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Chair: Mr. Ken McDonald



Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

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• (1530)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 97 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.

Pursuant to a request by more than four members of the committee under Standing Order 106(4), the committee is meeting to discuss a request to undertake a study of the concerns surrounding the elver fishery in Nova Scotia.

Mr. Perkins, you have the floor.

Mr. Rick Perkins (South Shore—St. Margarets, CPC): Thank you, committee members, for enabling this discussion today.

Over the last two months, we've had sporadic opportunities to ask some questions of various officials about their plans to deal with the upcoming season of the elver fishery, in hopes of avoiding all of the issues that we saw in my community and throughout Nova Scotia and New Brunswick last year.

For those who are watching and who don't know what an elver is, it's a baby eel. It's a very expensive fish. It's the most expensive fish there is. They sell them for about \$5,000 a kilogram, and they're caught at the mouths of rivers as the rivers enter the sea in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Maine, principally.

They come in at night, for some reason, on the high tide, when it's dark. They're caught by using a dip net or what's called a fyke net. There are, I believe, 12 DFO-licensed harvesters for this fish.

This season is a quota-based season, so as soon as an individual harvester gets their quota, they're done. Even though the elvers start arriving in Nova Scotia in March—although the season generally starts in April and goes until June—there are elvers still on some of the rivers in July. They come at different times of the year in New Brunswick; they come a little later than March.

The various licence-holders are assigned a specific river, depending on when the elvers come in and when they get the catch, yet last year, after only 18 days of the season, as we know, the Minister of Fisheries shut down the season for the licence-holders, while poaching continued on the rivers. It became a big public safety issue, more so last year than in the previous couple of years. I just want to outline what it was like.

Picture yourself in the beautiful riding that I represent, on the south shore in Nova Scotia, on St. Margarets Bay, the bay that Peggy's Cove is on. You bought your dream house. Your dream house is right at the mouth, where the river, which may be 10 to 20 feet wide, enters the sea. You might have a little beach at the front of your little Cape Cod house, and you enjoy the tranquility of all that and all the fun that comes from having access to the fresh water when the tides go out and the river comes in, and the salt water as the tide comes in.

Many years into your ownership, a few years ago, about midnight, because that's generally when people fish elvers, when the tides are coming in, people start showing up on your property. They start crossing your property. They park their trucks on your property, and they're there all night. You go out and ask them what they're doing, and they tell you they're fishing, even though they're on private property. You ask them to leave, but they refuse to leave.

This goes on for a few nights, starting in March. That's only a few weeks from now, and it will happen again in March. Because they're fishing, you phone DFO. DFO's numbers for enforcement are available on the web and in the book. You phone them up, and you leave messages, because it's at night and there's nobody there. Nobody ever calls you back from DFO.

Then you see that nobody ever shows up from DFO, even though you've called, so you phone the local police detachment. Usually, in my part of the world, that's the RCMP detachment. You phone the detachment. You start phoning the RCMP, and you start asking the RCMP to please come to deal with these people who are trespassing on your lawn, because, when you wake up in the morning and they're gone, there is an incredible mess. They fish with lights on their heads, so they're bothering you at night while you're trying to sleep. They're making noise. In the morning, there are remnants of food, remnants of used toilet paper and remnants of what toilet paper is used for on your property. That's every night, for months.

You phone the RCMP so many times that the RCMP says, "If you keep calling me and complaining about these people on your property, I'm going to come and arrest you for filing too many claims with the RCMP."

• (1535)

A few miles down the river in Hubbards, a single mother is there with her teenage daughter. The same thing's going on on her property, except they're wearing khaki gear at night. One of her neighbours was walking her dog—this happened last spring—and asked what they were doing. They said, “We're fishing.” They said, “You can see the DFO sign here that says you're not fishing.” They took out a pipe and beat him. Further down the river, rival gangs of criminal organizations actually started firing guns at each other for turf on the river.

Meanwhile, the legal licence-holders could not get on the river—and the legal licence-holders are assigned to specific rivers—and they have motion-activated cameras on all the legal spots. Not every river in Nova Scotia is a legal spot, but almost every river has elvers. They have cameras with motion detection, and they take live pictures and video, so they know when people are there during the day and at night, and they never saw a DFO enforcement officer, ever, at night, when the fishing of elvers was going on, both legally and illegally.

Every day last year, from the beginning of the season, I got a copy of the emails sent from the licence-holders to the Minister of Fisheries, to the director-general of fisheries for Nova Scotia, and to C and P enforcement, and of the photos of the individuals as well as identification of their vehicles. Never once did anyone return anyone's calls, and never once did C and P ever do anything about it. This was going on at the Sackville River in Halifax, three minutes from a DFO C and P enforcement office. Complaints were made, but nothing ever happened.

A licensed elver fisher had what's called a fyke net—the other way of doing this. This happened in Shelburne county last year, and he had a GPS tracker attached to his net. He went to the river, and his net was gone, so he turned on the GPS tracker. He said, “Oh, I can see it. I can drive. It's at a house.” He drove up to the house in his pickup, and there's a pickup truck in the driveway with his net in the back. The owner of the house came out and said, “What are you doing here?” He said, “I'm here to pick up my net.” He said, “It's not your net. It's my net.” He said, “That's my net. DFO requires me to have my licence number on the net. There's my licence number.” The guy went into the garage, took out a baseball bat, came out and started beating on the guy's truck, smashing his windows and smashing his mirrors off. Then he went into his truck, backed it into this guy's truck, pushed it out onto the street and took off. He went to another place and damaged the truck. This got reported to both the police and DFO, the locations and where the net was. DFO never went to charge the person or to get the property back. It was stolen right out of the river.

This went on every night for four months while the elvers were running, and it's getting worse.

The industry has been meeting with DFO and just asking them for their plan for river enforcement, and they won't do it. They won't share it, and, in fact, in meetings in the last week, they said they're not going to provide any more support legally than they did last year.

Given all that, I think it's urgent that this committee do a study and call these agencies to account before this committee as to why they are not increasing their enforcement of the law and of the act.

I don't know if we circulated the motion. Oh, it's being handed out.

I would propose:

That, given reports concerning the illegal elver fishery in Atlantic Canada and violence that occurred in the 2023 fishing season—

That should say, “elver fishing season”.

—the committee agree to hear plans prepared by the federal government to prevent further incidents of violence this fishing season; the committee agree to hear testimony from the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, with departmental officials responsible for law enforcement—

Obviously, that's C and P.

—the Canada Border Services Agency and the RCMP; that the committee draft a letter at the end of the study with its recommendation to the minister invited [named here]; and that the committee agree to begin this study at its next scheduled meeting.

• (1540)

The rationale for the next meeting being next week is that there are already illegal nets being placed on rivers today. The season will not start for a little while, probably not until April. The minister hasn't announced when the season starts yet, but urgency in ensuring that there is an enforcement regime to maintain law and order on the river is necessary now. We need to have the officials now. That's the reason for the urgency on this. I don't think, from my part of the world in the fishery, that there is any more pressing enforcement issue than this, currently.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

Mr. Morrissey, you have your hand up.

Mr. Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.): Can we suspend for a few minutes?

I agree with everything that Mr. Perkins said, but could we suspend for a minute or two, while we review his motion?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): I realize the motion was just redistributed, so we'll recess for a few minutes.

• (1540) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1556)

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

Mr. Morrissey.

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

I've concluded my comments, Mr. Chair. Thanks for the suspension. I believe Ms. Barron is—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Translation is coming through on the English channel in French on mine. I'm not sure what happened. I was getting English in one ear and French in the other, so now I'm really confused. Could you start again?

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

Mr. Serge Cormier (Acadie—Bathurst, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I have a problem also on my end. Can you just keep talking, please?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Yes. I'm hoping translation has it sorted out to the correct channel. It looks like I'm getting a thumbs-up from Mr. Kelloway.

Go ahead, Mr. Morrissey.

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

I believe Ms. Barron is going to read in an amendment to the motion. I'll wait. I'll defer and make comment after that.

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

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to get it documented, so that we could send it out to everybody.

I just want to suggest a few amendments to the motion that's been circulated. Thanks to Mr. Perkins for his work around this.

The amendment that I'd like to make is:

That, given reports concerning the illegal elver fishery in Atlantic Canada and violence that occurred—

Here I would like to add “in the elver fishery”.

—in the 2023 fishing season, illegal harvesting and widespread misunderstanding of indigenous moderate livelihood rights

Then it would continue on with the remainder of it as is, except for one addition of “Deputy Minister” instead of “Minister”.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Where was the last piece to be inserted? “The elver fishery in the 2023 fishing season”.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Yes, so it reads:

That, given reports concerning violence that occurred in the elver fishery in the 2023 fishing season, illegal harvesting and widespread misunderstanding of indigenous moderate livelihood rights

Then it goes on as previously written.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, BQ): A point of order, Mr. Chair.

The member read her motion very quickly and the interpreter didn't have a copy of the corrected motion, which caused a bit of a problem with the interpretation.

Could the member please resume reading the motion?

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Ms. Barron, if you'd like to go again, can you speak slowly and clearly as to where it's being inserted?

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Yes. It's the Newfoundlander in me. We speak quickly.

The other thing is that we can circulate an email version, if that's helpful. I realize it could be confusing. I'll try again. It is:

That, given reports concerning violence that occurred in the elver fishery in the 2023 fishing season, illegal harvesting and widespread misunderstanding of indigenous moderate livelihood rights

The remainder stays the same, except for the addition of, in front of “Minister”, “Deputy”.

• (1600)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): In which section where it says “minister”? The Minister of Fisheries is mentioned, and then it's “recommendations to the minister”, so the word “minister” is in there twice.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: I'm sorry, Mr. Chair. That would be the first “Minister”—the first reference to the minister.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Am I understanding that you're recommending a change, that it be the deputy minister who is invited instead of the minister, or is it in addition to the minister?

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: It's a change to the deputy minister.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): That's instead of the minister.

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): I thought you wanted this within five days.

Mr. Rick Perkins: We want to start within five days, but she doesn't have to be here within five days. We can start with the other witnesses. She can come at the end.

Mr. Ken Hardie: How many days are you looking at?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Well, we have next week and the week in—

I'm sorry.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I know it's sort of traditional that ministers appear first, but it's not a requirement. In my view, it's fine if the minister comes at the end.

We have two sitting weeks left in February. We have next week, then a week's break, then another week when we come back that is partially in February, I think.

Mr. Ken Hardie: No, next Friday, we begin two weeks of constituency break. I'm pretty sure.

Is there only one?

Mr. Rick Perkins: It's one week.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Are you sure?

Okay.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Within the time frame of those sitting weeks, I'm sure the minister can find time to be here. We're just inviting her.

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

Mr. Rick Perkins: I'm fine with the rest of it, especially the grammatical change.

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

Just to clarify, I was adding the "deputy" part only because I thought there was unanimous consent that this was the best path forward. I'm okay either way—whichever is easiest.

The beginning part is the part I want to see the addition to, but whether it's the minister or deputy minister coming to the meeting, I am fine either way. If it's the preference of the mover of the motion to keep "minister", I would support that and ask that we add the remainder I spoke about.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): I'm not sure whether the clerk has an accurate idea of what was proposed.

Can Ms. Barron provide it? Has it been circulated?

Pardon me.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Mr. Chair, it would be great if it could be circulated.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Okay.

Can we get it circulated, then, please?

Mr. Hardie.

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

Through the chair, if we have our first meeting next Tuesday, it would have to be with the deputy minister, because the minister would not be available.

I want Mr. Perkins to give us a sense as to how many meetings, in fact, we will need to deal with this. Given the time sensitivity he indicated—things are already starting to happen—we would want some resolution proposed to the minister sooner rather than later.

What would you see as the number of meetings necessary to deal with this?

Mr. Rick Perkins: Obviously, that depends, Mr. Chair, on the availability of witnesses and resources.

I see three different ways to go at this, and I am prepared to see whether the clerk can figure it out.

One, our meetings start in our normal meeting spot next week, so the two meetings next week would be on this issue. Based on the number of witnesses, we would make a determination about whether we need a third one for officials. We'll obviously need a third one, or some portion of a third one, for the minister after the break week. We could probably get all of those done in those areas. I'm not sure, with the addition MP Barron is making, how many witnesses she envisages beyond the ones I've listed, but it would add to that. My original thinking was that, with the officials and the minister, we could probably get it done in three normal meetings.

Two, when you look at the calendar for all committees, there are some slots available. Whether or not we want to add a meeting during the week.... I know that, on another committee I'm on, we've done that. We've chosen to use one of those additional slots.

Three, on another committee I'm on, we've also chosen to say that, depending on resource availability, we'll add a third hour to the regular meetings we already have scheduled for other issues.

I am in the hands of the committee on that. How many meetings it takes depends on which method you use. I think that if you do full two-hour meetings, with the minister it's probably three meetings.

• (1605)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Mr. Morrissey.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Thank you, Chair.

We don't need extensive meetings to regurgitate what occurred. We know what occurred. Nobody's disputing that.

I, as a committee member, want to hear from those responsible for the management of this fishery. They can tell this committee what they're putting in place to prevent a repeat of that this coming year. Nobody can guarantee immunity from violence. It happens.

One meeting, in my opinion, is adequate to have them explain to the committee what steps are being put in place. We can spend days going back and bringing people in.

We know. Nobody is disputing what occurred, and what occurred is unacceptable. I do not agree with having multiple meetings with this urgency. The people fundamentally responsible are in DFO protection and enforcement, the RCMP and the Canada Border Services Agency.

They get involved only when somebody illegally catches them and tries to get them out of the country. The issue is stopping the illegal activity and the violence from occurring. The CBSA has no jurisdiction there.

If the intent of the motion—and I agree with the intent—is to find this out from the two federal government agencies that have the responsibility for law and order and protection of the resource, we have them in the RCMP and DFO. That's where my interest is. I know the CBSA is responsible for ensuring that illegal products do not cross the border, but it shouldn't be illegal to get to the border.

That falls, Mr. Chair, under the RCMP and Fisheries and Oceans. I do not want to dilute and confuse the serious situation that may be about to repeat itself in 2024. That's why I want to hear specifically from the most senior people within the operational side of these two ministries about what they are putting in place this coming year to ensure that what happened last year does not repeat itself.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): As I understand it, there's nothing in the original motion or the amendment that determines the number of meetings yet, so this would be a further amendment. We have an amendment on the floor that we're waiting to have circulated. Before we can amend it to include how many meetings we'll have, we have to deal with the current amendment.

I saw Mr. Kelloway online first, and then Mr. Perkins.

Mr. Kelloway.

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

Mr. Morrissey brought up what I was going to bring up about the timeline for the meetings and bringing people around the table at the same time as senior officials to discuss a variety of perspectives. Fundamentally, there are a couple of perspectives. One is safety, security and enforcement, and the other is plans moving forward.

I'm with Mr. Morrissey on looking at this in a meeting and making sure we have the absolute right people at the table for that meeting. Mr. Perkins talked quite eloquently about the experiences he's had as an MP and as a citizen in the South Shore, what his constituents and other people who fish elvers faced and what happened last year. If we can bring everyone together....

My experience with this committee is not as long as most of yours. Some of you have been here on the fisheries committee since 2015, but I find it's not necessarily about quantity; it's about quality. We can bring people in at the same time with the clear directives and the focus of the motion and look at that one meeting.

The letter will come for recommendations, by what I read, through you, Chair, to Mr. Perkins. There will be a letter to the minister with our recommendations. I think that is more than doable.

Everybody will be ready with their questions and sub-questions. We need to have the right people around the table. I think, for the most part, it's a good selection of people in the motion.

Thank you.

• (1610)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): I have Mr. Hardie first, and then it's Mr. Perkins.

Mr. Ken Hardie: I do take the point, Mr. Chair, that the inclusion of the CBSA in this discussion is necessary sooner or later. The reason I say that is that the CBSA, as has been pointed out, would be the ones who would be inspecting shipments heading out of the country, and we've heard in testimony in our IUU study that it's pretty easy to conceal elvers inside other stuff.

I would suggest, though, if we haven't done a deep enough dive into that aspect of it, that we add a meeting to the IUU study and burrow right into that one, because I think that's the other half of it. If we cut off the market, all of a sudden there's really no rationale for people to be out fishing for something they can't sell and there's no market for.

I think that piece of it has to be covered off, but the issue at hand is enforcing the laws we have right now, given that the shipping issues and CBSA-related issues are not going to be dealt with in time to prevent the drive for a fishery this year, especially an illegal one with that kind of value attached to it. We needn't dilute the focus by calling in the CBSA at this point, but I would suggest that we could add a meeting to the IUU study, which isn't really complete yet, to deal with that aspect of it.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Mr. Perkins, you're next.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you, everyone, for your general support for the motion. I really appreciate it.

Maybe I could start with Mr. Hardie's last point. I believe that the IUU study is finished. We're supposed to do drafting instructions today; that's on the agenda.

To the main issue, there's no question in my mind that the thing of primary concern is enforcement on the rivers, and I think we're all agreed on enforcement. That involves DFO C and P, and, if called in, the RCMP to back them up on the river, but also the RCMP enforcing trespassing laws. That's the on-river portion.

We have had a bit of testimony already in some of my questions in the IUU study, and the deputy minister already answered and said that there is a coordination committee on the planning for the elver stuff that involves all three agencies, including the CBSA. Unofficially, I'm told by the elver licence-holders that they've been told they're shifting resources away from river enforcement towards the purchasing part of this, the land-based purchasing, where it's being purchased, and the airports and CBSA enforcement.

We need to have CBSA here in order to ask whether that's really what they're doing, because I think that's a problem. It's obviously safer, but it's like whack-a-mole on this thing, because there are way more people doing this than there are enforcement officers. I think that's the whole picture.

I think it's hard to do that along with the minister, in one meeting. That would be one hour for one and one hour for another, which I do not think would do enough justice to the depth of the discussion. To me, it would have to be at least one meeting, if it were a two-hour meeting, with C and P, RCMP and CBSA together, if they're working together on this. Then, at least on the second one, it would be another one with the minister and officials. Whether that's in two two-hour meetings or added on as bits and pieces to a couple of other meetings, we could leave to the clerk to sort out.

• (1615)

Mr. Robert Morrissey: It would be for four hours.

Mr. Rick Perkins: It's for four hours, basically, yes.

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

Mr. Robert Morrissey: You made a valid point about the CBSA. I wasn't looking at it from that context, but I agree with you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): I believe we're still waiting for the translated amendment to be distributed, but it's very close.

Ms. Barron, you have the floor.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thanks, Chair.

I want to apologize to the clerk and the translators for the amendment that needs to be translated on short notice. Thank you for that.

Once this amendment is decided upon, to make sure we're all on the same page, will we be agreeing to add the specific number of meetings that will be allocated to this at the end? I'm assuming we won't need to get that translated; that's pretty simple to add.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): That could be done as an amendment, to make sure it's in the motion, if you prefer.

It depends on how the committee wishes to go about that.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Can we unanimously agree on two meetings, as we articulated, Chair?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): We can if it's noted in the minutes, so that there's no dispute afterwards....

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Would you assess as chair the unanimity regarding the two meetings?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Is there agreement with all parties that two two-hour meetings would be sufficient for this? Are we all in agreement that four hours total would be sufficient?

Mr. Hanley.

Mr. Brendan Hanley (Yukon, Lib.): My only qualification—not to disagree with my own team—is that Mr. Perkins said to get the number of hours.

An example might be extending our existing meetings by an hour each. One of my worries is that delays in the Yukon salmon meeting might lead to more difficulties getting our witnesses. It's been a lot of work getting our witnesses lined up.

I totally understand the urgency of this. I want to get going on it, but some flexibility—

Mr. Rick Perkins: That's what I was trying to do.

Mr. Brendan Hanley: —in other words, around the number of hours, according to whatever schedule we can agree on....

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Is there consensus that four hours of meeting time for the committee would be sufficient?

I see agreement all around the room, so I'll ask that that be noted in the minutes.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I think we all agreed on the motion, too.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: It would be good to read it back, but it sounds good from our side.

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

I'm sorry, but I have to move my head to see your hand up on the screen,

Mr. Serge Cormier: I'm sorry. I should have intervened before, Mr. Chair.

I just want to point out something before we go too far. I think there's some kind of agreement between all of you on two meetings, but it's just regarding CBSA.

Look, I think all of us want to get to the bottom of this. However, regarding CBSA, if you recall, Mr. Chair, in lots of meetings, I and my colleague, Mr. Perkins, asked lots of questions already to CBSA on the elver issue. They basically told us what they were involved in and how it was working with the shipping and everything, so I'm not sure we need to have them in some of those meetings to see what's going on with the situation. With all of the witnesses we've had in the last couple of months, Mr. Perkins, other colleagues and I have already asked some questions regarding the elver situation. I personally think that one meeting is enough.

I understand that you guys were thinking about maybe two, but if we can get one meeting with everybody at the table at the same time, I think we will get a good result in terms of seeing what the problem is with the situation.

Those are just my thoughts. It's hard for us—for me and Mike. We're away, so we're not in the room, but I think one meeting will be enough to tackle this issue.

• (1620)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): I think we've gone around the room, and there was consensus on four hours total, but if it requires less, then I think the committee could make that decision as we proceed.

Mr. Morrissey.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Chair, could we suspend for another moment or two, while we sort through where we're at?

I think we're close.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): We'll suspend for a few minutes.

• (1620)

(Pause)

• (1625)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): We are back.

Ms. Barron, go ahead.

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

Through discussion with my peers, I want to seek unanimous consent to withdraw the amendment, keep the original version and focus our attention on the number of meetings we'd like to move forward with. That way, we can get on with this.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Do we have unanimous consent?

(Amendment withdrawn)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Is there any further discussion on the original motion?

Mr. Hanley.

Mr. Brendan Hanley: It looks like, in terms of the Yukon salmon study, we only had DFO scheduled for Tuesday. I'm happy to devote Tuesday to this meeting and just get it done. Maybe we can do it in one meeting.

Mr. Rick Perkins: No, we can't get it done in one meeting. We still have the invite to the minister and officials. I think it's one

meeting with the three enforcement agencies and another meeting with the minister and officials. If the minister comes to that, that's great. If she can't, that's up to her schedule. It's an invitation, anyway.

It's two meetings, where we were before the break.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Mr. Morrissey.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Mr. Chair, that would be an amendment to the motion, because the motion we reverted to had no reference to the number of meetings.

Mr. Rick Perkins: You guys wanted to formalize it. I was more open and flexible, but that's okay.

I can't amend my own motion.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Would you like to move that motion, Mr. Morrissey?

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Yes, thank you.

I would move an amendment to the original motion: "begin the study at its next scheduled meeting for one meeting".

Mr. Rick Perkins: You already know my views on that. I think that's diminishing the issue.

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

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: If we go ahead with inserting "one meeting", what does that mean if the committee decides more meetings are required? Can we make a decision as committee members to add additional meetings after that time?

That's just for some clarification.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Yes, committees are masters of their own destiny.

Mr. Perkins, did you have your hand up?

Mr. Rick Perkins: I was saying that, obviously, I oppose this.

You're asking to have CBSA, RCMP, C and P, the minister and officials all in one meeting. I think that's ridiculous. It's, quite frankly, an insult to the issue we're doing. To not spend the time we need with the three enforcement agencies and then have a discussion with the minister and officials is an insult to anyone who cares about the fishery.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Are you suggesting a sub-amendment to the amendment?

Mr. Rick Perkins: I'd rather just vote the amendment down.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): That's your prerogative.

Mr. Hanley.

Mr. Brendan Hanley: Before we go to the question.... Maybe it's from our side or the other side. Is that the intent? Would we invite all of those people for one meeting? I guess we prioritize a witness list for one meeting.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): I believe all of those agencies are listed in the motion.

Ms. Barron.

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

I have a couple of thoughts.

First of all, I want to get clarification, before we go to a vote, on the last few words Mr. Perkins said, because I didn't hear the last few words that were said there.

The other thing is this. We have heard from CBSA officers throughout our study of IUU, as Mr. Cormier mentioned. We have already heard a lot about what's happening with the elver fishery and the problems. Now, not to diminish the importance of hearing about this and getting the clarity we need, but I feel that, if we take into consideration the work that's already been done, putting together one meeting would offer us an opportunity to see what's happening and then decide whether adding more meetings is the most appropriate step forward. This is a request that's been put forward due to an emergent issue. I think that's a good way for us to move forward: adapt to the request and get this issue on the table, but don't put in so many meetings.

I can think of so many examples of studies we put forward where there were too many meetings attached. I wish that we had put in fewer, and then added on after the fact, once we knew. I'd rather go that route and see us add meetings, if necessary, once we hear from the witnesses. We can add that to the information we've already received, as well.

• (1630)

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

Mr. Rick Perkins: The way the motion will be worded with this amendment is that you would have all these witnesses in one meeting. That's the way it works. They're invited to one meeting.

It's not an add-on. It's all one meeting. It's to have the CBSA, the RCMP, C and P, the minister and the officials all in one meeting. If you support the one-meeting amendment, that's the way it will be. It is standard practice.... We are not coming up with a long list of other witnesses. Lord knows, there are a lot of other witnesses who could come. Because I have asked a couple of questions over the last two months when officials have been here on other issues, it is not a study on the specific issue and crisis for us.

It is a fairly standard practice that the minister and officials appear on a study, no matter how long or short, on their own, away from other officials. We're talking about separating the policing forces on this from the bureaucratic, political and administrative forces; we're talking about separating them into two meetings.

I don't think that's an onerous task between now and the end of February on a crisis that is going to see more violence, more people assaulted and perhaps even the unthinkable, given the armaments that are on these rivers—people with firearms on almost every river of Nova Scotia on people's private property. It is not an onerous thing to ask for two two-hour meetings, separating the policing arm of this from the administrative arm. It's a fairly standard practice.

Thank you.

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

Ms. Barron.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: I'll be quick.

I do appreciate the point around the fact that, as the motion is written, it will result in many people all being in one meeting. I do question how that will work out and if that's even possible.

I just want to acknowledge that I appreciate that additional point, and I think that's shifting my mind on the best steps forward.

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

I see no further hands raised, so I will call the question.

Mr. Rick Perkins: What's the question?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): It's on Mr. Morrissey's amendment that the study be for one meeting.

We have a rare tie. In that case, the chair will cast a vote. I vote nay.

(Amendment negatived: nays 6; yeas 5 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): We're now on the main motion.

Mr. Hardie.

• (1635)

Mr. Ken Hardie: The main motion does not prescribe the number of meetings, so somebody should move the number of meetings to be added as an amendment.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I can't.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Well, you have buddies over there. I think they're your friends, are they not?

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

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: The easiest—

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): In the interest of advancing this—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): I had Ms. Barron with her hand up, and then you can speak, if you'd like, Mr. Kelly.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: I apologize to my friend Mr. Kelly. I don't believe he has spoken yet at this meeting.

I'm just going to suggest that we add two meetings to the end of this motion. I don't know if you need me to read it out or if I can just say "two".

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): If we could basically use most of the wording from the previous amendment and change "one meeting" to "two meetings"....

The clerk has it, so she can read it out as it would be.

Ms. Miriam Burke (Committee Clerk): It would just add to the end of the motion "for two meetings".

Mr. Rick Perkins: Did somebody put that forward?

Ms. Miriam Burke: Ms. Barron did.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Mr. Kelly, you had your hand up.

Mr. Pat Kelly: I was going to propose a similar amendment, but I'm not going to speak to it.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): Okay. Are there any questions on the amendment? No.

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

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

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mel Arnold): We will suspend for a few minutes while we go in camera to move to the drafting instructions.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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