



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 089

PUBLIC PART ONLY - PARTIE PUBLIQUE SEULEMENT

Tuesday, November 28, 2023

Chair: Mr. Ken McDonald



Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

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• (1100)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.)): Welcome to meeting number 89 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans.

This meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders.

Before we proceed, I want to remind members to be very careful when handling the earpieces, especially when your microphone or your neighbour's microphone is turned on. Earpieces placed too close to a microphone are one of the most common causes of sound feedback, which is extremely harmful for interpreters and cause serious injuries.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on January 18, 2022, the committee is resuming its study on illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing.

For our first hour, joining us from the Canada Border Services Agency, we have Daniel Anson, director general, intelligence and investigations. Accompanying him, we have Cathy Toxopeus, director general, commercial programs.

Welcome to the committee.

Mr. Anson, you have up to five minutes for your opening statement.

Mr. Daniel Anson (Director General, Intelligence and Investigations, Canada Border Services Agency): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning. I'm Dan Anson, and I am the director general of intelligence and investigations within the intelligence and enforcement branch of the CBSA. With me is Cathy Toxopeus, DG of commercial programs within the commercial and trade branch.

[Translation]

Mr. Chair, members of the committee, I appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the committee's study of illegal, unreported and unregulated fisheries and share with the committee the roles and responsibilities of the Canada Border Services Agency, or CBSA, in the monitoring of fish and seafood imports and exports.

The CBSA facilitates the flow of legitimate trade and enforces more than 100 acts and regulations that keep our country and Canadians safe. With respect to fish and seafood, the CBSA plays an indirect role by verifying that other government department requirements are met for seafood being imported into and exported from Canada, as well as administering the Customs Act.

[English]

The policies governing the importation and exportation of fish, seafood, seafood products and shellfish are established by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and Environment and Climate Change Canada. The CBSA works closely with other government departments to support them and to ensure that fish and seafood importations and exports are compliant with established policies. These activities primarily include verifying that any required licences, permits, certificates or other documentation required to import and export the goods to and from Canada are provided.

The CBSA assists DFO with the enforcement of the aquatic invasive species regulations and the import prohibition of shark fins under the Fisheries Act. It also assists with trade tracking for certain species of tuna, swordfish and toothfish, as well as illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing under the Coastal Fisheries Protection Act and related regulations.

The CBSA also assists ECCC with the administration of the Wild Animal and Plant Protection and Regulation of International and Interprovincial Trade Act, or WAPPRIITA, which governs illegal wildlife trade and the importation and exportation of species protected by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species.

The CBSA is responsible for ensuring that goods being imported to or exported from Canada are compliant with partner government agency program legislation and regulations. The CBSA's role is to enforce these acts and policies as they apply at Canadian border points of entry or exit.

The agency fulfills this role by employing a layered and comprehensive risk-based approach, including assessing pre-arrival data, sharing intelligence, reviewing ongoing emerging threats, issuing targets and lookouts, conducting examinations and inspections, seizing or detaining goods where required, and issuing penalties for non-compliance. The CBSA regularly updates directions to front-line officers to manage the handling, interdiction or release of at-risk goods.

To increase compliance, the CBSA enforces an administrative monetary penalty system for contraventions to the governing legislation. Under this system, border officers may issue monetary penalties to importers and exporters who fail to provide true, accurate and complete information in the import or export declarations.

As a final point, the agency is continuously working to improve not only our relationship with our partners but also our collective intelligence and enforcement capabilities and our operations, and seeking to build on lessons learned and our successes.

This concludes my opening remarks.

Along with my colleague, I'm very happy to take any questions.

• (1105)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Anson.

We'll go right to questions now with Mr. Small for six minutes or less, please.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for coming out today and helping us with a very important study.

Mr. Anson, does salmon require export permits in Canada?

Mr. Daniel Anson: Specific to salmon, for any type of export, there is a certain amount of requirement to report what is being exported.

Mr. Clifford Small: Does the same apply to lobster?

Mr. Daniel Anson: I'm not specifically aware of what all the different permit requirements are for each individual commodity or type of fish, but it's something that we could verify and stratify for the committee, if required, in writing.

Mr. Clifford Small: It's the same for eels and baby eels, I guess.

Mr. Daniel Anson: Again, I think there is a variety of different layers of legislation and regulatory frameworks that apply to those different types of fish and fish products, or anything that is harvested. We do have a variety of different compliance mechanisms in place that will require the surfacing of those types of information.

Mr. Clifford Small: Thank you.

I'm wondering if the Minister of Fisheries flagged to CBSA, in this year that we have behind us here, that illegal offshore or baby eels may be destined to be exported either by road or by air in the Maritimes.

Did the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans flag that to your department?

Mr. Daniel Anson: I cannot speak to whether or not the minister had informed our department.

What I would say is that illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing is certainly an issue for the CBSA, and we ensure that we have compliance measures in place to find and to intervene where illegal exports are destined abroad. The variety of different export mechanisms or the different modes would require anything from road...and there's air and marine commercial. We have officers that

are specifically focused on ensuring there is compliance and that only legal products are destined for overseas.

I cannot speak to any conversations that the minister may have had with any of our senior officials within the CBSA. However, I would state that it is something we are very much attuned to, and we have a variety of different types of operational activities specifically designed to identify and intervene for illegal shipments destined abroad.

Mr. Clifford Small: For example, if a tractor-trailer load of lobster were to cross the border into Maine in August, would you check into that load of lobster or could that just sail right on through unchecked?

Mr. Daniel Anson: My colleague may have something to add, but for doing cross-border commercial shipments, there is a certain amount of reporting required that would be verified on export. In addition, Customs and Border Protection in the United States also have their own measures that they apply at the border to ensure that these are safe and legitimate exports.

In a situation such as that which you are identifying as a case study, there are various layers of law enforcement regulatory measures that are in place that would hopefully have identified that beforehand. Illegal or unreported fishing, harvesting and then export abroad is something that we do certainly try to catch, but that is one method that illicit actors may attempt to use to circumvent established procedures. However, paperwork is required at the border for export.

• (1110)

Mr. Clifford Small: Paperwork is required at the border. How many truckloads of lobster, semis or larger tractor-trailer loads crossed the border in Maine this year? If you don't know, you can submit that in writing.

Also, what flags were raised by you, and was that reported back to the Minister of Fisheries? If you don't have that information, you could submit it in writing, please.

Mr. Daniel Anson: We ensure that there is an enforcement layer and certainly compliance. We do not necessarily track the trade data. However, based on the systems that we have, we may be able to capture that information, as you requested and as the committee requires, and would commit to submit whatever we can to identify how many of the commercial motor vehicles may have been destined for the United States through the main ports of exit.

In terms of flags, in a situation like that, if something had happened without our knowledge, then no flags would have been presented. However, we do have fairly comprehensive targeting and intelligence programs that support the identification of illicit activities. In a situation such as that, whether a business, a mode of export or an individual that may have previous enforcement actions, or a variety of other indicators, may have surfaced something that is destined for export as a potential issue, that would have flagged something for examination in certain circumstances. We would also expect that the same would apply to our U.S. CBP colleagues as they have their own indicators that they enforce at their own borders.

Mr. Clifford Small: We had a lot of reports of IUU baby eels being shipped from Nova Scotia this past spring. I would like for you to submit to the committee in writing the details of the inspections you made and any sources of irregularity, missing permits, captures, infractions and things like that that took place with elvers this past spring, please.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Small.

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

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

Through you to Mr. Anson, could you elaborate a bit more? You used the term "compliance measures", which you take at the Canada-U.S border. Could you expand a bit on what those measures are as they relate to seafood entering the U.S.? I'm just referencing from Canada to the U.S.

Mr. Daniel Anson: Thanks for the question, Mr. Chair.

Specifically, there's an amount of administrative reporting or a number of permits that need to be sought for certain types of exports. The compliance measures are those that would surface all the types of information that are important to us. That lets us know what is coming from where, who achieved it, who harvested the fish in this particular instance and what its destination might be. That also allows us to verify what end use or destination countries, areas, regions or ports for export they might be going to.

The compliance measures are a tool for us to enable our targeting program to ensure that there is the greatest amount of compliance and that actors are conforming to regulatory or legislation regimes and frameworks.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Could you expand a bit on the targeting program?

Mr. Daniel Anson: Absolutely. It's my pleasure to expand on the targeting program.

Our national targeting centre, the NTC, is a 24-7, fairly large, robust and extremely capable targeting centre that applies scenario-based targets, algorithms, intelligence, research and open-source research to ensure that we are doing our best to secure the borders. The variety of different targets may apply to anything from illegal, unreported or unregulated fishing to national security risks, as well as other key priorities for border security, such as firearms, contraband and illegal drugs—unregulated drugs like fentanyl, etc.

• (1115)

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Chair, to be clear, to which minister does the CBSA report?

Mr. Daniel Anson: The CBSA reports to the Minister of Public Safety.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Going back to the compliance measures that you would take at the border, we'll use the scenario my colleague raised earlier about a tractor-trailer load. We'll use lobster arriving at the border. For the information you would check, who provides the information to you? Is it the processor who is shipping the product?

Ms. Cathy Toxopeus (Director General, Commercial Programs, Canada Border Services Agency): The exporter provides the information to us through our export system. They fill out the export documentation, which we review.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Who does that?

Ms. Cathy Toxopeus: The exporter.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: It's the exporter. In this case, it's the processor. In that situation, then, the federal ministry of fisheries would have now....

The processing sector in Canada is regulated under provincial jurisdiction. That's the buying, processing and preparing for shipment. It would not be an accurate reflection of the activity occurring in the field or on the water. Am I correct?

Ms. Cathy Toxopeus: You are correct.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Okay. That's what I thought.

The CBSA is simply there to check the accuracy of the documentation provided by the shipper.

Can you follow that thread through? Do you have jurisdiction to follow that thread through to who provided that processor with the raw product?

Mr. Daniel Anson: Those are excellent questions, for sure.

Based on the information that is provided and surfaced through the exporter requirements, we are able to do risk assessments based on our gauge of whether or not the person is compliant. In certain circumstances—to extend to the example you provided—if there are individuals, modes of transport or destinations for export that have previous enforcement actions, or that are linked to other problematic entities, criminal networks or organized criminality domestically, those are the types of threads that we will pull through the targeting process.

Our export controls are also intended to identify these types of illicit activities. We would not only assess the administrative compliance in the full and truthful verification of information supporting the export, but—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: However, you're primarily dealing with the information that's given to you by the packers, the shippers of the product arriving at the border. The scenario, and what this study is looking at, is illegal, unreported cash sales. If the processor in this case were shipping product across the border, I'm not sure how your agency would have the legislative capability or the operational capability of testing to see if all the product that arrived at the plant arrived through regulated fisheries in compliance with those fisheries. Would that be a stretch?

Mr. Daniel Anson: It's not a stretch at all. The interesting aspect to people pursuing illegal activities is that we do not expect honesty in certain administrative components or phases of them. In circumstances where dishonest or non-truthful information is provided in export declarations, we do our best to ensure compliance, and we also integrate, within our intelligence partners, a lot of the research that is hopefully intended to identify those circumstances of administrative or operational non-compliance.

However, in circumstances where successful illegal exports have occurred, those are typically the types of methods that would be employed.

Yes, there is feasibility in the hypothetical example.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Morrissey.

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.

I'd like to thank the witnesses very much for being with us today, and in person, among other things.

Tell me, is it important to be rigorous about traceability and labelling in your work?

[*English*]

Mr. Daniel Anson: I don't believe so. With any further details on the types of labelling you referenced, I could potentially provide a more comprehensive answer. The labelling within export declarations is very important. The labelling of goods for export is certainly important for export verifications that might be done by the CBSA or a Customs and Border Protection officer in the commercial motor-vehicle stream of land ports of exit. It is likely to be important, and it is certainly a feature. It just depends on what phase of export compliance or verification we're referencing.

Thank you for the question.

• (1120)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: In principle, this process should already have run its course before the merchandise arrives at your door. That's what you're telling me.

We did a study on this not long ago. In addition, I wanted to make a brief aside to find out what its weight is, once it arrives on your premises.

Do you keep statistics on the offenders you arrest at your borders? In fact, do you have a profile of offenders? Do you have statistics on species? Have you drawn up a table of all this, or do you proceed rather on a case-by-case basis?

[*English*]

Mr. Daniel Anson: We absolutely collect statistics for a variety of different reasons, not only to inform predictive analytics on non-compliance but also to guide our priorities so that we ensure that we are shifting towards some of the greatest threats, such as this, when it comes to local fishing communities on either of the coasts. We do have the statistics.

Regarding the second part of the question on profiles, we do develop profiles on individual potential bad actors or organized crime groups that would be strategically helpful to people in making determinations and assessments.

In terms of what we may or may not be able to share with the committee, it's something I can certainly look into on the statistics,

if we would like to shape and stratify the question and the specific statistics that might be required here. However, in many cases, those are statistics that are drawn from internal compartmented either commercial systems or, in many cases, intelligence management systems, where we do attempt to keep a certain compartmented approach towards a lot of the intelligence that's derived.

It does also integrate and intersect with a lot of our law enforcement communities and partners and our domestic public safety partners, as well as the other government departments that have a very genuine stake within this particular topic today.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for the question, madam.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: The answer to my next question is perhaps more a matter of personal opinion. You are free to answer yes or no.

Are penalties sufficient to compel a certain number of offenders to comply with the law? Should we increase them? In your opinion, are penalties—paying the price for doing something wrong—a sufficient tool? Should we use other techniques instead?

Mr. Daniel Anson: Thank you for your question.

[*English*]

My opinion is that we are very effective at using the tools that we have at our disposal and that the administrative monetary penalties have been an impactful tool in previous cases.

With regard to whether or not the penalty matches, outweighs or is a sunk cost for the lucrative nature of exports, I'm not qualified to make that opinion. However, again, the AMPs that are available to us as a tool.... We do seek to use those to the extent possible or to use those as motivators towards compliance for illicit actors.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Beyond fines, do you have any other tools to counter crime?

[*English*]

Mr. Daniel Anson: In terms of penalties, I would have to give a bit more thought to the range of penalties. I think that the challenge is the issue of the seizure of goods destined for export, because we can seize the goods, but that does not necessarily relieve some of the pressures on local fishing communities that might have been disadvantaged by that product having been illegally harvested or unregulated in its harvesting.

The ultimate tool is ensuring that the export does not go abroad. However, I would say that we are two to three layers away from the original crime and the original issue, so I would potentially defer to some of our partner departments to assess what types of escalation or tools are available in terms of the direct regulation of the fishing industry.

For us at the border, there are certain implications should somebody attempt to export something illegally or something that is non-compliant, or to not represent the nature, the true value, of the goods deemed for export. That would certainly have an impact—if there is time, I would defer, potentially, to my colleague—on their ability to export legitimately.

Again, I think that most of the tools for escalation are more within the partner departments and agencies that have a direct role in the regulation of this particular industry.

• (1125)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Desbiens.

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

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being here. Thanks for the information that you've provided so far.

This may be expanding on some of what you've already identified, but my first question, perhaps for you, Mr. Anson, is this: On what grounds can vessels be inspected and searched under the Coastal Fisheries Protection Act? Can you expand on that and share a little bit of your knowledge around that?

Mr. Daniel Anson: Our role, really, is at the port. If you are referencing vessels that are in the process of fishing or harvesting within or outside of our economic exclusion zone, the CBSA does not have a direct operational role, and I would defer, potentially, to Fisheries and Oceans Canada and the Coast Guard.

We do not have a role in inspecting. Specific to the agency, we do provide import verifications and examinations, and we will rummage or search ships that are arriving—crews, cargo and, obviously, the vessel. We do that at ports of entry, but for vessels that are loitering abroad or conducting fishing operations, again, within our coastal waters, the CBSA does not necessarily have a role.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Can you expand a little bit on what that looks like at the ports of entry specifically?

Mr. Daniel Anson: Within the ports of entry, absolutely, we will ensure that there is compliance. We will assess compliance, and we will do risk assessments of the crew, the cargo, the vessel and the company for any commercial vessel that does come to a Canadian port. We will ensure that there is compliance with all of our administrative, legislative or regulatory policies.

Specific to the committee's interest, that ensures that we are not allowing aquatic diseases, endangered species, unreported cargo fish or seafood products, or any other type of threats, into either our economy or our aquatic areas, just to protect the marine wildlife environment. That's a big part of what we do. In addition, we're also ensuring that there are no other illegal types of imports or potentially undocumented workers coming through on these different vessels. That's our primary role: ensuring that there's full compliance with all the legislation that the agency enforces at ports of entry.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

Could you share a little bit more around what that looks like as far as training those who are doing these searches and so on to be able to identify fishery products that may be illegal?

Mr. Daniel Anson: Yes, of course. It would be a pleasure.

Starting with the initial training at Rigaud for border services officers, an extensive number of training routines and repetitions occur to ensure that people are very aware of the different types of legislation and also the operational practice of searching different types of vessels, commercial motor vehicles, aircraft or air cargo, etc. The officers in the CBSA are exceptionally trained, extremely dedicated and very determined in their execution of these types of tasks.

Specifically on your question on marine vessels, there is a very specific rummaging course that officers will attend. It gives them great expertise and awareness of vessels, patterns, methods of concealment and deep concealment, but also some of the hidden areas like bulkheads and tiller flats and the different areas of a vessel that most people may not deem to be an area where you might try to smuggle different types of contraband or illegally fished or harvested products. There is extensive training.

In addition to that, to reinforce the expertise and the awareness of officers, we issue different types of operational bulletins to ensure that frontline officers are attuned to the different types of evolving threats and trends, even if they are economically dependent. Should we be trying to identify a certain type of illegally fished-abroad product, the bulletins would include what it looks like and how to identify it, and we'd also be aligning that with the different types of expertise in terms of where you could potentially deep-conceal that on a commercial vessel.

Those are the different types of integrated training that we offer our officers. Again, I think our officers are world-class in that regard and in many different regards. BSOs are at the forefront of protecting our fisheries and oceans against different types of illegal, unregulated or threatening products coming into our Canadian economy and wildlife.

• (1130)

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you for sharing that.

I am wondering if you could expand a little further on the patterns and trends that you were talking about for the smuggling we're seeing related to fishing products.

What are some of those? Are we seeing an increase? Can you share a little of that information?

Mr. Daniel Anson: It would be a pleasure.

In terms of compliance or any attempts to smuggle contraband fish, seafood, etc., into or out of Canada—for import or export—there is not necessarily a high volume. We have not noticed a significant threat of late.

Through our national targeting centre, we run different types of targeting models that are very much designed to catch these types of illicit or nefarious activities. For the most part, those have largely surfaced administrative non-compliance. We have not noticed any real patterns of shipping or illegal shipping.

In addition, we enforce a variety of partner-department target requests. That would be the Canadian Food Inspection Agency or Fisheries and Oceans Canada requesting that the CBSA examine goods due for export or potentially for import. In such cases, we are very diligent and quickly respond to partner-department requests. In those cases, we have not necessarily seen a pattern or trend.

That does not necessarily negate the fact that illegal, unregulated or unreported fishing is occurring. However, at the ports of export, we would say that we're not necessarily noting a pattern or trend that is problematic. I would say the same thing for import, but that requires the crossing of an international border and does not negate that this might be a local, municipal or regional issue that is obviously affecting many Canadians.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Barron.

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 both witnesses for being here. I'll start with Mr. Anson, I guess.

I believe you said that all exports of seafood products from Canada require export permits. Is that correct?

Ms. Cathy Toxopeus: It's not necessarily all. There are some exemptions going to the U.S.

Mr. Mel Arnold: There are minor exemptions to the U.S.

Ms. Cathy Toxopeus: That's correct.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Basically, the elver fishery in eastern Canada and Atlantic Canada was completely shut down this year. Is that correct?

Ms. Cathy Toxopeus: I am unaware of it being shut down. I can't speak to that.

Mr. Mel Arnold: It was basically closed.

Ms. Cathy Toxopeus: I am unaware.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Was CBSA not aware that the season was closed for the elver fishery?

Ms. Cathy Toxopeus: I wouldn't say that it was CBSA. I would say that I was not aware of the....

Mr. Mel Arnold: Perhaps Mr. Anson could answer.

Was CBSA aware that the elver fishery was closed?

Mr. Daniel Anson: There may have been CBSA regional resources that were aware that an elver or an eel facility may have shut down, but I cannot state for certain.

Mr. Mel Arnold: That's surprising, because this was all over the news in Atlantic Canada and across the country.

With the fishery being closed, there would not have been, supposedly, any elver for export. Would that make sense?

Mr. Daniel Anson: The statement makes sense. I can't speak to how many other fisheries conducting the same activity may have been open, but, if it is the only fishery and it's shutdown, then it would make sense that there were no exports of elver eels.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Would CBSA be aware of how many export permits were issued for elvers in 2023?

Mr. Daniel Anson: I would suspect yes. We would likely have statistics on how many elver eel exports were deemed for abroad.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Could we get that information provided to the committee in writing, please?

For either one of you, what revenue streams for the government would be impacted by illegal or unauthorized exports of Canada's seafood?

• (1135)

Mr. Daniel Anson: I would not be qualified to speak to all the different economic impacts, other than that it would have one as well as a much more severe impact on municipal and regional interests.

All imports and exports have an effect on our economy. I wouldn't be able to stratify specifically the different types or aspects of the economy.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Would taxes payable on the export of goods and the harvest of goods and royalties, if there were such, be lost if goods were exported without permits and illegally?

Mr. Daniel Anson: Illegal exports inherently have all sorts of impacts, such as the loss of revenue, the avoidance of revenue to the consolidated revenue fund for the Government of Canada and also local taxes or provincial taxes that may or may not have been paid. The same circumstance would exist with all trade fraud and trade-based money laundering. There are a lot of revenue evasion methods that are implicit in those types of activities, so yes, I would confirm that.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

As for imports into Canada, we've seen reports, broadly publicized reports, of illegal fisheries taking place in international waters, some of them involving basically human slavery and human rights' issues.

What role does CBSA have in monitoring the imports of those products into Canada?

Mr. Daniel Anson: Our role would be ensuring full compliance in that only legal and lawfully declared or fished products are admitted into Canada.

In terms of this fishing activity outside of our economic zones, we don't necessarily have oversight or a mandate specifically. However, there may be a different role through our governmental partners that might be manifested in the marine security operations centres, which also provide a bit of an oversight of certain types of fishing. I don't know what their geographical constraints may be.

Specific to the other part of the question, we are very much focused on ensuring that only lawfully employed foreign nationals, Canadians, permanent residents and temporary workers are employed with any potential fishing venture or companies. In those circumstances, the CBSA does have a separate area that focuses on ensuring that there is compliance with IRPA, the Immigration Refugee Protection Act, and I believe section 124 applies to the lawful employment of foreign nationals only with authority to do so.

That is something that we are focused on as a mandate. In circumstances where we are doing risk assessments of commercial vessels where there are foreign workers, we will in many circumstances also ensure that they are appropriately documented and that the employers are employing them lawfully.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arnold.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you. I believe my time is up.

The Chair: You're a little bit over.

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

[*Translation*]

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

I'll start with the elver eel fishery. As my colleague was saying, this situation has made headlines in Canada, and even internationally. There are people who were conducting illegal activities while the fishing season was closed.

How many pounds or kilograms of elvers did you seize at the border?

[*English*]

Mr. Daniel Anson: Specific to the one enforcement action that I recall, without researching it I can't speak to the volume of seized elver eels. Based on the fact that it was an official enforcement action, it's something we can return to the committee with should you wish to know the size, quantity, weight or any of the details of that.

However, in the more recent history, we have not had any enforcement actions specific to elver eels destined for export.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier: I would be grateful if you could inform the committee of the quantity of elver eels that have been seized, this year.

I'll continue along the same lines. When you know that a fishery is closed, there should be collaboration between the various authorities like yours, that is, the Canada Border Services Agency, the RCMP, probably, and Fisheries and Oceans Canada so that all are informed, for example, that the lobster fishery is closed, and that there should be no export of lobster across the border.

When a fishery or other operation is closed, do you inform your agents at the various ports of entry that there are illegal activities and that they should keep an eye on these activities?

• (1140)

[*English*]

Mr. Daniel Anson: That is something we can look into. I do not know how many fisheries are specifically focused on elver eels. If there is only one source of legitimate harvesting of elver eels and that fishery is closed, then it would make sense that there may not be any exports specific to that item, to that commodity. However, the other part of your question was specific to the seizures for this year. We have not had any seizures of elver eels this specific year. We have effected a variety of different examinations to ensure compliance and have not found anything that was illicit or destined abroad that had been harvested illegally or was the result of unreported fishing.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Just to be sure, in the first question I asked if you seized some elvers and you said you will get back to the committee with some numbers, but now you just said you didn't seize any this past season. Those are shipped across this country, so it must be shipped from some port of entry or whatever. I would appreciate it if we could have some numbers if there were some that were seized.

I'll get to my next question.

In the last couple of years we saw that the export of our lobster and crabs had enormous growth. Millions and millions of pounds of lobster, for example, are shipped from Moncton airport, and I think some from Halifax airport also, mostly to China.

Let's say there is a plane that has a million pounds on it, which you see on the packing slip, or whatever you call it, the paper. The fish plant will say there's a million pounds in this shipment. How do you know exactly if there is a million pounds and there is not 1.2 million pounds or 1.5 million pounds?

Is there something that you verify, or do you just look at the slip and there's one million pounds and you're good to go and the shipment is gone? Is there a mechanism that your agents have whereby they can monitor if it's the right number of pounds in those shipments?

Mr. Daniel Anson: Unless my colleague has anything to add to that, we have a variety of different verification methods in place. I cannot speak from memory whether weighing the products is part of that. It's usually done by volume, size and an assessment of the shipment itself and the product. Specific to a million pounds of lobster destined for China, it's something I would have to return to the committee on to give you a fulsome answer and to ensure that I do not misreport should we not necessarily weigh. If we do, then I would like to give you more details as to how we achieve that.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Please, Mr. Chair, can we have that mechanism they use?

Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go now to Madame Desbiens for two and a half minutes or less.

[*Translation*]

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

Earlier, I was asking if you kept a register and statistics on the profile of offenders and which species are seized more than others.

Would it be possible to have documentation in this regard? We would be grateful.

I don't have much time, but I'd like to know if, in your work as a whole, there are any elements that could be improved. It's the role of the committee to know the particular problems that concern you. Do you lack agents, boats, financial resources or technological tools?

What could be done to deter offenders while maximizing the efficiency of your work?

[English]

Mr. Daniel Anson: Thank you for the question.

The first and most important response is that I believe we do have the right tools and that we have some of the most well-trained officers of any nation. I have a great degree of faith in what they do and how they achieve it.

In terms of the different gaps, there is a variety of different noted gaps if you study the seafood industry. Typically, it does apply to a variety of things that don't.... I'm not necessarily highlighting it as a gap for the agency, but it is resource-intensive. To focus on Nova Scotia as an example, there are 13,300 kilometres of coastline, so the prevalence of small boats conducting illegal fishing as well as boats that hover beyond our economic exclusion zone are areas that we may or may not even have the ability to monitor or surveil or, in some cases, have the authority to interdict. There is a variety of gaps.

Specific to the agency's tools, resources and people, we have a sufficient number of resources applied to the task commensurate with the level of priority that this is for the agency, but I suspect that when you are dealing with the tactical level, where the actual fishing and harvesting are occurring, those gaps would likely require a significant number of resources, people and surveillance and the ability to interdict small boats. It's very difficult to have a culture of compliance and to monitor a wide variety of very intensive offshore activities as well.

Those gaps are quite inherent, but I would also defer to a lot of our partner agencies and police of jurisdiction, who likely are more qualified to speak to what the gaps are in the identification of illegal fishing. On issues like this, we have a variety of different projects and working groups where we do focus on this particular threat stream. We work hand in hand with all of our partner agencies.

To continue on the example of the marine security operations centres, we have the RCMP, Fisheries and Oceans, the Coast Guard and a variety of other partners there. We do work together. That facilitates a lot of information sharing, but most importantly, awareness of what the different regional challenges are.

We are well equipped, and we have been successful in achieving a lot of targets, lookouts and examinations on behalf of the department and agencies that hold the legislation we enforce, but again, I

would suspect that maybe some of the more regional operational teams might have a more qualified opinion or response.

• (1145)

[Translation]

Thank you again for your question.

[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.

I'll continue with my questions for Mr. Anson. Following some of what you were discussing around many partners working together and some of the regional challenges, you mentioned that you felt well equipped.

Can you speak a bit about any challenges you are seeing? I know that often in these large systems, when we have many different departments working in different areas, sometimes there can be a breakdown in communication or sometimes there can be challenges in getting information in a timely manner between one department and another.

Are you experiencing any of those challenges? What are some improvements that you can see that could happen and could have people working together in a really timely manner to address the bigger issues we're seeing around illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing?

Mr. Daniel Anson: Thank you for the question.

I'm very content with the system that we have. The national targeting centre serves as a central node for a lot of the departments and agencies that hold the legislation, and that gives a lot of our partners a direct line to the people who will coordinate and effect a target examination. That is one success.

An additional layer of success would be that we have tremendous interoperability with our domestic partners on security intelligence. We do share information. We have mechanisms in place that allow us to—with authority—share intel or information that can see either a domestic enforcement action or potentially an action at the border for an examination and potentially the interdiction and seizure of goods.

The last thing I would add to that in terms of maybe elucidating some of the successes here is that those marine security operations centres are very much designed to allow us to sit alongside the people who have a vested and regional interest in the security and the compliance and in ensuring that illegal, unreported fishing does not occur. We have a variety of different methods whereby we can very quickly, in almost real time, provide a response on behalf of the agency. An officer will respond to, for example, a CFIA target when they want an examination to ensure that certain goods are not coming into or leaving Canada illegally or coming into Canada and might pose a threat to our ecosystems. Those are really great systems in place.

Again, to go back to the national targeting centre, it's a very high-performing area full of targeting officers who take this very seriously. A lot of them have regional roots in some of these communities and locations and, in addition to the professional dedication, there is an enhanced motivation to ensure compliance.

Those are the successes. In terms of the gaps, other than the implicit ones or the ones we discussed in terms of the identification of illegal fishing, I couldn't necessarily expand.

• (1150)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Barron.

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

Mr. Richard Bragdon (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): It's Mr. Small.

The Chair: Mr. Small, you're up for five minutes.

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

Mr. Anson, in your preamble, you highlighted that the CBSA facilitates the flow of legitimate products and assists DFO in controlling coastal IUU fisheries. If a member of the public has suspicions about IUU fish exporting, is there a means for them to report those suspicions to you?

Mr. Daniel Anson: In that circumstance, it would likely apply to the police of jurisdiction, whether it's the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary or the RCMP. Depending on the locale, there would likely be law enforcement to receive those tips.

In addition, however, specific to the CBSA—again, this is several layers away from where the offence may be occurring—we also have our own tip line within our border operations centre, which allows us to be in a position to respond to any tips that might be specific to exports. However, when there is illegal, unregulated or unreported fishing occurring locally, it would very much defer to the police of jurisdiction, who, I imagine, have that type of system in place.

Mr. Clifford Small: Thank you.

I was getting at the export side of it, not the capturing of the fish. Can you give the committee a brief explanation of the step-by-step process that would be followed after the receipt from the public of suspicious exporting activities of IUU fisheries products?

Mr. Daniel Anson: We have a variety. It turns out that we have a specific 1-888 number available online as well, where people can report these types of activities.

Our interest lies not only in the export of specific products or shipments but also in the networks behind it. Where there is particularly networked or organized criminality behind it, that's very much where we focus, because attacking the networks or the crime behind the event is getting more to the root of the issue.

That is part of the reason why I also mentioned the utility and efficiency of working very much hand in hand with our police of jurisdiction partners. In those circumstances, where there is a lawful requirement to share, we will transfer the information reported to us. Whether or not we have the mandate and authority, we will ensure it gets into the right hands of law enforcement agencies, so

there can be an action. Potentially, in this case, it might even be either Criminal Code or regulatory non-compliance.

Mr. Clifford Small: Have you ever intercepted suspicious fish products that you thought might be IUU, reported them to another agency and been instructed on whether to act or turn a blind eye? Do you think that could be happening?

Mr. Daniel Anson: Mr. Chair, we would not turn a blind eye. This is the one certitude I would state, following that.

However, I do not have a full list of all enforcement actions on suspected illegal exports of fish or seafood products. That is something we can certainly verify.

The only instance I can recall is the example I provided to the other member of the committee, which occurred a number of years ago. I believe it was through the Toronto Pearson airport. That would have been an example where that type of coordination, enforcement action and collaboration with our law enforcement partners occurred.

However, we take this exceptionally seriously. We do not ever turn a blind eye. There will always be some kind of response—even if it's after the event—to at least contribute to our intelligence and profile awareness of potential illicit actors, so we can take measures, inform our targeting rules and try to catch that event. Targeting must be iterative in nature. We learn from every single incident and circumstance of contravention.

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

Mr. Chair, I'm going to turn my remaining time over to Mr. Arnold.

The Chair: You have 40 seconds.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you. I'll try to be quick.

Mr. Anson or Ms. Toxopeus, are there gaps in communication between the CBSA and other jurisdictional organizations or countries, in terms of sharing information about the organized crime we sometimes hear is impacting IUU fisheries around the world? If there are gaps, how can they be filled?

• (1155)

Mr. Daniel Anson: Thank you for the question.

Thank you to the member. I'm not sure, but my colleague may have something to offer on the World Customs Organization. If anything, it would be my intent in my response to give you great confidence that we have a tremendous relationship with our international partners. We have a variety of different Five Eyes, G7 and European partnerships, a variety of different trade-based partnerships, through which we share information intelligence, but we also do that through the lens of ensuring that there is integrity in our supply chains. Supply chain security is a very important feature for us, so it is about how we share information intelligence and how we continually evolve against threats, given that international or illegal shipping is by virtue and by nature a transnational event. We must share information intelligence readily, and we do so quite a bit with our key trade partners as well as with our traditional security intelligence partners, not the least of which would be our Five Eyes group.

We have various layers, and we could add to the layer a variety of different international law enforcement-specific groups, with which we share information intelligence that allows us to quickly and readily respond to any kind of evolutions of the threat or different types of trade circumvention measures, etc.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arnold.

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

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

Thank you for being here. Does the name Queenie ring a bell with you guys? This is a character out on the west coast who actually paid a \$200,000 fine that had to do with illicit trade in crab. Obviously you may not have the minutiae of this, but here is an individual who was caught and convicted and who paid the fine and basically wrote that off as just a cost of doing business and who may still in fact be doing business.

This is an example of somebody who was nabbed, but I'm wondering what mechanisms are in place to find out where she got the crab from.

Mr. Daniel Anson: I would definitely defer to the police of jurisdiction on that. In a circumstance like that, in which there was a previous enforcement action, that would help inform our targeting rules so that we would try to ensure whether Queenie or whatever company—

Mr. Ken Hardie: This product was clearly for export. That would have been, I presume, in the domain of the CBSA somewhere along the way as it was trying to get out of the country. Now, if Queenie had an export licence, is there anything or any mechanism to verify where the actual product came from when your guys have a look at it?

Mr. Daniel Anson: I can't speak to where the product may have come from. However, there would certainly be an enhanced approach to any exports by a person who had been noted as previously contravening or subject to a previous enforcement action, so that would be an instance or a circumstance in which we would flag something that was destined for export and likely verify or examine the goods to ensure full compliance.

Where the individual was fishing or where they might have obtained or harvested the product would be very much a local thing, so we would not have officers verifying that. I would defer to partner departments and agencies. They have a vested—

Mr. Ken Hardie: You must understand, of course, that these are pretty crafty people. Queenie's name—or whatever her real name is, because Queenie is a nickname—probably wouldn't appear on an export licence now until you-know-what freezes over, simply because she has been nabbed.

What about dark vessels? We heard a little bit about those last night in the context of Canada's Indo-Pacific strategy. They're out there. There are no transponders; there's nothing. Do we have a mechanism to identify these vessels, and if they put into port, is there anything we can do about that?

Mr. Daniel Anson: Specific to dark vessels and the mechanisms in place, I don't want to get into too much detail. I'm happy to expand a bit more after the committee or in camera. However, the marine security operation centres do also monitor vessel traffic and fishing traffic, and there are certain types of indicators that, when you are surveilling vessels, might be indicators of potential dark vessels that are being used as support vessels for potential transloading or cross-loading that would support and facilitate under-reporting of fishing.

• (1200)

Mr. Ken Hardie: In that situation, would you then work with the Coast Guard, for instance, to deal with that?

Mr. Daniel Anson: In a circumstance like that, we would certainly work with the Coast Guard, but the Coast Guard would also be in the MSOCs—the marine security operations centres—and likely through the enforcement of their own mandate would be looking for the exact same type of activity. In fact, it likely would have been Coast Guard staff who taught us these types of lessons, but we would work together to identify and then share the information to ensure this is the appropriate enforcement action.

For the dark vessels that come to port, as you were saying, if these are local and only regional examples of illegal or unreported fishing, then the Border Services Agency is not necessarily going to have a role. We would not see or have any kinds of filters to apply. That would be more along, again, our partner departments and agencies that have a specific mandate to enforce compliance in the fisheries industry. Until it goes across an international border or it's deemed for export, lawfully or otherwise, the CBSA would not necessarily have a role. If it were an international vessel coming to a Canadian port, then it might be subject to examinations and verifications. Again, their crew, the vessel and the goods would also be risk-assessed through our national targeting centre.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hardie.

That closes out our first hour of testimony from witnesses. We'll take a short pause now.

I want to thank Mr. Anson and Ms. Toxopeus for their participation here today with their valued information.

Again, we'll take a short recess to do the change-out. Then we'll get on with our second hour of business.

• (1200) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1200)

The Chair: We're back for our second hour.

Joining us today, from the B.C. Wildlife Federation, we have Jesse Zeman, the executive director.

Mr. Zeman, you have up to five minutes for your opening statement. You're on.

Mr. Jesse Zeman (Executive Director, B.C. Wildlife Federation): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to the committee for the opportunity to be a witness today.

The B.C. Wildlife Federation is British Columbia's largest and oldest conservation organization, with over 41,000 members and 100 member clubs across the province. Our clubs and members spend hundreds of thousands of volunteer hours and dollars conducting wetland and fish habitat restoration across the province, as well as advocating for legislative, regulatory and policy changes to support a future that includes healthy watersheds and vibrant fish populations.

In the world of illegal, unregulated and unreported fisheries there are hundreds, if not thousands, of incidents here in British Columbia, which cover everything from illegal harvests by foreign vessels in the high seas to harvests of endangered early Fraser chinook as well as endangered interior Fraser steelhead.

Two indicator stocks with the interior Fraser steelhead include the Thompson and the Chilcotin. This year the spawning forecast for both of those fish were 228 and 108 fish respectively, putting them both well inside the extreme conservation concern zone.

In 2021, two steelhead were seized in the mid-Fraser in August, which were most likely Chilcotin fish. The estimated spawner statement for those fish was 19 that year, at that point. In one incident 10% of the entire run was killed by one incident that was found by fisheries officers. ATIPs and reports to the BCWF conservation app demonstrate that these issues are common.

Within compliance and protection there has been a shift recently. The agency seems to be rapidly moving from on-the-ground people who are passionate about fish and resource conservation to an agency that is being filled with managers from other ministries and other agencies, most notably Canada Border Services Agency. As it relates to culture, this has not gone over well. Combined with poor wages and a shifting culture, you will likely find a number of officers on leave, high turnover and, most importantly, reduced performance as it relates to conserving and protecting our fish resources. Former officers with decades of experience report that morale within the agency is the worst it's ever been.

This year I'm aware that nighttime patrols and boat and helicopter patrols were significantly reduced on the lower and mid-Fraser. The outcome of this lack of a presence on the river will be increased illegal activity. Typically, in past years officers would remove or seize 300 to 400 nets. This year, given the lack of presence on the river, I would expect the number of nets seized and removed to be way down.

The narrative out of compliance and enforcement will likely be that compliance has improved, but I believe what you will find is that this is a self-fulfilling prophecy. If there is no enforcement presence on the water, there is no one to discover, manage and track issues.

Improved outcomes, as they relate to illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing, come down to funding, capacity and culture. Compliance and enforcement, or compliance and protection, need allies on the water. We will never have enough officers to cover every square kilometre of water, but there are hundreds of thousands—

• (1205)

The Chair: Just wait one second, Mr. Zeman.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Mr. Chair, the interpreters tell me that they are having difficulty understanding Mr. Zeman because of the poor sound quality.

Could we do a quick test?

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay. We'll suspend for a moment to see if we can correct that.

• (1205) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1205)

The Chair: We are back.

We'll try it again.

I will ask Mr. Zeman to speak slowly to give the interpreters an opportunity to keep up and to translate it for everyone in the room who wants to hear it in the language of their choice.

Again, you can start from where you ended off, and we'll see how it works out.

Mr. Jesse Zeman: I'm sorry, Chair. I will speak more slowly.

We were talking about the hundreds of thousands of eyes and ears from first nations to commercial to Canadian anglers, who believe they can help identify and report infractions.

I'll just give you one example as it relates to these challenges around capacity. In the world of reporting fisheries' infractions, DFO off-loaded its observe, record, report line to a third party years ago.

BCWF members found it nearly impossible to get in touch with DFO officers or even the operators at the observe, record, report line to report infractions, and they were often only able to leave voice mail hoping someone would return their call. In our conversations with DFO biologists, it turns out they had the same result. They could not get through the observe, report, record line to report infractions.

As a result, the BCWF created a conservation app, which allows reporting of infractions via your smart phone. When we went to implement the app, we experienced significant adversity from DFO, the issue being that compliance and protection knew they could not meet public expectations.

Well, times have changed, and so has our relationship with compliance and protection. Adoption has been approved. I will leave you with the thought that Canada's compliance and protection agency did not want the public to have the ability to report infractions on their smart phones, because it did not have the capacity to deal with those reports.

I believe the committee has a number of questions to ask DFO compliance and protection around historical data related to officers on leave, turnover and the number and dates of night patrols and helicopter and boat patrols, on both the lower and middle Fraser River. This would give the committee a better temperature check on the changing effectiveness and culture within compliance and protection as it relates to illegal, unreported and unregulated fisheries.

Thank you.

• (1210)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Zeman.

Before we move on to questions, I just want to remind the committee that, before we finish today, we have to do one item of committee business. We'll have to go in camera. We'll have to leave time to do that at the end.

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

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

Thank you, Mr. Zeman, for being a part of this very important study. I know it's as important to you as it is to us.

Is it a widely held belief that there's a significant IUU fishery for salmon on the Fraser River and in other areas or rivers in British Columbia?

Mr. Jesse Zeman: The answer to that is yes. We definitely have experienced a number of reports through the conservation app and through ATIP as it relates to IUU fisheries.

Mr. Clifford Small: Mr. Zeman, have you been in touch with any U.S. counterparts? Do you have an idea of how the enforcement of the C and P in the United States is working? Do you have some idea of how you'd rate Canada's efforts compared with similar efforts for similar infractions in the United States?

Mr. Jesse Zeman: That's a good question.

I can relate more in the world of fisheries management and the world of biology and funding. Certainly, when we look across the

line, we find that funding as it relates to the sustainability of species like salmon is orders of magnitude more than it is here in Canada.

Specifically as it relates to compliance and enforcement or compliance and protection, I don't have that data. We're not in touch with them. However, there is absolutely no doubt in my mind that, south of the border, their budgets are orders of magnitude greater than what they are here in Canada.

Mr. Clifford Small: In terms of the various threats to wild Pacific salmon populations—climate change, habitat destruction, some people saying salmon farming is a threat, others saying pinnipeds are a big threat—how would you rate IUU fishing for salmon in terms of where it sits on a scale of threats to wild Pacific salmon populations?

Mr. Jesse Zeman: Thanks for the question.

The best answer is that it will depend on the run of fish. When we talk about endangered interior Fraser steelhead and we talk about Chilcotin fish in 2021-22, if the estimate was that only 19 fish made it to the spawning grounds when there should have been thousands, and we had two of them seized in August in the river, I would say that the threat is extremely high.

Broadly, though, a lot of the science that's coming back now seems to tie in to pinniped predation. The answer is that it's variable, but when we have only a few handfuls of fish left, it can be very high.

Mr. Clifford Small: Mr. Zeman, you talked about your reporting line or about the app you set up. Do you think the minister has been made aware of illegal salmon fishing in B.C.?

• (1215)

Mr. Jesse Zeman: Yes.

Mr. Clifford Small: Do you have specific examples of where this illegal fishing was reported and of the actions taken by DFO? Were charges laid and penalties issued?

Mr. Jesse Zeman: That's a really good question. It is a bit of a black box, I would say. Once the report goes in, in terms of outcomes, we are not often privy to what happens during or after an investigation. Our membership and the public who have downloaded the app have used it to report infractions. It happens regularly.

As for what happens after that, I'm definitely not aware. I think there are definitely some complexities in the system. I think that would be another great question for compliance and protection.

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

If we did some access to information probes, we might be able to find out some of that information and get it submitted before this study concludes. It seems like we're kind of spinning our wheels in getting this study completed. You can feel free...or we may do some ATIPs ourselves to check out some of this stuff.

If DFO is not providing the appropriate C and P, what do you think is holding them back? Do you think they're being told to stand down on some of these activities by other government departments? Do you think that could be possible?

Mr. Jesse Zeman: It could be possible. As expressed, there is definitely a concern from former officers that there has been, and there is, an ongoing culture shift within compliance and protection. There's been a move away from people who are young and who care about the resource. There's been a shift to bringing managers in from other ministries. It is not going well. I think the result is that there's a lack of presence on the river.

I don't know why that's happening at the top end, but at the bottom end, we're certainly seeing the result with the lack of presence.

Mr. Clifford Small: Mr. Zeman, if this continues, what will be the end result? If the Minister of Fisheries doesn't get a grip on these activities, what will be the end result for these precious wild Pacific salmon stocks?

Mr. Jesse Zeman: It's variable. As I said, the best example is that, in a year, potentially only 21 fish got up to spawn. Two of them died in one day and were found by fisheries officers. The challenge with this is that we don't know what we don't know. If we don't have a presence on the river, we don't know what's going missing.

We definitely have years where reports go through the roof and we find all kinds of issues related to IUU. I did see the previous speaker. There certainly has been a lot of discussion, which I haven't been privy to, around even the discovery of potentially a million pounds of fish that were found on a foreign vessel off the west coast.

It's big. These are not trivial amounts. Do we know how much? No. We get only a small fraction of what's actually happening out there.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Small.

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

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

Mr. Zeman, it's good to have you with us.

On that last point, you mentioned that fish were found on a vessel. Where was the vessel outbound from? Do you know?

Mr. Jesse Zeman: In my world, we're getting second-hand information come up through DFO a number of times. It was definitely not a Canadian vessel. That's the best way to put it. I understand—

Mr. Ken Hardie: Where did it come from? What was its port of exit? Was it the mainland, was it Vancouver Island, was it up north...? Do you know?

Mr. Jesse Zeman: I don't know. I didn't ask those questions. I'm not privy. I think those are questions, again, for the committee to ask, for sure. I know that scales were taken off some of the fish, and they found out that they were B.C.-bound fish.

Mr. Ken Hardie: You mentioned that there's an app that people can use to report. Is this something that the wildlife federation has put together?

Mr. Jesse Zeman: Yes, we created it, the BCWF, because we were having so many issues with reporting both through to the province and through to DFO.

As said, to report an infraction to DFO, it goes through what's called the observe, record, report line, which I understand, at least

before, was being operated by commissionaires, not by DFO. That line, most of the time, went to voice mail and, if you were lucky, you would get someone on the line to report it to.

As a result, we created an app that would allow people to automatically report infractions that go directly to the agency so that the public has a record. Of course, with a smart phone, it has GPS, and there are a whole bunch of advantages. It's really interesting that an ENGO or conservation group is creating these tools for the public to report infractions. One would think that it would be the responsibility of both the Province of British Columbia and the Government of Canada.

• (1220)

Mr. Ken Hardie: Can you give us statistics on how many times your app has been used, say, in the last year? You can provide that in writing if it's available.

Mr. Jesse Zeman: I could get my staff to look that up, and I can get it sent to the committee.

Mr. Ken Hardie: You have an app. Did you say that there are other apps out there doing the same thing?

Mr. Jesse Zeman: There are no other apps, no.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Years ago, and I'm talking about quite a number of years ago, there was an item in the newspaper that B.C. Parks, which used to have inspectors and enforcement officers, cut things back, and there was one officer for the entire province.

Does that position even exist anymore, or is the province not engaged at all in this issue?

Mr. Jesse Zeman: As it relates to IUU, the province has the B.C. conservation officer service, and they would be the ones doing the work. It's a very different culture and workflow.

Again, I think in our world of taking care of our fish, wildlife and habitat resources, from our perspective, there are not enough people and there never are enough people, but the conservation officer service does have staff. They're not experiencing the same cultural issues that compliance and protection are right now and, to be quite frank, it would not surprise me to see some DFO compliance and protection officers go to the conservation officer service.

Mr. Ken Hardie: That's fair enough.

Of course, up and down the Fraser River, the Skeena, the Nass, etc., quite often the big, bright light is shone on first nations' involvement in fisheries, illegal or otherwise.

Do you think that, when enforcement comes around, there are uncertainties or a lack of clarity in UNDRIP around the fishing rights and indigenous rights that are applied? Are they clear? Would enforcement officers be in a position to make the right call?

Mr. Jesse Zeman: That's a loaded question, and not one I can probably give a great answer to. I think that broadly a lot of those issues are relationship-based issues, I would say, first of all. There's a lot of frustration around the status of salmon and sturgeon broadly across the province of B.C.

I think fisheries officers have regulations and legislation that they're supposed to follow. How that works as it moves further up the line from line officers is a world that, as I said, I'm not privy to. Enforcement is a bit of a black box to us. We don't know what the outcomes look like. We file reports, but we don't know how they move through the system.

Mr. Ken Hardie: What kind of liaison do you have with first nations? Are first nations involved with the federation? If so, talk to us about the liaison with the guardians who are out there enforcing or at least monitoring on behalf of first nations.

Mr. Jesse Zeman: Certainly. Since 2021, the federation partnered with over 49 first nations delivering about 10 million dollars' worth of projects. We have also provided guardian training to some of the communities across the province. We have a number of existing relationships, but not with all of the communities or all of the nations.

I think a lot of this world is understanding and appreciation. We just had Chief Bob Chamberlin at the Sport Fishing Institute of B.C. on the weekend talking about harvest reporting and harvest management.

I think a lot of this is really about relationships and moving forward on a positive path. Half of this issue is around the sustainability of salmon and trying to get back what we had. The other half is working out some historical issues. We're working on it is the best answer, and we do have partnerships with a number of nations across the province.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hardie.

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

• (1225)

[Translation]

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

Since this is more on the Pacific side, I'm going to ask the witness a question. After that, I'll turn my time over to my colleague Ms. Barron.

Mr. Zeman, have you received approval from the Quebec side? Have you had any contact with fishermen in the Gulf of St. Lawrence? Have you been able to discover similar problems on the Quebec side?

[English]

Mr. Jesse Zeman: That's a really great question. As the B.C. Wildlife Federation, we're also a member of the Canadian Wildlife Federation, so all of the wildlife federations, from one end of the country to the other, meet pretty regularly. We've actually had two in-person meetings this year, and the frustration is shared. The species are different. The types of fishing are different, but there is a shared frustration in terms of funding, mostly about outcomes and moving DFO to an outcome-based organization in the sense that we really need to focus on restoring our fish, whether it is codfish on the east coast or salmon on the west coast. There is a shared frustration.

The issues at a high level are often very similar. At a low level, the fishing opportunities and the fish are different.

[Translation]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: In your opinion, if the fish are different, is the effect on the biomass and the resource as important on the Gulf of St. Lawrence side?

[English]

Mr. Jesse Zeman: I would say though that certainly the people are just as passionate. Yes, it is just as important from one end of the country to the other. Again, moving DFO to an outcome-based agency really could be an important goal for this committee in terms of delivering things on the ground.

We all know that we have issues with sustainability. The question is how we change that. More years of planning, more years of policy, more years of process have not and will not change that. We need to start getting onto some policy that's pulling some levers as it relates to sustainability.

[Translation]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: So we need to protect the fishery as well as the resource. Have I understood correctly?

[English]

Mr. Jesse Zeman: Yes, those are worthy goals.

[Translation]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Mr. Chair, I yield the remainder of my speaking time to Ms. Barron.

[English]

The Chair: You have a little over nine minutes total.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Excellent. Thank you so much to my colleague for providing me with extra time as I have lots of questions.

Again, welcome, Mr. Zeman, to our committee. I'm happy you are here to provide us with your wealth of knowledge and experience.

These are some of the first questions I want to ask about. The article you made available on the BCWF website is quoting you, saying "The BCWF is seeing reports of dumping involving thousands, possibly tens of thousands of fish, which is a symptom of illegal sales on a massive scale". You go on to say, "The fish have spoiled suggesting that there are far more fish on the black market than there are buyers."

Can you expand a little bit more on that particular piece? You have spoken more to the others, but maybe expand a little bit more on the black market and that there are more fish on the black market than there are buyers.

Mr. Jesse Zeman: Yes, that is just a function of the fact that, if you are obtaining a fish and looking to sell it and you can't get it moved quickly enough and it spoils, it ends up being dumped. That is a symptom of a challenge that I understand goes back for quite a long time.

When we've talked about it with some of our partners in the lower Fraser, no one condones that. No one thinks it is acceptable, but it sure seems there is definitely an underground black market around sales of fish. Certainly there was also some media about a sturgeon that was caught and taken away in a vehicle. That was on Global News a few years ago.

It sure seems like there is a black market. There has been lots of discussion, I heard, in the committee about some issues around crabbing, and the same for halibut. The reality is that it's happening and we are probably catching very few of the individuals involved.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

Can you add a little more around what you were suggesting in your article concerning the fact that, when fish are on the black market, they haven't been inspected and they haven't been properly stored. I should rephrase that. We don't know if they've been properly stored, which can lead to an increase of food-borne illness.

Is this something you are hearing of or seeing in your day-to-day?

• (1230)

Mr. Jesse Zeman: Really, it's about messaging the public and the people who are the potential buyers, so they recognize that sustainable fisheries have ways of managing the fish. You end up with a quality product. If fish are being dumped, it's because they do not have the facilities to keep them cool or properly take care of the meat. Of course, if they're not taking care of their catch properly, you're going to end up getting sick.

That was part of the message to the people who are potentially buying these fish: If you don't know where it came from and how it's been treated, don't take the risk.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

Can you also expand on the point you made in...? The wording here reads, "Authorities are hopelessly overmatched to deal with the problem, especially after Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) shut down its special investigations unit nine years ago."

Can you expand on that?

Mr. Jesse Zeman: Yes. This is a matter of prioritization. We quite often find that our priorities don't necessarily align with the priorities of compliance and protection in terms of patrols—as I stated earlier here—or even the priorities of DFO. If this is a big issue and if it's important to the Government of Canada, we need to resource it. In disbanding things like the SIU, the signal we get as Canadians and as a group that cares deeply about these fish is that it is not important to the Government of Canada.

It's a matter of focusing, figuring out what the priorities are and resourcing them. It feels, right now—as it relates to IUU and, certainly, the culture shift in DFO—as if compliance and protection does not seem to be a priority.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: For my final point, I want to ask for clarification on the article I'm looking at here—which was very well done, I might add. It talks about how "Addressing poaching requires significant resources."

Can you expand on that a bit more?

Mr. Jesse Zeman: Yes. It's the same as it is in the rest of our lives. When people engage in illegal activities, they try not to get caught. As with criminals in other parts of our society, things often happen at night, under the cover of darkness. Again, if compliance and protection is reducing the number of night patrols, helicopter patrols and boat patrols, you're only catching a fraction of the incidents. If you don't have a presence on the river or the ocean, you're going to catch even fewer of them.

It comes down, again, to priorities. If we're not resourcing these things, or if we're cutting back on them, we're not going to catch people engaging in illegal activity.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

I think it would be good to bring into this discussion the importance of wild Pacific salmon as a keystone species.

I am not sure whether the importance of wild Pacific salmon—not just in our marine ecosystems but also in the entire environmental ecosystem—to coastal communities, indigenous rights and food security is general knowledge.

Could you speak a bit about the importance of wild Pacific salmon, the key piece here being the prevention of illegal sales of wild Pacific salmon?

Mr. Jesse Zeman: Yes. It's a challenging question to answer.

In one sense, if we raise the social value of species like salmon, and if there is broad awareness that comes out of compliance and protection, in terms of how important these are to Canadians and first nations, how we take care of them.... Education is probably the first, best approach. We always talk about an ounce of prevention being worth a pound of cure. I think raising the profile of wild salmon—having compliance and protection out talking to the public and to first nations about how to work together to take care of salmon in perpetuity—is a very important and missing piece.

That is something the Province of B.C. does through the conservation officer service. Its outreach is going to be very important moving forward, as we shift more to an urban environment where people aren't exposed to salmon or to the sustainability issue.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: In relation to prevention, we know we're seeing the impacts of the climate crisis we're experiencing on wild Pacific salmon: warming waters, droughts and flooding. There are so many ways we are seeing the impacts of the climate crisis on wild Pacific salmon. In addition to that, there are further barriers and challenges for wild Pacific salmon when we see overfishing and illegal fishing. Open-net fish farming is another example.

Can you share your thoughts on the importance of our taking seriously the dwindling stocks of wild Pacific salmon that we're seeing, and of doing all we can to reduce the barriers and challenges being experienced by wild Pacific salmon?

• (1235)

Mr. Jesse Zeman: This is a tough one, but we deal with this with endangered caribou. We're getting to a point with a number of fish populations—interior Fraser steelhead and early chinook—where, I think, in this world we're always looking for a silver bullet and the one thing we can do that will change the outcome. The reality is that there's not one thing. We can't just pull one lever and expect wild salmon to all of a sudden bounce back. We have in-river water conditions and water flows in the summertime. We have pin-niped predation. We have salmon farms, and there are cases of overfishing.

When you get down to small numbers, you can have stochastic events that literally just wipe out what remains. When we have 21 fish in a river, it's very easy for all 21 of those to just disappear. Our learning in the world of caribou is that you need to pull all of the available levers and you need to pull them hard.

We are definitely approaching a time when we can't talk about pulling one lever or another, about just removing some fish farms in the Broughton or just spending some money in the Thompson River or the Nicola River. It has to be broad-based. We have to pull multiple levers, and then we need to use the science that we have to adapt and understand which levers work.

We all want to be in a world where we can do one thing and it will magically fix the problem, but we're not in those times right now. We're in times when we need to start pulling multiple levers, figuring out what works and continuing on with it.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Barron. Even though you had a little over nine minutes, you went over a bit, but we'll excuse you for that.

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

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you, Chair.

Welcome, Mr. Zeman.

Going back a number of years to when I used to sit on the sport fishing advisory board, DFO would present data to members of the public to create advice on open seasons or the opening of fisheries. DFO members at that time reported that they had to account for IUU harvest in the calculation of escapements.

Is that still the case? Do you know? I believe the BCWF has members who sit on the sport fishing advisory board.

Mr. Jesse Zeman: I think it's getting better, from what I understand, but there was certainly a constraint in the system in some of the escapement models, where compliance and protection would find fish that had been caught and killed and that didn't work into the model.

I think in the past there have been some issues between resource managers and fishery protection officers in terms of putting all that data together to account for IUU fisheries. I'd say it's variable. It's

not perfect, but my understanding is that that part of the equation is improving.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

Through your organization, would you be able to obtain the information from DFO on how those numbers factor into determining the annual allowable catch, either for commercial or recreational fisheries? It was the recreational fishery that I was referring to earlier. If you could provide those in writing, that would be fantastic.

Mr. Zeman, it's concerning to hear you talk about the decrease of DFO's C and P capacities in B.C. and the Fraser. Can you share the reasons for the apparent decrease at a time when enforcement is needed to prevent the extinction of some stocks?

Mr. Jesse Zeman: That one I don't have a good answer to. I've asked the question. No one seems to have a good answer. I don't know why. I can't tell you.

I know the outcome is that there have been very few helicopter patrols compared with in the past. There have been very few boat patrols and very few night patrols. I don't have the answer. I'm definitely hearing that there are some pretty serious cultural issues and changes that are happening within DFO.

I think that's a really good question for the committee to put to compliance and protection to ask historically how many flights we were doing every summer, how many patrols we were doing, how much night work we were doing and whether it has changed. The next question after that is, "Why?"

• (1240)

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

It used to be that fishery openings were authorized by DFO or there were no openings. Is that the case? Do you know?

Are you hearing of fisheries being potentially authorized by other agreements in other parts of the country? Are you aware of that happening in B.C., and has that complicated enforcement in B.C.?

Mr. Jesse Zeman: I'm not aware of that in B.C., no.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

What year was the RAPP line moved to an external operator, and what year was your smart phone app introduced?

Mr. Jesse Zeman: The ORR line, I think that happened years ago. It was maybe decades ago; I'm not sure. I don't know who manages it now, but at the time it was the commissionaires. I believe our app was probably created around 2017, something like that—2016 or 2017. It was really to fill a gap and to help the public report stuff.

As I said, one of the other advantages around having a smart phone is that it has a GPS, so it provides really good location data. If there's someone on one end of the phone on the other end of the phone it's really hard to explain where you are on a river or on a road verbally.

That's the history.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

I'd like to drill down a little further on the effects of IUU fishing in B.C. What are the effects when fish are harvested but the harvest is not reported, and why is it essential that those fish be taken into account?

Mr. Jesse Zeman: Certainly, you have to monitor it to manage it. That applies to compliance and enforcement, or compliance and protection. That applies to fisheries management, and that applies to everybody's bank accounts. If you don't know what's going into the system and you don't know what's going out of the system, you're guessing the whole way through, which makes our estimates unreliable and that can have some pretty severe conservation impacts as well. It just really increases your level of risk.

The other thing is that, when we can't account for it, typically, it comes out of regulated fishing, so it impacts everyone who wants—

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

Five minutes goes quickly. If there's anything else you can provide to the committee, we'd certainly be happy to see it in writing.

Thank you.

The Chair: Five minutes and 30 seconds goes pretty fast too.

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

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

Thank you, Mr. Zeman, for your insight and your expertise.

I guess this would fall under both of those, but also, maybe an opinion. Is there an organized crime aspect to the sale of illegally harvested fish in B.C.?

Mr. Jesse Zeman: That's the impression we've been given by former DFO officers, but again, compliance and protection I feel would be the best to speak to that in a meaningful way.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Again, based on observations or opinion, do you know whether the RCMP is aware and whether they're doing anything to try to intervene? I think clearly what we're seeing here is that this is a web of responsibilities. DFO has its responsibility. CBSA has some responsibility. Provincial police and RCMP may have some responsibility. Are you seeing any interaction on the ground with respect to the RCMP?

Mr. Jesse Zeman: I can't articulate to that effect. I do know, through my discussions with DFO, that DFO and CBSA do work together. That has been made clear to us, but the RCMP's role in that I'm not aware of.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: I'm an Atlantic Canadian so I'm getting familiar with B.C. I'm wondering, when it comes to the illegal harvesting of fish, whether there are certain communities that are more

impacted than others. Is there a top-tier level of communities that have more illegal fishing and harvesting of fish than others?

Mr. Jesse Zeman: That's a good question. I'm just thinking. It seems like through the app there are places and times where there are increased reports of infractions, but it's really hard to say whether that's a function of there being a lot of people, i.e., eyes and ears, out in those places. It would be really challenging to put that data together. That may be best for compliance and protection.

Certainly, as it relates to the app we have, it works really well where there are a lot of people. There are other parts of the province in B.C. in particular where there are very few people, so it's hard to say. I would say in terms of the impacts, we're all impacted by IUU. Everyone who cares about fish and about salmon and who wants to go fishing, every store owner who sells tackle—everyone is impacted.

• (1245)

Mr. Mike Kelloway: I think this has been asked in one form or fashion, but I'm wondering if you can drill down deeply in terms of the ecosystem impact caused by illegal fishing. Perhaps it could be something you're seeing now or something you have seen—you can go past, present and future—with respect to illegal fishing and why from an ecosystem perspective this is absolutely critical and important. If you could highlight that for us, that would be great.

Mr. Jesse Zeman: It's a challenging question to answer because we don't actually know how much is coming out of the bucket every single year as it relates to IUU, so it makes it really hard to make a guess.

One of the big announcements that came out was around the provincial nature agreement and protecting old growth forests. As we know, and as we continue to learn on the coast, old growth forests are often fed by salmon carcasses, which are moved by bears.

The answer is that we're all interconnected. We need to take care of this resource if we want old growth trees. If we want to take care of grizzly bears, then here in British Columbia we're going to need salmon in our rivers. Again, in the absence of a properly funded and staffed compliance and protection agency, we really don't know how much goes missing. We have these cases where people get busted or get fines or end up in court, but I think we're only really scratching the surface as it relates to IUU. It's an unknown, it feels like.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: I'm wondering.... Well, I'll just ask you. If there are three things with respect to this topic that you want to leave this committee with, what would they be as it relates to this very topic in terms of what could be a solution, what could be an observation or what could be an observation and solution or an idea of some sort in terms of something to leave us with that we need to do extra due diligence on.

Mr. Jesse Zeman: In my mind, again, it comes to outcomes. In my mind, it would be developing a metric to say how many officers we need per square kilometre of river or per thousand square kilometres of river, and that would be a recommendation that would go up: “Here’s how many officers we should have for these different rivers to meet the minimum baseline.”

The second piece under that is what they do and how we focus on outcomes and also on bringing stakeholders, first nations and the public along and getting everyone on board.

The other one is that we really need to address this culture issue. We do see it in other parts of the world of fish and wildlife, where we bring in managers from other ministries and other agencies who do not have the passion for the resource. We live in this world where fish people.... They’re half crazy. This is what they live and breathe and what they love to do, and when we bring in people who do not share that passion, it really feels like the ship gets turned in a direction that is not consistent with the desires of the public.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Thanks very much. I really appreciate that.

The Chair: Thank you.

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

[Translation]

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

Mr. Zeman, I’d like to come back to what you said earlier about the frustration with funding and the fact that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans must base its interventions on results.

How could you reach this goal more effectively? Do you need more money, better communication or more agents in the field?

What do you think needs to be done urgently? What would be the most constructive thing to do next?

[English]

Mr. Jesse Zeman: I think that, specifically as it relates to IUU, it needs to be focused on the ground. Admin time and spending time in an office does not help to get a presence out on the river or out on the ocean. You’re going to need people in the field who are out and engaging fishers and talking to them.

The other part is outreach: building relationships with the public, stakeholders and first nations, and talking about sustainability and things like the app and encouraging people to use it.

In British Columbia and all across the country, you have hundreds of thousands of sets of eyes—if not millions—that are passionate about this resource. Having relationships with those members of the public, Canadians and first nations so they go out to be your eyes and ears is critically important.

I would say that getting officers on the ground so they can have a presence and they can do their jobs, and, secondly, building relationships with Canadians so they can be the eyes and ears are two of the functions that would be really important as it relates to C and P and IUU.

• (1250)

[Translation]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: You say there’s been a change in culture. Was it much better before?

[English]

Mr. Jesse Zeman: Yes, our discussions with former DFO officers are showing that the culture is the worst it’s ever been. There’s a lot of that being attributed to a change in bringing managers in from outside of compliance and enforcement and bringing managers in who are not passionate about the resource and passionate about fish. That is a challenge in our area provincially and federally. We really want to see people work for DFO who are advocates for fish and care about the sustainability of fishing first. That’s really important to us.

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Desbiens.

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

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Chair.

I just want to open it and see, Mr. Zeman, if you have any additional points that you weren’t able to cover today that you wanted to mention to us as a committee as we move forward in this study.

Mr. Jesse Zeman: I think it would be really enlightening to see some statistics from C and P and to ask some questions. There are two metrics here: what compliance looks like and how many infractions we have.

The first one is what the presence is like out on the water and in the river. That’s the biggest one. I would really love to see what the historical data is around how many flights we had on the lower and mid-Fraser, how many night patrols we had in the past and how many we had this year. I think that is a really telling metric in terms of what’s going on inside the agency.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

I’m going to ask a bit of a bigger question, because it comes up so often in our role on the fisheries and oceans committee. We talk a lot about fisheries and the importance of fisheries. Then we also look at, of course, the impacts on our marine ecosystems and how we find that balance. Increasingly so, this is becoming a more and more challenging avenue to navigate as we see the impacts of the climate crisis. We see people who are struggling with the cost of living crisis. Of course, the fishing stocks are reducing. It’s a big, complicated issue.

I’m wondering if you could speak to the vital balance required in protecting our marine ecosystems and ensuring that the government supports transition plans or support plans for those who may be impacted as any of these transitions are moving forward.

Mr. Jesse Zeman: Yes, broadly, the needs of any resource management, whether it’s fish, wildlife or habitat, are funding, science and social support, which is essentially government.

The funding piece is one of the critical pieces in Canada. When we look south of the border, they have dedicated funding mechanisms. They have funding mechanisms where dollars flow directly from the purchase of hunting and fishing gear and where dollars from resource extraction fund directly into compensation.

One other example is in the Columbia basin. Here in British Columbia is 30% of it, and then 70% is in the United States. Due to hydroelectric development, we have a compensation program that spends \$5.5 million to \$6 million a year trying to offset or compensate for the losses to fish and wildlife, including salmon. When we look south of the border, their funding is north of \$500 million a year in 70% of the basin. I will add that Canada and British Columbia are net beneficiaries of the Columbia River Treaty.

The bottom line here in Canada is that we need dedicated, long-term funding to take care of our salmon. We currently do not have that. Salmon, quite frankly, do not operate on four-year time scales like our electoral process. When times get tough, the first thing that's cut is the environment. When times are good, the last thing that gets funding is the environment. Canada really needs to move to a sustainable, long-term funding model that is dedicated to taking care of our fish, wildlife and habitat. Unless we do that, I think things are going to continue to slide.

You did mention fish farms. That's also been a commitment of the Government of Canada: to transition out. We are definitely concerned that we're seeing signs that the transition may not happen or may get dragged out. I think the science is in. We need to do everything we can for our wild salmon. Transitioning to close containment or getting fish farms out of the water is certainly one of those pieces.

● (1255)

The Chair: I'm going to make an executive decision now.

We have to go in camera for a couple of minutes to do something. We have about five minutes left for questioning. I'd like to split it between Mr. Bragdon and Mr. Hanley so we can complete that round.

Mr. Arnold is going to take the two and half minutes.

Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

Mr. Zeman, in 2018 former fisheries minister Dominic LeBlanc went public about a picture he provided depicting an eight-kilometre-long net that was scooping up more than 400,000 kilograms of wild salmon in the Pacific Ocean. At the time, Minister LeBlanc said he wanted to name and shame the countries that were conducting massive, illegal overfishing operations. However, the country of origin of the ship in the picture was not made public.

Do you know if the incident of large-scale IUU Pacific salmon fishing you described is the same incident in the picture that Minister LeBlanc described in 2018?

Mr. Jesse Zeman: I don't know, and I think again this is an issue of transparency. We hear this stuff through DFO, but quite frankly if there was a ship that had B.C.-bound fish on it, and apparently hundreds of thousands and up to a million pounds' worth, I feel like

that should be disclosed to the public, because Canadians deserve to know.

Mr. Mel Arnold: I believe it was in 2022, when there was no sockeye fishery open yet on the Fraser River, that we were seeing ads on social media for "fresh-caught daily" Fraser River sockeye, yet there was no commercial season opened. Then a few days later, when these issues were raised, there was a very brief—I believe one day—opening for Fraser River sockeye for British Columbian fishers.

Do you feel that brief opening negated the opportunity for compliance and protection officers to investigate and prosecute those posts and alleged illegal fishing sales that were happening at the time?

Mr. Jesse Zeman: My best answer would be that I don't know. I would say, as it relates to that opening in 2022, there were a number of missteps. I think there were literally hundreds of thousands of fish that the Pacific Salmon Commission believed hit the mouth of the Fraser River but didn't end up spawning.

As it relates to fisheries' openings and closures, there are some real challenges with the way the department manages that. I think we need to have very strict objectives in terms of when fisheries are open or closed. Right now it's left up in the air, so there's a lack of certainty, and uncertainty creates conflict.

I think as it relates to these kinds of openings and what you're referring to, where there are timing issues, I think we need to be really clear in terms of how and when we open fisheries and for what reasons, and how and when we close fisheries as well.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Zeman.

We'll now go to Mr. Hanley for two and a half minutes, please.

Mr. Brendan Hanley (Yukon, Lib.): Thanks, Mr. Zeman, for all of your testimony. It's been so important and informational.

On the question of funding and resourcing, I noted from our notes from the Library of Parliament that, as part of the PSSI, there's a commitment of more than \$46 million over the next five years to combat IUU fishing in the north Pacific.

I'm just wondering what impact that potentially could have. Does that potentially hit the mark? Is it anywhere near what we need?

● (1300)

Mr. Jesse Zeman: Yes, I would imagine, since it's in the north Pacific, that will be tied to these foreign vessels coming in and catching B.C.-bound or Washington state-bound fish, so again I have to answer a question with a question. What was the result of the \$46 million? That would be my question. Again, when it relates to enforcement, it's quite often a black box.

We report stuff. We don't hear how it goes in the end, and that's a challenge. Maybe there's an opportunity to have a bit more transparency around how many investigations, how many people were charged and those kinds of metrics. They can't just tell us how many nets were seized on the Fraser. They need to tell us what they did about it, and I think there's a bit of a black box there.

Mr. Brendan Hanley: Much of what you've been describing about the state of wild Pacific salmon and the need for multiple solutions and that holistic approach reflects very much the themes.... I was just in Washington, D.C., with the Yukon delegation about the Yukon River salmon.

I'm just wondering what information, if any, you have going north, even into northern B.C., on the importance of illegal and unreported fishing. This is maybe for a last remark.

Mr. Jesse Zeman: It's not one part of British Columbia versus another. It's a full cross-provincial approach. Our fish do not know

boundaries. They do not know borders. There's lots of discussion about marine protected areas as well. Salmon has been through it all. The front end of the Fraser right around Richmond and Vancouver is a fully industrialized area. We can't think the world stops and starts there. We have to think about a whole approach, which includes going all the way up to Alaska and into waters outside of Canada's waters for sure.

Mr. Brendan Hanley: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Zeman, for your participation in the committee work today. Thank you for appearing and sharing your knowledge with the committee as we go through this particular study.

I'm going to let you sign off now so we can take a moment to go in camera to do a very small bit of committee business.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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