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Chair: Mr. Ken McDonald



Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

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• (1100)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC)): Good morning, everyone. I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 92 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 I proceed, I'd like to make a few comments for the benefit of witnesses and members.

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

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

Please address all comments through the chair.

Before we proceed, I simply 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 the microphone are one of the most common causes of sound feedback, which is extremely harmful to interpreters and causes serious injuries.

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

I would like to welcome our witnesses today. We have, representing the Canadian Committee for a Sustainable Eel Fishery Inc., Mr. Stanley King, acting president. Representing the Group of Professional Pelagic Fishermen from Southern Gaspé, we have Ghislain Collin, president, and representing MDA we have Dr. Minda Suchan, vice-president, and Leslie Swartman, senior director of government and public affairs.

Thank you for taking the time to appear today. You will each have up to five minutes per organization for your opening statement.

I will invite Mr. King to begin, please.

Mr. Rick Perkins (South Shore—St. Margarets, CPC): I have a brief point of order.

Andrew Roman was invited as a witness today. I understand he can't be here because he did not get the appropriate headset from this committee. I would ask that Mr. Roman be reinvited and that the committee send him the appropriate headset for this study.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Are there any objections? Is there agreement around the room?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Thank you, Mr. Perkins.

Mr. King, please proceed.

Mr. Stanley King (Acting President, Canadian Committee for a Sustainable Eel Fishery Inc.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'm grateful for this opportunity to inform this committee on IUU harvesting in the Canadian elver industry. It's a problem that desperately needs to be addressed.

I'm here representing the Canadian Committee for a Sustainable Eel Fishery, which is a group that advocates for the conservation of American eel stocks through sustainable fishing practices and scientific monitoring. My family has also fished elvers for more than 25 years.

The Canadian elver fishery is unique. Fishing happens at night on select maritime rivers. Fish are sold live to foreign markets and exported to China. Illegal harvesting has steadily increased in recent years, but exploded in 2023, when licensed fishers were outnumbered 10 to one by poachers.

This fishery is particularly appealing to unlicensed fishers, as the barrier to entry is low. In recent years, the price per kilogram has increased considerably. That aside, the real draw for poachers has been the lack of enforcement. In 2023, DFO estimates that 45% of the overall quota was stolen by unlicensed harvesters, yet enforcement efforts to curb this poaching were noticeably absent. Among these poachers are bad actors, backed by organized crime. Our normally peaceful industry has recently seen kidnapping, robbery, assault, gun violence and an overall disruption to the peace. To date, the response from both DFO and the RCMP to this organized crime ring has been almost non-existent.

Poaching became so rampant in 2020, and again in 2023, that the minister prematurely closed the fishery, costing those fishing legally their livelihood while poachers continued to fish unfettered. In a few short years, the industry has gone from one of the most well-regulated fisheries in Canada to chaotic and unsustainable in its current form.

One thing all stakeholders can agree on is that DFO is mismanaging this fishery. All commercial licence-holders, the six chiefs of the Wolastoqey First Nation in New Brunswick, the Assembly of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq Chiefs and the provincial governments of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick have all publicly stated that DFO has not done enough to curb poaching in the elver fishery.

Licence-holders have made countless reports of poaching and provided DFO with vehicle descriptions, licence plate numbers, the names of reported buyers, the addresses of reported holding facilities, and even flight details for upcoming export shipments of black-market fish. DFO enforcement took no action on these tips.

In one striking case, one poacher advertised on Facebook when and where he would be illegally buying elvers. We forwarded this information to RCMP officers, but again, no action was taken.

This lack of enforcement is especially frustrating on one particularly important river, Chester's East River, which is home to the longest-running scientific study on elver abundance in North America. This industry-funded study provides critical data that informs the DFO science on the health of elver stocks and the sustainability of our industry. We expressed to DFO that above all, this study needed to be protected from poachers. Despite our pleas, DFO did not protect the East River study from poachers. The study could not proceed, costing us valuable data.

There are two confounding factors to solving the challenges facing the elver fishery.

First, this is not a homegrown problem. Illegal elver fishing sits at the crossroads of a transnational organized crime network. Eels are so important to the Chinese, who are the primary buyers of Canadian elvers, that elvers are one of only 17 commodities protected as a national security concern by the Chinese government. Chinese buyers readily buy black and grey market elvers from anyone and pay in cash, which has opened the door for global organized crime.

The second challenge is the growing demand from indigenous people for access to the fishery. Our members have a long track record of supporting greater indigenous access. To ensure the sustainability of the industry, we feel strongly that access must be licensed by DFO. As of 2022, 28% of the overall quota is designated to indigenous harvesters, yet thousands of additional indigenous harvesters access the fishery without a DFO licence.

What's the solution?

The government needs to take immediate action on the following three points.

First, we need to implement a traceability system, similar to that in the U.S., to make it easier to identify unlawfully harvested fish.

Second, we need meaningful enforcement with meaningful consequences. The industry can no longer withstand token gestures of enforcement with shockingly low penalties.

Lastly, we need the federal government to stand behind its commitment to provide greater indigenous access to the fishery through a willing buyer-willing seller model. We have willing sellers.

• (1105)

To close, we have faith in our new minister and hope that a fresh perspective will bring positive change to the industry, but the next elver season is only three months away, so we must act quickly.

Thanks for your time.

• (1110)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Thank you. You were almost right on time; thank you very much.

We'll go on to Mr. Collin now, please, online.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ghislain Collin (President, Regroupement des pêcheurs pélagiques professionnels du sud de la Gaspésie): Good morning.

Thank you for inviting me to appear before you today.

I'm not here today to make accusations against anyone in the fishing industry, but rather to criticize the methods of Fisheries and Oceans Canada, which exacerbates the inequality between Quebec's fleets and those of the other provinces, damages the resource, which is mismanaged and not data-based, and disregards the issue of tax evasion.

I will begin by explaining the differences between commercial herring and mackerel fishers from Quebec and those in the other provinces. No catch-reporting measures are in force in the other provinces, except for trawler fleets. The Quebec fishery is highly regulated. Hail-ins, logbooks and dockside weighing are a part of commercial fishers' everyday lives in Quebec. The same regulatory inequalities also affect seaweed harvesters, for example, who are forced to leave Quebec and work in New Brunswick, where harvesting laws are less restrictive.

Here's an example. I fish for herring in Carleton-sur-Mer, on Chaleur Bay, where fishers from Quebec and New Brunswick work the same fishing ground. To preserve the resource in Quebec, my catch is limited to 22,500 pounds of fish per week. I'm also required to shorten my nets, and there are spawning areas where fishing is prohibited. If I catch my fish on Tuesday, I have to take in my nets before the following Sunday. If I exceed the 22,500-pound limit during the week, I am sanctioned and have to pay a fine.

It's frustrating to be the only commercial fishers from Quebec making an effort to preserve the resource while others fish without being subject to controls and ruin our resource. Then we're abandoned as soon as the government no longer needs our data.

Nothing is being done despite all the comments, questions and recommendations I have submitted to the senior officials responsible for both resources, herring and mackerel, in Moncton and Halifax for all of Canada. What's worse is that, after two years of meetings and discussions with the members of that committee, meetings in which I have actively participated, criticizing these illegal practices that harm our resource and our livelihood, representatives of our organization are expelled from meetings. All the remarks they make are deleted from meeting minutes for arbitrary administrative reasons, even though our organization has a history of being a fishing leader based on our catch reports.

I strongly urge you to read the brief that the Regroupement des pêcheurs pélagiques professionnels du sud de la Gaspésie prepared and submitted to the committee in 2021, criticizing this situation, on which no action has been taken.

This inability of senior officials to make decisions deprives their own scientists of invaluable data that would help them properly do their work, conduct studies and perform other tasks. It also perpetuates the inequality between Quebec fishers and those in the rest of Canada and causes irreparable harm to the Regroupement des pêcheurs pélagiques professionnels du sud de la Gaspésie, which relies solely on the resource, by failing to properly manage those data and the mechanisms for protecting a fragile resource. This is tantamount to wilful blindness to the illegal practice of tax evasion.

As I observe this lack of action and this inequality, I see that other fishers associations, mainly in Quebec, have the same problem as we do. Redfish fishers are an example of this. No decision has been made to lift the moratorium. They are already fishing for redfish in the Maritimes, and fishers have already developed their markets. Quebec fishers are once again put at a disadvantage.

• (1115)

In conclusion, I ask that the Government of Canada shed light on this problematic situation in Canada's fisheries, which puts Quebec fishers at a disadvantage and deprives the Canadian government of revenue. The Regroupement des pêcheurs pélagiques professionnels du sud de la Gaspésie is still awaiting compensatory measures for the closure of their fisheries.

Thank you.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Thank you, Mr. Collin. You were a little bit over time, but very close. Thank you.

Now we'll move on to Dr. Suchan, if you could, please, for five minutes or less.

Dr. Minda Suchan (Vice President, Geointelligence Division, MDA): Good morning.

I'm the vice-president of geointelligence at MDA, and I'm excited to be here with you today to talk about the health and preservation of our world's ocean ecosystems.

Headquartered in Canada and publicly traded on the TSX, MDA is a global leader in the development of space technology and the country's leading space company. We are well known for iconic space technologies such as Canadarm, as well as the RADARSAT family of earth observation satellites. As a partner to the Government of Canada and other nations, MDA-built radar satellites have been collecting and providing data and insights about the health of our planet for decades.

According to the United Nations, illegal fishing is the planet's sixth-largest crime, with 20% of the over 90 million tonnes of fish caught globally each year being captured illegally, which steals billions from the global economy, damages precious ocean ecosystems and does serious harm to the food security of coastal nations. The important impact of the ocean ecosystems that surround all of us cannot be overstated. The real and devastating impact of the massive illegal activity taking place every day on our oceans cannot be overlooked and must not be left unchecked.

MDA's own RADARSAT-2 satellite has been used for monitoring fisheries for more than 15 years. In partnership with Canada's Department of Fisheries and Oceans and Global Affairs Canada, we have been utilizing our satellite technology to detect vessels engaged in illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing.

Radar satellites can take images of the earth, day or night, through all weather conditions, giving us complete insight into what is happening on our oceans' surfaces. By combining radar satellite imagery with our maritime insight analytics, we are able to locate and track fishing vessels that have switched off their location transmitting devices in an attempt to evade monitoring, control and surveillance.

A month ago, my team and I joined our Canadian government partners in the Philippines, where we trained 75 analysts from 14 Filipino government agencies and departments to use MDA dark vessel detection technology. This effort is a key part of Canada's Indo-Pacific strategy, with a focus on supporting oceans management initiatives delivered through Canadian-made satellite technology. At MDA, we know that the work we do in space can improve life here on earth and in our oceans, because we see the impact that our data has on daily life.

Our new commercial earth observation radar satellite constellation, CHORUS, is being designed with a specific focus on maritime surveillance applications, including dedicated vessel detection imaging capacity to collect an area equal to 40% of the global exclusive economic zones daily. In addition, CHORUS will support the detection of bilge water dumping, monitor coastal erosion and the effects of climate change, and support disaster response in the event of all marine oil spills, floods, earthquakes, hurricanes and volcanoes.

We hope that our contribution to the Canadian-led international efforts to stop illegal fishing will provide the world the tools and transparency to see precisely what is happening on our oceans. We are grateful for the partnership with the Government of Canada to prevent illegal fishing activity.

Thank you for the opportunity to talk with you today. I look forward to your questions.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Thank you, Ms. Suchan. You're one minute under, but that's okay.

We'll move on to our first round of questions now, beginning with Mr. Small.

• (1120)

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

Thank you to the witnesses for coming out to take part in this important study.

First, I have a quick question for Mr. Collin.

I know that you're very involved in the pelagic fishing industry in Quebec. Have you heard any talk of mackerel being caught and sold commercially in the Gulf of St. Lawrence this past summer? There's "product of Canada" mackerel for sale right now, and it's dated 2023. Is there any possibility that the mackerel could have been caught by fishers illegally while that mackerel fishery is under moratorium?

[Translation]

Mr. Ghislain Collin: I don't know if I'm going to be able to answer those questions.

What I can confirm is that the fishers of the Regroupement des pêcheurs pélagiques professionnels du sud de la Gaspésie didn't catch that fish. I'm surprised to hear that. We're going to look into that. Personally, I haven't heard that a fleet could fish for mackerel. So you can assume it's illegal fishing.

[English]

Mr. Clifford Small: The product is being sold out of a Quebec lower north shore processor. I didn't know if you had any information to share with the committee about possible IUU catching of mackerel and selling it to those processors.

[Translation]

Mr. Ghislain Collin: I don't have any information about that. I'm not aware of that situation. If I had been, I would have mounted the barricades.

[English]

Mr. Clifford Small: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, my next question is for Mr. King.

I heard you reference China as being a big part of IUU fishing for elvers. How is this so? Why is China such a big player in this fishery?

Mr. Stanley King: We fish elvers and ship them live. We export them out of the country for growth in aquaculture facilities. Now,

100% of our fish, whether they're legally caught or illegally caught, are shipped to China. That's where they're grown out to market size.

They have an insatiable appetite for this protein source. They will buy as much as they can, and they want to protect this commodity. They need fresh elvers to come every year to make sure that they have enough for their population, and they don't really care how they do it.

They have partnered with organized crime and criminals. They will show up with bags of cash for black-market transactions, and they have basically undermined our fishery and our local economy. They're stealing tax dollars. They're stealing jobs. Our fisheries are getting shut down. The criminal element has basically threatened and intimidated a lot of the legal fishers to quit. We've had employees quit over this.

One employee in particular.... The industry, as a whole, employs a lot of women who have families. One fisher for us, who has been fishing for 15 years, has two small children under five. She makes her yearly salary in this industry, and has for 15 years, but she will not return to work this year, because she said it's too dangerous and she has to keep her kids in mind.

We have this transnational organization. It's global crime, and nobody will pay attention to it. We call the RCMP; we give tips and we call DFO's C and P—the enforcement wing of DFO—and nobody will do anything. It's costing Canadians jobs and tax dollars, and it's going to cost them this industry if DFO doesn't get its act together soon.

Mr. Clifford Small: I heard you say in your testimony that legal harvesters were outnumbered 10:1 by poachers.

Who were these poachers? Where were they from?

Mr. Stanley King: That's a good question, and I think you'll be surprised by the answer.

We all know that indigenous communities want greater access to this fishery, whether they have a licence or not, so that represents the bulk of the illegal and unlicensed fishers, but it's not just local indigenous actors. We've seen people from Maine....

I'm sorry. I should preface this by saying I fish in Nova Scotia, on the east coast. We're fishing next to people who have migrated to our coastline to fish from New Brunswick, from Maine and from Toronto. We've talked to people from B.C. who have told us, "We heard that we could make some quick money down here, and that there's no enforcement, so we've come to do that."

It's like a cottage industry now. People will come and fish illegally, because they know there is no enforcement action.

• (1125)

Mr. Clifford Small: There's one more thing I want to ask. You said there were individuals advertising that they were buying elvers illegally. Do you have any names for the committee?

Mr. Stanley King: Absolutely. I submitted it in my appendix. I put the Facebook post on the last page of that appendix. It very clearly said when, where and for how much they would buy these illegal elvers. We submitted this to DFO conservation and protection prior to that, so that they could go and make a bust—or so I had hoped—but they did nothing.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Thank you, Mr. King.

That's your time, Mr. Small.

We'll now go to Mr. Cormier online.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being with us today.

I'm sorry if my pronunciation isn't great, but this is for Ms. Suchan from MDA.

It's very nice to hear about what you guys are doing, in terms of detecting dark vessels. I was even surprised to hear that you are already doing some work with DFO.

I missed something somewhere. Can you give us a situation? For instance, how do you detect those vessels? Do they have some kind of chip in them, or whatever? Those vessels are going unnoticed. How do you detect them with the tools you have?

Dr. Minda Suchan: Radar satellite imagery is a well-known technology that we've been using for over 15 years. It's an active sensor technology from space. We transmit our radar down and detect the radar that is reflected up. Through this, we are able to see large ships on the ocean. We combine it, through our analytics platform, with other types of data, such as AIS data, which is tracking information that ships emit. We can combine that with the imagery we see. If people want to turn off the information signal about who and where they are, we are able to detect them through radar imagery. There are other types of data that we bring in as well.

Mr. Serge Cormier: How many years have you been doing business—if I can say that—with DFO on illegal fishing?

Dr. Minda Suchan: We worked with them a few years ago to develop the analytics and pull in the right set of data to do what is needed. It turned operational in 2021.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Is there a number you can share with us on how many ships you've caught? Do you let DFO know, "Look, we suspect this ship is probably catching some fish illegally"? Is there a number you already have that you...?

Dr. Minda Suchan: I would probably leave it up to DFO to share that number with you.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Okay.

Dr. Minda Suchan: We certainly turn over the data and provide the analytics and reports. They are the ones who confirm or validate the information and data and take action beyond that.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Okay.

It's a long shot, but I'm going to ask you this question. Maybe you're aware of this. It's not about ships. It's actually about whales.

We have a situation in my region with the North Atlantic right whale. Since 2015, we've had their presence in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Each time there's a whale in a certain area, we close it to fishing, so we don't have any entanglement and dead whales.

Is there something in your satellite devices we can use to detect whales, not just boats?

• (1130)

Dr. Minda Suchan: Radar reflects very well off metal, but not so well off a whale. We do some whale detection using UAV technology for VTOL, but it's a very different type of technology from satellite. Radar satellites are very good at detecting objects on the water, not under the water.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Okay. Thanks for that.

How many pounds—I must use the word "tonnes" instead—do those illegal boats catch in a year? Do you have a number on that? Are there estimated numbers you guys can share with us?

Dr. Minda Suchan: I have only the number from the UN that talks about 20% of the 90 million tonnes captured per year. It's 20% of the over 90 million tonnes of fish caught globally each year. That is what is presumed to be captured illegally. That's a statistic from the United Nations.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Look, I'm going to read more about your company and what you're doing. It seems to be a great tool that we can use more and more. Thank you very much.

My next question is for Mr. King.

We had officials recently at our committee. We had DFO officials. We also had some CBSA officials. We haven't yet had the RCMP comment on the situation with elver fisheries in Nova Scotia.

Do you feel the DFO and CBSA officials responsible for checking what's leaving the country, in terms of fish, and that everything is legal—paperwork and everything...? Even the RCMP... Do you think they did their job properly in the situation that occurred in Nova Scotia this past year?

Mr. Stanley King: The answer is a resounding no. I don't blame the CBSA officials so much, because they should be informed by DFO C and P on what to look for and at what time of year; they should sort of be tipped off so they can do their job more effectively. It is hard to differentiate a package of seafood of, say, lobsters versus elvers. Even if you put it through an X-ray machine, these guys aren't going to notice it.

DFO acknowledges that four and a half metric tons of elvers were fished illegally in 2023, and the real number—because that's only the quota that we have that was taken off the TAC—is probably closer to 25 metric tons. They all went through airports and flew out of this country to China.

I saw some of the testimony at the committee you're talking about, with the head of the CBSA. To say that they did not intercept one package, not one kilogram, of 25 metric tons coming through the airports, is scandalous. DFO won't do anything on the riverbanks; they won't do anything in the transports; they won't do anything in the chain of command; and they won't do anything when our natural resources—our dollars—are leaving the country. They step aside.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Thank you, Mr. King and Mr. Cormier. Your time is up.

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

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): We'll now move on to Madame Desbiens for six minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

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

Thanks to the witnesses for being with us. It takes courage to testify before this committee as part of the studies we're conducting.

Mr. Collin, do you think that Fisheries and Oceans Canada has scientific data showing that the waters of Chaleur Bay along the coast of New Brunswick are different from those on the Quebec side?

Do the waters of New Brunswick speak English and those of Quebec French?

Why are the laws different?

Mr. Ghislain Collin: I don't understand why. All of us fish for the same species, and we're all in Canada. You could say that the government has a double standard, since it's the same species in the same place. I can go and fish near New Brunswick, but if I go back to Quebec to land it, I'm subject to all these controls. That's good for protecting the resource, but we want that to apply to all Canadian fleets.

• (1135)

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: What will this inequality lead to in the long run, and what does it show?

Mr. Ghislain Collin: First, it has resulted in a decline in the species. Second, we've seen our catches drop to shutdown level. Third, as a result of unreported fishing, there's a much bigger fishery than what was proposed. I've seen estimates of unreported catches too, and I can tell you they're far greater than the total allowable catches. As for resource preservation, that's unfortunate. We now have nothing to fish as a result, whereas we harvested the resource properly.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: What does that show, apart from the fact that Quebec has been put at a disadvantage? Is it a lack of fairness or a failure to listen on the department's part? We sense that you aren't being heard.

Mr. Ghislain Collin: It shows that there's no consideration for a small group of Quebec fishers.

It also shows that the government ultimately wants to have three big associations of fishers in Quebec and to have the smallest associations ultimately disappear so there's no more problem. That's

what we think. It has destroyed our fishery by acting as it does, and as it has done in the past, and by closing its eyes to certain issues.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Would your viability be secured if you were granted compensation or offered an alternative solution for the fishery?

Mr. Ghislain Collin: That's the solution. We want to keep on fishing. The fishing industry is still devalued, but we're going to make every effort to persevere. Yes, we need alternative solutions.

We especially need to continue working with the scientists. It's not their fault that senior officials have never had the courage to enforce the actual regulations across Canada. The scientists have been deprived of data. We need to keep on working with them. We need data in order to reopen fishery, and I hope we'll soon be working with the scientists from Fisheries and Oceans Canada.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Is the economy in your region based on your fishing?

Would businesses or towns therefore be at risk of shutting down because you're essentially being penalized for fishing in Quebec?

Mr. Ghislain Collin: Yes, that's exactly it. Government inaction has resulted in a lot of uncertainty in the fishing industry, as a result of which investment has declined. No one will invest in the fishery, to buy fishing nets, for example, without knowing what's going to happen.

The same is true in the processing industry. Businesses won't invest in machinery without knowing when our fishing operations will resume.

So we're caught in a vicious circle, and my sense is that the fact we've stopped fishing suits certain individuals just fine.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: You said that the fact you had stopped fishing would suit certain individuals just fine.

What would happen to the resource data if you stopped collecting it?

Will we be able to rely on something else? You were the only ones providing that data. However, now you're hardly ever on the water, for reasons we're unaware of, except that you are Quebeckers.

Does the fact that this data is no longer being collected mean that we'll have no more information to use in managing the resource's survival?

• (1140)

Mr. Ghislain Collin: That's exactly right. We need data and fishers on the water. How can the department prepare a recovery plan without data?

Echo sounding has its limits when it comes to assessing stocks. You need fishers. That's true across Canada, not just in Carleton-sur-Mer, on Chaleur Bay.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Thank you, Madame Desbiens.

We'll now move to Ms. Barron for six minutes, please.

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

[Translation]

Mr. Collin, how can indigenous and non-indigenous fishers and communities co-operate and work with Fisheries and Oceans Canada to combat unreported and unregulated illegal fishing?

Mr. Ghislain Collin: First of all, everyone has to abide by the same rules regarding hail-ins, logbooks and dockside weighing, for example. The same rules must apply to everyone, not just to Quebec commercial pelagic fishers. That way, we can collect reliable data, and the scientists won't be deprived of that invaluable information.

We could work in collaboration with the indigenous communities by following the same rules and providing data to the scientists. We can really help by providing that data.

[English]

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

My next question is for Mr. King.

Mr. King, you were giving us some pretty specific numbers around the illegal eel fishery in Nova Scotia. I'm wondering if you have a breakdown. I know that you were talking about the number of eels leaving the country. Do you have the information around how that looks as far as the amount of illegal fishing that's happening locally is concerned, as well as by those who are coming in from outside the local community? You talked about people coming in from Maine. I'm trying to understand how that breaks down—how much is being done locally, by local people, and how much is being done by those who are coming in specifically to participate in illegal fisheries.

Mr. Stanley King: Unfortunately, there's no good answer for that, because we don't know the breakdown of local, non-local, indigenous or non-indigenous poachers or illegal fishers. That's because we see no enforcement. Nobody's going around checking for licences. Nobody's asking for identification. If DFO enforcement were doing their job on the riverbanks at night, we might have a bit more insight into that question.

What I can tell you is that no matter where they're from, they sell their fish locally, so there's a local buyer. They just leave the province with cash. That local buyer sells to a Chinese buyer. Then they ship it by air. Sometimes, to evade DFO—although I don't think they're really looking—they'll truck the fish out of the Maritimes to an airport in Toronto or Montreal and fly it straight to China that way.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

It's clear that if there's nobody following up on the reports that are being made, it's hard to really differentiate the information on what's happening.

You made a statement at the beginning, though, that I'm trying to understand—and correct me if I'm wrong—around indigenous people playing a big part in this. Without this information, I'm wondering if you can explain a little more the basis of that comment.

Mr. Stanley King: Sure. For a long time, indigenous communities in the Maritimes have wanted greater access to the fishery, and our organization has always been a strong proponent of that. We think there's room in the fishery for greater indigenous access, and that should be one of DFO's prime objectives. However, we need to do it through a licensed setting, because we have a set TAC. This is a species that traditionally has had some problems but is doing quite well now, but we still have to keep an eye on it. Therefore, all harvesting has to come under a DFO umbrella so that we know exactly what's coming out of the fishery from a conservation standpoint.

I don't want to paint all first nations with the same brush about doing unlicensed fishing, because they're not all doing it. There are opportunists. Other non-first nation fishers have capitalized on this, because they've seen that there's no enforcement and that nobody's minding the shop. They're capitalists. They just come in, and they are fishing and trying to make as much money as they can as well.

● (1145)

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you for the clarification.

Just to clarify, based on the information we have, there is no actual evidence that indigenous people are leading these illegal fisheries or are predominantly seen participating in these illegal fisheries. There is no information to support that specific comment that was made, just to clarify.

Mr. Stanley King: No, there is specific information. A lot of the first nation bands that are not working with DFO have come up with their own conservation plan—fishing plan—and have implemented it without DFO's permission. They will readily tell you that it's actually the majority of first nation bands. Therefore, when you're on the—

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: I'm sorry. I interrupt only because I have only 45 seconds left, and I want to make sure. I really do feel that the onus of responsibility here should be on DFO to ensure that we have the appropriate information being collected, that we have accountability being put into place and that we're bringing indigenous and non-indigenous community members together to talk about what's happening. I would be willing to bet that we would have more common concerns among all those involved than not.

Have there been any opportunities or any discussion? Has DFO been in touch at all to discuss this complex issue and to bring non-indigenous and indigenous people together to talk about a path forward?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Please be very quick, if you can.

Mr. Stanley King: I'll just comment that the first nation bands that are licensed participants are very upset with DFO, as are the non-first nations fishers. We're all upset with DFO for mismanaging this fishery.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Thank you, Ms. Barron.

Before we go on to the second round, I've had requests from two members to bring motions forward later in this meeting. If everyone is in agreement, we can carve out 15 minutes at 12:45 to deal with these motions. I see no objections, so our rounds of questioning witnesses will wrap up, and we'll take a short suspension at 12:45. Thank you.

The next round goes to Mr. Perkins for five minutes.

Go ahead, please.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you, Mr. Chair. You're doing a wonderful job, by the way.

I'm sure this will surprise people: My questions will all go to Mr. King.

I'm following up on MP Barron's questions. As you know, every night I was home during the legal elver fishing season. I was going out every Friday and Saturday night at midnight, looking at the rivers to see what was going on. Every river I went to—many of which are not even licensed elver rivers, not designated by DFO—had poachers on it. I had many constituents whose properties were being defiled and destroyed as poachers parked and utilized their... I had single mothers threatened by people.

I understand it's a sensitive topic. I had death threats during this time, as did my wife. There was a lot of criminal activity, from the U.S., Quebec and all over, but there was also a lot of indigenous illegal fishing. I talked to them and saw them first-hand.

How long has this been going on?

Mr. Stanley King: This really started in 2020. We'd see dribs and drabs before that, but in 2020 there was a concerted effort to access the fishery unlicensed. If I may, a typical fishing night for us is two people per river, one on each side. We will have a dip net. In 2020, maybe 10 people showed up, five of them on each side. Then, it slowly grew over 2021, because there was no enforcement. In 2022, it grew more. In 2023, it exploded, so that there would be 50 people, unlicensed, on each side of the river, with one licensed fisher on each side of the river. You can see the logistics are just unbelievable.

Mr. Rick Perkins: My office called the RCMP detachments on the south shore of Nova Scotia almost every day, asking if DFO had been contacting them for assistance, and every day they said no. I had the RCMP threatening to arrest my constituents who were complaining about the trespassing on their land, and refusing to actually come and enforce even their responsibilities.

Did you see any DFO C and P enforcement officers on the rivers at all, either during the month before the legal season, when the poaching started, or even in the months after, into the summer, when the illegal poaching continued into the summer?

• (1150)

Mr. Stanley King: As for prior to the season and the whole duration of the season, for the six rivers that we monitor 24 hours a day, we saw zero DFO C and P enforcement, none. After it was closed, they used that as a lever to be able to enforce a bit more. That's what they told us. They used that. We did see them, but normally in the day.

This is a fishery that happens at night, so we have pictures of them coming out in the day to check the river. It's completely useless. They told us prior to the season—we have an annual meeting with our DFO supervisor—to temper our expectations for enforcement. They said that to us before the season.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Publicly, they said before the season started that they had enough resources to enforce the law, but then they shut it down, because it was too dangerous and they didn't have enough resources.

The inconsistency is huge. The violence is terrible. It's only going to get worse. DFO may use the lack of science now on the river as an excuse to shut down the legal fishery. Have they contacted you at all about their plans, three months from now, for how they're going to enforce the law and prevent this from happening again?

Mr. Stanley King: There has been virtually no transparency on DFO's part on what the next season will look like. We have had workshops, because they're working on a fisheries review, but we are not hopeful that this will make one iota of difference, because the criminals and illegal harvesters don't care what the rules and regulations are. If you don't go down with boots on the ground, with C and P Fisheries officers, and put these people in check, the same thing is going to happen in 2024 as happened in 2023. I can guarantee it.

Mr. Rick Perkins: There's probably going to be exponentially more, because when it's \$5,000 a kilogram, it just brings in more criminal activity.

To be clear, people don't eat elvers. They are shipped to be grown into full eels. The elver fishery, I believe, has only existed for 30 years. Is that correct?

Mr. Stanley King: That's correct.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Any claim to a right to a fishery that didn't exist before 30 years ago, I personally believe does not exist.

Mr. Stanley King: Yes. You're absolutely right. All the fish are exported live to grow out in aquaculture facilities. The fishery is quite young, approximately 30 years. For 20 or 25 of those years, we had a very modest living. We just scraped by. We didn't have a market. We had to travel the world to try to get people to buy our fish. We travelled many trips to Asia. The state of the fishery today is a direct result of our hard work, and grinding it out for 20 or 25 years, making next to nothing. Global markets have shifted. Global markets may shift back, but right now, yes, the price has increased.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Thank you Mr. Perkins and Mr. King.

We'll move on now to Mr. Morrissey for five minutes, please.

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

My question is for Mr. King, through you, Chair.

Mr. King, your testimony before the committee is alarming, but I take you at your word.

You referenced bags of cash. Did you see that?

Mr. Stanley King: We know that they deal in cash. Prior to all of this, we know that Chinese buyers, who we have dealt with, are prone to coming with briefcases full of cash, so I know that is how they operate.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: I don't disagree, because we've heard this quite a bit. It's a growing situation, not only in the elver fishery.

Was there any record of that? A simple transaction of cash itself is not illegal if it's documented and reported. That becomes the illegal part. What records, if any...?

You referenced a local buyer. Was the buyer a licensed buyer?

Mr. Stanley King: The licensed buyers sometimes skirt the law and sometimes play on both sides of the fence. Sometimes these guys don't have a licence at all, and they're just running afoul of the law.

As far as proof is concerned, we have a roughly 10-tonne total allowable catch—a TAC. We were unable to harvest 45% of that because of a premature closure by ministerial order—

• (1155)

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Of that 10-tonne quota that was assigned, what portion were you not able to catch?

Mr. Stanley King: Licensed harvesters harvested 55%, and—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: That's 55% of the 10 tonnes.

Mr. Stanley King: Yes, and unlicensed harvesters did 45%, or four and a half tonnes. That's by DFO's own account.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Could you elaborate a bit on DFO's count?

Mr. Stanley King: Yes, sure. We've pieced together the way they figure this. Instead of going down to the river when the actual fishing is happening, they're using drones—they've told us this—and other measures to count how many illegal fishers are on the river. Then they sort of back-calculate by how much we catch, because we report our catch in real time.

If I go out one night and catch one kilo of fish and there are 50 other non-licensed fishers with me, they assume that those guys caught one each too, so that's 50 kilos that they take off the TAC. That then leaves the TAC short from us.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Are you telling me that DFO is documenting illegal activity?

Mr. Stanley King: Absolutely.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Okay.

You said that quota was stolen. Is that how you define that?

Mr. Stanley King: It's a contentious term, but that's how I would define it. We have—

Mr. Robert Morrissey: You'd define it with the methodology you've just explained.

Mr. Stanley King: Absolutely.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: For my next question, when you say that DFO is mismanaging the fishery, you use flight information for shipments. Did you provide that to DFO?

Mr. Stanley King: Yes. We have provided a lot of information to DFO, including that. As you can well imagine, the pots mix. We have 200 fishing families, and they have fishermen friends and relatives, so we get some intel back to us. We pass that along promptly.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Is that information about Canada? Halifax or Moncton, I take it, are—

Mr. Stanley King: Yes, it's export flights out of the country with live fish.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: You said that it's primarily to China.

You made 30 recommendations. One is for a traceability system.

Could you explain a bit more? I'm not sure how a traceability system would work within the elver fishery. We're just referring to the elver fishery.

Mr. Stanley King: A traceability system documents the chain of custody of illegally caught fish. We can document where they're caught, who they're sold to, who bought them to export them and where their final destination is.

It's no silver bullet, but it will help identify unlawfully caught fish more easily.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: In my remaining time, for the elver licence, you referenced the willing buyer and willing seller, which has been a principle that successive governments have used in trying to get access to existing fisheries for first nations. It's one I agree with.

What would it cost for an elver licence?

Mr. Stanley King: According to DFO, it's not worth that much, because they've made shockingly low valuations on it, we think, to sort of undermine us, to create greater indigenous access, and to skirt the willing buyer-willing seller process, which was the state of the path forward of the previous two ministers.

What is a licence worth today, after the fishery has been undermined by poaching and nobody else will invest in it, because it's basically a mess? That is anyone's guess.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Thank you, Mr. Morrissey. Your time is up.

We're moving on now to Madame Desbiens for two and a half minutes, please.

[Translation]

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

Mr. Collin, I want to go back to the issue of the fishery in Quebec.

The mackerel and herring fishery, which is your fishery and is closed, was a measured and measurable fishery.

What would be the solution for you to stay alive?

Could we suggest a sentinel fishery for you, using a hook and line, for example, which would have a lesser impact on the resource and would be much more habitat-friendly? We could even compensate you for your trouble.

Instead of offering you monetary compensation, we could pay you to take measurements, participate in a sentinel fishery and earn a modest living, while continuing to take appropriate measurements.

Is that a solution that appeals to you?

Mr. Ghislain Collin: Yes, it's a measure that could easily be implemented. Our fishers are already equipped. They already have all the necessary equipment and expertise for a selective hook and line fishery that's respectful of the resource.

• (1200)

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: That would keep you afloat and let you continue using your expertise and know-how. You could stay on the water.

Couldn't you?

Mr. Ghislain Collin: To that we could add other types of fishing, scientific or exploratory fishing, for example, even the development of new products and the discovery of emerging species.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: I see.

Could those types of fishing also improve our understanding of the resource's behaviour? It seems that mackerel move around.

Is that correct?

Mr. Ghislain Collin: We're seeing that now for [*Technical Difficulty—Editor*] of mackerel. You now have mackerel in places where they previously weren't found in large quantities.

So biomass is now shifting as a result of water temperature. Mackerel have moved slightly more to the north. That's all. Fishers can go get them there.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: The same rules should also apply fairly to everyone, to Quebeckers and to fishers from the rest of Canada.

Shouldn't they?

Mr. Ghislain Collin: [*Technical Difficulty—Editor*] to have a sustainable fishery and that [*Inaudible—Editor*] that we'll be able to leave to future generations. Everyone should abide by the same rules as we do, particularly as regards mandatory reporting, hail-ins and dockside weighing.

Lastly, I would say that this is the history that Fisheries and Oceans Canada [*Inaudible—Editor*] for certain species.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Thank you.

We haven't heard certain words—

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Thank you.

If you're ready, Ms. Barron, it's your time now, for two and a half minutes, please.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Chair.

I'm asking lots of questions. The first thing I want to clarify is that when I say DFO, I'm talking about those in decision-making capacities and also those who are making the decisions around how to allocate funding. Ultimately I know there are lots of good people doing good work in DFO. There is just not capacity to be able to take this on, in many ways. That is a big problem that needs to be resolved, and it needs to be funded appropriately.

What I'm trying to understand and wrap my head around, if I can be frank, is the treaty rights of indigenous peoples and how that plays into this. I don't think I'll go any further into that, only just to state that I have some serious concerns around the fact that we're seeing this repeated pattern in which we have non-indigenous and indigenous people pegged against each other. We have no clear avenue for seeing DFO take the lead on ensuring that everybody has the same information, that everybody is able to work together, and that there are accountability mechanisms that ensure we're conserving this species.

I can definitely empathize with the concerns of those locally who are worried about the species, worried about their livelihoods and worried about their communities.

I just wanted to clarify that.

I'm going to leave it there and pass the remainder of my time over to Madame Desbiens, if that's okay with you, Mr. Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Absolutely. It's your time.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Ms. Barron, thank you for your response. I'm very grateful to you for it.

Mr. Collin, as we all know, the United States also participates in the mackerel fishery.

What troubles you most? Is it the lack of action by Fisheries and Oceans Canada?

Do you sense that the department lacks the resources or power to correct this entire situation, or do you think it isn't interested in fishers from Quebec?

Mr. Ghislain Collin: What we're seeing now is that the department is completely uninterested in the fishers in my Quebec fleet.

[*English*]

Mr. Mike Kelloway (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I'm looking at the relevance of this part of the questions and answers in terms of IUU. I'm wondering if we can get to that.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Madame Desbiens, we're almost out of time, but would you like to point to the relevance of the question to the IUU study?

[Translation]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: I'm trying to understand why the department is doing nothing for Quebec fishers, whereas fishing continues everywhere else.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Thank you very much.

You have about seven seconds for an answer. If more can be provided in writing, we can—

• (1205)

[Translation]

Mr. Ghislain Collin: What we're asking is for the mackerel fishery to be reopened. If we don't go out and fish, we won't be able to provide data for the scientists and the fishery will quite simply not be reopened. We therefore need to go back and fish for a reopening of the fisheries to be possible.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Okay. Thank you very much.

Moving on to our next series of questions, I'm going back to Mr. Small now, for five minutes, please.

Mr. Clifford Small: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have a very quick question for Mr. King.

When you look at the breakdown of indigenous- and non-indigenous-owned elver licences, what's the percentage of the quota that was harvested by first nations and by non-first nations this past year? I mean just the percentage.

Mr. Stanley King: Of the overall TAC, 28% is allocated to first nations harvesters. The season was shut down prematurely, so I know that the Wolastoqey band in New Brunswick did not get a chance to fulfill their whole quota. If the season is allowed to remain open until everybody catches their quota, then it's 28% allocated to first nations.

Mr. Clifford Small: Those first nations suffer because of this poaching.

Mr. Stanley King: Absolutely, and they're not very happy about it.

Mr. Clifford Small: Thank you very much.

For our folks from MDA, Ms. Suchan, are you aware of any successful outcomes as a result of the investment the current government has made in your technology?

Dr. Minda Suchan: I hear anecdotally about different things that occur through our customers, through DFO, where they have been able to leverage the technology through various means—for example, for drug interdiction—and that certain illegal activities were able to be stopped because of our technology. It's more on an anecdotal basis than from a magic formula.

Mr. Clifford Small: I'm asking in terms of IUU fishing.

Dr. Minda Suchan: In terms of IUU fishing as well, we do hear examples of successes, when they were able to board and to find illegal fishing activity, and they were able to confirm that. Our technology gave them data to successfully stop certain activities.

Mr. Clifford Small: Thank you.

You're hearing a lot about the elver fishery right now. We've heard a lot about summer lobster fishing in Nova Scotia and suspicious IUU salmon fishing on the Fraser River. Has the Minister of Fisheries ever approached you about using your technology to combat homegrown IUU fishing?

Dr. Minda Suchan: We do support some of the monitoring in the coastal regions, but I'm not sure how far inland and in what specific areas. Yes, we do try to also help domestically as well as overseas.

Mr. Clifford Small: Could your technology be used in monitoring elver fishing at night?

Dr. Minda Suchan: Certainly. It's all day, all night and in all weather that those kinds of images can be taken. I would say it would be a great opportunity for us to explore further with DFO to see how we could support it.

The way we take imagery and the modalities we have—in other words, the area of interest, the resolution and how small the objects are that we can detect—vary, depending on where we are geolocated, where we're looking and the types of modes available at the time we have across that area. We would probably have to work with DFO. I do think that's an interesting opportunity to explore further.

Mr. Clifford Small: Are you telling me the minister hasn't contacted you to help them out in monitoring elver fishing or summer lobster fishing in Nova Scotia, or salmon fishing on the Fraser River?

Dr. Minda Suchan: I can't speak to that, specifically. They could have asked in other ways to my team. I would have to go back and double-check. I'm not aware of that specifically, but that doesn't mean it hasn't been investigated.

• (1210)

Mr. Clifford Small: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, I don't know if Mr. King's appendix has been circulated. I have it right here, but it was just handed to me by our staff. Make sure that gets admitted for evidence in this study.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): We're moving on now to Mr. Kelloway for five minutes, please.

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

Today I think we've had a really good, candid conversation.

I want to speak to elver for a moment. I can't add anything to what other parliamentarians have said, and you have said, Mr. King, in terms of the severity of the issue from a safety, security and economic perspective. It's been clearly laid out, and you've done that quite well.

I want to go to solutions, and you've highlighted many of them. Before I do that, I want to speak to the fact that, clearly, DFO has a fundamental role to play here. That goes without question. I also think, and we've seen this in other testimony, that CBSA has a role to play here, as, I dare say, does the RCMP. I think we need to have the RCMP come to this committee. I believe we've asked, but I think we need to ask again. I think it's really important. We don't direct the RCMP to do the work. At the same point, we need to have it here to speak to this really fundamental issue of what's happening in Atlantic Canada, in particular New Brunswick and Nova Scotia.

I want to go to an example that's often brought up by folks in the elver industry around following the best practice of Maine. You spoke of traceability. I wonder not only if you can unpack the traceability for a second, but also if you can talk about other things Maine has done to mitigate.... They haven't completely squashed illegal poachers. I'm wondering if you can speak to the Maine example and what the lessons are that we could learn, in particular in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia.

Mr. Stanley King: Thanks for the question, Mr. Kelloway, and thank you for your interest in the topic. We know you've been interested previously, and we appreciate that.

Maine used to be way behind the Canadian system. We were really leaders in this fishery, and then it blew our doors off. It has hoppedscotched us, and now we're way behind it.

They have implemented a few different ways to limit illegal harvesting. One is a robust traceability system, using swipe cards. We know, from the time the fish are caught at the river, when they're swiped in, who they're sold to and who buys them again. Often, there are a few buyers before they're exported. The traceability issue, the chain of custody, is always transparent. That does help identify illegally harvested fish.

Maine has also done something interesting. It has partnered with a lot of first nations and made it a group problem. Everybody wants this fishery to run smoothly, because it benefits everybody. It benefits the fishers and the communities, whether it's an indigenous community or a non-indigenous community. It benefits the government's bottom line. It's a resource that we can take advantage of—that's the best way I can put it—and utilize. We can take care of it, and it can fund a lot of good stuff.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: In terms of the coming year and understanding that the Maine example wasn't built overnight—it took years to develop; it was incremental—what are some of the first things...? In three or four months, we're back into the elver fishery. What are some things you want to see? Understanding that you brought up that there is a study, and I believe you mentioned that you haven't been.... I'm not sure if you said that you aren't actively involved in the study or that you haven't been asked to be part of the study or that you have been asked but it hasn't been consistent. However, let's go to what you want to see in what we'll call the first phase. The DFO has said that it is planning regulation changes and things of that nature, but what do you want to see, first and foremost, as an elver fisher and someone who represents so many people in our communities?

Mr. Stanley King: We've been asking the DFO for a traceability system for 10 years. That's 10 full years of asking repeatedly if we can please have a traceability system, so that is first and foremost. We have just now initiated an industry-funded pilot project that we hope will get off the ground, but again, that's our idea. We've put this forward; the DFO has really done nothing.

To jump back to what you said about the study, that's an industry-funded study. We run the study. We designed the study. We give the DFO the data to analyze, but that study doesn't run without us. It was cancelled this year and cancelled in 2020 as well, which cost us incredibly valuable data. The DFO head scientist has said that that's a real punch to the gut of this study.

For this upcoming season, we need a traceability system.

• (1215)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Thank you.

Mr. Kelloway, your time is up.

We'll go back to Mr. Perkins for five minutes, please.

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

Mr. King, I'd like to talk about solutions. We've talked a lot about enforcement. I believe that if you start arresting people for poaching, river by river, you'll soon see an end to it. In terms of enforcement, one of the things I think your organization has asked the DFO quite a bit to start putting in place is a traceability program for elvers. Could you explain how that would work?

Mr. Stanley King: Yes. It's no silver bullet. That's what I want to express to this committee: that it is no silver bullet. It will help a bit to separate illegally harvested eels from legally harvested eels in more of an airport setting or in transit. We will be able to say, "Oh, you have elvers in this shipment. You have elvers in this truck. Let's see your chain of custody." That's what a traceability system will do.

It is not the be-all and end-all. We need enforcement more than anything, which is easier said than done. We also need increased fines. The last fine I saw in the paper last month was for \$500 for poaching elvers. You have to consider that they can go out and make \$10,000, \$15,000, \$20,000 in a single night—sometimes more. Who wouldn't pay \$500 gladly if they were caught and convicted? We need real penalties.

Mr. Rick Perkins: On that conviction.... You mentioned that there was one individual—more than one, in fact—advertising on Kijiji and other places about various parking lots around Halifax where they would be willing to buy illegally caught eels at a set price. I think I even read one of them where he was offering tacos, too, if you came to sell to him. If I were advertising on Kijiji that I could go to the Home Depot parking lot and that I was selling cocaine at a discount—and that, by the way, if you buy a certain amount, I'll give you some tacos—do you think the police would allow me to do that for very long?

Mr. Stanley King: I think it's an apt analogy, and I certainly hope not. I don't see the difference; they're both commodities.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I'll move to another subject. For the last two years, I believe, the DFO has expropriated the licence-holder quota without compensation. It's done it for the purpose of getting more first nations access, which is a legitimate public policy desire that we have with regard to all fisheries. However, the DFO has an extensive willing buyer-willing seller program, with a lot of taxpayer resources. I understand that it engaged in the last two years—maybe not the last year but certainly two years ago—in a discussion with elver licence-holders about purchasing and compensating, about the willing buyer-willing seller concept. Elver licence-holders had independent third party evaluations done as part of that process, yet the DFO didn't buy any of the licences. It just expropriated them. Why was the DFO unwilling to accept—and maybe this is unfair—the independent study that you had done? Maybe you could explain a bit about that.

Mr. Stanley King: You're absolutely right.

Two years ago, in order to generate more first nations access, they asked for proposals to voluntarily surrender elver quotas under a willing buyer-willing seller model, which has been the government's stated path forward on how to generate more first nations access. All the licence-holders submitted proposals in good faith. We want the fishery to work. We did an independent market analysis.

There was a resounding “no” from DFO. Actually, they didn't even respond. They waited for a whole year before they even responded to us and said, “No, it's too expensive. We'll ask you again to lower your price, please. We'll ask again in a few weeks.” We all waited for a second round of proposals, but they never came. They said, “No, we're going to pull the plug on that. We're not going to bother. We're just going to expropriate it.” That's exactly what they did.

• (1220)

Mr. Rick Perkins: Did DFO engage in any consultation with you or the licence-holders about what they may or may not do? I think that was a temporary transfer. That's the way they do it for lobster. It's a temporary licence that goes on for years. Has DFO approached you about this coming season and how much they are going to expropriate from legal licence-holders?

Mr. Stanley King: No, they have not, but you're right. It's an ongoing 14% temporary expropriation. They just keep taking it for no compensation. They say it's going to be temporary, but it's ongoing.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Thank you, Mr. Perkins.

Now we're over to Mr. Hardie for five minutes.

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

Ms. Suchan, are you able to track a vessel that is live, goes dark, and then becomes live again? Are you then able to identify vessels that exhibit this kind of behaviour?

Dr. Minda Suchan: Identification is different from detection. We pull in other sorts of—

Mr. Ken Hardie: I need a very simple answer, because I have lots of questions in little time.

Dr. Minda Suchan: Okay.

Yes, we are, in certain circumstances.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Are you able to tell us the nation of origin of most of the vessels exhibiting this kind of behaviour? You may not have this at hand. Is it something you would be able to develop?

Dr. Minda Suchan: Yes, that is something we work on in conjunction with customers like DFO.

Mr. Ken Hardie: It would be worthwhile knowing where these vessels are and determining whether, like many vessels in the ocean fleet, they're registered in Panama. That would be very worthwhile to know, because that's another avenue.

Mr. King, what do you know about the end use of the product? You say they capture the elvers. They're taken to China to grow into full-size eels. What happens to that product? Is it consumed entirely in China, or does it go someplace else?

Mr. Stanley King: A large majority of it is consumed in China, but it's also exported throughout Asia. It's very large in the sushi market, so some of it comes back to Canada. Some of it comes back to North America and is served in a few different formats.

The growth rate is about one year of aquaculture. That's why they need a constant supply of elvers to keep up.

Mr. Ken Hardie: A human rights group is starting to focus on Chinese seafood processing, because of the use of Uyghurs and others in slave labour, etc. That's another avenue that I think we need to investigate.

I would not want to be an enforcement officer out on the river, with hundreds of people doing illegal things. It is dangerous. It occurs to me that if there's no money in it, the problem will go away. What do we do to take the money out of it?

One thing we heard in earlier testimony is lack of intelligence—the lack of knowing who, in fact, is benefiting the most. It's not the people on the river. It's the people up the totem pole from those people. This includes provincially regulated processors, which are probably handling some of this stuff and turning a blind eye. I don't know.

What about intelligence efforts? Can you sense anything like that going on?

Mr. Stanley King: Last year, when they asked us to temper our expectations around enforcement—boots on the ground and river-side at night—they said, “We’re going to concentrate on big-picture stuff. We’re going to concentrate on getting the buyers and exporters.” Well, that obviously hasn’t come to fruition. I don’t know why, but I think that if CBSA took a fair chunk out of the exports that have already been paid for, it would dry up this market. Why aren’t they doing that? I don’t know.

You could come to the river with me at night and follow these guys right to their house, then to the airport. They’re not trying to hide. It’s not clandestine crime. It’s out in the open.

• (1225)

Mr. Ken Hardie: When they’re at the airport, obviously putting something into a container to be shipped on an aircraft, are there any export permits needed, or are any presented that you’re aware of?

Mr. Stanley King: It’s my opinion that they mislabel the packages. We’ve gone out to the airport and used their X-ray machine with a box of lobster and a box of elvers. We put them through the X-ray machine, and they looked identical, so it’s easy for a company.... Nova Scotia ships out a lot of lobsters to Asia, a lot, so I think that they can get away, most of the time, with telling the CBSA agent that they’re lobsters, not elvers.

That’s where DFO comes in. They have to inform the CBSA that, for these four weeks during the season, if they see a bunch of packages come in, they have to open one up. You could really put a dent in the whole criminal enterprise, but they don’t want to do that. I think it’s opening a can of worms for the government, and they would sooner turn a blind eye.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Thank you.

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

[Translation]

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

Mr. Collin, I must say I’m very concerned about the future of the fisheries in Quebec. I wouldn’t want to make you say anything you don’t want to say, but the department hasn’t responded to the brief you submitted in 2021. Nothing has changed. Once you’ve reached your limit of 22,500 pounds of fish per week, you go back to port and watch the others fish.

Do you think the department has simply abandoned Quebec?

Mr. Ghislain Collin: I think there is a double standard.

There are measures that have to be complied with in Quebec, failing which fishers are sanctioned. Quebecers can pay fines. Those kinds of sanctions are applied nowhere else in Canada.

We feel somewhat isolated from other fishers. We’ve handed our resource over others.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: I’m trying to understand why we’ve let down Quebec fishers in particular, when they discharge their legal duty to report fishery-related data more than anyone else. If anyone is acting legally, it’s them because they report everything they harvest.

How do you explain that?

Mr. Ghislain Collin: It’s inexplicable.

What I told our members the first time the fishery was shut down is that they would be receiving compensation. They had done their work for years and had paid for dockside landing audit services and hail-in-related services. I told them that Fisheries and Oceans Canada had the history of all that. The departmental officials know them and know that they’ve harvested the resource.

At first, I thought we’d work with a group of fishers, the trawlers and fishers who had filed reports, including the Quebec pelagic fishers. However, we were ignored and abandoned. We’ve had no meetings with the minister to date.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Thank you very much.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Thank you, Madame Desbiens. That’s right on time.

Ms. Barron, you have two and a half minutes now, please.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you very much, Chair.

I have other questions for the other witnesses as well, but I’m stuck on one point that was made by Mr. King.

Mr. King, you mentioned that there are elvers going overseas and coming back as sushi to Canada. As a committee, we did a study on the importance of labelling because of things like this, and I’m wondering if you could speak a little about how you know that they’re coming back. Is there labelling that says this? Do you have any information that you can share around ways Canadians and people in your local community can be educated on what’s required to be able to differentiate between legally caught elvers and illegally caught ones, to try to keep the local economy local?

• (1230)

Mr. Stanley King: Unfortunately, there’s no good way to differentiate between illegally caught fish and legally caught fish right now when you’re at the supermarket. We hope that a traceability program could eventually be expanded to have some kind of seal or verification on the packaging to show that the fish coming back was responsibly caught. We hope that will happen one day in the future, but it doesn’t happen now.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

With the time that I have left, I’m going to ask Ms. Suchan a question.

When you were speaking, Ms. Suchan, you talked about the radar satellite being very effective on the water but not under the water. What about beside the water?

I'm thinking about the opportunities for us to use technology to help increase the efficiency of follow-up and accountability around illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing that's happening along the side.

Dr. Minda Suchan: Absolutely. As long as it's above the water and not under the water, along coastlines and even on certain land areas, we are also able.... Radar technology can come in and monitor certain activity as well.

There are various land and maritime applications. I've been focused a bit more on the maritime opportunities, but certainly it's along the coastlines as well.

We have different types of radar that go out there and can detect different sizes, so the size of the object, the size of the ship, the size of the boat and the material of the boat all dictate how our radar can detect and image that, as well as bringing other types of data in.

Sometimes, for our radar satellites, we have a very broad area, but we can bring in other satellites, like optical satellites or higher-resolution satellites that come in and can get more detailed information and more specific imagery to help with the situation as well.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Thank you, Ms. Barron. Your time's up.

Now, we're back to Mr. Small, I believe, for five minutes.

Mr. Clifford Small: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I may be splitting these five minutes with Mr. Perkins if I'm in a good mood.

I'll go first to Mr. King. I have a headline here that reads, "Eel poachers forced Nova Scotia Power to shut down hydro dam". That's pretty big stuff. It's a CBC news article that says, "Illegal fishing near dam created safety concerns".

Do you know if the RCMP was called in to take care of that?

Mr. Stanley King: Yes, I do know that. This is one of our licensed rivers, and we have had the chance to talk to the people who run that particular power plant. They were told by the RCMP that they couldn't remove any of the unlicensed fishers and that they should put up a fence around the property.

I don't know why they couldn't get them removed from private property, but that's what they were told, and DFO enforcement would not remove them either.

They surrounded where the effluent comes out of the turbine, and if they had fallen in, they would have died. That's why they finally had to shut down the power plant, to make sure there were no incidents of death.

Mr. Clifford Small: There were no charges laid, though, and no law enforcement to take them away?

Mr. Stanley King: No. They were left unfettered for the whole season.

Mr. Clifford Small: Wow. With regard to Atlantic salmon, any time that poachers are encountered by C and P, their boats, their trailers, their big four-wheel drives—everything is taken. There are thousands of dollars in fines.

Why do you think there's a difference in enforcing the rules around Atlantic salmon and not around elvers?

Mr. Stanley King: There were at least 50 high-priced trucks in the parking lot of this particular hydro dam that was shut down, with only one entrance. If the RCMP or DFO had wanted to come and seize all those trucks, they could have just parked in front of it. They were sitting ducks.

Why didn't they? I believe it is because it's a political issue now, and they've been told to stand down, either by Ottawa or by their regional supervisors.

• (1235)

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

How much time do I have left, Mr. Chair?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): You have two minutes and 26 seconds.

Mr. Clifford Small: I'm going to benevolently turn my remaining time over to MP Perkins, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I guess he's in a good mood.

My question is for Dr. Suchan.

I heard earlier in the committee that you do the surveillance with all of your global technology in international waters. Is it in international waters around Canada, or is it in specific other parts of the world?

Dr. Minda Suchan: We support DFO in a variety of different places. For example, I mentioned the Philippines. We recently went out there to train some of the Filipino analysts on how to use DFO's dark vessel detection program. That is one area. We've also done that in Ecuador and a couple of other places globally. We do it, of course, here within Canadian waters as well.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Do you do it within Canadian waters or in the international waters just outside of Canada?

Dr. Minda Suchan: I would say both, from my understanding.

Mr. Rick Perkins: When you provide that information to DFO, do you have any idea what they do with it?

Dr. Minda Suchan: Certainly, as I mentioned, sometimes I hear back anecdotally about some of the successes they have achieved using our technology. That is really exciting for me and my team to hear, but we really are a technology company providing that data to DFO and reports to DFO. How they choose to utilize it in terms of the end response is within their parameters, not ours.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Would you be providing DFO with photographic evidence or other evidence of such areas as St. Marys Bay and southwestern and southern Nova Scotia, where lobster fishing is happening out of season?

Dr. Minda Suchan: We get asked to monitor certain areas very specifically, depending on DFO's needs. It's a back-and-forth conversation.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Have you been asked to monitor those areas?

Dr. Minda Suchan: Not that I am specifically aware of, but certainly I know that my team works very closely with them on a daily basis, so—

Mr. Rick Perkins: I'm sorry to be abrupt, but I don't have a lot of time.

Could you get back to the committee in writing on whether you are monitoring lobster fishing areas within Atlantic Canada and are turning that data over?

Dr. Minda Suchan: Certainly. I can do that.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Thank you, Mr. Perkins.

I'm now turning it back over to Mr. Hanley for five minutes.

Mr. Brendan Hanley (Yukon, Lib.): Thank you.

I'll pick up with Ms. Suchan and maybe go to Ms. Swartman too. They haven't had a chance to speak yet.

For either of you, I realize that you provide information to DFO and don't necessarily have that specific information to disclose, but you have been aware of illegal fishing actually being detected and documented through your systems. Would that be correct?

Dr. Minda Suchan: That is correct.

Mr. Brendan Hanley: Has MDA weighed in on or been involved with the government to...? I assume that it's under the port state measures act that you're involved in this detection. Would that be accurate? There is a review of the port state measures act. Are you in conversation with government over that review?

Dr. Minda Suchan: Not that I know of specifically, or not at this time. Certainly we support questions that come to us through our customers, sometimes relating back to certain policies and procedures, but I haven't heard this specifically.

Mr. Brendan Hanley: Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Collin, you referred to a brief of the Regroupement des pêcheurs pélagiques professionnels du sud de la Gaspésie that I think was submitted in 2020.

Would you please tell me briefly about the document and the recommendations it contains?

Mr. Ghislain Collin: The document contains a lot of information, including a dozen or so recommendations. The main one is that requirements should be imposed regarding logbooks, hail-ins and mandatory reporting for all fishers in Canada.

I mainly condemn the lack of action by the Halifax and Moncton task force, which was unwilling to impose easy and no-cost mandatory catch reporting. It's the reporting that makes it possible to collect accurate data and then forward it to the scientists.

• (1240)

Mr. Brendan Hanley: Exactly what do you want the minister and department to do to put an end to that lack of action?

Mr. Ghislain Collin: They need to impose the rules now governing Quebec fishers on all fishers in Canada. We are Canadians, we harvest the same resource, we do so in the same waters; the same rules should therefore be imposed on everyone. In addition, the department would thus obtain data on the resource enabling it to monitor that resource much more closely.

Mr. Brendan Hanley: Thank you.

[English]

Mr. King, I think I'll end with you.

I really want to thank you for being clear about describing the problem.

I'm really concerned also about the threats that were made, which Mr. Perkins described—to him and his family, and presumably to others—for those who are attempting to document illegal sales. That should not happen. That certainly speaks to the seriousness of this issue and to our need to ensure that we have strong recommendations to put in place the documentation and enforcement measures that are needed.

This is a bit of an “out there” question, probably. Are there market opportunities for adult eels in Canada? Is that something that's being explored? I'm just wondering if there's any interest or opportunity, given that everything goes to China.

Mr. Stanley King: Traditionally, before the elver industry started about 30 years ago, all of our eels were captured as adults and sold as adults. Now, the price for that today has made the fishery not worth the time.

However, a collection of elver licence-holders have been trying to get our own aquaculture facilities off the ground in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, to grow these fish here, create jobs and create more revenue. We believe we can do that, and it would be beneficial.

We've invested millions of dollars in this already, and we are getting close; however, the idea is stalled, because nobody is willing to invest. Nobody wants to be a part of an industry with such turmoil and uncertainty. How does anybody know if there's going to be an industry next year, with these kinds of things?

These problems have spun out into the side projects of value-adds that we could do but are stalled on.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Thank you, Mr. Hanley. That completes the round.

As we have a couple of motions that apparently need to be dealt with, we will suspend for a few minutes to release our witnesses.

I wish to thank the witnesses for their appearances today. It's valuable testimony for the committee. If you have anything further that you would like to submit, the committee can also receive written briefs as well.

We will suspend for a few minutes.

• (1240)

(Pause)

• (1245)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): We're back in session.

If we're ready to go, I'm looking for raised hands.

Mr. Hardie.

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

I have one of two motions on basically the same topic that you're going to hear about.

You will have received my notice of motion a couple of days ago. There's a preamble included with the motion that doesn't get included officially with the motion. I'll read it. It says, "Given the urgent need for steps to protect Canada's wild fish stocks while supporting the potential for aquaculture to contribute to local economies and to the world's demand for high quality protein, and in the spirit of fair process..."

Those were the motivations behind the motion. There will be some amendments suggested by my colleague to clarify a couple of things—most particularly that there'll be a focus on the west coast, because we don't want to have unforeseen spillover effects of this on the east coast; and, secondly, to ensure that the wording is correct in terms of what we do as a committee and how we transmit that for follow-up and action.

I'll read the motion as you have it, and then it will be open to amendments.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Can it be sent out again?

Mr. Ken Hardie: I have extra copies.

Mr. Rick Perkins: That's wonderful. I'm an old-fashioned paper guy.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Okay. There you go.

A voice: We can also send it electronically, but we'll...

Mr. Ken Hardie: No, no. It's "IBM"—"it's better manually". There you are.

I will read it as it was submitted in the notice of motion, and then it will be open to amendments. Is that okay?

That the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard dedicate two meetings to hear from the aquaculture industry the steps they will take to eliminate all harms to wild fish stocks of their operations, and that the committee present the findings of these hearings to the Minister to inform her decisions on the nature and scope of the transitions the industry will make to achieve this goal, and that the government issue a response to these findings.

That's the motion as transmitted in the notice of motion, and to your pleasure, Mr. Chair, I think Mr. Kelloway has some amendments to suggest.

• (1250)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): I saw Mr. Kelloway, but I also saw Ms. Barron.

Mr. Rick Perkins: On a point of order, I'm just clarifying. We have a motion on notice from MP Barron, but just so I'm clear, this is a different motion, not amending her motion.

Mr. Ken Hardie: This is a different motion.

I don't want to pre-empt where anybody is coming from, but I believe there may be an opportunity to do some merging here. We'll leave that open to possible comment, though.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Mr. Kelloway, go ahead.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I do have some amendments to make here, so I will provide them very slowly.

In the second paragraph, after "That the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard" would be added "on the west coast". In the second paragraph, "to eliminate" would be changed to "to minimize".

To the third paragraph, which starts with "that the committee present", we would add, "its findings to the House and, pursuant to Standing Order 109, request that the government issue a response". That would replace "the findings of these hearings to the Minister to inform her decisions" and the remainder of that sentence.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Everyone has heard the amendment.

Ms. Barron, I saw your hand up first. Go ahead.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you. First I'll speak to the amendment to the motion; however, I do want to point out that I also have an amendment, just to make things complicated.

Just to be clear, Chair, am I able to speak only to specific amendments that were brought forward to the committee, or can I speak to the motion as is, with the amendments included?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): The motion we're dealing with right now is the amendment to the original motion. We have to discuss the amendment first and decide on that. Then we can go back to discussion on the main motion.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I'm sorry, but I'm a little confused here. This is not the first time, but....

Are you saying we don't have an amendment, but we have a separate motion? This is not an amendment.

Mr. Ken Hardie: No, that's the motion. Mr. Kelloway amended it.

Mr. Rick Perkins: We're not discussing your motion, then. We're discussing the amendment.

Mr. Ken Hardie: We're discussing the amendment to the motion.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Is that to Ms. Barron's motion or to this motion?

Mr. Ken Hardie: No, it's to that motion. For the time being, Ms. Barron's motion is totally separate and may remain that way.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Okay. Have we sent around the amendment to this motion too?

Mr. Ken Hardie: No. It's just been made.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Oh. Okay. I'm feeling a bit like Abbott and Costello.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Mr. Hardie introduced the motion. Mr. Kelloway introduced an amendment to the motion. We are discussing the amendment to the motion made by Mr. Kelloway.

Ms. Barron, I see your hand up.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Chair.

On the amendment, I'm going to just say, with this caveat, that I have amendments, because I have concerns over the content of the motion itself. However, I will speak only to the amendment right now, in the hope that I'll be able to speak to the motion when we loop back around to it.

With respect to the three points that Mr. Kelloway just brought forward, the first one, "west coast", seems like an appropriate addition.

I am 100% against taking out "eliminate" and trading that for "minimize". Otherwise, I'm happy with that, but I will say I have some concerns that I want to speak to over the motion in general. As for the specific amendments, I do not agree with taking out "eliminate".

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): If you wish to make a sub-amendment to that amendment, that is what you would need to do to maintain the word "eliminate" and not use the word "minimize".

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Mr. Chair, if I can clarify, I think it might be easier for me to just vote down the entire amendment. Then I can actually vote on the motion as is, if that's an option that I can take.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): You can vote any way you wish.

Mr. Small.

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

I know that this motion states that it's about aquaculture, but is it salmon farming? There are different aspects and categories of aquaculture, because we're going to have also—

• (1255)

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I apologize to my colleague Mr. Small. That wasn't intended to be a personal attack in any way. I'm just trying to get clarification, so that we're all on the same page.

Are we speaking only to the amendments that were put forward to this motion? It sounds like we've gone down the rabbit hole of debating the content of the original motion that was brought forward, which is a debate that I one hundred per cent want to participate in but have not, because we are amending the three points that have been brought forward by Mr. Kelloway on the content of the motion. The "minimize" to "eliminate", the "west coast" and then the request to the government are the three points I heard and that I spoke to.

I'm happy to hear from Mr. Small, of course, but I want to make sure we're all debating the same thing right now.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): I've had a suggestion from the clerk that it may be easiest to deal with if you were to break down your amendment into separate pieces so that we can deal with the west coast phrase and then move on to the amendments to the next paragraph, if you're willing to do that.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Do you want me to verbally do that again, or do you want it in written format?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): The amendment we are discussing, then, is to insert the words "on the west coast" after "Cana-

dian Coast Guard" and then to remove the word "eliminate" and insert the word "minimize".

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Okay. I'll take it step by step in terms of the vote.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): We'll deal with that sentence and move on from there.

Mr. Hardie.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Actually, I think we should be a bit more granular, deal with "on the west coast" and then deal separately with "minimize" versus "eliminate".

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Granular it is.

I see you, Mr. Bragdon, online with your hand up.

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

Yes, I just want to speak in regard to "on the west coast". I think this is a very important distinction that needs to be recognized by this committee in any study that we're going forward with. It deals with the matter of jurisdiction. It's very clear that in Atlantic Canada, much more Fisheries and Oceans...and much more that pertains to net pens and open-net pens would fall under areas of provincial jurisdiction and that of provincial governments.

That distinction is critical. It's vital to the east coast region, and anything we're doing at the federal level as it pertains to this matter needs to be specified. I think it is important to make sure that this distinction is laid out clearly in anything we do with any such study. Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Mr. Morrissey, I see your hand was up next.

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

Mr. Chair, we had an amendment moved to a motion. Are we now separating that amendment? The amendment is currently on the floor. It has to be either withdrawn or voted on. Isn't that correct?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): I asked and there was no opposition around the room to dealing with just the changes to the first paragraph.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Are we going to vote on the changes to the first paragraph of the amendment?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): We are having a discussion on adding the words "on the west coast" and changing the word "eliminate" to "minimize".

Mr. Hardie.

Mr. Ken Hardie: I think with the first one, you could probably just use a show of hands. The second one, which is to replace "eliminate" with "minimize", might take a vote. Then the third one could be a show of hands issue again.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Ms. Barron, I saw your hand up.

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

I was going to propose the efficiency of just moving forward. I think everybody is speaking in support of the west coast.

Through you, Mr. Chair, it's up to you to decide. I would like us to move on, because we all need to move on to the next thing, and clearly there's not going to be time to make any big decisions today.

• (1300)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Is everyone in agreement that “on the west coast” be accepted as an amendment?

(Amendment agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Now we'll go to the word change, from “eliminate” to “minimize”.

I have Mr. Perkins.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I actually like this amendment, but I'm open to hearing why it's the word “eliminate”, because I'm not sure that in the ocean we can totally eliminate anything. I think what we can do is minimize harms in managing it as much as possible. As much as I'd like to eliminate the harms, I'm not sure that, while it may be laudable, it's ever achievable.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Can I ask, for clarification, that the mover of the motion read the word “eliminate” into the context of the sentence to ensure we're all talking about the same thing? I imagined the word “eliminate” in a different context from what's being proposed, and I want to make sure I'm fully aware.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Go ahead, Mr. Hardie. Then we're going to have to do the hard stop. It's one o'clock.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Yes.

We're giving the agriculture industry the opportunity to tell us what steps they would take to “eliminate” all harms to wild fish stocks of their operations. I would take it as a friendly amendment to replace the word “eliminate” with “minimize”. To Mr. Perkins' point, it would be almost entirely impossible to totally eliminate all harms, even from onshore operations.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): I'm seeing multiple hands up for debate on this one, but we are up against a one o'clock timeline. I think we're going to have to come back to this at the next meeting. Is there a motion to adjourn?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Thank you, everyone.

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