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# Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

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Tuesday, February 6, 2024

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Chair: Mr. Ken McDonald





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• (1545)

[English]

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

Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to meeting number 96 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans. This meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders.

Before we proceed, I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of the 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, and please mute yourself when you are not speaking.

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

Please address all comments through the chair.

Before we proceed, I simply want to remind members to be careful when handling their earpieces, especially when their microphone or their 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.

Today we welcome the Office of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development, as well as the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, for a briefing on “Report 6: Monitoring Marine Fisheries Catch” of the commissioner's report.

I would like to welcome our witnesses. From the Office of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development, we have Jerry DeMarco, commissioner; David Normand, principal; and Francis Michaud, director.

Representing the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, we have Brent Napier, acting director general, conservation and protection. On Zoom, we have Todd Williams, senior director, fisheries resource management, operations; Jennifer Mooney, director of national licensing operations, is here in the room.

Thank you all for taking the time to appear today. Each department will have five minutes or less for an opening statement.

I will invite Mr. Jerry DeMarco to begin, please.

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco (Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development, Office of the Auditor General):**

Mr. Chair, thank you for this opportunity to appear before your committee to discuss our report on monitoring marine fisheries catch, which was tabled in the House of Commons on November 7, 2023.

I would like to acknowledge that this hearing is taking place on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

Joining me today are David Normand and Francis Michaud, who were responsible for the audit.

In Canada, approximately 72,000 people make their living directly from fishing and related activities. In 2021 the country's commercial marine fisheries were valued at \$4.6 billion. As of 2022, there were 156 federally managed commercial marine fish stocks on Canada's east and west coasts and in the Arctic. Fisheries and Oceans Canada is responsible for monitoring fish catch to ensure that these stocks are sustainably managed.

Fish catch information supports many stock management processes, including assessing fish stock health and setting seasonal fishing quotas to ensure that stocks are not depleted.

Our audit focused on whether Fisheries and Oceans Canada obtained dependable and timely fisheries catch monitoring information and whether the department used that information to sustainably manage the harvesting of commercial marine fisheries.

Overall, we found that the department was unable to collect dependable and timely data to have a full picture of the health of Canada's fish stocks. We also found that the department did not ensure that catch data collected by third party observers was dependable and timely.

[Translation]

We also found that many of the weaknesses found when we last audited this area seven years ago remain problematic. For example, the department created the fishery monitoring policy in response to a recommendation in our 2016 audit, but it had not implemented the policy or supported it with resources or an action plan.

Seven years ago, we also flagged that the department's information management systems needed to be modernized to support the collection of dependable and timely data. We found that progress in this area has been very slow. Fisheries and Oceans Canada has spent about \$31 million to implement a system that would provide ready access to data and integrate information across all its regions. However, the department's rollout of this new system is incomplete, and the timeline for delivery has been delayed 10 years.

Without dependable and timely data on fish being caught, Fisheries and Oceans Canada does not know whether commercial stocks are being overfished. The collapse of the Atlantic cod population in the 1990s—with its far-reaching economic and social impacts—has shown that it is far more expensive and difficult to recover depleted stocks than it is to keep them healthy in the first place.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my opening statement. We would be pleased to answer any questions the committee may have.

• (1550)

[*English*]

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold):** Thank you very much. That was well within the five minutes.

I invite Mr. Brent Napier to give his opening statement.

**Mr. Brent Napier (Acting Director General, Conservation and Protection, Department of Fisheries and Oceans):** Thank you, Chair. I believe Todd Williams will be providing the introductory statement today.

Thank you so much.

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

Mr. Williams, please go ahead.

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

Good day, members of the committee.

I would like to begin by recognizing I am speaking to you from Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq people. This territory was covered by the treaties of peace and friendship that Mi'kmaq, Wolastoqiyik or Maliseet, and Passamaquoddy peoples first signed with the British Crown in 1726. The treaties did not deal with the surrender of lands and resources but in fact recognized Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqiyik—Maliseet—title and established the rules for what was to be an ongoing relationship between nations.

My name is Todd Williams. I'm the acting director general of fisheries resource management substantively the senior director of fisheries management operations at Fisheries and Oceans Canada. With me today are Brent Napier, acting director general for conservation and protection, and Jennifer Mooney, director of national licensing operations.

I appreciate the opportunity to be here before this committee on behalf of the department to speak to the commissioner of the envi-

ronment and sustainable development's audit on monitoring fisheries catch, which was tabled in Parliament on November 7, 2023.

The commissioner has provided parliamentarians and Canadians with independent analyses and recommendations in their audit on the monitoring of fisheries catch. The commissioner's report raises awareness of the challenges that the government and its partners face with regard to fisheries monitoring. On behalf of Fisheries and Oceans Canada, I would like to thank the commissioner for his work and acknowledge the report's findings. Moreover, the department welcomes the recommendations put forth in the report and is taking action to address them.

While we agree that there are areas for improvement, we are not in agreement with the broad conclusion that catch monitoring programs in commercial fisheries were not sufficient to meet our fishery objectives. All of our commercial fisheries have catch monitoring programs, and harvest decisions are based on a robust combination of data from those programs along with data from scientific surveys of stocks.

With regard to catch monitoring, the department is in the process of implementing its fishery monitoring policy and recognizes the need to accelerate this work. This is why the federal government has invested \$30.9 million from this fiscal year to 2028, with \$5.1 million ongoing to support the implementation of this policy. This funding will help accelerate work to achieve the overarching policy goal, which is to ensure that fishery monitoring programs produce reliable, timely and accessible fish catch information.

In addition, Fisheries and Oceans Canada will continue to make improvements to the at-sea observer program by working collaboratively with at-sea observer companies.

The expansion of electronic logbooks and the development of the Canadian fisheries information system, CFIS, are major efforts to improve and enhance catch reporting services, which the department believes are crucial to ensuring that modernization and data collection are at the forefront of the fishing industry.

Fisheries and Oceans Canada is committed to continuing to improve our catch monitoring programs and introducing more efficient and effective methods to collect and verify catch data. As part of this commitment, DFO is making strides to modernize catch information systems, modernize the observer program and implement the national fisheries monitoring policy.

• (1555)

[*Translation*]

In closing, Fisheries and Oceans Canada is committed to sustainably managing Canada's fisheries for the long-term benefit of all Canadians. We recognize the essential role that robust catch data has in achieving that goal and are confident that our investments to strengthen catch monitoring over the coming years will have long-term benefits for Canada's fisheries.

[English]

Thank you for the opportunity to appear today. We would welcome your questions.

Thank you.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold):** Thank you both. You were both well within the five minutes allotted, so thank you very much.

We'll go to our first round of questions. We'll begin with Mr. Small.

**Mr. Clifford Small (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you to the witnesses for coming out today.

I'll start off with Mr. DeMarco.

You referenced the need for dependable and timely data and that it's not forthcoming. What's changed since your last report? Has anything improved?

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** I've been commissioner now for a little over three years within the Office of the Auditor General, and it troubles me that had I been commissioner seven years ago when our office last looked at this issue, I would be saying some of the same things then as I'm saying now. There's been a lack of progress, considering that we audited this issue back in 2016 and that it's now just over seven years later.

There have been some improvements. There have been some investments in information technology. The most significant improvement was the creation of the policy that was promised after our audit, but, as we set out in our report, the implementation of the policy is still lacking, as well as the resources to implement it.

It is disappointing that many of the findings we made seven years ago still hold true today.

**Mr. Clifford Small:** Thank you.

You've mentioned that stocks may be overfished as a result of missing catch data. Is it possible that the opposite could be true? Could we be missing economic opportunity as a result of incomplete stock assessments?

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** The situation could be both, yes. It could be that the data are not there and the quotas are set too low, or the data are not there and the quotas are set too high. It could be either.

**Mr. Clifford Small:** Thank you.

This takes me to northern cod, which is mentioned quite a bit in your report.

DFO has nearly doubled its budget. It's had a 40% increase in personnel since 2015. In response to an Order Paper question, I was told that logbook data results since 2019 have not been compiled for the northern cod species. There's a lot of data that's been available without new technology or whatever; it's basically from old technology and it's very old data, but it couldn't be provided to me.

Did DFO not have enough money or personnel, or did the minister simply not make it a priority, Mr. Napier?

**Mr. Brent Napier:** I think it was a priority, and it remains a priority. From an enforcement perspective, we have ensured that we have a commitment both to ensuring that officers are out doing the work and using the most highly technical tools available to them, such—

**Mr. Clifford Small:** Mr. Napier, that's data that would be number-crunched in an office. You've hired 800 to 900 people here in Ottawa in very high-level positions. At the same time, there was no trawl data to be analyzed. I have to question the efficiency of the science program if you have data that's four years old and no trawl data coming in to be analyzed.

Why did I get an answer back to an Order Paper question that the data's not been compiled after four years?

**Mr. Brent Napier:** Again, I can speak only on the enforcement front.

I know, as my colleague Todd Williams mentioned, that aside from some of the cash monitoring tools that were assessed, such as the third party monitoring, there's a significant amount of other information that's collected, particularly by the enforcement group, whether it be through intelligence, aircraft surveillance, on-water patrols, through our own port inspections or through facility inspections.

**Mr. Clifford Small:** How important is this catch data?

I'd like to ask Mr. Williams how important catch rate data is, especially with the absence of a trawl survey, in getting a picture of the biomass.

● (1600)

**Mr. Todd Williams:** There are a number of data sources that we use when making fisheries management decisions. Certainly, science data is one.

If we are missing a trawl, there are ways that we can look back at the existing science that we had previously and extrapolate from it and make some conclusions as to where we can go forward. Certainly, a lack of catch data is an issue, and it's something that can be included when it comes to fishery management decisions.

**Mr. Clifford Small:** Mr. Williams, I'm sorry: That data was provided. It's the law for fishermen to submit that data. You've been sitting on that data for a very long time.

With the northern cod, we've seen exponentially increasing catch rates. When I went to the minister in June, there was no data to support it other than the sentinel fisheries, which showed no improvement for some reason.

It's strange for me to find out through my Order Paper question that the sentinel fisheries showed no improvement in the stock when gillnet catch rates were up about 50 times over what they were in the eighties on a per-hour basis, based on what I'm seeing on the ground.

Do you trust the data that's provided by fishermen, or do you discount it?

**Mr. Todd Williams:** I think all of that is actually very important.

That's part of the purpose of the fishery monitoring policy. It essentially conducts an audit on the risk, quality and dependability of that data that's coming in. In some fisheries, the quality of data is excellent and we know for certain that it can be validated. In other cases in which there are different requirements, it is a bit more of a challenge.

**Mr. Clifford Small:** Thank you, Mr. Williams.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold):** Thank you, Mr. Small. That's your time.

Mr. Hardie is next.

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

I have a difficult question, I think, for Mr. Williams.

In the course of our various studies, one of the things we've also discovered over and above what the commissioner's report says is that the DFO's effort in stock assessment is quite behind schedule in many cases, in many places and with many species. If on top of that we don't have good enough data on the catch, in lieu of stock assessments, one would assume that you go to the precautionary principle and you manage fishing effort, but managing fishing effort effectively means knowing what's being caught, and the commissioner's report suggests that we really don't have a good grasp of that.

Really, are we in any place to know exactly the state of our current industry or of our indigenous fishery, much less where we're going in the future? It seems that everything is in a black box right now. Can you comment on that?

**Mr. Todd Williams:** I think it's important to note that certainly not all fisheries are equal. We have many fisheries that have 100% at-sea observer coverage. We have very good data coming out of those fisheries, as well as very recent stock assessments.

Then in other cases, in stock assessments, perhaps we might have missed one. In other cases, perhaps we don't have 100% at-sea observers. Perhaps we have some other method to get that catch information: perhaps hail-in and hail-out reports, dockside monitoring and/or different percentages of at-sea observer coverage.

That's all based on us as a department working with harvesters to determine what is feasible. One hundred per cent at-sea observer coverage is not feasible across all of our fisheries, especially for small boat operators, so we have to figure out which tools work in which fisheries.

That's why I think you see, in some cases, some gaps, but I guess it's important to note that while there are some gaps—and we recognize that—we're working to improve that situation. We do have instances and very good examples of good, reliable data coming in to the department to further augment the information coming from science.

• (1605)

**Mr. Ken Hardie:** Well, it would be good to get some examples from you, perhaps in writing, which would fulfill a need that we

have here for more clarity on this, because certainly the commissioner's report suggests that it's very limited success.

It does lead to another thing that has been bothering a number of us. Many of us have been on this committee since late 2015. We have done lots of reports with lots of recommendations, but when it's time to go back and find out what has been done—and I will certainly point to, for instance, the “risks and benefits” study that came out in 2019—precious little has even been started, much less accomplished.

I guess I have to wonder. Given this information and given the gaps that we've seen mentioned time and time again, the priority setting has to be questioned, and the use of the resources as well. The government has put a lot more resources into the DFO since 2015, and it is disappointing to see a lack of progress on really critical facets of managing this resource.

Again, who sets the priorities? Are you convinced that they're the right ones? Are you reviewing them, Mr. Williams?

**Mr. Todd Williams:** I think the issue of catch monitoring and data collection is very important. In fact, today I'm attending this meeting from Halifax because I was chairing the Atlantic mackerel advisory committee meeting, where we had a session on fishery monitoring policy implementation and how that could feed into the rebuilding plan of that stock, which is in the critical zone.

We take this very seriously and we're incorporating the recommendations that were provided to us by the commissioner and working them into our business lines and right across our fisheries where we think improvements can be made. Today is a good example of that.

**Mr. Ken Hardie:** I'll probably have further questions.

Let's move on.

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

We'll now move to Madame Desbiens for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being here and making time in their schedules for the committee.

I'll get right into it. A number of small shrimping businesses have basically just been put out of work. The news is making its way around. Already, we are hearing about shrimp harvesters putting their boats up for sale.

The quota set by the minister is much too small and has to be shared with big fleets that have hundred-foot-plus boats, when we know that small businesses and villages are the backbone of the fishing economy. At least, that's the case in Quebec. The whole village suffers when a boat is tied up.

The assertion is that we don't have the right data, but the best evidence seems to come from scientists and harvesters telling us that there are at least three million tonnes of redfish in the gulf. Redfish are a predator for shrimp, so apparently we have to harvest at least 300,000 tonnes annually to curb the growth of redfish. How, then, do you explain a 25,000-tonne quota that has to be shared with big offshore fleets, while numerous boats stay tied up?

Then we're told that we don't have the right data or all the necessary data, while local economies are being jeopardized. I'm having trouble wrapping my head around the decisions DFO is making right now, and I'm not the only one. Many harvesters are in trouble and they're very frustrated. When they find out that the data are incomplete, it's even worse. It hurts even more.

Mr. Williams, isn't there some sort of middle ground, something that could be done? How can we increase the quotas to give these people a chance to earn a living without hurting the resource? It's been clearly shown that redfish are prevalent.

• (1610)

[English]

**Mr. Todd Williams:** Thank you very much for the question.

I think there are a couple of points.

One is that the situation with gulf shrimp and the estuary is problematic, and the minister and department certainly recognize that. The total allowable catch would be lower this season as a result of where that stock is.

In terms of redfish, that is a stock that is coming out of moratorium. The minister has made the decision that it will reopen this year, and we're working diligently to do that.

With respect to large vessels operating in the gulf, there is no policy on preventing vessels over 100 feet from doing so. When we speak of monitoring, in some cases—I'm not saying this is a universal truth—monitoring larger vessels can be easier, in a sense, with at-sea observers, and collecting that data—

[Translation]

**Mrs. Caroline Desbiens:** I'm going to stop you there, Mr. Williams. You took a good bit of time telling us what we already knew.

Of course, we can't stop big vessels from fishing, but history shows us that they are the ones who put the fishery at risk, if we look back 30 years. That's what worries people in the fishing community. I repeat, they know the sector better than all of us here. They take a reading of the situation every day. I don't think anyone is more motivated than they are to preserve the resource, so why don't you pay more attention to what they have to say? What can you do to give them a stronger voice?

[English]

**Mr. Todd Williams:** In fact, we are working with them. The announcement was just made by the minister a week and a half ago with respect to the redfish fishery. She announced a minimum total allowable catch of 25,000 tonnes, which can be increased based on the feedback and advice we get from industry.

In fact, just on Friday, I communicated with industry to review the minister's decision as well as the most recent science. In the coming weeks there will be an advisory committee meeting; we will work collaboratively with industry at that meeting to develop the fishery management plan, including monitoring requirements for this fishery going forward.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Caroline Desbiens:** Thank you.

I hope an announcement will be made very soon, because the fishing sector needs predictability. A boat can't just be put in the water like that. It takes a lot of time, money and workers. It takes planning, so we are already way behind.

I'd like to know why only harvesters in Quebec, mainly pelagic fish harvesters, are required to report their catches? If you required all the harvesters to report their catches, wouldn't that give you more data?

Those boats are tied up, since the herring and mackerel fisheries are closed for the season, but couldn't you require more harvesters to report their catches?

[English]

**Mr. Todd Williams:** Certainly within the licence conditions, we have requirements with respect to the reporting of catches. I take your point, though. There is certainly inconsistency between fleets, between regions, and that's actually one of the things that implementing the fishery monitoring policy will help us discover. It will tease out those inconsistencies and help us find solutions to improve that data.

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

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

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP):** Thank you, our new chair.

I think I'm going to direct my first question to you, Mr. DeMarco.

I found myself reflecting on something when I was reading this report. As many people around this table know, I'm originally from Newfoundland. My family were not fishers; however, we were deeply impacted by the cod collapse, so much so that my family, because of the shift in the economy, packed everything up in our car and drove from one coast to the other to start new lives because of the direct impacts of the cod collapse, even though we weren't fishers. I bring that with me in my work in this role, and it's one of the many reasons that I so appreciate the opportunity to sit around this table.

I noticed that you used that in your report as one of the rationales as to why it's particularly important that we're paying attention.

I'm wondering if you can bring it back for us and highlight those reflections. Tell us why it is essential that we collect data and have appropriate leadership and actions that follow, based on the data that's collected.

• (1615)

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** Yes. If we don't learn from the past, we may be at risk of being doomed to repeat it. We don't see the likelihood of a repeat of the incredible negative impacts of the collapse of the cod, because there's no single fishery of that size and importance anymore in Canada, but if you look at all of the fisheries together, they're still extremely important, as I mentioned in my opening remarks. We can learn from that unfortunate story that came to a head back in 1992.

It's quite striking that now, in 2024, we still don't have a recovery. That's why I concluded my opening remarks by talking about the fact that it's much better to maintain healthy stocks than to allow them to deplete and then hope to recover them, because it may take decades if it's at all possible. We can learn from those mistakes in the past.

If we just go back seven years to the last time our Office of the Auditor General looked at this issue, it is troubling that some of the same problems continue. We just heard from Mr. Williams about inconsistencies. That was something we pointed out in previous work in this area. From my last product, we also had the introduction of the fisheries monitoring policy, which was promised in 2017. It came in 2019. However, as you see from exhibit 9.2, no fish, not even one species of the 156, have gone through the six steps of the policy.

We would like to see an acceleration of the efforts to learn from the mistakes of the past and to implement not only our recommendations from this past November but also our recommendations from 2016.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Thank you.

Your report provides us with some graphs and some information and a breakdown of data and information that was collected. I noticed that there's repeated mention that the evidence could not be provided. Can you speak a little bit more around what you saw in the examples of when and how information was not provided so that I can better understand that?

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** Yes.

I'll introduce our answer to that, and then I'll turn it over to Monsieur Normand for more detail.

Part of our role as auditors within the Office of the Auditor General of Canada is to check on these assertions made by departments. We had assertions about both timeliness and coverage regarding at-sea and dockside monitoring. What was troubling is that for some of the sampling we did, even when the department asserted that it did have the data that was needed, when we sampled it, we found many instances in which it wasn't there.

I'll ask Monsieur Normand to use one of the examples from the exhibits to help explain that.

**Mr. David Normand (Principal, Office of the Auditor General):** Sure. Thank you for the question.

Basically, the approach we took was this: In the first place, we asked the department if they now have any systematic way of tracking whether the coverage and timeliness requirements of providing the data were met. We found there is no such thing as a systematic way of doing this.

Therefore, what we did was dig further by having the department open their books and search their records to find the answer to the question for us, though not for the 156 fish stocks. There are 130 that are subject to observer company data and collecting catch data from the fishing industry. This is an explanation for why the graphics you see in our report are a bit complicated: It's because we found many problems. To a large extent, we found that either the monitoring programs were not fully implemented or the department could not tell because the records wouldn't allow them to.

In a number of cases, the answer was, "Yes, we have the information, and here's the answer: The coverage was met." In cases when the coverage was met in a timely way, we could not audit everything because it's too large a population. We took a sample. Almost consistently, while looking at those samples.... The purpose of samples was to generalize the whole population and have simple graphics in our report. However, that was not possible because, almost consistently, the audit found either more cases of non-compliance or more cases of the department not being able to provide the data.

At the end of the day, the data presented in our report is what we found for the negative cases, I would say. There could be more than that, but we could not get to the bottom of it.

• (1620)

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold):** Thank you. That's well beyond the six minutes.

We'll now move to five-minute rounds, starting with Mr. Perkins.

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

Thank you, witnesses, for being here.

Commissioner, I'd like to start with you.

I'd like to take a step back, especially for those who are watching and trying to figure out what the heck it is we're talking about here.

The goal is to get an integrated fisheries management plan for all major fish species so that DFO can manage our commercial stocks in a sustainable way. Is that correct?

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** Yes, sustainable management is the ultimate objective.

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** It's the ultimate objective.

Can you do that if you don't have either the science or the catch data?



**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** We looked at the catch data in this audit. We may look at the science in another audit to come.

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** I'd recommend you look at our committee report on that.

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** Yes, I've been following that.

On the catch data, we found enough deficiencies to prevent us from doing a lot in the second line of inquiry of our audit, which was to ask how well the data is used to sustainably manage fisheries. If we had seen good data, we could have made a better assessment of sustainable management. Because there are gaps in the data, we aren't confident in signing off one way or the other on whether the management decisions are sustainable.

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** Then catch data is like polling. It's a picture of what happened in the past. It doesn't necessarily tell you what's going to happen in the future. It may tell you the governing party is declining in popularity, but it doesn't predict with accuracy what's going to happen in the next election.

It's sort of like that. It's self-reported, for the most part. It's the catch data of fishermen on what they caught this year, last year and the year before. Is that correct?

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** It's self-reporting, but there are also third party observers. There are different sets of—

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** Third party observers are primarily offshore, not inshore.

In most cases, in my understanding—and I'm not sure whether you're aware of this—DFO doesn't come down to the wharf and inspect inshore fishermen and their reporting logs. It's a self-reporting thing that gets collected by a third party and reported to DFO.

Are you aware of that?

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** Yes, that's the model they've chosen to operate. They could have kept it in-house and have, essentially, a fleet of DFO staff doing this sort of thing, but they outsourced it to the—

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** They could have had a fleet of DFO people. Since 2019—just since 2019—DFO's budget has increased by 25%, and it has doubled from \$2 billion to over \$4 billion since 2016, but they haven't put any more money in here.

I do know that the HR department at DFO has grown from 400 to 833, so there have been over 400 people put into that. Do you know how many enforcement people—because enforcement is a key part of all of this too—have been added to DFO in that time? Seven.

It doesn't seem to me like the emphasis is on the right syllable for DFO if your fundamental mandate is to manage the conservation and the sustainable commercial fisheries for our country.

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** To your point, two important aspects of this audit and our previous audit are that, one, we didn't see enough resources going into the implementation of the monitoring policy that was produced in 2019, and that's set out in exhibit 9.2. Then, with respect to enforcement, in our audit from the previous year, in 2022, "Protecting Aquatic Species at Risk", we do have a section there on enforcement. We would agree with you that the resources needed in enforcement were not there. That's set out in exhibit 7.11

of our report 7 from 2022. We're happy to give a copy of that to the committee as well.

• (1625)

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** Thank you.

I did an Order Paper question, as it's called here in the House of Commons, which asked for how many C and P officers existed from those years on. I was shocked to learn that there's a whole 156 enforcement people for all of Canada in DFO, while there are 833 people in HR.

Again, it seems to me that if you don't know what the catch data is, if you have inadequate science—which was a unanimous report by this committee—and if you don't put money into enforcement, you can't actually ensure that we have the sustainability of our stocks. Without policing, you don't have certainty of data.

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** I would agree completely. The science, the catch data and the enforcement are all integral parts of the sustainable management of a fishery. These are all procedural measures, so we would also want to look at the results: How have things gone?

The cod example is well known to everyone, but with regard to our "Protecting Aquatic Species at Risk" report, let us also think about how many fish species in Canada have become extinct, extirpated, endangered, threatened or of special concern. It's over 200 species.

Fisheries is a federal concern. They have the ability to manage harvests and to address fish habitat degradation and pollution of fisheries waters, yet we see that almost a quarter of all the species at risk in Canada are fish species. From a results point of view, it is troubling.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold):** Thank you, Mr. DeMarco. I'll have to stop you there and move on to our next member, Mr. Kelloway, who is online.

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

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

I'm going to start with the commissioner.

Adequate data on fish stocks is essential to maintaining healthy fish populations. I think everyone in the room would agree with that. Right now, DFO seems to be encouraging ELOGS for some fisheries. Do you think that bringing new technologies like ELOGS into the fishery industry will assist in the data collection for DFO? That's question one.

Also, are there other technologies that you recommend DFO implement to ensure more accurate data collection?

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** You're getting at the issue of modernization of their system, the information management system.

**Mr. Mike Kelloway:** That's correct.

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** This is the second time around for us in recommending improvements in that regard. We have our 2023 report on that, and also a 2016 report.

We agree with you on modernizing their system, and not only modernizing it but integrating it. Recall the answer to the question from Member Desbiens about the inconsistencies in approaches and so on. It's not just a matter of modernizing it; it's also about integrating the systems to eliminate those inconsistencies and also achieve economies of scale and have a more integrated and consistent approach to sustainable management.

In terms of specific areas, I can turn to Monsieur Normand to more directly address that aspect of the question, because I didn't get into that level of specificity.

**Mr. David Normand:** Thank you for the question.

Yes, in our audit, we looked at the overall system for managing catch data, and we found that there were parts of a system in place in Newfoundland that were available, but that for fish catch information, largely the systems were still at the inception stage.

For part of this, I think, electronic logs have been considered since 2003 to accelerate the logging of data, etc., as well as to ensure quality, because automating this area would help. However, in our audit we found that electronic logs were still at the very beginning, in the inception stage. In their response to our recommendation, the department indicated that they wish to pursue this avenue.

**Mr. Mike Kelloway:** Thank you very much.

I'm going to work on doing some integration here. I'm going to stay on the ELOGS theme, so I want to go to officials for a second.

Other officials recently mentioned in a previous committee meeting that not all ELOGS work perfectly for different fisheries. I am wondering if you could elaborate on why different types of ELOGS are needed now and how that may pose challenges to the modernization efforts that we were just talking about in the first question.

• (1630)

**Ms. Jennifer Mooney (Director, National Licensing Operations, Department of Fisheries and Oceans):** Perhaps I can answer this question.

With respect to ELOGS, yes, we have made quite a bit of progress since the commissioner's report was finalized at the end of December. We have set out the technical specifications for all fisheries across the country for those applications to be developed, and they are based on the current paper logbook information that is already collected. We're continuing to advance in that regard.

**Mr. Mike Kelloway:** I'll stay with the officials for a second and move away from ELOGS.

The DFO is taking many steps to ensure that Canada meets its environmental targets, including through its "30 by 30" initiative,

which will convert, as we all know, 30% of Canada's oceans into conservation areas.

I'm wondering, officials, if you could tell us how actions like the 30 by 30 plan help Canada to meet environmental targets while protecting fish stock?

**Mr. Brent Napier:** I can certainly answer from the enforcement perspective, and I will integrate two answers with regard to the technology.

We've been using quite a bit of satellite technology—our dark vessel detection system, which we've had some really good success with—especially in the international fora and bringing those things back to Canada. Some of these remote areas.... With regard to the 30 by 30 plan, you'd be looking at more vulnerable areas in the north where there are no traditional fisheries and at having to get eyes on those areas to ensure that they're not being overfished, protecting those valuable areas to ensure that new stocks that are developing are properly managed and that information is available to make sound decisions.

**Mr. Mike Kelloway:** How much time do I have, Mr. Chair? Is that it?

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold):** You have five seconds. You cut it pretty close.

**Mr. Mike Kelloway:** That's fine. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

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

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Normand, I want to pick up on the discussion about the implementation of the monitoring system.

You said earlier that some sort of monitoring system was in the works back in 2003 but that it still wasn't up and running.

What percentage of the system is up and running, according to your estimates?

The process to implement the system started in 2003. It's been 20 years.

**Mr. David Normand:** Thank you for your question.

In 1999, actually, our office conducted an audit on two specific fish stocks, and as part of that audit, we also identified problems with system integration.

We found the same thing in 2016, when we identified a major lack of system integration.

Following that, we took a closer look at two aspects of the information systems as part of our audit. One was the quota management component, which was in place in five of the six regions. As I explained earlier, with respect to data collection, so the information management system, the department was in the process of implementing the system in the eastern provinces. No part of the system was actually in place.

**Mrs. Caroline Desbiens:** That means no system is fully up and running. Is that right?

**Mr. David Normand:** That's exactly right. That is one of DFO's challenges.

The commissioner mentioned in his opening remarks that some of the findings we made in 2016 were still relevant. That is true for these systems, which represent—

**Mrs. Caroline Desbiens:** If I understand correctly, that is the basis on which DFO currently makes its decisions. Is that right?

**Mr. David Normand:** That's absolutely correct.

In terms of accessing and compiling the data to have a complete picture of the situation, we had a pretty difficult time getting the answers, precisely because the data were scattered all over the place. That comes back to what we were talking about earlier, the lack of system integration.

**Mrs. Caroline Desbiens:** Thank you, Mr. Normand.

[English]

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

I'll move to Ms. Barron for two and a half minutes, please.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Thank you. I was hoping you were going to say five.

The first question I'm going to ask is to Mr. DeMarco.

We're hearing from many of those on the water a discrepancy between the data, or lack of data, that's being collected, the decisions that are being made, and what they're seeing on the water. That goes from both ends.

There are those who are saying there are unfair cuts being made that are impacting their livelihoods. On the other side, people are saying there's a sustainability risk to the species and there's not enough being done.

Can you speak to how that interconnects to what we're talking about today? Do you think that the results that you're telling us today may play a part in some of that disconnect between the observations on the water and the decisions that are being made?

• (1635)

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** We've been talking mainly about the importance of good data and reliable data—dependable and timely data—for decisions to sustainably manage a fishery. As you point out, having data that's reliable and dependable also gets better buy-in from regulated communities. They're more confident in the decisions of the department and more likely to be in agreement with the quotas that are set, and so on.

The data has an impact on both the substantive decisions and also the buy-in or the support that the communities have for those decisions. That's another reason that we should have better data: so that the regulated communities feel more confident in the regulator.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Thank you very much.

I'll try to put a quick question to Mr. Napier or Mr. Williams.

Could you provide an update on what's happening? We're hearing from witnesses about all the steps that are happening around this technology, but the evidence is clearly showing us that the required technology is not in place. Could you provide me some quick insights on what's happening, and why we're not seeing those actions taken?

**Mr. Brent Napier:** Yes. The technology is slow to advance, but we're making great strides. We're looking at increasing technology in our existing collection. I see observers looking at hand-held modules that can provide information in a more timely way. They can collect it and there are fewer mistakes. Data quality is improved. We have also had experience with new technologies, like electronic monitoring, on the west coast for some time now.

Learning from that and applying that on the east coast, our observer program is stretched. We have only nine designated companies. We have only 100 observers. You heard that about 130 different fisheries require at-sea observers, so we're going to have to use those technologies to support that collection of information.

We also have officers on the ground. In fact, we have 550 front-line officers who are available to collect information. They can monitor catch. They can go aboard and verify compliance, so if harvesters are collecting as they should and we're aboard in real time, we're confirming that. The data at the end of it will not necessarily be assured, but it will be a better quality than you would expect otherwise.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold):** Thank you, Mr. Napier. That's additional time for you, actually.

We'll move on now to the next round with Mr. Bragdon. You have five minutes, please.

**Mr. Richard Bragdon (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the guests and to those who bear witness here today. Thank you so much for being here.

I have just one question and then I'll yield to my friend Mr. Small.

Obviously, we've had a couple of reports come out, one in 2016 and one in 2020. There was a lot of talk about planning to plan, and that they were planning a meeting to plan. They were going to plan to have a plan that was going to implement a plan that was going to really resolve in a great plan. Hopefully, at the end of the planning of the plan, we would start to get results that would be reported back to the committee about how the plan was going.

I'd like to ask all of you this question. In your estimation, how far along in the trajectory of these plans have we come since they started and initiated the original planning to plan?

I'll start with you, Mr. DeMarco.

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** I'm glad I brought the action plan from our 2016 audit with me, because I'm growing a little bit frustrated too.

If you look at the responses to our 2016 report, there's reason for optimism. There are commitments to do something. If you look at the responses to the audit from this past fall, there are strong timelines, and so on. What I'd like to see, though, is implementation on the ground, or in this case in the ocean and lakes, and not just good intentions but good actions.

**Mr. Richard Bragdon:** Thank you, Mr. DeMarco.

Mr. Napier, if you want, you can speak on behalf of the department. Obviously it's across the board that so much talk has gone into plans, plans about plans and plans around plans, with not a lot of action and concrete steps that produce results. Our fish harvesters and those communities that rely on the fisheries are looking for concrete steps and actions that can ensure the safety and the future of their industries.

Can you report where we're at concerning action versus plans?

• (1640)

**Mr. Brent Napier:** We have developed an action plan. All kidding aside, the department remains committed to delivering on actions, although from 2016 to 2023 it might not be evident that work has been produced on the national verification strategy. One of the pieces that was of concern to the auditor in 2016 was conflict of interest. We've done an interim protocol. We've moved the bar. We've started to advance on some of these things.

Much of this takes a lot of consultation. Much of this includes a COVID break in there. There were two years when, for example, the at-sea observer program did not function. I don't mean to use that as an excuse and I know that it had impacts on many, but it is a viable excuse in terms of changing gears and ensuring safety in those industries.

What we're doing, too, is supporting some of those third party monitors with harassment protection. Recruitment and retention are critical in those industries, and it's been very challenging to bring people in. We've had to pivot on some of our initial plans to address some of these concrete issues.

**Mr. Richard Bragdon:** Thank you.

I'll turn it over to Mr. Small,

**Mr. Clifford Small:** Thank you, Mr. Bragdon.

I'll address this question to Mr. DeMarco here.

Mr. DeMarco, if catch data is missing and stock assessments are incomplete, can this impact the eco-certification of fisheries? If so, what would be the impact?

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** Eco-certification isn't something that we looked at, but certification does rely on good-quality data in the same way that sustainable management decisions require good-quality data.

I'm afraid that I can't give you any more detail than that in terms of certifications for sustainable fisheries and so on in the marketplace.

**Mr. Clifford Small:** Can someone from the department answer, maybe Mr. Napier?

**Mr. Todd Williams:** I can speak to that, Mr. Chair.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold):** Go ahead, Mr. Williams.

**Mr. Todd Williams:** Thank you very much.

As the commissioner just noted, certainly eco-certification schemes such as MSC—the Marine Stewardship Council—and others do rely on science data, catch data. That's very important. It's part of their certification process. We work with them very closely and work with industry very closely to try to address any gaps if they are seeking certification or seeking to retain certification.

**Mr. Clifford Small:** We've had some stakeholders, Mr. Williams, who have approached us directly with big concerns, especially with Greenland halibut in the north, because of the lack of trawl surveys, but if some of these eco-certification groups knew that your catch data is four years behind, I don't think they'd be all that pleased. What do you think on northern cod, for example?

**Mr. Todd Williams:** With respect to northern cod, the 2J3KL science assessment is coming up on that, but we do know, at least based on an assessment last year, that it appears that we might be able to have a commercial fishery for that stock. We'd be working with industry to develop the monitoring requirements for it. If there is a certification question for that, we will work with industry to ensure that they have the information that they need to seek certification.

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

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

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Serge Cormier (Acadie—Bathurst, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. You have done a wonderful job so far. No complaints here.

Mr. DeMarco, thank you for joining us today.

I'll address some of the concerns raised by my colleague, Caroline Desbiens. We just heard the announcement regarding the re-opening of the redfish fishery, which has been closed for the past 30 years. It's happening right here, in front of me, in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. I have many concerns about this. However, I want to acknowledge the tremendous work done by Minister Lebouthillier to reopen this fishery.

I read your report and I also heard what you said today about the lack of data, for example. Given the opening of this fishery, which unfortunately closed 30 years ago, I wonder what steps will be taken to make it sustainable and beneficial to communities. These are my concerns. As you know, the new Fisheries Act clearly states that the fishery must benefit our communities.

I'm deeply concerned about the fact that large vessels will be coming into the Gulf of St. Lawrence. I would like your opinion on this. I know that, in your report, you talk at length about sustainable fishing and community benefits.

Are we on the right path? I know that many discussions are under way and that no decision has been made yet. However, if we want the redfish fishery to last for a long time, shouldn't we make sure that the opening of this fishery will benefit communities, not big companies?

• (1645)

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** We haven't analyzed the differences between large fishing vessels and other vessels. However, I can tell you that we have the same goal. We want to make sure that the systems will keep the fisheries sustainable. The department has the same goal. We don't want to see fisheries constantly opening and closing.

Can I be sure that this fishery will be managed sustainably? No. For the reasons provided in our report, the department's current data isn't reliable enough. If implemented, our recommendations will make the fishery more sustainable. However, I won't know for sure until I see the results in the sea and lakes.

**Mr. Serge Cormier:** Okay.

I wanted to talk about the relationship between redfish and shrimp. Since 2016, redfish stocks have soared in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. We know that redfish prey on shrimp. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans has been saying since 2016 that something must be done about the growth of redfish stocks in the St. Lawrence. This year, shrimp quotas have dropped significantly. I don't mean to sound alarmist, but I predict a shrimp moratorium in the next few years.

Do you think that Fisheries and Oceans Canada has managed the shrimp population effectively over the past four or five years, despite knowing that redfish, whose stocks are soaring, prey on shrimp?

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** We haven't conducted an in-depth analysis of specific species. However, the two species in question will indeed pose a challenge, according to current data. Things will become even more difficult in light of climate change and its impact on ocean temperature. The department will face many challenges when it comes to ensuring sustainable management. The department must determine what steps to take.

[English]

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

[Translation]

**Mr. Serge Cormier:** Thank you, Mr. DeMarco.

I think my time is—

[English]

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

That concludes the round of questioning. We're now into the next round.

We start again with Mr. Perkins.

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

Mr. Commissioner, maybe I can carry on where I left off, as a concrete example. Again, it's through one of these great, marvelous things we call "Order Paper questions" in the House of Commons, whereby MPs get to ask questions and sometimes get responses.

One response I got recently was on science data related to Canada's most lucrative fish stock, the lobster fishery in the Maritimes. It's broken up into various fishing areas, as you may know, called LFAs—lobster fishing areas. This summer, DFO granted an increase in quota. The only place where there's a quota on lobster is in the offshore, where Clearwater owns all eight licences and has a monopoly in an area three times the size of Nova Scotia. DFO increased the quota by 7,200 tonnes.

I asked for the science behind that increase in quota. I asked for the science for all the LFAs in the Maritimes. I'm sure you won't be surprised to learn that the answer was, "We don't have any science data on that. We rely solely on catch data."

Do you think, in setting an integrated fisheries management plan, that the only thing DFO should rely on is catch data?

• (1650)

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** No, there's a role for various sources of data.

I'm not familiar with the specific example you're giving, but as I mentioned before, science data, catch data and enforcement data are all important inputs into a more informed decision on sustainability.

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** In doing the data part, we had DFO appear before this committee on a study we're engaged in right now on illegal and unreported fishing. They said they sort of guess at what the illegal quota is. We saw that in my area last year. They guessed that the elver fishery had been poached to the tune of four to five times the quota within 18 days, so they shut it down, and then let the poaching happen through to the end of July.

Do you think that guessing at poaching of our various species is adequate? There is no dockside monitoring in the summer in southwest Nova Scotia. There's none for the lobster fishery either, when illegal lobster catches are being brought in. Do you think some sort of guess from DFO, based on the current size, is an adequate way to put catch data into the fisheries management plan?

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** A preferable approach would be to implement the recommendation from our 2022 report, “Protecting Aquatic Species at Risk”, in which we said that DFO should ensure enough staff are available to enforce the prohibitions in both the Species at Risk Act and the Fisheries Act. If there are enough resources put into enforcement, you have better data about illegal fishing and also deter illegal fishing.

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** I'm going to ask you about something in the paper today. You probably can't comment. Mr. Napier might comment on it.

The enforcement part of effective fisheries management is for DFO's C and P—conservation and protection—to lay charges and for the public prosecution office to actually pursue those charges. The public prosecution office in Nova Scotia announced today that they're not going to pursue any charges laid by C and P with regard to illegal elver fishing if it has to do with first nations.

Is this an appropriate way? That will lead, in my view, to more lawlessness on the water. It's encouragement when they announce there won't be enforcement. The public prosecution office won't pursue it. Do you think that's going to discourage C and P officers from laying charges?

**Mr. Brent Napier:** Thank you for the question.

I don't believe so. I think we still have a responsibility, and there is a separation. As you mentioned, PPSC—the Public Prosecution Service of Canada—will determine whether there are charges or not. It's still our responsibility to collect that information and evidence in cases of unauthorized fishing and provide that information, moving forward.

In terms of the results, if they're not what we want, we're used to it—not just there, but also in many other fisheries.

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** I've heard from C and P officers on the ground that they find this discouraging. When they're putting their lives at risk, it affects whether or not they think it's worth laying charges on the ground when they know the public prosecution office is not going to pursue them.

**Mr. Brent Napier:** Certainly I would imagine they would be discouraged, but I think they're loyal in their implementation. They conduct their work. If it's unauthorized, they document it as they would in any other case. I think they're hoping for the result that eventually, through other mechanisms within the department, through negotiation, we resolve this issue.

• (1655)

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** Thank you.

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

The next individual is Mr. Kelloway, please, online.

No, it's Mr. Hardie; pardon me. My apologies, sir.

**Mr. Ken Hardie:** Totally.

I wanted to reflect on my evil twin on X over here and the comment he made about the growth in the human resources department at the DFO. I have a theory that the health and effectiveness of any

organization is inversely related to the number of people in HR. I'll let him just think on that one.

I want to talk about exhibit 9.2 in your report. There are five steps for “Implementing the Fishery Monitoring Policy”: “prioritize fisheries”, “assess current fishery program”, “set conservation and compliance monitoring objectives”, “identify monitoring requirements” and “develop and operationalize a fishery monitoring program”, so at step five we actually get to do something. Then step six is “review monitoring program performance”.

Mr. Williams or Mr. Napier, one of you can answer yes or no. Is this really what the DFO accepts as the proper approach?

**Mr. Todd Williams:** Yes, that is an accurate reflection of the fisheries monitoring policy.

**Mr. Ken Hardie:** Okay.

In eight years we've managed to identify 22 of 156 fish stocks. Of that, two of that 22—or two out of 156 possible stocks—have reached the second stage—assessing the current fishery monitoring programs. I guess there's nothing beyond that, and it's been eight years.

In assessing the current fishery monitoring programs of the two of the 22, are you convinced, based on what the report is telling us about the shortcomings of the monitoring program, that even the two of the 22 have been effectively assessed?

**Mr. Todd Williams:** I am, yes. Using the data that was available to us, including catch data supplied to us from harvesters, we were able to arrive at what we believe, following the policy, are accurate numbers with respect to quality and risk.

**Mr. Ken Hardie:** How much of that data was extrapolated?

**Mr. Todd Williams:** There is some level of qualitative assumption built into the assessment, but it is the policy as it's developed and as approved by the department. As I understand it, the commissioner and his office supported the policy in that way, in terms of how it was designed.

**Mr. Ken Hardie:** With climate change and all of the things that are taking place out there on the water, even extrapolation becomes a pretty tricky business.

How many people are actually working on these five steps? Do we have a number of staff that are actually engaged in following the department's process and performance in these five steps? How many people are working there?

**Mr. Todd Williams:** Dedicated resources were provided in the 2023 budget. I can tell you that on my team we have two full-time equivalents working on this to provide national coordination and implementation on the stocks that we manage out of Ottawa.

In the regions, they also have resources based in fish management, conservation and protection, and in science as well, to implement FMP, fish monitoring policy. They have gone through and assessed their fisheries and are working through it as well. The assessment is just the next step after we've already prioritized, of course.

The monitoring objectives—

**Mr. Ken Hardie:** I'm sorry, Mr. Williams. Did you just indicate that this activity of these five steps wasn't actually resourced until after the 2023 budget?

**Mr. Todd Williams:** That is correct. We were using existing resources to implement the policy until 2023.

**Mr. Ken Hardie:** Did those existing resources then follow through and become dedicated, or were they new people in 2023?

**Mr. Todd Williams:** These are the same resources that we use to manage the fishery. They are our fishery analysts.

**Mr. Ken Hardie:** How are the 22 of the 156 fish stocks prioritized? What made them a priority for this activity?

• (1700)

**Mr. Todd Williams:** We looked at a few things within the criteria.

First, were they listed as schedule 1 under regulations—batch 1, as we'd say—where we have those higher regulatory requirements to manage them, as per the fish stock provisions? That was one. Two, if not there, are they coming into what we think would be batch 2 when those get added to the regulation?

We also looked at the economic value of those fisheries. That's why we see lobster listed as a priority area. We also looked at the ecological significance of a stock, such as Atlantic mackerel as a forage species. We applied those criteria in our prioritization.

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

We'll move on to our next member, Madame Desbiens, for two and a half minutes.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Caroline Desbiens:** My question is for Mr. Williams or Mr. Napier.

Considering that the fisheries are an ecosystem and that there are fish and humans in that ecosystem, there's a whole economy of scale to protect; there's sustainability, obviously, and the climate change variable. Sustainable fisheries are another consideration, so we want to protect the resource, as well as fishers' expertise. Let's assume it's all equal.

Would it be possible, in the short term, to take into account the relationship between the large volume of redfish in the gulf and the low fishing quota, in order to increase the quota and distribute it equitably among small boats? I say "short term" because the fishery will be open very soon and these people are facing uncertainty and a void.

Do you think that, in a context where human beings, families and children are awaiting their fate, things could be moved along a bit and a small risk could be taken that will not kill anyone? This risk

will certainly not alter the resource and will at least enable these people to break even and make ends meet.

Do you think something along those lines can be considered in the short term? Is there no point in dreaming?

[English]

**Mr. Todd Williams:** Perhaps I can speak to that.

The minister had a very difficult decision with respect to the allocation of the redfish resource. Her decision did see a 20% reduction in the offshore, which was reallocated equally to an indigenous quota bank and affected shrimp harvesters in the gulf and the estuary. The other fleets' shares were protected. The inshore and mid-shore were protected and remained the same.

In terms of other short-term initiatives, I think that would be beyond the mandate of fisheries management per se.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold):** You have 20 seconds.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Caroline Desbiens:** What do you think of that answer, Commissioner? Have we reached the point of distress?

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** I have no opinion on the substance of the decisions concerning that fishery, as we looked at the system as a whole and, as I said, we did not do an in-depth analysis on any specific fish stocks.

[English]

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

We'll move on to Ms. Barron for two and a half minutes.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Thank you.

Mr. DeMarco, I was elected in 2021. I haven't been around since 2015, as some of my colleagues have been. I'm curious to know how long you have been in the position of commissioner. How long have you been doing this work?

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** My third anniversary was last week.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Okay. I'm trying to understand the history that brought us to this time.

You were referencing seven years. It must not be new to us that we need to accumulate data to better understand how to ensure our fisheries are sustainable. Were there recommendations similar to this made before? Is this something that's been going on for a while? It just helps my brain to understand what brought us to where we are today.

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** Yes. Even though you and I may be dating back to 2021 in terms of familiarity with this specific issue, our office, the Office of the Auditor General of Canada, reported on this issue in the late 1990s, as Mr. Normand mentioned, but most recently, before this past one, there was “Report 2—Sustaining Canada’s Major Fish Stocks”, from 2016. One of the predecessor commissioners in the Office of the Auditor General reported on this situation.

As I’ve mentioned before, it was disappointing for me to open this file and see how many similarities there were in both the issues that we are highlighting and also the recommendations we are making. It is frustrating to have to re-recommend on issues when we did a full audit of the issue only seven years prior.

• (1705)

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Thank you.

What’s interesting to me is that clearly, based on the information we have, we know there have been consecutive governments that have not provided funding in this area that was adequate to ensure that we have the data required from different parties. I just want to highlight that. It is interesting.

My question is for you, Mr. Napier. Were you surprised by the results of this audit?

**Mr. Brent Napier:** No, I was not.

Being close to the program as well, I understood some of the challenges we’ve had over the years in terms of instituting it. I recognize the infrastructure challenges around the change of model in the program.

In 2013, the third party model changed from a co-funded model to an industry-funded model, and we had some growing pains and transition pains from that, as well as some recruitment and retention issues.

Actually, we welcomed some of the recommendations, and some were the same. We had taken some action. The national verification strategy was something we implemented after 2016. It was intended to be a deep dive into the program, a look not just at the recommendations but at the program as a whole and at how we can more effectively administer it.

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

We’re moving on now to Mr. Small for five minutes. Go ahead, please.

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

We’ve heard some talk about electronic logbooks. I’m just wondering about the practical side of those. Perhaps, Ms. Mooney, you could talk to this one.

I’m sure you’re quite familiar with the coastline of Newfoundland and Labrador, with Labrador especially being very remote and with many areas around the island of Newfoundland and Labrador and up the Quebec lower and north shore having very little cell coverage and whatnot. How would that data be transmitted for electronic logbooks? Would it be live or would you be waiting until the fishermen returned to the wharf?

**Mrs. Jennifer Mooney:** Thank you for the question.

When harvesters enter the data into their logbooks, that information is submitted live to the department. When they enter a remote area where there is a lack of access, the data in the logbook is essentially locked. When a harvester enters an area where access is regained, that information is then sent to the department.

**Mr. Clifford Small:** So they wouldn’t be relying on VMS or black boxes? A lot of the fleet—for example, the lobster and halibut fleet in Nova Scotia—doesn’t use VMS. How would that look for them?

**Mr. Brent Napier:** Specifically with VMS, they don’t have, as you mentioned, that access, but there are satellite provisions as well. In fisheries where timeliness is essential, there are satellite options. Those are, of course, what VMS uses, but as Ms. Mooney said, in cases where that transmission is not possible, that information is locked. C and P has been involved in that. We’re satisfied there’s continuity with that data, and when they reach an area where they can transmit, it’s then transmitted to the department.

**Mr. Clifford Small:** Do you think you’ll have the logbook data back to 2020 analyzed before you start getting the new data flowing in from the electronic logbooks—for example, for northern cod?

**Mrs. Jennifer Mooney:** I agree that the lack of timely catch data and information is a challenge. We need to have timely data for informing our fisheries’ management decisions.

I’m not responsible for Newfoundland’s regional licensing in terms of perhaps some of the gaps in entering information there, but that’s why we need to have e-logs going forward.

**Mr. Clifford Small:** Thank you.

Lobster is a species on which very little scientific data exists. Catch data is very important, because it’s basically all we have.

When you analyze lobster logbooks, how quickly can you pump out that data and do that analysis? We know there have been significant drops in most of southwest Nova Scotia and the Bay of Fundy this year. This could be catching them off guard. Are you analyzing the data fast enough so that you can give a forecast to these harvesters as to what they’re facing?

• (1710)

**Mrs. Jennifer Mooney:** Regarding lobster and crab, yes, that is a priority area for electronic logs this year, and all regions have plans to roll out mandatory....



Also, with respect to how we analyze the information, Quebec region, for example, is already gathering that electronic log information for lobster, so I would presume that is helping them inform their regional decisions.

**Mr. Clifford Small:** Thank you.

Mr. Chair, in light of what we've heard here today, the very concerning information from the commissioner and the team, I have a motion to move here. I sent it to the clerk and it's been translated, I believe, in both official languages.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold):** I believe the clerk is circulating it as we speak.

**Mr. Clifford Small:** Okay. Are we ready to go?

Mr. Chair, I move:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), and considering the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development's 2023 report titled "Monitoring Marine Fisheries Catch" and the Commissioner's testimony received by the committee on Tuesday, February 6, 2024, the committee request that the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans appear for no fewer than two hours, as soon as possible, to answer questions related to her department's failures to implement the Fishery Monitoring Policy.

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

I'm just waiting for confirmation that it's been distributed.

Could we suspend for just a minute until it's been distributed?

We are suspended, then.

• (1710) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1715)

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold):** We'll reconvene.

The motion has been distributed. I believe huddles took place.

Ms. Barron did have her hand up, but I spoke to her. It was a question on something else, so she didn't need to speak.

I see Mr. Perkins and Mr. Hardie.

Go ahead, Mr. Perkins.

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** Thank you. I'll be brief.

I think the motion is self-evident. I think the evidence in this report and the previous one the commissioner referenced is shocking, and there's the frustration. Here's the 2016 report, with a plan to get a plan for having integrated fisheries management plans. The department said they would have a plan for that plan on how to get there in 2017, a year later, after that report. I suspect they haven't done that, since we have virtually no more integrated fisheries management plans now than we did then.

These reports keep getting done by the commissioner of the environment, and they keep getting done by this committee on other aspects of this situation. The department says, "Yes, we agree." The minister says yes and signs off—actually, it's six ministers who have said yes, they agree—and then nothing happens. Nothing gets done. Successive ministers clearly hope that this just goes away.

There will be another report, and it will get one day in committee. They'll never call the minister on it, because the minister only

comes for estimates, and he or she will never have to answer for it. Well, that time is over. The minister has to answer for her and her predecessors' not fulfilling their duties to Parliament, to the fishing community and to Canada's environment by ignoring these reports, setting these false deadlines knowingly, sending these reports in response to Parliament and then actually not doing anything about it.

I think it's time. Enough is enough. There's the time in that famous movie when they say, "I'm not going to take this anymore." Well, we're not going to take it anymore. The minister has to come and be held accountable for the actions of her department in ignoring all these reports.

• (1720)

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold):** Mr. Hardie is next.

**Mr. Ken Hardie:** Having gone through this for about eight years, I cannot disagree.

That said, I have one small amendment to make to the motion. It is to add, after the part where it says "on Tuesday, February 6, 2024, the committee request that the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans"—here's the amendment—"and appropriate officials" and then it continues "appear for no fewer than two hours".

If you're happy with that, we're happy with that.

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

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold):** Ms. Barron, did you have a comment on the main motion now?

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Yes. I was going to say that I agree with the main motion. I'm happy for it to move forward.

I was just going to ask, because we are speaking to the main motion, if we can work together as a committee to make sure that when we know there's a motion coming forward, we give each other a heads-up. Caroline and I are the only ones who get chopped off the end when we bring forward motions like this in terms of our opportunity to speak and our time being taken away. If we were to redistribute our time more fairly at the beginning, that would be a more fair process for us to take as committee members.

I just wanted to note that and share it with my colleagues, for us to work together. Of course, I will do the same due diligence moving forward.

**An hon. member:** I've been cut off on this one, too.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Yes. Let's think about working together.

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

Go ahead, Madame Desbiens.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Caroline Desbiens:** I quite agree with this motion, as well.

I think my father, who is a captain, would say that if we had to run our ship like others run the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, we would have been aground a long time ago.

I would like to point out that there is a history at DFO and that the Liberal government is not the only one to be at fault.

[*English*]

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

I don't see any other hands up.

(Motion as amended agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold):** We will carry on with our questioning. Apparently Mr. Morrissey is up next.

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

My question is for Mr. DeMarco.

I found your report very interesting and also troubling.

My question is this: If you are a fisher on the east coast, can you be confident that your livelihood is being managed by DFO on accurate and complete data?

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** No.

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** That's troubling, given that so many coastal communities depend on a well-managed fishery for the future.

Could you briefly tell the committee what has to change to ensure that these fishers can have confidence in the data that's being used for management decisions that affect their livelihood?

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** I'll cover that in a brief manner and reference my answer to Member Barron's question earlier.

Not only do we need good data for the substantive decisions about sustainability of the fisheries, but we need good data so that there's buy-in from the communities and the regulated industry in terms of confidence in the decisions that are being made that affect their livelihoods. There are two benefits: Better data means better decisions and better support for those decisions.

I would like to see as a starting point the prompt implementation of all of the recommendations from this report, plus those in our previous report from 2016.

Would that be enough? No, it wouldn't, because this report is about monitoring fish catch. There's the science aspect as well as the enforcement aspect, which are out of the scope for this particular audit. We would need to see improvements in those areas as well, so that the department has what it needs to sustain the fisheries and the communities have what they need to be confident in those decisions about sustainability.

• (1725)

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** Thank you.

I'm going to come back to you, but first I have a question for Mr. Williams.

For what species on the east coast do you have total confidence that the department's stock data is accurately managed?

**Mr. Todd Williams:** Thank you very much for the question.

We do have fisheries where we have 100% at-sea observer coverage, such as the northern shrimp SFAs 4 through 6, as an example. That in and of itself doesn't guarantee quality data: it has to be verified and double-checked. It is one example of a fishery where we have fairly good coverage.

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** Thank you.

In the last two years there was a decision to close the spring mackerel fishery, which is the bait fishery we referred to.

My question goes back to Mr. DeMarco.

Did you have a chance to look at the data process used by DFO in the management of the spring mackerel fishery?

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** No. As I've indicated before, we were looking at the quality of the data and then we were hoping to look at the use of that data in sustainability decisions, because—

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** You didn't go species-specific?

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** No, we didn't go into any species specifically. We didn't even go into the second question that deeply because of the problems we found in the first question.

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** Based on what you told the committee on your data, and in the time I have left, if the department applies management practices based on the data process that you audited, would you have confidence in the decision that would impact the spring mackerel fishery?

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** I can't speak to that specific species, but I can point you to our conclusion, which was, "given that the department had not ensured that this data was dependable and timely, in our opinion, it did not form a solid basis for the department to rely on for decision making."

That's a global conclusion. We didn't do a deep dive into specific species.

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** Okay. Thank you for your candidness.

I'll concede, Chair.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold):** Good, thank you.

We are almost at 5:30, but because we started at 3:44 p.m., the clerk has advised that we can go to 5:44 p.m., which would permit another round of five minutes, five minutes, two and a half, and two and a half, if the committee so chooses.

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold):** Then we go over to the Conservative Party for five minutes.

Mr. Perkins, is it?

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

As a quick follow-up question to Mr. Williams, on the question you were just asked, in the under-65-foot fleet in area 6, how many observers were on the boats this year?

**Mr. Todd Williams:** I think what I'll have to do is provide something in writing to answer that question for the member.

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** Obviously it's not 100%. That was only in the over-65-foot boats, the longliners.

**Mr. Todd Williams:** That's correct.

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** Right, so on the under-65-foot fleet, you don't know. My understanding is that it's been—

**Mr. Todd Williams:** There are different requirements.

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** —declining every year the last few years, and it was zero this year. If you have zero observers on the under-65-foot fleet, you can't have confidence in the shrimp numbers.

I'd like to go back to the commissioner to ask about a couple of the charts. I'm specifically interested in the charts in exhibits 9.4 and 9.3. Can you explain 9.3 first and then 9.4?

• (1730)

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** I think I'll turn it to Monsieur Normand to do it more succinctly than I could.

Go ahead, Monsieur Normand.

**Mr. David Normand:** These charts are all built the same way. The chart in exhibit 9.4 looks at coverage for dockside monitoring, and the chart for 9.3 looks at at-sea observation for coverage we have. In our report, we present similar charts for both at-sea and dockside monitoring for aspects of both coverage and timeliness.

I need to apologize. As I said earlier, these charts are a bit complicated to follow because we had to do more work to get to the answer we were looking for—

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** Because I have limited time, I understand that the department made claims about what they had coverage on and data on, and if I'm reading these two charts right, when you went in, they didn't have any. They couldn't produce data on any of the fish stock reports that they said they had data on. I believe the department provides bonuses; it's one of their metrics, so are they fudging the data?

**Mr. David Normand:** What we asked the department for in the first place were the cases in which they knew the coverage and timeliness requirements were either not established in the first place or not met, and they reported to us the places where, based on their records, they believed that the requirements were met. When we heard that, we further investigated, based on sampling, and in that context, we actually found more cases of non-compliance and more cases where they could not tell.

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** That's a long way of saying that they claimed to have catch data in the numbers they report up through the system, but when you went in to audit it, they couldn't produce it.

**Mr. David Normand:** Exactly, yes.

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** How do we believe any of the reports we get from the department in any of these metrics they give at the end of the year about their performance and meeting their performance

targets when they're self-regulating, and it looks to me like they're fudging the data? They don't have the data. They have no integrated fisheries management plan. They have virtually no data on the catch data, and what they have is self-reported. They think that they have observers in the offshore, but they have few in the inshore. Mr. Williams just said they don't know. Well, we know that there were zero observers in Newfoundland in area 6 last year.

Mr. Williams, I'd like to know about the observer status for snow crab in Newfoundland this year. How many observers did you have in the snow crab fleet this year?

**Mr. Todd Williams:** I would have to report back to the committee. Sometimes there is a difference between what is required or what is stated on a licence condition versus what the availability of an observer or dockside monitor is.

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** You knew—or you thought—that in northern shrimp, you had 100%, but that turned out not to be correct, because from what I understand, you had nobody in the under-65-foot fleet, so you didn't have 100% coverage on shrimp. Now you don't know how much you had on snow crab; you knew how much you had on the longliners on shrimp, but you don't know it for snow crab.

**Mr. Todd Williams:** Thank you very much for that.

I should specify that it was for the offshore northern shrimp fishery that I know we had 100%. For the snow crab, we would have to report back to you in writing.

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** As the commissioner has pointed out a number of times—

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold):** Mr. Perkins, that's your time. It's a bit over, actually.

We'll now go to the Liberal members. Up now is Mr. Cormier, who is online, apparently.

[Translation]

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

Commissioner, I don't want to put words in your mouth, but, throughout this meeting, you have clearly been saying that the department did not have enough data to properly assess stocks, among other things.

Am I wrong?

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** No. There is not enough data, and the data that does exist is not reliable enough.

**Mr. Serge Cormier:** Okay.

I often say this in committee, and it is important for me to mention it: My father was a lobster fisherman all his life. As you said at the outset, in presenting your figures, 72,000 people in Canada depend on the fisheries, and they generate economic benefits of \$4.6 billion.

Fishers seem to be losing trust in DFO data. Don't you think it would be beneficial for the department to send more officials out on the water to collect data, in collaboration with fishers' associations, who are on the water every day, in order to have a more accurate picture of the various fish stocks? Some are in trouble, but some may not be as much as you would think.

Do you think there should be more collaboration between the fishers, who are out on the water every day, and the officials, who are in offices every day and don't really see the reality on the ground?

• (1735)

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** Yes, I agree, for the two reasons I mentioned. First, it would lead to better decisions about the sustainability of fisheries. Second, communities would be more supportive of these decisions if they were reliable and sustainable.

**Mr. Serge Cormier:** It is important for the committee to understand the reach of your message. I know that my Conservative colleagues seem to blame the government for all the failures and everything that has happened over the past few years, but this has been going on for some time, and I think we have to look to the future.

So, Commissioner, looking to the future, what improvements should be made so that our stocks are managed properly, so that our communities can benefit from these very important resources, so that our fishers can earn a living and, once again, so that our communities can continue to make a living from fishing?

What do you think DFO could do to address the situation involving various fish stocks and the lack of data you talked about?

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** In summary, those are the reasons why we made these recommendations in our report. So implementing all our recommendations will improve the situation and the sustainability of fish stocks. That would be the first thing to do. I don't want to come back here in six or seven years and make the same recommendations.

**Mr. Serge Cormier:** I don't remember all of your recommendations, but I've read a few.

Do you feel that DFO's current resources are sufficient to implement your recommendations, or does it need additional funding?

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** More resources are needed to implement our recommendations. Is it necessary across the department, or could the department reallocate existing resources internally? I don't know, as we haven't done a full audit of the department.

However, more resources are indeed needed to implement these recommendations and our 2022 recommendations on species at risk.

**Mr. Serge Cormier:** Thank you, Commissioner.

[English]

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold):** Thank you, Mr. Cormier and Mr. DeMarco.

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

[Translation]

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

In Quebec, we see that our fishers have been exemplary in a number of ways, particularly by providing catch amounts and data, and by meeting the obligation to participate in the dockside monitoring program. Mr. Collin, president of the Regroupement des pêcheurs pélagiques professionnels du sud de la Gaspésie, has often come here to testify to that.

Why can't this obligation that Quebeckers have been extended to all fishers? That could provide more data quite quickly because the fishers are on the ground. Why are Quebeckers the only ones who are required to report on their catch?

When the Department of Fisheries and Oceans makes decisions on the Atlantic side, we often see that those decisions severely penalize Quebeckers. In Quebec, the small fishing economy and small boats support all coastal villages. However, it is these small boats that are often penalized. In addition, Quebeckers are afraid that the larger boats will reproduce what happened 30 years ago. Those are the two things Quebeckers are seeing right now. They are very concerned about that.

How can the situation be improved in the short term?

I emphasize the importance of taking steps in the short term, as it is in the short term that boats will be moored for good. It will be over. It's already over for a number of them.

Mr. Williams, Mr. Napier, Mr. DeMarco, how can things be done differently in the short term?

• (1740)

[English]

**Mr. Brent Napier:** Thank you for the question.

From an enforcement perspective, those licence holders in Quebec are not the sole licence holders who have to provide catch information. Most other regions do. In fact, in most fisheries, log books are a requirement. The department looks at risk and it looks at conservation to determine what measures need to be in each of those fisheries.

The fisheries monitoring policy will support that activity and look for a more even distribution, potentially, of those sorts of requirements. At this stage, I wouldn't say there's inequality in the way that the department requires Quebec fishers to provide information versus, potentially, other regions.

Maybe Todd has something additional—

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold):** Thank you, Mr. Napier. We've actually gone over time for Madame Desbiens.

We'll go to Ms. Barron for the final round.

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

My question is perhaps for Mr. DeMarco, and if Mr. Napier has time, he can follow up with some comments. That would be great.

Specifically, what I am reading is that the audit found that no consultation took place with indigenous groups and stakeholders. I'm wondering if you can share your findings around that specific section. A response from Mr. Napier would be great as well.

**Mr. Jerry V. DeMarco:** Mr. Normand will answer that question.

**Mr. David Normand:** In the course of the implementation of the fishery management policy, there is a step of identifying which stocks to prioritize. There is a requirement to consult with first nations. We found that in that context—in the identification of the 22 that were presented in our report—they were not consulted.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Are there any additional thoughts from you, Mr. Napier?

**Mr. Brent Napier:** No. Thank you, Chair.

**Mr. Todd Williams:** Thank you very much for the question. In fact, it's a very good question, and just two weeks ago I was at the Atlantic Policy Congress in Cape Breton. I was invited to speak at their indigenous fisheries conference, and we spoke about that, the collaboration with indigenous partners on the implementation of the fisheries monitoring program.

There was also a small grants and contributions component that was provided in that funding envelope for indigenous engagement and collaboration in implementing a policy and approving the data that goes into the system.

• (1745)

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** My only follow-up question is around how this fits with the indigenous guardians program that we've been talking about throughout the previous study. We were looking at it in terms of the ability to effectively collect data and how we're working alongside indigenous people who are, rightfully so, taking on the stewardship of their land and water.

**Mr. Brent Napier:** I can certainly address that question.

The indigenous or aboriginal guardians program, as it's called, refers to fishery guardians under the Fisheries Act. All their powers are vested in there. We have the ability to limit those powers or to use the full extent of them. We're looking now at renewing that entire program. We're looking at training to ensure that proper training is provided to those communities, and in this way we are able to help.

The point of a guardian is to complement and support conservation, so we're very excited about this. There have been some delays in the process, but we're striving to get that done relatively soon.

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

That concludes our round of questioning today. I want to thank all of the witnesses for appearing and providing their valuable information and responses.

Our next meeting on Thursday will be a business meeting to discuss committee business.

This meeting is adjourned.

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