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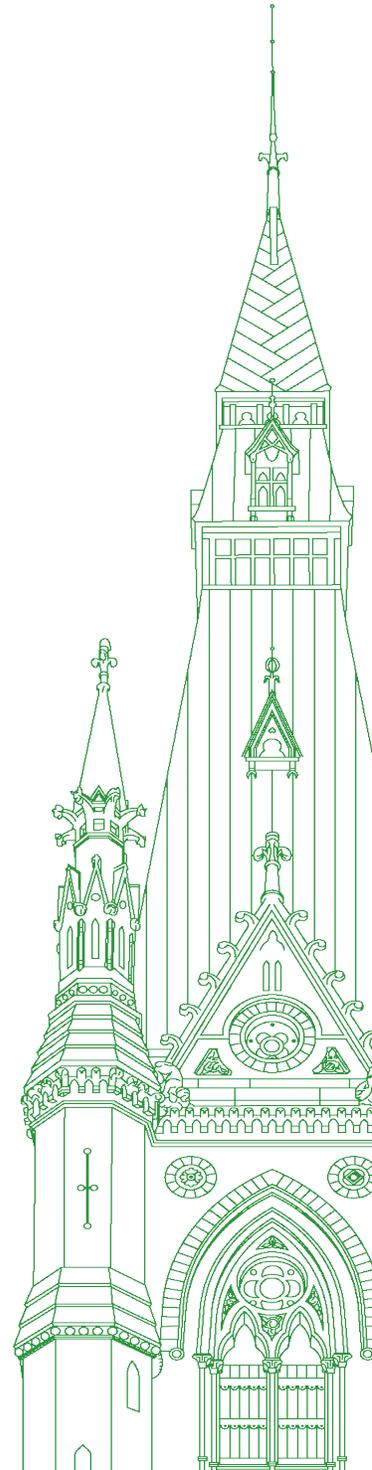
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Thursday, November 30, 2023

Chair: Mr. Ken McDonald



Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

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• (1140)

[English]

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

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.

Joining us today as witnesses we have Mr. Jamie Fox, former minister of fisheries and communities for the Province of Prince Edward Island.

We also have Mr. Ian MacPherson, executive director of the Prince Edward Island Fishermen's Association, who is quite familiar with committee here.

Welcome to you both. You each have up to five minutes for your opening statements.

We will start with Mr. Fox for five minutes or less, please.

Hon. Jamie Fox (Former Minister of Fisheries and Communities, Government of Prince Edward Island, As an Individual): Thank you, Chair, and thank you to everybody on the committee for the invitation to appear before the fisheries standing committee for the study on illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing.

As a former minister of fisheries for the Province of Prince Edward Island, from 2019-23, I cannot underscore enough the importance of the seafood industry to the economy of a smaller province, such as Prince Edward Island. The seafood industry is one of the top three economic drivers of the P.E.I. economy and one of the highest contributors to the gross domestic product in comparison to other provinces in Canada. Our fishery must be preserved in a sustainable and responsible manner for all fishers.

During my tenure as a provincial fisheries minister, I worked with the wild capture, aquaculture and seafood processing sectors to ensure our fishery stayed strong and healthy for current and future generations.

We must reinforce the existing controls on our fisheries where they are needed and also develop more stringent controls in the areas where are lacking.

I have supported, and continue to support, the increase of fines to plants or buyers dealing in the sale or trade of illegal products. As plant and buyer licensing falls under provincial jurisdiction, it is important that the provincial and federal governments continue to

work together on plugging gaps that allow illegal activity to continue to this day.

Fines for infractions must be increased to levels that truly deter individuals or companies from continuing illegal practices. Currently, some fines and penalties are considered to be a cost of doing business. Financial penalties and reduced fishing or buying days could be ways to send a strong message to offenders that those types of activities will not be tolerated.

I can tell you, as a former police officer, I have a great amount of respect for the men and women tasked with keeping our fisheries operating in a legal manner. Organizations such as the Department of Fisheries and Oceans must be adequately funded and staffed so that this important enforcement work can be carried out.

I am also a strong advocate for penalties being administered to all offenders in a clear and consistent manner, whatever the Fisheries Act infraction. In many ways, in conversations with harvesters at the wharf, the concept of equality and fairness among harvesters is paramount. Those who take illegal advantage of the fishery hurt not only their fellow fishers but also their communities, their provinces, Canada and our reputation on the world stage.

Unfortunately, many of our local species are in a rebuilding stage, and some may take years to reach previous stock limits. Prince Edward Island does not have the range of species that adjoining provinces even consider part of their fisheries. Therefore, we must be more diligent in protecting stocks for important fisheries such as lobster.

Our dependency on a vital fishery is not one of choice, but one of necessity for our province. Therefore, before I left provincial politics, I truly supported the efforts of the Prince Edward Island Fishermen's Association in its development of the electronic log system. I feel that e-logs are a necessary step in assisting both the federal and the provincial governments in the collection of real-time data that will allow more accurate and timely decisions to be made concerning our resources.

The capacity of these units can also be expanded to assist in the collection of scientific data and to improve harvester communications once the technology is in place and implemented.

In closing, I would like to re-emphasize the importance of the federal and the provincial governments, industry organizations and a variety of government departments working together on finding better ways to fight illegal activities across the Atlantic region and across our country. These illegal activities hurt our communities, our provincial economies and our positive international reputation.

• (1145)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fox, for that.

I notice the bells are ringing, and it's counting down. I don't know if people want to go to the House to vote or if they want to vote from here. Is everybody in agreement to vote here? All right.

The vote won't be called for that countdown, so we will watch the clock as it counts down, and then we will do the vote.

Mr. Clifford Small (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, CPC): If we all vote simultaneously, we will crash the system over there.

The Chair: Yes, because of all the good votes going through.

Mr. MacPherson, for five minutes or less, please.

Mr. Ian MacPherson (Executive Director, Prince Edward Island Fishermen's Association): The Prince Edward Island Fishermen's Association is pleased to present on this topic of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing.

We thank the committee chair and the fisheries committee for today's opportunity.

I would like to outline the views of our association, in addition to potential remedies to this serious topic.

The PEIFA has for many years advocated for stronger penalties for any person charged and convicted of crimes that exploit or harm our valuable seafood resources. This also includes providing Department of Fisheries and Oceans officers with victim impact statements that detail the consequences to a fishery that is harmed by illegal activity.

One item that we all must keep in mind is that certain species, such as herring and rock crab, form the critical foundation of our fisheries in eastern Canada. The collapse of these fisheries would essentially lead to a collapse of many other fisheries that rely on these stocks for survival and their important place in the ecosystem. Any illegal activity around these two fisheries should be treated with heightened severity.

The majority of harvesters want a consistent, level playing field so that they can earn their living in a fair and equitable manner.

In addition to increasing fines—for example, to 20% of a vessel's revenue—there should be more stringent consequences for repeat offenders. This should include a decrease in fishing days in the current or future seasons. Available hardware such as on-board cameras could assist in stopping repeat offenders.

It is critical that all harvesters—indigenous and commercial harvesters—regardless of the fishery or type of fishery, be treated in the same way in terms of consequences for resource infractions. All harvesters and communities suffer if illegal activity is not dealt with in a consistent manner and if the same consequences are not applied to all.

In the spring of 2024, the PEIFA will be launching an electronic log application that will record catches and other interactions in real time. This will be a second harvester-based app available in the marketplace, an option that has been designed by harvesters for harvesters.

E-logs will replace the current system, which is fully manual, on paper and manually submitted, and in which it takes approximately six months for the data to be compiled and distributed to industry.

Industry and DFO cannot make informed decisions on our ocean resources if the most current information is not available when those decisions are being made. The e-log option has been discussed since 2014, but is being used in very few fisheries. There is no clear path for widespread implementation, which puts the investment by groups such as the PEIFA in a position of uncertainty. The time for a detailed implementation path is now, and all harvester groups need to be participants once a fishery is activated for e-logs.

Another area of concern is a lack of people resources that dock-side monitoring companies can access. The current hiring guidelines do not allow for fishers that hold a license, even if the licenses are not fished, or crew members. In addition, there is a minimum grade 12 educational requirement. This approach seems contrary and outdated in terms of the current climate of labour shortages.

Again, we must ensure that the playing field is kept level and that our ocean resources are not exploited.

The suite of solutions we have offered in this document have been primarily on the harvester side. However, the PEIFA is also advocating that the fines for buyers and/or plants that process illegal lobster be significantly increased.

We recently sent a letter to the Province of Prince Edward Island, suggesting an increased fine for conviction of up to \$2 million. We are also seeking that convicted individuals be prevented from holding future licenses or buying or processing licenses.

Although these changes would come under provincial jurisdiction, it takes a multipronged approach by federal and provincial levels of government to keep our ocean resources protected and to stop illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing.

I would like to thank the standing committee for the opportunity to present today and would be pleased to answer any questions at the appropriate time.

Thank you.

• (1150)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacPherson.

We'll now go to our rounds of questioning. We'll start for six minutes with Mr. Small.

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

I'd like to extend a special "thank you" to our guests for making the trek to Ottawa to be a part of this important study.

My first question is for Mr. Fox.

In terms of DFO C and P enforcement on the water and the wharves, have you compared the current presence to where it was 25 or 30 years ago? In your opinion and in the opinions expressed by stakeholders in your region, is the Department of Fisheries as committed as it should be in order to curb IUU fisheries in the Atlantic region?

Hon. Jamie Fox: It's very interesting. Actually, I can talk back that far because I policed for over 25 years, back in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s. It was more a question of local police departments working with DFO. The DFO officers were on the wharves a lot more. I remember that. We did a lot more checks and department checks in different points of Prince Edward Island to find out where fish and different species of animals were going, and stuff like that.

Nowadays, you do not see that. It's almost as if the wharves know when the DFO guy is going to be there or when he's not. I would have to say, in my opinion, there appear to be fewer conservation officers actually on the road doing enforcement or checks than there were in the past.

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

Mr. MacPherson, do you feel that the trap and net tagging system that's in place now in Atlantic Canada is adequate to curb IUU fishing? Is it as effective as the system it replaced?

Mr. Ian MacPherson: First of all, I want to declare that the Prince Edward Island Fishermen's Association is a tag distributor. I think we were third or fourth when organizations or companies were picked. It's something we take very seriously. We certainly don't issue all the tags that are used on Prince Edward Island, as no one organization issues in other provinces.

We've had our challenges with DFO, but one thing a lot of harvesters have said to me is that when DFO issued all the tags for all of Canada, it was almost self-policing. It was a really good system. DFO did a good job of it. There was continuity. Everyone was using the same colours. Everyone knew what colours replacement tags were. Now, I would suggest, we're not seeing that kind of administration.

The other thing that could be tracked quite a bit more easily.... If someone was getting large volumes of replacement tags on an on-

going basis, they could cross-reference that very easily. Now, with a multitude of distributors, I think that's a lot more of a challenge.

It's my understanding now that we have a number of different colours and challenges out there that we didn't have before.

• (1155)

Mr. Clifford Small: Thank you, Mr. MacPherson. If there's anything you'd like to add to that in writing, feel free to submit it.

My next question is also for you, Mr. MacPherson. Do you think the Department of Fisheries right now has any idea what the combined total legal and illegal lobster landings are in Atlantic Canada?

Mr. Ian MacPherson: That's a tough question. I would say no. I think it's something we want to get a handle on across the board in Canada, as was alluded to earlier. It has done a lot of damage to a lot of companies and a lot of communities, so it's something we really need to get under control, and we need to have a sense of urgency for it.

Mr. Clifford Small: To Mr. MacPherson, again, on that same line, there were a lot of reports of high landings of lobster this past summer. I've heard that coming out of some bays, it's projected to be 50,000 pounds a day.

Now, I don't know if that's out to lunch or not, but that being said, do you feel the fishing that takes place outside of DFO science-recognized season parameters is going to be detrimental to our lobster stocks down the road?

Mr. Ian MacPherson: The position our association and other associations have taken for over three or four years has been that we need to all be fishing at the same time, under the same rules and regulations, and that we're all contributing to science and science-based decisions.

Mr. Clifford Small: Thank you.

This one is going to be yes or no.

Do you think the Minister of Fisheries should investigate IUU fishing in the lobster industry?

Mr. Ian MacPherson: Absolutely.

Mr. Clifford Small: Thank you.

My next question is for any one of you. Whoever wants to answer it.... You can hash it out.

According to a 2018 World Wildlife Fund report from Brussels, at that point close to 12.5 million euros' worth—\$20 million Canadian—of IUU bluefin tuna was caught and sold in Europe. This same stock migrates to Atlantic Canadian waters in the home province of you folks. P.E.I. catches a lot of tuna.

Does IUU fishing of North Atlantic bluefin tuna in international waters affect what can be caught by fishermen in P.E.I. and the rest of Atlantic Canada?

Hon. Jamie Fox: Yes, it does.

One problem we have is with longliners and bycatch. Longliners can fish it, and the tuna is not calculated as a bycatch. That, of course, affects the quotas allowed and allotted to our fishers in respective provinces under tri-pack agreements among the countries, as they apply to tuna.

Yes, it does affect it. It affects the price and quality, and it also affects reputation.

Mr. Clifford Small: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Small. Your time has gone a bit over.

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

Mr. Serge Cormier: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

For people watching the proceedings of this committee at home today, Mr. Fox, you said you were the former minister of fisheries for P.E.I., yes or no?

Hon. Jamie Fox: Yes.

Mr. Serge Cormier: You were not given your portfolio back. Is that right?

Hon. Jamie Fox: I was asked to step down from the portfolio.

Mr. Serge Cormier: I think you also just resigned as an MLA.

Hon. Jamie Fox: That's right.

Mr. Serge Cormier: If my information is correct, Mr. Chair... It's from CBC, so I'm not sure my Conservative colleagues will believe it.

Let me read a bit of the article. It said:

While [Premier] King said he tries to provide members of his caucus as much freedom as possible, Fox's plans to run against the governing federal Liberal Party, which included attacks on the federal government in the P.E.I. Legislature, were becoming a problem.

Premier King said:

My job as the premier is to make sure we have as solid federal relations as we can have with the government.

As Jamie got closer to becoming the declared candidate [for the Conservative Party of Canada] that was causing a strain that probably we didn't need.

Mr. Chair, I'm questioning why Mr. Fox is here. Perhaps it's to promote his next federal election campaign. We don't have the actual, current minister of fisheries for P.E.I. here.

My next question, which gets serious, will be for Mr. MacPherson.

Mr. MacPherson, how do we solve this problem of unregulated fishing?

• (1200)

Mr. Clifford Small: On a point of order, Mr. Chair—

A voice: That's ridiculous.

—we had Mr. Morley Knight here, a former assistant deputy minister of fisheries. His testimony was taken and accepted because of the expert role he was in, and his knowledge. To cherry-pick and single out.... What I'm seeing happening here right now is not cool.

I'd like you to pass that message on to my honourable colleague across the way, Mr. Cormier.

Mr. Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

The Chair: Before you go to that point, I'll answer Mr. Small.

The time is allocated to Mr. Cormier. He can ask whatever question he likes, or he can use his time and make a speech if he likes. It's his time.

I'll go to Mr. Morrissey now.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Thank you, Mr. Chair. That ruling is correct.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Thank you.

Mr. MacPherson, as the son of a fisherman, I understand we have a huge problem in fisheries right now, even if it's going well in some.

How do we solve the problem we're dealing with right now? I know the lobster industry is facing a big problem right now when it comes to illegal, unreported fishing.

What is the solution we need? How do we come to that, once and for all, and solve this problem?

Mr. Ian MacPherson: I think there are definitely some good systems out there, but they need updating, or they need to move into the digital age. For example, there are electronic logs for some of the reporting and tracking. As I mentioned, we have fisheries where dockside monitors are supposed to be at a much higher percentage. There just aren't the people there to do it. Maybe we need to look at, as I said, the qualifications.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Okay.

On dockside monitoring, Mr. MacPherson, we were told by officials that it is probably impossible to do it for all the water we have in Atlantic Canada, because there is too much.

Do you believe it's impossible to do dockside monitoring at all of our wharves in Atlantic Canada?

Mr. Ian MacPherson: I can speak only for Prince Edward Island, but I know that one of the companies over there has had real challenges for a number of years hiring enough people to cover its commitments.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Are you saying that the problem is hiring people or that we don't have enough people? Is that what you're saying? I want to make sure I understand.

Mr. Ian MacPherson: The way I understand it now, a big challenge is that it's hard to get enough people to meet the commitments that DFO would like to see on the boats.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Do you think a really good dockside monitoring program, if we can call it that, in every single wharf in Atlantic Canada would solve maybe not all of the problems but some of the problems?

Mr. Ian MacPherson: I think that would definitely help, for sure, whatever the system is, but that's a challenge. I mean, COVID was a unique circumstance, but there were fisheries that didn't have any dockside monitoring during that period.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Do you think fishers would be willing to have a system like that implemented?

Mr. Ian MacPherson: I think the biggest thing, Mr. Cormier, is to involve harvesters and harvester groups in the discussion on how maybe there's a better way to do it. As we know, there are different programs, spot audits and such things that are also a deterrent, so things like that could possibly be looked at.

Mr. Serge Cormier: On the illegal selling of lobster, do you see that in P.E.I.?

Mr. Ian MacPherson: I'm not personally aware of it, but I am aware of situations in which sometimes lobster is being advertised on social media or something that is quite public.

Mr. Serge Cormier: I ask this question purely for some context and answers: Is this from commercial fishermen? Is this from indigenous fishermen? Is it all sorts of groups, like criminals or whatever? Is there a particular group we're looking at who are doing the illegal selling of lobster, or...?

• (1205)

Mr. Ian MacPherson: I wouldn't want to target one group, and I think, certainly, that needs to be looked at. We all know, and certainly you would, sir, that the value of lobster skyrocketed in the last few years, and it's a very valuable commodity. When there's money out there and big money to be made, people get involved who normally wouldn't.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cormier.

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

[Translation]

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

Mr. MacPherson, are you in contact with your Quebec counterparts regarding illegal fishing?

[English]

Mr. Ian MacPherson: We work with our colleagues in Quebec on a regular basis on a number of issues. We're dealing with a lot of other things, but we haven't had direct conversations about that. Could you be a little more specific?

[Translation]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Have you heard about similar problems with illegal fishing in Quebec?

[English]

Mr. Ian MacPherson: My understanding is that it's a widespread problem for our east coast fisheries.

[Translation]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Is it something you could work together to address? Could the fishers join forces to have a stronger voice with the department, say?

[English]

Mr. Ian MacPherson: I would suggest that we're doing that now, but there's always room, I'm sure, for more dialogue. It's a concern, because we're threatening the future of the fishery for everyone.

[Translation]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Yes, that's what I was thinking. Illegal fishing is going on, it's intrusive, and it's hurting not only the resource itself, but also the economy and the playing field among fishers. If fishers in Atlantic Canada joined forces, would it send a strong message? Is that something you've considered? Is it doable? Is it something that makes sense to you?

[English]

Mr. Ian MacPherson: Certainly. That's why we've been an advocate for higher fines, stiffer fines, suspensions and whatever it takes to send a strong message. That's the concern, that it becomes the cost of doing business for some people.

[Translation]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: You're calling for significantly stiffer penalties and fines. You even said that licence holders who break the law should face stricter licence conditions.

What's your relationship with the department like in that regard? Do officials listen to you, or would you say the discussion is unfocused, slow and cumbersome?

[English]

Mr. Ian MacPherson: We have seen an improvement in P.E.I. in terms of fines being increased. As I mentioned earlier, we do victim impact statements. It puts the association in an awkward position, because generally you're writing a statement that involves one of your members.

That being said, we need the deterrence, and this is something new that we're putting forward. If a fine is relative to the gross income of a boat, that would send a very strong message. Obviously, in this room we cannot directly influence the legal system, but we are making detailed requests in a number of cases.

[Translation]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Here's an analogy with illicit drugs. In Quebec, when authorities seize drugs or impose a heavy fine for illegal drug trafficking, the money they recover is used to fund and improve monitoring activities.

Is that something that could apply to illegal fishing?

• (1210)

[English]

Mr. Ian MacPherson: Certainly, we support a better job being done and more resources being put towards monitoring and enforcement.

I'll make a brief comment. There's a whole, huge, recreational fishery side that DFO has to regulate and oversee, too. It's not just the commercial fishery; there are lots of fisheries that they are responsible for.

[Translation]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Yes, of course. That's something we will be studying soon. It was my idea, in fact.

I don't have much time left, so I'll wrap up with this question. What is your most pressing requirement? Is it more money, more technology or stiffer fines?

[English]

Mr. Ian MacPherson: I think consulting fishing groups and asking for specific recommendations would be a good thing. Most of what we proposed here today was more related to fines and penalties to discourage this being a cost of doing business.

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Desbiens.

We've gone a little bit over time.

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

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Since we'll probably have to go vote in five minutes, I assume my time will be split in two.

I'm very happy to be here today. Given my personal and professional experience and the fact that I represent a riding in central Montreal, I'm really glad I'm the one asking you questions, not the other way around. That would be an unpleasant situation for me.

Either of you can answer my first question.

A recent report by the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development revealed that DFO still isn't able to collect the accurate comprehensive catch data it needs to sustainably manage fisheries in Canada and protect fish stocks. That finding is further

to a 2016 audit, so seven years later. The department has apparently done very little, almost nothing.

Why do you think the department is still unable to collect all of that information and data in order to sustainably protect fish stocks?

[English]

Mr. Ian MacPherson: That's an excellent point. We go back to the discussion in 2014. The original implementation date for electronic logs for lobster, for example, was to be 2018 or 2019, but it keeps getting moved. It's a significant capital investment, so it's very hard to get things implemented if there's no implementation date.

Hon. Jamie Fox: Thanks, Chair.

Again, on that too, one problem with the science for a number of years was that, because of COVID, a lot of the science vessels and the data collection were put on hold for a two- to three-year period. Of course, that affected our numbers in terms of what was actually available out there for stocks or that continued work.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Now that the pandemic is over, do you think DFO can improve its planning and resource capacity, to better understand and quantify illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing?

[English]

Hon. Jamie Fox: From what I understand, now that DFO is actually getting back up to get the science vessels out there on the water and the work is starting to be collected, it's going to take a collaborative approach between the provinces to also assist in that collection of data on our stocks and our species as it applies all across Atlantic Canada. I'm not too familiar with what happens out in British Columbia, but there is a willingness there.

I did chair the Atlantic ministers, and I brought forth the Province of Quebec back in 2019, under then minister Bernadette Jordan. We had a good relationship. It was all agreed by the Atlantic ministers, including from the Province of Quebec, that there should be more of a collaborative approach when it comes to the science and knowledge of our stocks between the provinces and the federal government.

• (1215)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: During her appearance before the committee on October 26, 2023, Ms. Lebouthillier, the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, said that even when people are caught fishing illegally, “the fines imposed are very low compared to the profit the people make from this fishing.” The minister, herself, admitted that just recently.

How should DFO ensure that fines and prosecutions are proportional to the profit illegal fishing generates? As you pointed out, when offenders making huge profits face low fines, they just see the fines as the cost of doing business.

Do you want to see measures in place to ensure that fines are really proportional to offenders' profits and catch sizes?

[*English*]

Mr. Ian MacPherson: One of the things we're seeing more often now is these lost fishing days also being part of the penalty. Perhaps an offender loses the first week of fishing at the start of the next season, which, typically, can be a very high-revenue week. Things like that in conjunction with fines, I think, are a good step forward.

Hon. Jamie Fox: That's a very interesting question.

One problem is that the justice system fails to take into account the importance of the fishery and the actions of fishers out there on the water. I think case law.... In some cases, we have prosecutors not asking for the fines to be increased for repeat offenders in how they're affecting the actual fisheries.

I think there needs to be more education in the Department of Justice or for the Crown prosecutors on what the ramifications are. A case in point would be that not too long ago, on the coast of British Columbia, there was a crab fisher who was caught with a bunch of illegal sales. The fine was very low. It's almost like a cost of doing business.

It affects your small communities greatly in other provinces and other areas. I think we must make sure that our courts system actually takes into account how important these issues are.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Boulerice.

We're going to suspend for a moment now, as we're waiting for the vote to be called. We'll get our phones and see if we can identify ourselves on the camera.

• (1215)

(Pause)

• (1220)

The Chair: We'll get back to questioning now.

We thank the witnesses for their patience.

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

Mr. Richard Bragdon (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses today, both of you. It's really good to have you.

I want to say, on behalf of us all, that we certainly respect the experience, knowledge and background that both of you bring to this. Both of you have been doing this for years.

I've seen Mr. MacPherson at the committee many times. I know that he always brings good testimony and has informative input.

I'm very pleased today to be joined by former minister of fisheries for Prince Edward Island, Jamie Fox. He served as an MLA for a number of years. If my knowledge is correct, Mr. Fox also served as Minister of Fisheries and Communities for four years. I believe that he was one of the longest-serving ministers of fisheries for a province in Canada.

Mr. Fox, you also served as chair of all of the Atlantic ministers of fisheries and oceans for Atlantic Canada. You also incorporated and invited the Quebec minister of fisheries and oceans to join. There were no fewer than five provincial ministers of fisheries and oceans that you chaired. I would say that your depth of knowledge and understanding of this particular issue would probably be among the elite and the best in Canada.

We're really honoured to have you here today. I appreciate your taking the time. Also, your experience in law enforcement is very applicable to what we're talking about here today as well.

Thanks to both of you for being here. I have a couple of questions.

Mr. Fox, I want to start with you and this question.

We're coming to learn about IUU, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishery. How would you describe the impacts within Prince Edward Island of this type of fishery and also within the broader Atlantic context and Quebec, from your experience? What's the input you are hearing and knowledge that you've gained about the effect it's having on local economies? What's the effect on the fish harvesters whose livelihoods are being directly impacted?

• (1225)

Hon. Jamie Fox: I don't think that anybody really knows the impact in total across the five Atlantic provinces, if you include the province of Quebec. I don't think anybody has a grasp on what communities it hits and what communities it doesn't hit. We know it hits in certain areas more than others.

I will say that the province of Prince Edward Island seems to be a little less impacted by it compared to other areas, but I can tell you that for all five provincial fisheries ministers during the period of 2019 to 2023, it was a concern. We asked that there be more collaboration between several departments, CRA, the RCMP, DFO and, of course, the provinces in getting a handle on what the real impact is.

The impact is big. The fishery in Atlantic Canada is comprised of small fishers. They're small businessmen trying to make money for their families. That money is directly spent inside small towns, harbours, cities and stuff. When you take that money out illegally, there is an impact to the Government of Canada, the province itself and also the community.

Mr. Richard Bragdon: I have just a follow-up to that.

Obviously, we've come to know that it is the responsibility of the federal Minister of Fisheries and Oceans to understand how much fish is being caught in order to uphold the principles of conservation and protect the future livelihoods of fish harvesters across the country from coast to coast. The fact that we've already heard testimony that there really is no firm establishment of those kinds of numbers and the effects they're having makes it seem like there is a definite falling short of meeting the federal responsibility at this point in getting a handle on the IUU fishery.

Has that been your experience as well? Are you finding that, when you're hearing from other ministers who were in this role at the Atlantic table and the five that you chaired? Does there need to be much more involvement at the federal level to get a handle on this?

Hon. Jamie Fox: If you look at the narcotics trade, illegal tobacco, firearms or anything like that, the federal government does a fairly good job in knowing through intelligence what is being moved in those three illicit trades. When it comes to the fishery, because of the size of the fishery and the number of ports and harbours that are involved across the Atlantic region, it's harder to get a clear understanding.

There needs to be more intelligence-gathering. With that, you need to involve more departments within the federal government that can provide background data to get some kind of baseline.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bragdon. Your five minutes are up. I'm sorry.

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

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Thank you, Chair.

Quickly, to Mr. MacPherson, from my colleagues, is there an acknowledgement now within the fishing industry that we should be looking at dockside monitoring on the key lobster fishery?

• (1230)

Mr. Ian MacPherson: I can't say that specifically, no, but we work with our dockside monitoring companies in that situation.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: I agree. The fishery has gotten extremely valuable over the years.

The other part, too, is in your presentation. Am I correct in interpreting that the PEIFA acknowledged that technology must play an important part of regulating the fishery and ensuring that its landings are accurate?

Mr. Ian MacPherson: Yes. I would say that's accurate.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Thank you.

Mr. Fox, I want to go to you. You were the minister for four years, as you pointed out, so you were responsible for licensing buyers and processors.

Are you aware of all the lobster that was bought by those buyers in every given year?

Hon. Jamie Fox: No, not completely—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: However, you were responsible, as the minister. You had sole jurisdiction over licensing buyers and processors.

Hon. Jamie Fox: That's right.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Did your enforcement mechanism report to you the quantity of product that those buyers you licensed were landing?

Hon. Jamie Fox: Yes.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: You know the amount.

Hon. Jamie Fox: The problem is that there's no corresponding data between the dockside on the federal side and the provincial.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: During your time as minister, how many buyers or processors were charged by the province?

Hon. Jamie Fox: None, that I'm aware of.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: During your time as minister, what regulation changes did you make as they related to fines and penalties for buyers and processors?

Hon. Jamie Fox: There's actually a review being done of the fines structure.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: No. When you were the minister for four years, did you change any of the fines?

Hon. Jamie Fox: No.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: You made reference to the fact that you really needed to increase the fines for them to be a deterrent.

Hon. Jamie Fox: No.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: You served for four years as the minister, but failed to make any move in that area. Is that correct?

Hon. Jamie Fox: The problem is the actual court system. The courts will ask for case law, and they will give out a certain fine.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: You were the minister. You had responsibility for the regulations. You had responsibility for the act. You did not take any measures to increase fines to the level that was referenced by the PEIFA, or even by you, that would actually be a deterrent.

Am I correct?

For four years—

Hon. Jamie Fox: No. You're not.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: I just want to be clear.

The other thing, for the record, that was mentioned here, Mr. Chair... Again, a reference was made to "adequately funded" support for conservation and protection.

The record will show clearly that the protection and compliance department at DFO was gutted between 2007 and 2015 by a former government.

Are you well aware of that?

Hon. Jamie Fox: I'm not aware of that.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: You're not aware of that. I'm surprised. That was extremely.... The numbers....

For the last number of years, that division has increased its personnel by several hundred people through budget allocations from our government, because we recognize that the fishery is so important to communities and must be protected.

Mr. MacPherson, would you agree that one of the areas of conflict is the first nations fishing product that is at a lesser carapace size than what the commercial fishers are licensed for? I believe it occurs more in New Brunswick than it has been occurring in the gulf.

If the buyers and processors did not buy that product, it would be a significant deterrent to anybody from being involved in that. Is that a correct assessment?

Mr. Ian MacPherson: I think so. I would say it creates a lot of questions from non-indigenous fishers as to why we have the two—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: We get this report that there are some first nations fishers fishing at a smaller carapace size. This is of value only if somebody buys it.

Mr. Ian MacPherson: Yes.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Again, the buying of that product and the processing are the sole responsibility of the provinces, which license those identities.

Mr. Ian MacPherson: Yes, but it is a legal carapace size.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: It is a legal [*Inaudible—Editor*], but the provincial regulators could impose their own regulations on that.

Mr. Ian MacPherson: I'm not sure about that. I'd have to defer to someone from the province.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: I might get Mr. Fox, as former minister, to comment on that.

Hon. Jamie Fox: The province has no jurisdiction over the carapace size of a species of fish being caught. That's the complete jurisdiction of the federal government and the minister responsible for the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

• (1235)

Mr. Robert Morrissey: On the—

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

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

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Fox, you talked about the importance of bigger fines. You said every region was being impacted, although some more than others.

Which parts of Atlantic Canada and Quebec experience more illegal fishing? Have you been able to identify them, or is it all still murky? The argument is that we need to quantify illegal fishing, but obviously, if we could quantify it, we could target and stop it. Therein lies the problem.

Does your data show that certain parts of the east coast are subject to illegal fishing more than others?

[*English*]

Hon. Jamie Fox: There are some regions that are more of a concern than others in Atlantic Canada. I can say that those areas are under the watch of DFO conservation protection in conjunction with other members of the federal government's investigative agencies.

To answer your question, yes, there are some areas that are more aware than others.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: You can't name them, can you?

[*English*]

Hon. Jamie Fox: I didn't understand that.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: I said that you couldn't name them for me.

[*English*]

Hon. Jamie Fox: I would not want to jeopardize any ongoing investigation I may have knowledge of by saying that, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Desbiens. It's right on time.

I see the bells are ringing again for some folks. Does everybody want to continue doing it on the phone, once it counts down for the half hour, so we can continue with our testimony from the witnesses?

I see thumbs up and heads nodding. Thank you.

We'll now go to Mr. Boulerville for two and a half minutes or less.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerville: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to turn the focus to climate change and its impacts. Climate change is affecting our oceans, which will alter fish habitats. The movement of fish stocks is going to affect the members you represent, harvesters in Prince Edward Island or the Maritime provinces.

Currently, fisheries management systems are based on areas. Regional fisheries management organizations and national fisheries regulations cover static, predetermined areas. Conversely, climate change is forcing fish stocks and species to adapt and relocate.

How should the federal government plan for this relocation or shifting distribution of species in Canadian waters, if it wants to deter fishers from engaging in illegal fishing? We have a system that's based on areas, but the environment is changing because of climate change. How might that affect illegal fishing?

[English]

Mr. Ian MacPherson: That's an interesting question.

We are seeing areas change. Historic areas shift and things like that. We need to modify our enforcement and monitoring of those areas when things shift, not just keep focusing on the same areas, because things are changing out there.

We're still trying to assess the impact of hurricane Fiona on Prince Edward Island. One thing most committee members would know is that we may not see the impacts on lobster—because of their life cycle—for five to seven years, which is distressing.

• (1240)

Hon. Jamie Fox: Science is key. There's no question about that. I believe climates are changing. I believe our fish stocks are moving.

The point about our fish stocks in Atlantic Canada is that they're not predominantly around one province. The fish are off the north of Prince Edward Island, the east of New Brunswick and part of Quebec. As the months change, they go over to the province of Newfoundland and around Nova Scotia.

I think it's key that we understand how our waters are changing, how our fish are adapting or moving with climate change and how waters are warming. With that, we must make sure the departments mandated to watch, look over or whatever are also changing.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Boulерice.

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

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm starting my watch here.

Mr. Fox, you were asked questions a few moments ago, and you started to explain problems with the court systems, changing laws and so on. Then you were cut off from replying.

Would you like to continue with your reply about the problems with overlapping court systems, or whatever it was you were going to say?

Hon. Jamie Fox: The federal or provincial government can put in minimum and maximum fines in regard to any contravention of any law or act. The judiciary, which is a separate branch of government, can interpret that infraction as it applies to a law, then issue a fine relevant to previous case law or to other fines that have been given out, respectively.

To say the provincial minister failed to raise a fine, where applicable, is not the way the real world works. The provincial minister of any department does not interfere with a judge or judicial system, or suggest to the Attorney General what a fine should be. We can bring in a maximum and a minimum, but it's up to the judicial system and the judge hearing the case to determine what the level of fine should be, according to the infraction.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

At this committee, we've heard there is an exchange of jurisdiction over the product at the docks. On the boats, I believe it's mostly under the jurisdiction of the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans—DFO. Once it hits the docks and has landed, I believe it becomes provincial jurisdiction.

Can you explain that a little more clearly, so we have that information as a committee? How can that process be improved for better control, monitoring and enforcement of fisheries products as they are landed?

Hon. Jamie Fox: We can't look at measures to record catches as just the fisher's responsibility. The buyer and processor have a responsibility, also. There needs to be a clear path to compare what the fisher is bringing in and what the buyer or processor is processing and shipping. That, I think, is where there's a gap in the system right now. It's not the fisher who is totally responsible for the handling of the product. When the fisher brings it in and the product or species is delivered at the dock, it goes to a buyer, then into the world market or the processing sector.

There needs to be an approach whereby the species fisher, the buyer and the processor can share more information in order to find out whether what is landed is going out the back door or the front door.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Mr. MacPherson, you were talking earlier about e-logs. There seems to be very slow adaptation, in terms of using them.

Can you provide us with any information you have on why there has been a slow process in accepting e-logs, and the value they could have?

• (1245)

Mr. Ian MacPherson: There have been several things.

Probably one of the most significant ones was around 2017, I believe, when the platform changed. There was a working group between industry and DFO on this particular challenge—getting it going and implementing it. I'm not an IT expert, but that meant the companies or organizations that, at the time, had developed a log had to step back, reinvest and develop on a different platform. That was not only costly but also time-consuming.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Who changed the platform?

Mr. Ian MacPherson: DFO did.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

For one or both of you, in your experience and observations, is there adequate communication, coordination and co-operation between federal and provincial activities fighting IUU?

Hon. Jamie Fox: I can say that the relationship regionally among DFO and the provincial departments of fisheries is a good balance. They do talk a lot, and there is a lot of conversation and education back and forth on what's going on.

I will say that there sometimes seems to be a disconnect between the regional office of DFO and the headquarters bunch on what's happening on the ground area and what's needed on the ground area or in the fishery itself.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

I think my time is up.

The Chair: We'll now go to Mr. Kelloway for five minutes or less, please.

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

Hello to both of you.

Last meeting we heard from the CBSA that export documents are provided to folks shipping seafood across Canadian borders. We were told that the paperwork is provided by the processors, who are regulated by the province.

Mr. Fox, as fisheries minister, are you aware of that particular component?

Hon. Jamie Fox: That's right.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Yes. I am wondering, too, Mr. Fox, if you can tell us a bit about how the provinces oversee processors to ensure that they're acting in good faith and not allowing illegally caught seafood to be shipped out of the country.

Hon. Jamie Fox: The province, of course, licenses the buyers, and then they license the processors, and then they report, of course, what's going out in a rough number. It's not really to the pound, but it's an approximate value and roughly where that seafood is going.

One problem the Province of Prince Edward Island has is that some of our seafood that's landed in Prince Edward Island is calculated on the papers of the Province of Nova Scotia, because it's processed over there.

Then, vice versa, in some cases there is product that comes over from the province of New Brunswick into the province of Prince Edward Island.

There needs to be—and it's in the works—a more clear-cut way of analyzing how the species move between provinces and how it's calculated.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Thanks very much.

The way I approach problems is that I try to look at the long-term solutions and the low-hanging fruit of what we can do now. I usually try to categorize it in three different pieces. First we do this, and second we do that in terms of the low-hanging fruit.

I just want to try to crystalize and capture three things that the Government of Canada can do now to mitigate what's happening, because we've clearly heard, both on this committee and back home, that IUU is a huge problem. It's a huge problem in terms of

what we think it's doing to the ecosystem, but there's also the underground economy and potential ties to organized crime.

From both of your perspectives, if I were to ask, which I am, three things that we can be doing right now or in the next six months to mitigate.... We'll park the long term and stick to the short term. This is for both Mr. MacPherson and you, Mr. Fox.

Mr. Ian MacPherson: I have four, if that's okay.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: We'll take that as well.

Mr. Ian MacPherson: I think the tags in licensing should be reviewed. That could be done, I think.

We used to get annual audits, and I think a lot of that's gone away, so that could be reactivated with a time frame and an action plan for the implementation of electronic logs. It was not meant to be staged in all fisheries at once, which we totally understand, but there is no real rollout, I think, for any fishery planned in the immediate future.

Certainly, everyone fishing the same seasons is a big thing in terms of keeping harmony on the water, and control. It makes it easier for DFO.

The last one, as I mentioned earlier, is to take a look at the hiring criteria for someone to be a dockside monitor. If someone is not fishing a species, could that not be a great person who knows the water, is used to being out on the water and those kinds of things? I think it just needs to be looked at to hopefully add more people to dockside monitoring.

• (1250)

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Thank you.

Mr. Fox?

Hon. Jamie Fox: The use of tags is a big thing that could solve a lot of problems very quickly.

I agree with the audit part, but the audit has to be cross.... If DFO goes in and does an audit, or CRA goes in and does an audit, they should cross-reference at some point with the opposite department or the opposite province, to see if they match within a tolerance of whatever.

This is a bit out there, but I think C and P should come out of DFO; I do not believe that conservation and protection should be in DFO. They should be with the Department of Justice or the Minister of Public Safety. Then they're more independent, and they can follow along more with what the Department of Justice does or with what that type of enforcement action is.

That's one thing that I think should happen sooner rather than later. I think it's not fair that the conservation and protection officers are put into situations in which politics comes into play more than the enforcement of the law. I think they could be set up almost the same as an RCMP agency in that case.

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

Mr. Ian MacPherson: Chair, I have one more point.

I guess, quickly.... It's more provincial jurisdiction, but there should be alignment of the fines for illegal activity among the provinces.

I guess one problem, too, that we could have now is that a fine in Prince Edward Island might be \$1,000 for an infraction, and it might be \$200 in Nova Scotia. We share lots of waters, so that could encourage activity in a different area—

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Are you speaking of consistency of fines?

Mr. Ian MacPherson: Yes.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Thank you.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Small, for five minutes or less.

Mr. Clifford Small: We'll share some time with Ms. Ferreri.

Mr. Chair, following up on Mr. Bragdon's question about the government's knowledge of IUU fishing, most stakeholders have it, in their view, that the St. Marys Bay lobster fishery this summer and the elver fishery in the Maritimes this past spring had strong elements of IUU attached to them.

Mr. Fox, have you heard any of those allegations among stakeholders?

Hon. Jamie Fox: There is concern. Allegations have surfaced from time to time over the last two or three years, so yes, I would confirm that those allegations are there.

Mr. Clifford Small: If those allegations end up someday being proven correct, it's a funny thing that DFO would be able to let that slide. If that was Atlantic salmon that was being caught illegally, all those boys would be in the slammer, you know? Do the job to figure it out.

I have a question on mackerel. It's been brought to our attention that mackerel is being packed and sold as product of Canada mackerel, a product of Quebec. The mackerel fishery is currently under moratorium, and this is this year's mackerel.

Would that be an IUU product if that's, indeed, Canadian mackerel, when mackerel's been shut down for the last two years, Mr. Fox?

Hon. Jamie Fox: I'd have to say yes.

Mr. Clifford Small: I find that really odd. How could that happen? Who would be allowed to catch that fish and not be charged for catching it? Is there anyone? Is there any group or anyone who would be allowed to do that, Mr. Fox?

Hon. Jamie Fox: There is not, that I'm aware of.

Mr. Clifford Small: Okay, so we'll highlight that, and we'll ask more questions in the committee as the time goes on, Mr. Chair.

The figure on the landed value of North Atlantic bluefin tuna in Europe is alarming in an internationally monitored fishery.

My last question is, is it possible that our government is not working hard enough to bring that IUU fishing down to protect Canadian Atlantic bluefin tuna harvesters, Mr. Fox?

• (1255)

Hon. Jamie Fox: I think it's a little broader than that. A prime example would be the closure of the herring and mackerel fisheries

as bait fisheries for commercial fishing, yet we had no conversations with officials in other countries who were allowed to pick up that quota and fish it. I'm talking about the United States of America here.

When they cut the mackerel and the herring out for our fishers across Atlantic Canada, that quota was automatically picked up by another country. Are there other species out there for which we could be doing the same type of deal? Yes, that's a possibility.

I can tell you that I believe very strongly in relationships with foreign countries. I've had conversations over the last four years with 10 foreign governments, and I think those lines of communication need to be strengthened. When it comes to our fisheries, we need to have more direct conversations with foreign governments on species, the movement of species, enforcement and the market-place itself.

Mr. Clifford Small: Thank you, Mr. Fox. If you have something to add to that, you can submit it in writing, and we would appreciate that as a committee.

I'm going to turn my time over to Ms. Ferreri, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: That's very generous.

Ms. Ferreri, you have a minute.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC): Thank you, I'll see what I can do in a minute.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

Mr. Fox, serving as a provincial minister for as long as you did in the fisheries, can you tell us what the role of the federal government is in overseeing and uncovering IUU fishing? For those watching at home, that's illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. Is it the provincial minister's role or is it the federal minister's role?

Hon. Jamie Fox: It's completely the federal minister's role. The provincial boundaries and provincial jurisdiction and authority apply only when a species actually lands on the dock. Anything on the water side of the boat outward is in the complete control of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and the minister.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you so much for that.

Has the federal minister done her due diligence in collecting this data? How do you enforce conservation if you don't actually know the numbers of fish leaving the ocean? Aren't IUU numbers critical to managing conservation?

Hon. Jamie Fox: I can tell you that those concerns were brought up—I'm guessing, Chair, probably around the end of 2019 or early 2020—to Minister Bernadette Jordan on behalf of all the ministers. This was an issue, and it was brought up again to Minister Joyce Murray in conversations we had with her.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Then it's just incompetence in that part. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ferreri. You went a bit over, but of course you didn't have much time to start with.

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

Mr. Serge Cormier: Actually, I'm going to give my time to my colleague, Mr. Hardie.

The Chair: A full five minutes. That's generous.

Mr. Hardie.

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

I'm a west coaster, so I'm going to ask what may be a couple of really dumb questions, but just put it down to my being a west coaster.

Why do people fish illegally? The answer, of course, is pretty clear. They want to make money, but are there some factors in there? I'll give you one, and it might make you think of some others.

It was suggested in one of our earlier hearings when we were talking to somebody that the difficulty in getting licences, which is an issue out on the west coast, could lead people to just basically go out and freelance, where they go out and fish illegally.

Number one, is that a factor on the east coast?

Number two, are there other reasons?

We'll leave it at that, because I have a follow-up question. Do you have any thoughts on that?

Hon. Jamie Fox: I can tell you that I've always believed in one licence in and one licence out, as it applies to the lobster fishery or a species fishery. In some cases, there are individuals who fish without a licence—grey boats or black boats, as they call them—but then there are also the other individuals who can turn a fast buck.

It's no different from contraband cigarettes. We used to float them down the river at St. Croix and into St. Stephen. They'd be dropped at the border and floated down. It's a way of making money or supplementing your income. You don't have to pay taxes.

It applies the same way to the fishery. If I can bring in 500, 600, 1,000 or 10,000 pounds—whatever, it doesn't matter—I can sell that at a reduced cost and get cash in my pocket.

It's organized crime, I have to say. That's exactly what it is: organized crime.

• (1300)

Mr. Ken Hardie: Thank you.

One of the issues that come up quite often in our discussions about the west coast is the impact of the indigenous fishery. Perhaps there's a lack of clarity on what really constitutes a ceremonial food fishery, which is permitted. Is there a lack of clarity, particularly for enforcement officers, when they come across indigenous fishers fishing?

Mr. Ian MacPherson: I would suggest there is, yes.

I think part of it is this: It's a self-regulating fishery, and it's not managed in the same way as commercial fisheries. There are tags issued, but it's spot checks. That's why a lot of what we're putting forth here today is.... As harvesters, let's work together and have the same management controls.

I think, at the end of the day, everyone has the same interest: to preserve the fishery for future generations. However, it's a concern.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Thank you for that.

We were to have, today, a witness representing some of the first nations guardians, who play a meaningful role out on the west coast.

Can you give us your assessment of that program? Do they have training? Do they have the enforcement backup? Are they being put in the impossible situation of trying to enforce or observe fishing in their community?

Mr. Ian MacPherson: One of the problems is that, because non-indigenous harvesters aren't involved in a lot of the discussions, we don't know. I can't comment on that. It doesn't mean it's a bad program. We've been trying for a long time, Mr. Hardie, to get more dialogue going among the federal government, first nations and non-indigenous harvester groups. We're not getting much traction. I'll tell you that.

Mr. Ken Hardie: I spent a wee bit of time with the Vancouver police.

Mr. Fox, I'll call on your enforcement background.

You see a situation and.... We saw a lot of disorder, a couple of summers or seasons ago. There were burnings and all kinds of stuff going on. Here you are. You are one officer sent out to do something, and you see all kinds of stuff going on. However, it's just you and maybe 40 or 50 other people. That puts you, the officer, in a pretty dicey situation.

What can you do about that?

Hon. Jamie Fox: Departments need to work together more.

I was in a situation a number of years ago, when seiner fishers came into Souris. There was a large protest at the Souris wharf.

Mr. Morrissey, you would remember that.

We were a small police department. How did we deal with that, as it came towards us? It puts a lone officer in a situation that's not very comfortable.

I think that when departments and agencies work together on intelligence-gathering, and when incidents happen, they can come together as a unified body. That helps. However, conservation officers need to know the circumstances around them and be educated about what is actually happening on the ground.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hardie. We have gone a bit over.

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

[Translation]

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

I want to turn back to the security officers, the conservation officers, all the people responsible for policing illegal fishing, so to speak. Someone in my immediate family is a police officer who's worked on patrol ships on the St. Lawrence River.

You called for better coordination among stakeholders at all levels. Building on that idea, I'd like to know whether the committee should make a recommendation to the government, one that would apply not just to DFO but also to the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness. I'm talking about a clear direction to support or implement a more coordinated system, so stakeholders can communicate more effectively and deliver a more coordinated response on the ground. Would that be a useful recommendation the committee could make as part of this study?

• (1305)

[English]

Hon. Jamie Fox: There needs to be a clear-cut intelligence-gathering group or mechanism that has all the different agencies in place.

We used to call it the “Criminal Intelligence Agency of P.E.I.” It had members from DFO conservation, the RCMP and municipal police departments on it—anybody who was in an enforcement role. Information was immediately passed on, as it was learned, to the different agencies, so that everybody was aware.

In a nutshell, we need to get back to that model and stop living in silos.

[Translation]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: People on the ground have told me the same thing: we need to get back to that type of coordinated approach.

Would better coordination or co-operation ultimately lead to better results? Let's say we go that route. Do you think illegal fishing would improve by 20%, 30%, 50% or 80%, say?

The question is for either of you, or both if we have time.

[English]

Hon. Jamie Fox: I don't know what the percentage would be, but I can tell you that education is key. Agencies need to know what their roles and responsibilities are as they apply to illegal activity. If it's a fisheries issue, then we must make sure that Fisheries is the lead and that the RCMP or other agencies have a backup role to support them as required. It's the exact same with illegal drugs or whatever.

Communication is key, and information flowing back and forth is key. We need to be going back to that model. To be honest, I haven't seen that model since, I would say, the very early 2000s.

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Desbiens.

It's gone a little bit over, and that brings us to the time to vote.

We'll suspend for everyone to vote.

• (1305)

(Pause)

• (1310)

The Chair: When you're ready, Mr. Arnold, you have five minutes or less, please, to close her out.

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

I want to start off again with Mr. MacPherson.

I asked you earlier about e-logs and when they were changed in DFO. Was it a snap decision that they just decided to go with a different platform? Was there any reasoning behind that?

Mr. Ian MacPherson: It was very disappointing, because a person out of our office was on the technical development committee. We weren't aware, and it came across, and they gave a date when the existing technology would no longer be accepted and when you would have to go out and develop to the new platform. It was very disappointing.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

Mr. Fox, I'm not sure if you would know what happens with fines at the federal level, but when there are fines levied for IUU, illegal or unregulated fishing, where do those fines, the dollars, go? Do they simply go into general revenue, or is any portion of that directed back to conservation programs or anything else?

• (1315)

Hon. Jamie Fox: If it's a federal fine under a federal act, then, of course, the money goes back to the federal Crown. If it's a provincial fine, then it would go back to the provincial government. If the judge orders restitution or some kind of other monetary penalty, then that would go to the jurisdiction that is responsible for the act. The only difference, sometimes, is as with impaired driving, theft or something like that. It would stay within the province, but anything to do with drugs, illegal tobacco or fisheries would go back to the federal government.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Would it be beneficial if some of these fines were directed back into conservation programs?

Hon. Jamie Fox: It would, 100%. Proceeds of crime fines can be used to help combat illegal activity, and it would be a good move to support that.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

Apart from CBSA and Canada Revenue Agency, what other federal departments, agencies or Crown organizations play or should play a role in combatting illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing?

Hon. Jamie Fox: The RCMP definitely would be top of the list. Then there are the CBSA, the Canada Revenue Agency, the Department of the Environment and Transport Canada, because, in some cases, these vessels being used out there on the water are not in the best of shape and could pose a hazard to navigation if something were to happen to them.

There is a multitude of agencies that could be brought aboard.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

I will turn my remaining time over to Mr. Small. He has some more questions.

Mr. Clifford Small: I asked Mr. Fox about that mackerel product that's being sold in southwest Nova Scotia right now as bait.

Mr. MacPherson, how is it possible that product is stamped "2023 Product of Canada", when the mackerel fishery is shut down for all commercial purposes? I know that a bait element still exists, somewhat.

Mr. Ian MacPherson: I can't comment on the process on that side of the industry, but to segue or to add on to what Mr. Arnold just asked there, maybe CFIA is an agency that should also be part of it, because they're quite involved in authorizing both imports and exports, I believe.

Are they, for example, notified that some product is in moratorium and needs to be questioned if it's being exported?

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

You've heard among your group loud and clear that they want at least a bait fishery for mackerel. How do you think the people in the Maritimes and Newfoundland and Labrador are going to feel about that product coming on the market? If it's being caught, that's unbelievable. They're going to be pretty riled up down there.

What do you think?

Mr. Ian MacPherson: The mackerel fishery is very controversial right now, as mentioned earlier. There needs to be more dialogue with the U.S., because Canada's gone into a moratorium, and the American quota hasn't varied very much, so, basically, it's not helping the resource.

There are lots of aspects to this.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Small.

That puts us at the end of our questioning today.

• (1320)

Mr. Clifford Small: You were about to say "Mr. Tall", weren't you?

The Chair: How would I say "Mr. Tall"? You have high hopes.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: I want to say a big thank you to Mr. Fox and to Mr. MacPherson for appearing before the committee today and for sharing your knowledge. I know Mr. MacPherson has been here many times over the last five or six years.

Again, thank you to everyone.

I will let everybody know that at the next meeting, on Tuesday, DFO will be appearing on the supplementary (B)s for the first hour. In the second hour, we will resume the study with witnesses on illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing.

I want to thank everyone for their patience today as we navigated through the committee and the votes.

I want to say thank you to the clerk, the analysts and, of course, the interpreters, and to the people who work to make this meeting possible each and every day.

Enjoy your weekend.

The meeting is adjourned.

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