our witnesses, and I would like our witnesses to continue to come back to this committee. I would like to please ask through you, Chair, that we have all MPs speak respectfully to witnesses, regardless of who is present and their affiliation or background.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thanks for raising that point, Ms. Barron. I'll comment on it after our witnesses are gone, perhaps, or at the next meeting.

I want to say thank you to the departmental officials for sharing their time with us today and providing insight into this particular study that the committee has undertaken. They have always been co-operative to come, regardless of which division they're from. There's never any problem to get the officials from the department to come before this committee. Again, we say thank you for that.

The next meeting, of course, is on Friday. We will hold our first meeting for the study on impacts of the climate crisis and hear from witnesses on this topic. We will also take time to discuss drafting instructions for the letter to the minister for the mackerel study.

As well, Mr. Fergus joined us today in place of Mr. Cormier, and I thank you, Mr. Fergus, for doing that. Hopefully we'll see you back again sometime. Maybe you'll be in the room next time and we'll be able to give you an official welcome.

Again, everybody, as I'm hearing no disagreement, the meeting is adjourned.

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