



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 100

Tuesday, February 27, 2024

Chair: Mr. Ken McDonald



Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

Tuesday, February 27, 2024

• (1545)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 100 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans.

This meeting, of course, 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 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 mike, 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 floor, English or French. For those in the room, you can use the earpiece and select the desired channel.

Please address all comments through the chair.

As a quick reminder before we proceed, I want to tell members and witnesses to be careful when handling your earpieces, especially when your microphone or your neighbours' microphones are turned on. Earpieces placed too close to a microphone are one of the most common causes of sound feedback, which is extremely harmful to the interpreters and causes serious injury.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted on February 15, 2024, the committee is commencing its study of the scales used by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to set redfish quotas.

Welcome, everyone.

Today we have the Department of Fisheries and Oceans with us. Of course, we have a number of them back again. We have Adam Burns, assistant deputy minister, programs sector; Bernard Vigneault, director general, ecosystem science directorate; Todd Williams, senior director, fisheries resource management operations; and, by video conference, we have Sylvain Vézina, regional director general, Quebec region; and Doug Wentzell, regional director general, gulf region.

Thank you for taking the time to appear today.

You have time for an opening statement of five minutes or less, please.

The floor is yours.

Mr. Adam Burns (Assistant Deputy Minister, Programs Sector, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for having us today to talk about the minister's recent decisions on unit 1 redfish and the shrimp fishery in the estuary in the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

[Translation]

My name is Adam Burns, assistant deputy minister of the Program Sector responsible for fisheries and harbour management at Fisheries and Oceans Canada.

[English]

I'd like to begin by acknowledging that the land on which we are meeting is the traditional territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe. The peoples of the Algonquin Anishinabe nation have lived on this territory for millennia, and their culture and presence have nurtured and continue to nurture this land.

[Translation]

The recent increase in redfish biomass and the move to a commercial fishery is a good news story, but not without its challenges. The reopening of the fishery offers a unique opportunity to do things differently given the socio-economic changes since the moratorium, particularly with respect to advancing indigenous reconciliation.

[English]

The department undertook consultations in 2021 and 2022 with indigenous groups and a range of stakeholders from eastern Canada. Participants were offered several opportunities to provide views on access, allocation and the principles they believed were important for the minister to consider in her decision.

[Translation]

There is no defined mechanism in DFO policies to rank or weigh the various criteria in access and allocation decisions. However, with the adoption of the amended Fisheries Act in 2019, the considerations for deciding on an access and allocation key (among possible others) are contained directly in legislation.

[English]

The minister's decision delivers on the commitment to indigenous reconciliation. It respects and maintains the inshore and mid-shore mobile fleets' historical access, and it provides 10% allocation to estuary and gulf shrimpers to contribute to the fleets' adjustments in response to the significant declines in that fishery.

• (1550)

[Translation]

In terms of next steps, there is more work to be done to operationalize the Unit 1 fishery for the upcoming season.

[English]

The department will meet with the redfish advisory committee in March to discuss recommendations for the total allowable catch, bycatch and other management measures as well as the sharing of the inshore mobile gear fleet and indigenous allocations.

[Translation]

Groundfish and shrimp fisheries in the Estuary and Gulf of St. Lawrence have been intimately linked for decades. In 2022, shrimpers' income was at the lowest level in thirteen years, and operating costs (fuel prices and wage increases) were at their highest. This negatively influenced the profitability of the fishery and the viability of the industry.

[English]

The 2023 season was very difficult. Catch rates in the most frequented fishing areas were less than 40% of the previous year. In response to continued declines, the 2024 total allowable catch was reduced to 3,060 tonnes, a 79% reduction.

Northern shrimp is a cold-water species. With warming and oxygen depletion in deep waters, shrimp are exposed to increasingly unfavourable environmental conditions. Notably, redfish predation on shrimp has increased significantly since 2017 and is considered to be a factor in the decline of shrimp. The total estimated biomass of redfish in the gulf was less than 100,000 tonnes in 2013, and, by 2021, the biomass was 2.8 million tonnes.

[Translation]

Until 2020, reductions in shrimp were partly mitigated by higher prices. Low fishing yields combined with very high operating costs, exacerbated by COVID-19 and inflation, have created major profitability challenges for this specialized and undiversified fleet.

[English]

The status of shrimp stocks is not expected to improve. Since shrimp play a key role as a forage species in the ecosystem, caution needs to be exercised when exploiting this resource.

The department is working diligently to address the various challenges in both the gulf shrimp and the unit 1 redfish fisheries.

We'd be happy to take your questions.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

We'll now go to our questions.

We'll start off with Mr. Small for six minutes or less, please.

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

I'd like to thank the officials for coming out today to help us out with this study and to try to make sense of it all.

This is the third time the minister has been invited to this committee since we came back in the new year.

Why is she hiding away and not coming to committee to answer for the mess she's made of the unit 1 redfish quota allocation for 2024?

Mr. Adam Burns: Thanks, Chair, and thanks for the question.

I'm not able to answer questions related to the minister's schedule and availability.

Mr. Clifford Small: Okay, I guess you can't answer.

After eight years and six DFO ministers—you're well aware who they all were—with this NDP-Liberal coalition, minister number six has set the unit 1 redfish quota at a mere 25,000 tonnes, when science has recommended that it can be 318,000 metric tons.

Why is the minister not responding to science when she's making this allocation and when there are so many factors that are detrimental to the balance of the ecosystem in unit 1 because of this redfish bloom?

Mr. Adam Burns: The minister's announcement was that the total allowable catch would be a minimum of 25,000 tonnes.

Further consultation will occur next week. A variety of factors will need to be taken into account, including the development of the industry and the development of markets. Next week, consultations will be undertaken and the views of industry will then inform the minister's ultimate decision on what the total allowable catch should be.

Mr. Clifford Small: Mr. Burns, this Liberal-NDP coalition has been in power for eight years. There are eight billion people in the world. What have they been doing to try to get a market for redfish? It seems to me to be nothing.

Are you aware of anything this government has done to promote redfish to the eight billion people in the world?

Mr. Adam Burns: DFO's role is as a regulator of the industry.

Certainly the minister has directed us to undertake consultations next week to work with industry to understand its needs and what an appropriate total allowable catch for the introduction of this fishery would be.

Mr. Clifford Small: There are 70,000 metric tons of bait used in crab and lobster fisheries in Atlantic Canada and Quebec.

Has there been anything undertaken—some kind of process—to come up with an integrated bait management plan to help redfish harvesters and to bring down the price of bait?

Redfish works for lobster and crab quite well. Has anything been done to promote redfish as the number one bait in Atlantic Canada?

• (1555)

Mr. Adam Burns: Indeed, the department has been working with industry, provinces and others on options for alternative bait. I know that there are some redfish, certainly from unit 1 and possibly unit 2, that are currently being purchased and sold as bait.

Of course, the preference is for a value-added industry that would provide a greater economic benefit to the coastal communities.

Mr. Clifford Small: Mr. Burns, I heard you mention the 2,500 tonnes that were allocated for shrimpers.

How much per licence—per vessel—is that?

Mr. Adam Burns: The minister's announcement was for a 10% allocation that would go specifically to shrimp-affected harvesters.

Consultations next week will include a discussion around how to suballocate that quota.

Mr. Clifford Small: Is that, like, 50,000 or 60,000 pounds per vessel at this stage?

Mr. Adam Burns: We're waiting to have the consultation next week to understand how the shrimp fleet itself would like to see that quota distributed.

Mr. Clifford Small: That's obviously not going to work for that fleet.

What's your plan for the 4RST shrimpers now that their shrimp stock has been destroyed by redfish predation?

They're sitting there with \$2-million or \$3-million vessels tied to the wharf, just laying idle, with harvesting capacity ready to roll.

What's the plan for them?

Mr. Adam Burns: The department's engaged with the shrimp fleet, certainly, to understand what policy flexibilities might assist them in adjusting to the significant declines. Of course, the shrimp stock has been declining for a number of years, and some adjustments have already been made to the policy frame, but clearly more will be needed.

In addition to that, the minister did make the allocation of the additional redfish beyond what the shrimp fleet would receive otherwise, as they are all groundfish harvesters as well, so the minister's also made that allocation to help support their transition.

Mr. Clifford Small: In the determining of the unit 1 redfish quota allocations, what was given the most weight? Was it historical attachment or adjacency?

Mr. Adam Burns: The minister sought to advance a couple of key policy objectives in the adjustments to the redfish quota key, both providing an allocation to help shrimp harvesters adjust to the declines in that stock and advancing reconciliation. The specific distribution of those two quotas will be further consulted on, as I mentioned, next week.

Mr. Clifford Small: Is the sharing arrangement that's there carved in stone? What's the minister doing? Does she have any direction? Does she know where she's going with this?

Mr. Adam Burns: The minister has announced the fleet shares, and what we'll be doing next week is consulting on the suballocation of those fleet shares, how the fleets and the harvesters themselves would like to see those quotas managed within the fleet.

Mr. Clifford Small: So, those allocations, those percentages by fleets and groups, are carved in stone.

Mr. Adam Burns: Yes, the minister's already announced those decisions following a prolonged period of consultation that we started back in 2021.

Mr. Clifford Small: Was the PMO involved in that?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Small. You've gone over your time.

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

[Translation]

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

I'll probably have a chance to ask more questions later, but I'm more interested in the technical side on the first round.

Mr. Burns, when a fishery closes and then reopens, no matter how many years later, is the catch history of the various fleets still considered when it reopens, in most cases?

Mr. Adam Burns: Yes, that generally is the case. Certainly, for the redfish opening in Unit 1, it's really the first time in recent history that we've opened a fishery of this magnitude. So it's hard to talk about precedents in particular, but, yes, when we reopen a fishery, we use its catch history.

Mr. Serge Cormier: As part of the new fishing quota allocation, they considered who had a catch history when the fishery closed. Despite that, fishing quotas were still allocated to other fleets or groups, such as the offshore fleet or the shrimp fleet, which had no catch history.

Is this correct?

• (1600)

Mr. Adam Burns: That's right.

The redfish fishery was closed for about 30 years. So there were no fishermen with an economic dependence on the redfish fishery in Unit 1. The Minister therefore took the opportunity to further the government's objectives.

Mr. Serge Cormier: When did the first consultations on reopening the redfish fishery begin?

I think the shrimpers have repeatedly told you that they need an allocation that's sufficient to get them through the crisis they're experiencing in the shrimp fishery. During these consultations, did they tell you that they needed a specific percentage? Did they say they needed a 10% allocation, or a 50% one?

Mr. Adam Burns: I don't have that specific information on hand, but Mr. Sylvain Vézina might.

Mr. Serge Cormier: All right.

Mr. Vézina, could you briefly tell us if the shrimpers gave you any figures as to the amount of money they needed to get past the difficulties their industry was experiencing?

Mr. Sylvain Vézina (Regional Director General, Quebec Region, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): No, they didn't mention any figures. As you reminded us, they told us they wanted an allocation to get them through the current crisis, but no specific quota was mentioned by the shrimpers.

Mr. Serge Cormier: All right.

In terms of the basic quota of 25,000 tonnes that the minister announced recently, your scientists have said quite clearly that this number could increase substantially. If I've understood correctly, we're talking about a total of 80,000 tonnes, or even over 300,000 tonnes.

Is that correct?

Dr. Bernard Vigneault (Director General, Ecosystem Science Directorate, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): Yes, that is correct.

Mr. Serge Cormier: If the total allowable catch, or TAC, is increased from 25,000 to 80,000 tonnes, and then to 250,000 tonnes, the share allocated to shrimpers and other fleets could increase. We know quite well that shrimp trawlers are currently one of our fleets with the highest needs.

Despite the initial TAC allocation and supplementary allocations, could the Minister say that one fleet is at greater risk than another and that, as a result, she has decided to increase that fleet's share of the supplementary TAC a little more, given the challenges it faces?

As you said earlier, the new Fisheries Act that we passed grants the minister the power to take these measures. Might she decide to do so?

Mr. Adam Burns: The Fisheries Act gives the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard the discretionary power to decide on allocations.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Very well.

Mr. Vigneault, I'd like to come back to the shrimp industry. When testifying before us in 2022 on this subject, department officials stated that redfish ate over 200,000 tonnes of shrimp a year,

but that only 55,000 tonnes of shrimp remained. Wasn't this imbalance noticed?

The decline in shrimp stocks was blamed on climate change, which causes warmer waters, for instance. This is certainly a factor to consider, but why was the redfish population allowed to explode to such proportions? Why wasn't a decision made sooner to avoid such a devastating effect on the biomass and the shrimp industry?

Dr. Bernard Vigneault: Thank you for the question.

The nuance is that we don't have an estimate of the total quantity of shrimp present in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. We use an indicator whose variations we track over time.

Mr. Serge Cormier: All right, but according to this indicator, there were 55,000 tonnes of shrimp in the Gulf of St. Lawrence at the time, and redfish were eating 200,000 tonnes. Something was wrong. Math wasn't my strong suit at school, but that's easy to understand.

Dr. Bernard Vigneault: There is no direct link to estimate the total number of shrimp available in the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

Another important point is—

Mr. Serge Cormier: If there is no available indicator—

[English]

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

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

• (1605)

[Translation]

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

Quebec's shrimp fishermen were out in force last Tuesday. They expressed not only their dismay, but also their resentment and bitterness after many years of reporting the exploding redfish population and issuing reminders that this fish preys on shrimp. Although these fishers focused their economic activity on a single species, namely shrimp, I would point out that there was a plentiful supply at the time and that this had always been the case. In fact, those working in the field are able to observe things that are not always apparent in real time in government offices. So they were sounding the alarm.

I think what made them so bitter last week was that they had repeatedly said that the redfish fishery had to be reopened quickly before a critical mass of shrimp disappeared. Indeed, the redfish fishery is one solution being considered by many scientists to at least bring the decline in shrimp biomass under control.

It is now the end of February. It's just been announced that the redfish TAC will be set at 25,000 tonnes, along with a host of other measures, but fishermen are still waiting for the fishery to reopen and don't want to invest for such a meagre quota, because there's too much investment required, too much financial risk. Can you explain how we ended up in this situation?

I don't know which of you is best suited to answer my question.

Mr. Adam Burns: Thank you very much for the question.

We've been consulting with industry for the past few years to inform our decisions on reopening the redfish fishery.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: You talk about the industry, but were Quebec fishermen given the opportunity to be heard?

Mr. Adam Burns: Yes, they were. Shrimpers, and the entire shrimp fleet, also have groundfish licenses.

There were many points of view in these discussions, including those of shrimpers, who wanted this fishery reopened quickly. Many others told us that we should take market development into account, and wait until redfish were larger so they could be processed into higher-value products. Several ideas were therefore expressed and taken into account. During the consultations, fishing remained prohibited.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: I find it hard to understand that there were several opinions and that the department had to ponder them for several years. I understand that scientists from the Maurice Lamontagne Institute, among others, reported that the redfish biomass had gone back down. Yet this fish becomes cannibalistic to compensate for lack of food.

Can we acknowledge that we waited too long? Can we at least tell the fishers that we should have listened to them?

Mr. Adam Burns: I don't know if there are any scientific explanations as to why the redfish haven't reached their normal size or why their population is dropping.

Mr. Vigneault may have something to add.

Dr. Bernard Vigneault: We don't really understand natural mortality and the decline we're seeing now, given the absence of fishing. We began tracking individual growth in new cohorts in 2013.

Apart from the biomass we've measured over time, there are other factors. At the time, there was talk of having fish that were big enough to be made into fillets. Unfortunately, their growth stopped and it didn't match expectations.

• (1610)

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: If I understand correctly, a fishery is opened by allocating a very small quota. They promise that this is the minimum and that the quota will increase. Then it's divided up to allocate part of it to factory ships that have damaged the seabed in the past, but are told that they'll be the ones to go fishing. Yet we're not even sure there's a market, because we're not sure the fish are big enough. Meanwhile, a whole village economy is affected. I know villages aren't so important for higher-ups in government, but, in Quebec, an entire peninsula's economy is indirectly affected.

Have you considered the psycho-sociological effects of this decision on villages, a decision made rather late, at the end of January? Has that been studied by scientists?

Mr. Adam Burns: Socio-economic considerations were taken into account by the Minister in reaching her decision. That's why she set a new allocation for shrimpers to support them during the transition.

As I mentioned earlier, the total allowable catch has not yet been established. It will be, at a minimum, 25,000 tonnes. Consultations will be held next week and will help the minister make her decision on this TAC.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Desbiens.

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

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

Welcome to our witnesses.

My first question is for Mr. Burns. There was a letter sent on February 5, 2024, and we have a quote here from Greg Pretty, the FFAW-Unifor president. I want to read this. He said:

The Minister has very clearly failed in her responsibility under the federal Fisheries Act by not prioritizing social, economic and cultural factors as well as the preservation and promotion of the independence of independent license holders.

I'm wondering if you can provide some thoughts on that quote, and provide some further insights, please.

Mr. Adam Burns: The minister's decision indeed did move some of the previous quota that had been allocated to the offshore fleet and established two new quotas—a 10% allocation for shrimp harvesters, who are inshore and midshore harvesters, as well as 10% for indigenous communities in order to further reconciliation. The allocation key that the minister announced was indeed one that resulted in a greater proportion of the overall quota going to inshore and midshore vessels than the quota key that existed when the fishery went under a moratorium.

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

Do you feel that it's enough? I know there's been a change, but through the chair, do you feel that it is enough of a change to support communities, and just speaking to the concerns that are being brought to our attention?

Mr. Adam Burns: The minister considered a variety of factors in taking the decision, certainly wanting to provide quota to help the gulf shrimp harvesters transition to advance reconciliation, and also certainly taking into account a number of other factors based on the consultation the department undertook, the discussions she would have had. Based on all of that information, she made the decision related to the quota key.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

With regard to the 10% of the total allowable catch, which you just mentioned as being allocated to the indigenous communities, we heard concerns from the Qalipu First Nation about the allocation of redfish quota to offshore fleets. There are clearly some concerns that are being expressed by first nations. Are you hearing any of these same concerns?

Mr. Adam Burns: The consultations on the suballocation, including the suballocation of the indigenous quota, will occur next week and all of those views and all of that information will be used to inform the minister's ultimate decision on suballocation.

• (1615)

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: To be clear, is it correct that decisions have not been made currently on how that 10% would will be allocated to different indigenous communities. Is that right?

Mr. Adam Burns: Yes, that's right.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Another thing that was brought to my attention—and actually FFAW also brought it up in their letter—was about the research that's been done since 2018 on the fishing gear that's being used. Basically an experimental redfish fishery has been in place to collect important fishery data, such as capture of under-fish and looking at reducing bycatch and doing so in a more sustainable manner. I'm wondering how all of this research and ample information that has been collected over the last few years is being utilized in this process.

Mr. Adam Burns: My colleague, Todd Williams, may have something to add since he's the chair of the redfish advisory committee. Certainly it is being analyzed and is being used and we'll be using it as a basis for consultation on management measures next week.

Mr. Todd Williams (Senior Director, Fisheries Resource Management, Operations, Department of Fisheries and Oceans): That's exactly it. We have carved out time within the agenda next week for these groups to make that information known and to share that research they've conducted over the past number of years with the experimental fishery and their experience in the index fishery as well.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Has this information been shared with stakeholders who are expressing concerns? I see multiple stakeholders here who are concerned that this information is not going to be used in a valuable way. I'm wondering if you can share with me what you would say to those stakeholders.

Mr. Todd Williams: Certainly. Next week we will be holding a four-day meeting and half of that will be dedicated to hearing views from stakeholders and first nations on their experience in the fishery and their recommendations on fisheries management measures going forward. I can assure them that all of the information they bring forward to us either verbally at that meeting or in writing to us will be part of the record and we'll provide that information. We'll look at that information and analyze it and provide recommendations to the minister.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

My last question, Mr. Burns, is can you share a little bit more about how you feel this quantity of quota being allocated to the offshore fisheries benefits local fishers, local communities, and those

who are seeing this resource and marine ecosystem right on their front door steps being utilized for offshore corporate interests?

Mr. Adam Burns: The minister has made it clear that in terms of the greater than 100-foot fleet and its activity in the unit 1 fishery, her focus is on the fact that that fleet is indeed crewed by individuals from coastal communities in Atlantic Canada and Quebec, and that those businesses and the processing facilities associated with them are located in coastal communities in Atlantic Canada and Quebec so that the fleet's revenue and business activities do indeed go to support coastal communities as well.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Burns.

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

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

You can ask, but it never usually happens, so we'll see.

In 2021, I was first elected by defeating Liberal fisheries minister number four, Bernadette Jordan. Quickly after that, I wrote a letter to Liberal fisheries minister number five, Joyce Murray, on the redfish issue, asking about her plans. This was in late 2021 or early 2022. In response, Liberal fisheries minister number five said that they would make sure to do it in a way that licence holders, the allocation holders, could have certainty in the planning of their business affairs. That was in early 2022. Here we are in 2024. Apparently, that means we still don't have a decision on the TAC.

In 2019, Liberal fisheries minister number three was told that the science supported.... The estimate was that the stock was at 4,300 kilotons. Then, fisheries minister number five—I'm losing track of the numbers—was told it was down to 2,500 kilotons, a 42% decline.

What does the science say about why?

Dr. Bernard Vigneault: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the question.

We don't fully understand why there's a natural mortality, as you described. It's still ongoing. That's something that started four years ago for the deepwater redfish, and we started to see it two years ago for the Acadian redfish.

There are a number of factors, including the environment and the availability of their prey. We are doing a lab study to try to understand how much they are impacted by the warming waters, oxygenation and so on. That's ongoing, but we have documented that mortality—

• (1620)

Mr. Rick Perkins: In the five years between Liberal fisheries minister number three and Liberal fisheries minister number six—the current one—we've seen this massive 42% decline.

What has DFO been doing?

Mr. Adam Burns: I can take that question, Mr. Chair.

Certainly, for a number of years, we've been engaged in discussions with the fishing industry. It's true the biomass was very large and continues to be very large, just less so. The issue we heard from many parts of the fishing industry is that the individual fish size is very small. There would be no value-added benefit from that size of fish. There's a minimum size to fillet it, for example. Certainly, the objective of the industry is to find higher-value markets, largely international, in order to get the maximum value back into Canada. That wouldn't be achieved with fish that are extremely small.

For reasons we don't fully understand, this stock has stopped growing. Individual fish size is smaller than what is typical. We believe the individual fish are not going to reach a size that is largely able to be filleted. That is why the minister, in part, took the decision to open it now.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Now Liberal fisheries minister number six has reallocated 20% of the quota to the gulf inshore, so far, and said there will be at least 25 kilotons in the quota. However, the science, according to you and everyone else, says it should be at least 88 to 300 kilotons.

What is a sustainable level of fishery catch per licence-holder? DFO surely has done that calculation in making this change in the quota. What is the minimum sustainable amount each licence-holder needs to catch in order to make a living?

Mr. Adam Burns: That depends on the vessel, the individual harvesting operation and the nature of a particular boat. It also depends on the value-added markets that can be identified by that particular small business in order to maximize the individual value.

It's actually a very complicated question to answer.

Mr. Rick Perkins: In other words, you're allocating licences on a mystical TAC that you're going to increase sometime in the future, but you don't know what it takes when you reallocate the quota. You have no idea what it takes for somebody to earn a living and how much they need to get.

At \$25,000, I believe that absolutely no one who is a licence-holder can make a living.

Mr. Adam Burns: Mr. Chair, first, to make a point, the minister hasn't issued any new licences. The quota would be harvested by existing gulf groundfish licence-holders.

What I can say is that we are working with the industry. Some of the discussions will occur next week at the consultations on various management measures that would help the industry adjust and transfer quotas, in order to find the most efficiency within their operations. We'll also be consulting on suballocations, which is another way of saying the allocation of individual fleet shares to specific licence-holders.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Perkins.

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

Mr. Mike Kelloway (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): The role of MP Morrissey will be played by Mike Kelloway.

The Chair: You can't pull that one off, buddy.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: There's no way can you pull that off.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: I know. I'll try.

I want to stay on somewhat the line of questioning of MP Perkins regarding the economic viability of redfish replacing shrimp entirely as a means of income for shrimpers. That is to say, is there any amount of redfish that would compensate shrimpers for the losses due to the dwindling numbers of shrimp in the gulf?

Mr. Adam Burns: Again, it's actually very difficult to do that calculation. That's because of the variables that are outside the department's control in terms of market value and individual enterprise costs to operate, as examples. It's actually very difficult for us to do a calculation that would specifically identify the amount that would be needed to offset the gulf shrimp declines.

• (1625)

Mr. Mike Kelloway: That's obviously because of the size of the fish at this time. What are the reasons we can't, though? I want to unpack why we can't.

Mr. Adam Burns: First of all, the redfish market is underdeveloped. In order to find markets that will have a demand for this quantity of redfish...or this potential quantity. While I can't give you a specific number, certainly the quantity would be significant. These would be new markets that Canadian industry would need to develop and identify. Given the size of the redfish, the specific markets would not be at the higher end of the value range for redfish. It makes it very, very difficult to predict what that would look like in the mid-term.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Let's unpack another thing. Phase one is what we're talking about here. It's the 2,500 tonnes, to my understanding. What's phase two? Talk to us and the people who are watching. We hear about phase one and phase two. What is phase two?

Mr. Adam Burns: To date, the minister has indicated that the TAC for 2024 will be a minimum of 25,000 tonnes. However, she's been clear that she's open to a TAC that is higher than that. We'll be consulting on that next week.

Over the next two years, industry allocations will have occurred and market development will have started. Harvesters will have gone out and fished. Based on that, the minister has indicated that she would take decisions related to a longer term for the fishery in terms of a more mature fishery relating to management measures and relating to the overall value of the fishery and what a longer-term TAC might be able to be.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: This question is for anyone on the panel. During the last couple of years, I've met with a lot of different groups—inshore fishers, offshore fishers and first nation fishers. Some of those groups mentioned that they were working on marketing in anticipation of redfish being open and looking at investing in markets. What do you know of that? I'm hearing that, no, nobody's done any work on marketing anything. Everyone was just waiting around, sitting around, waiting for a decision to be made.

Clearly there was work by DFO on this, because it appears that there was work by fishers, offshore in particular. Can you speak to that?

Mr. Todd Williams: Yes. In fact, while our primary role is to act as regulator, we do indeed support industry when and where we can. Over the course of last year, we worked very closely with a major stakeholder to provide them with the information they needed, whether it was science information or fisheries management information, so that they could take that to European markets to explore the development of those markets for this product that they anticipated.

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

The Chair: You have 50 seconds.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Thank you.

Clearly, we have a lot of challenges. We have some good stories. Redfish is a good story. Then it's the allocation of where that redfish goes. Is it to replace potentially other fisheries? Maybe not. Who knows? Time will tell on that.

You highlighted this to some degree, but I want to get some clarity. When it comes to resources like shrimp, what is the impact of climate change on shrimp? We know that there are other things that play a role in the decimation of shrimp, but what about the role of climate change? We seldom talk about climate change around the table here in terms of its impact on the species.

The Chair: Give a brief answer, please.

Dr. Bernard Vigneault: Mr. Chair, it's important because, in fact, the decline of the shrimp started in the mid 2000s before we started to see the strong cohort for redfish. It actually limits the suitable habitat for shrimp across the gulf. Because of the warming of the temperature, the acidification of the water and the deoxygenation, they're all factors that have greatly reduced the area of the gulf that is suitable for shrimp. We have documented that through the years, and that's one of the major factors for the decline, along with other factors such as predation from redfish and other predators.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kelloway.

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

• (1630)

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Vézina, I'm turning to you since you're more focused on Quebec.

Have you ensured that the voice of shrimpers is heard within the Department? Have you managed to ensure that Quebec shrimpers are heard and that their point of view is taken into account in departmental decisions?

Mr. Sylvain Vézina: Mr. Chair, I thank the member for her question.

Yes, we certainly have.

Within the department, there are various advisory committees to oversee the management of the different fish species for which we are responsible. As soon as we became aware of the problems, we

held several meetings with industry representatives, precisely to exchange information.

We could inform people in the industry of the effects we were seeing, and they could provide us with information. As soon as we received that information, we passed it on to our colleagues at headquarters.

At the last liaison committee meeting, the major committee in Quebec that brings together all the industry representatives, the minister was present and she was accompanied by our colleagues from headquarters. She wanted to meet face-to-face with people from the industry.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Did you feel that the minister and headquarters, as you call it, considered your comments regarding the allocation of quotas?

Mr. Sylvain Vézina: Mr. Chair, I thank the member for her question.

The people at headquarters are well aware of everything that's going on and the problems affecting people in the shrimp industry in Quebec.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: So in your opinion, the decisions are sound.

Are the shrimpers happy?

Mr. Sylvain Vézina: Shrimpers are certainly unhappy with the decision, I concur.

In the current context, our mandate as regulators is to ensure that fishing quotas are set, and so on. That said, the information has been conveyed.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Are you concerned that the fishers—
[*English*]

The Chair: I'm sorry, Madame Desbiens, you have four seconds left, which is not enough time to ask a question, let alone get an answer.

We'll go on now to Ms. Barron for two and a half minutes or less, please.

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

Actually, I will let my colleague, Madame Desbiens, continue with her questions for my two and a half minutes this round.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: I am most grateful to my colleague.

Mr. Vézina, are you concerned for Quebec's fishers and shrimpers?

Mr. Sylvain Vézina: Mr. Chair, I thank the member for the question.

We're certainly concerned for Quebec fishers. The situation is not easy for them right now. On the other hand, there's no doubt—

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: I'm sorry to interrupt you, but I don't have much time.

Are you making the case to the government, to headquarters specifically, that these shrimpers are going to need help?

Mr. Sylvain Vézina: We certainly are.

We're providing information on the situation facing shrimpers in Quebec.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: They need an alternative.

We've been hearing about minimum quotas for a long time. Equipping a boat takes time and kicking off a fishing season alone is expensive. When you have to equip yourself for a new fishery, it's even more costly and complicated. Clearly, not just anyone in the business can get into redfish harvesting, given the quotas imposed on shrimpers in Quebec. That's dreaming in Technicolour.

What can you tell them about the future, in terms of ensuring predictability, to keep the economy going for the villages on the Gaspé Peninsula, for example? What can you tell them to give them hope?

Mr. Sylvain Vézina: Right now, all we can do is try to open the fishery in spite of everything. We're working very hard to ensure that the next shrimp fishery opens.

The redfish advisory committee will be meeting next week. That's another avenue.

We're also working with our colleagues in the various departments to see what can be done, since we don't necessarily have a specific assistance program for the fisheries. We're trying to see what solutions are possible by working with the various organizations.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Who's going to take responsibility for the disappearance of villages because fishing is shutting down in the Gaspé?

A number of fishers are keeping their boats docked. Who's going to take responsibility for that? Aside from the issue of climate change, is anyone accountable for this situation?

• (1635)

Mr. Sylvain Vézina: Right now, the important thing for us is to open the next fishing season and remain in constant contact with all the fishers.

We listen to what's going on and try to help them as much as we can with the tools we have at the moment. We'll continue to listen to fishers.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Do you lack tools?

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Desbiens. It's gone a little bit over.

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

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll start with Mr. Burns.

Mr. Burns, ministers of the department you were the ADM for have stated repeatedly that they are the ultimate decision-makers for the ministry and the department. Would you agree with that?

Mr. Adam Burns: The Fisheries Act affords the minister the discretion related to fisheries management decisions.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

In November 2015, the new Prime Minister released for cabinet ministers a guidance document titled “Open and Accountable Government” to set out “core principles” and directions regarding the roles and responsibilities of cabinet ministers and individual ministerial responsibilities, like accountability to Parliament. In that document, the Prime Minister stated, “Ministers should place a high priority on...supporting the essential work of [committees]. This includes appearing [at] committees whenever appropriate.”

Minister Lebouthillier has now been the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans for over seven months and has attended the committee once, on October 26, 2023. In that same period, this committee—which the Prime Minister directed the minister to provide priority support to—has been visited by Deputy Minister Gibbons twice, Regional Director General Wentzell three times, and you, as assistant deputy minister, Mr. Burns, on five occasions.

The Prime Minister's guidance to ministers also clearly stated, “Public servants do not share in Ministers' constitutional accountability to Parliament”.

Since February 6, the minister has declined three requests from this committee for appearances, which we passed unanimously with all members' support. We believed it appropriate to hear from the minister herself, because she is supposed to be accountable to this committee and to the Canadians we represent. My office was informed that the minister's office provided the committee clerk with no reasons for the minister's refusal to attend the committee, as we unanimously requested her to on February 6, February 8 and February 13 of this year.

I don't wish to be inhospitable to the officials before us today, but I suspect that in fact you might be thinking the same thing that I am, the same thing the Prime Minister's 2015 guidance stated: “Public servants do not share [the Minister's] accountability to Parliament”.

Every day, our offices hear from Canadian harvesters worried about their livelihoods in coastal communities: Canadians who depend on marine resources like fisheries, Canadians pushed to anger because they are ignored by the minister, as they were by her predecessors—five predecessors, in fact. The whole point of Parliament is democracy, and it should be the opposite of tyranny. I'm starting to wonder what we call a government that tramples on the livelihoods and the communities of the people it is supposed to represent and work for. How can this committee support better decisions and policies from the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans when she won't even show up?

I know that there are fires burning in the minister's portfolio that she was assigned to, but ignoring affected Canadians and their elected representatives only makes things worse. It seems that the minister is trying to evade failures of her ministry by trying to evade accountability and evade the elected representatives of this committee, who do in fact have valuable points to contribute towards solutions.

I want to thank the witnesses for being here and commend you on your unending commitment to being deployed time and time again as human shields for ministers who simply refuse to fulfill their constitutional accountability to Parliament.

Mr. Burns, I was astonished earlier when I heard you say in response to a question about what quota numbers had been requested by the harvesters.... This meeting and study are specifically on redfish allocation and quotas, and you stated that you weren't able to provide that to the committee. You came to this meeting knowing that it was what was going to be discussed. How do you explain not having those answers?

• (1640)

Mr. Adam Burns: My colleague Sylvain Vézina indicated that indeed a specific quantum hadn't been identified by that fleet.

Mr. Mel Arnold: I'll pass the rest of my time to Mr. Perkins.

The Chair: You have 13 seconds.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Okay, I have one question: When will it? When will it be set?

Mr. Adam Burns: Well, next week, we'll be consulting with the redfish advisory committee to inform the suballocation decisions, the minister's decisions related to the overall quotas...the allocation key has been taken and was informed by consultations that have taken place since 2021.

Mr. Rick Perkins: So you don't know—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Perkins. That's a little bit over time.

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

[*Translation*]

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

If we're going to want to argue about the number of times the Minister of Fisheries or other Liberals in that position have appeared before the committee, I would remind you that the former minister of fisheries Gail Shea hardly attended any committee meetings. We're here to find solutions.

I would like to address Mr. Burns or another official from the department.

One of the major concerns of fishers, shrimpers or inshore fleets is the return of large vessels to the Gulf. I think you know that in 1977, Roméo LeBlanc, who was the minister of fisheries at the time, prohibited the presence of vessels over 100 feet long in the Gulf.

How many large Canadian vessels over 100 feet long are capable of harvesting redfish in the Gulf of St. Lawrence?

[*English*]

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

We currently don't have a policy that prevents large vessels over 100 feet from fishing in the gulf. We do know that there are nine offshore licence-holders.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Do they own boats over 100 feet, yes or no?

Mr. Todd Williams: I would imagine, yes.

Mr. Serge Cormier: How many?

Mr. Todd Williams: I don't have the number on hand. We can certainly provide that.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Okay. Perfect.

We just opened a fishery that was closed for 30 years. I think we almost all agree that this fishery closed, in big part, because of this big vessel that was catching a major amount of fish. Are we agreed on that?

Mr. Adam Burns: I think the evidence related to the decline of the gulf redfish fishery is actually related to a variety of factors at the time in the 1990s.

Mr. Serge Cormier: However, they contributed, didn't they?

Mr. Adam Burns: Colleagues, do you have that science information...?

Mr. Serge Cormier: We're here for answers.

Look, let me rephrase it this way. We've been talking for years about a sustainable fishery, a fishery that would respect the communities more, that would benefit communities; and we're seeing that we're going to allow big boats again in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, something that the minister back then, in 1997.... Former minister Roméo LeBlanc said no more big boats in the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

Don't you think that with our objective of having a more sustainable fishery—you said it in your speech, we want to have more opportunity for inshore fishers—we should look very carefully at that and not allow those big boats to come into the Gulf of St. Lawrence, so we don't have another decline of this fishery for years to come?

Mr. Adam Burns: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the question.

Certainly the minister has addressed the issues related to the greater than 100-foot vessels and indicated that, from a conservation perspective, any risk of conservation concerns to the fishery will be managed as a result of the fishery being managed through a TAC and fleet shares that will be monitored.

She's also indicated that there is not currently a policy in the department related to these vessels fishing in the Gulf of St. Lawrence—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Okay, Mr. Burns.

I'm sorry to interrupt, but when Mr. LeBlanc made the decision in 1977 not to allow the big vessels in the Gulf, was there a policy at that time, or did he put a policy in place himself as minister?

[English]

Mr. Adam Burns: What I can tell you is there is no policy in place at this time.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Okay.

Could the minister prohibit large vessels over 100 feet from entering the Gulf?

• (1645)

[English]

Mr. Adam Burns: What she's indicated is that her focus is on where the economic benefits are going. She has indicated that as long as there are local crew onboard the vessels and that the vessels are contributing to coastal communities, that's her focus in terms of the fishery.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier: The shrimpers are the ones most affected right now, because their resource is almost depleted. We're heading towards a moratorium on shrimp.

Apart from the redfish fishing quotas that were recently allocated, are you already considering other types of assistance that could be offered to shrimpers?

[English]

Mr. Adam Burns: The department has been engaged with other government departments to ensure that the full suite of available Government of Canada supports is available to this fleet to help in their transition. Certainly we're working diligently to ensure that's the case.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Mr. Vigneault, I'd like to briefly—

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cormier. Your five minutes is up.

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

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

Thank you to the witnesses for appearing today. I appreciate your taking the time and coming.

I know it has been referenced, but we must reference yet again that there is someone missing at this table today who should be here. That is the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, who should be answering at this time of crisis to many who have been affected by the dwindling shrimp stocks. Their livelihoods are at risk.

This has been identified as an area of potential revenue generation for those who have been affected, as well as others who perhaps are in the coastal communities and are being affected as well. Throughout the region, it affects no less than five provinces directly.

I would like to know and get a sense of this from you today. Whereas we know that the most valuable stakeholders—and I believe where some of the most valuable input can come from—are those whose livelihoods depend most upon the fishery. There are no greater protectors and stewards of the future stocks in our oceans off our coast here in Canada than those whose very communities and the livelihoods of generations of families have depended upon the fruits of the sea for their livelihood.

I think the input, if I'm not mistaken, that's been coming from the harvesters and those coastal communities has been pretty overwhelming as it relates to opening up the fishery and expanding the amount of quota that can be given as it relates to redfish. I think what they're saying is, "Let's get on with it, and let's make this expansive and meaningful", so that it can become a way of helping them make ends meet at the end of the day.

How much consultation has the minister herself done with the harvesters and the coastal communities in a meaningful way, and how much has she listened to the provincial ministers of fisheries, who are very close to the situation and are certainly aware of the challenges they are facing? Can you provide us a little bit of insight on that, Mr. Burns?

Mr. Adam Burns: Certainly, as I mentioned earlier, I don't have a specific line of sight on the minister's day-to-day schedule, but I can say that I am certainly aware of a number of meetings that she has had in which redfish allocations have been part of the discussion.

In addition to that, the department has undertaken very robust and detailed consultations over a number of years. All of that input and those views have also been provided to the minister and have helped inform her decisions.

I will note that certainly the minister has so far not taken a decision on the total allowable catch. She has indicated that 25,000 tonnes is the absolute minimum she will entertain, and next week she will be consulting with industry on an appropriate TAC.

Redfish is an interesting species in that it has episodic recruitment, so it's not a regular cycle of new fish coming into the fishable biomass. Therefore, you have to manage it in a way that spreads out the harvest, because when you take fish out this year, they won't be there next year, and won't be replaced instantly through the regular recruitment that we see among a lot of other species.

Part of that needs to be taken into account as we make plans for the management of this fishery so that market development can occur in the context of the projected duration of this pulse of biomass, which is a decade or less. We need to consult with industry to understand their market development plans and the pace they would like to see the TAC grow over the coming years so that they can extract the maximum value out of this fishery as well to the benefit of those coastal communities.

• (1650)

Mr. Richard Bragdon: Thank you, Mr. Burns.

Just to follow up on that, I think you could perhaps provide some clarity. Could you summarize the input you're getting from the harvesters who are closest to it as to what they feel the quota should be? What is the input and what are you hearing in regard to that at this point?

I'm sure it's a much greater level than perhaps what we're hearing reported so far as the minimum. Can you give this committee an idea of what they're recommending, the harvesters themselves, those who could be impacted by this?

Mr. Adam Burns: Certainly to date we haven't had specific consultations on that. That is scheduled for next week. I am well aware of the views that have been expressed through—

Mr. Richard Bragdon: I'm sorry, but I have to stop you there, Mr. Burns.

There have not been discussions up to this point with those who are most impacted by this decision, and the minister has not yet meaningfully consulted with the harvesters about what the catch rate should be or what the amount of quota should be, and the government has just made a big announcement. The minister has made a big announcement, yet there has not been that level of consultation.

I would think that one of the first levels of consultation the minister should have undertaken was directly with the harvesters and those whose livelihoods depend upon the sector. There is something wrong with the fact that this is happening now or next week, and already announcements have been made.

We've got to get this back right to where the fishery and those whose livelihoods depend upon it are valued and prioritized when it comes to these big decisions. For far too long we've had study after study and report after report, but again, it seems like the voices of the harvesters and the coastal communities get ignored. I don't mean this towards you; it's frustration towards the whole system and towards the minister in not properly consulting with those most affected by the decision.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bragdon.

Your time has gone over a little bit.

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

[*Translation*]

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

[*English*]

If they want to argue how many times the minister was here, the Minister of Fisheries was here once already. She's only six months in.

The former minister of fisheries, Gail Shea, only came twice to this committee in two and a half years.

Let's get serious here and let's ask some questions.

[*Translation*]

Circling back to the redfish fishery, I'd say that some fishers were very hopeful, but some of that hope has turned into despair.

The redfish fishery is supposed to open on May 15, isn't it?

[*English*]

Mr. Todd Williams: Yes, that is correct. However, the fishing itself would probably not start until June 15 because of spawning closures.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier: As you just said, we don't know if there are any markets for redfish. We have no idea how people are going to be able to sell this fish and at what price. We don't know what they will be able to do with redfish. We also don't know if the fishers are ready to fish it. The shrimpers aren't ready yet, for example. Their boats are not suited to that type of fishing.

Even if the fishing season opens on May 15, do you think that the shrimpers—I'm talking about them because the big companies won't have any problems, in my opinion—even the indigenous communities, will be able to break even and make money when the fishery opens?

Mr. Adam Burns: Market development was based on the expectation that the fish would get to a size where it could be processed. Unfortunately, that wasn't the case.

However, I can say that we will be holding consultations next week with people in the industry. We will discuss a number of topics, including the management measures that will be in place to allow fishers to exchange their quotas and have them apply to vessels that will fish this year. Even if some fishers don't go fishing themselves, they can make money by selling their quotas to other fishers, for example.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Okay.

Let's assume the quota stays the same, at 25,000 tonnes. For every shrimper, you're looking at about 60,000 or 70,000 tonnes.

Do you really think they're going to break even with 60,000 tonnes of redfish?

Mr. Adam Burns: We'll be holding consultations next week to clarify how the fleet quotas will be allocated.

Mr. Serge Cormier: My main question is, do you know what it will take for the shrimpers and the licensed fishers to be able to break even and pay what they owe the bank? Do you have those numbers?

● (1655)

Mr. Adam Burns: Yes, I do. Mr. Vézina could give you more details on that.

Mr. Serge Cormier: I'm going to continue along the same lines. We're opening a fishery for this redfish, but they don't know if they will be able to sell it.

Have plant representatives contacted you to say they're ready to process this fish? Have you inquired about that? Are you going to talk to people in the processing industry to determine whether plants are ready to process that fish and sell it? Have they located any markets?

Have you done that work?

Mr. Adam Burns: Yes, we have. Unfortunately, the fish are not big enough to be adequately processed.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Why are we opening a redfish fishery then?

Mr. Adam Burns: The question was asked earlier. Yes, it is possible. Right now, the industry is trying to establish international markets for whole fish. Some of the biomass may be big enough to warrant processing the resource. However, the vast majority are not.

Mr. Serge Cormier: According to the announcement, the Quebec fisheries fund will help shrimpers modernize their equipment.

Is that correct?

Mr. Adam Burns: Yes, that's right.

Mr. Serge Cormier: In terms of an assistance plan, I looked at everything that was done in 1992 around the cod moratorium. Are you aware of what was done in those circumstances, namely, when the cod stocks collapsed?

Could we draw inspiration from such programs to help the fleets that are hit harder? I'm referring in particular to shrimpers or indigenous communities. There are also the other inshore fleets.

Mr. Adam Burns: I'm aware of previous programs. At the moment, our mandate doesn't cover that kind of program. However, we're working with the other departments to ensure that all the measures and programs offered by the government are in place and available to this fleet.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cormier.

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

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Burns, thank you for being with us today. I'll say it again, this is quite a complex study.

The leader of my party, Mr. Blanchet, my colleague Ms. Michaud and I consulted the fishers. For example, we met last week with people from La Fourchette bleue. The people in the fishing sector, particularly the shrimpers in Quebec and the mackerel fishers, don't feel that they are being taken into consideration. They don't feel heard.

In the House, I asked the minister, are we going to see fishery in Quebec slowly shutting down? I'm not talking about lobster, because the seals are eating it. So we don't know what's going to happen. In Quebec, the general opinion is that this can't go on. What we saw last week was a terribly discouraging outpouring of emotion.

In a perfect world, the fisheries and the fishers' know-how would be supported, succession and skills would be ensured, and a sustainable fishery would be preserved. As we know, factory ships have already diminished the biomass, and they will keep doing it.

Is the government open to supporting a sustainable fishery for owner-operators so that they can make a living, create jobs and ensure succession? Is that part of your plan for Quebec?

Mr. Adam Burns: Of course, that's part of it, yes.

When the Fisheries Act was modernized in 2019, specific regulations were established to manage threatened stocks. We also work closely—

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Some human beings are threatened too.

Mr. Adam Burns: I absolutely agree with that.

In addition, we're working with our scientific and resource management colleagues to develop ecosystem-based management policies that take broader considerations than a single species into account.

The objectives are to better manage the ecosystem, to better consider species interaction and climate change impacts, and to improve and better manage fish stocks during this period of ecosystem changes. This work is very important, and it better informs those who will be making fisheries management decisions in the future.

• (1700)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Desbiens.

We'll now go to Ms. Barron for two and a half minutes or less, please.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Chair.

I am going to ask a quicker question and then allocate the remainder of my time to my colleague, Madame Desbiens.

One thing I'm trying to understand—and this has been asked in many different ways by some of my colleagues—is how allocating to the offshore fishery, corporatising this fishery, will be of benefit of our moving forward with the sustainable fisheries.

We know that the inshore fishers, local fishers, are the ones who understand best what's happening out on the water. They're better able to provide the data required for us to be able to determine the best steps forward. They're able to provide observations like the size of the fish and so on—vital information for the best decisions forward. Also, they're the ones who are invested in the sustainability of the fisheries.

We know from past practices that much of the reason we find ourselves in the position we are in is the fact that we had those who were not invested in the coastal communities, who were not invested in the sustainability of local fisheries, making decisions that were poor.

I just want to get your thoughts on how to not repeat this pattern of behaviour where we are setting local communities and local fishers up for failure. Instead, how do we set up sustainable fisheries by using local fishers? Why are we not doing that here?

Mr. Adam Burns: The minister's decision did indeed transition some of the previous offshore quota to indigenous groups as well as the gulf shrimp harvesters.

The minister indicated that her view is that the important thing is that the offshore fleet is crewed and owned by Canadians in coastal communities. Certainly we collaborate and work with the fishing industry, whether it be small inshore vessels and the fleet representatives of those small inshore vessels or with the offshore fleet in order to undertake a variety of data gathering exercises and indeed full fish stock surveys, depending on the particular fishery.

We work closely with the fishing industry throughout the spectrum of vessel sizes and geographic locations on the sustainable management of the fishery. The observation that I would make on that is that all of the sectors are very focused on the sustainable management of the fishery and the long-term success of their operations.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Barron. That's your time.

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

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

I'm looking at the historical allocations here, Mr. Burns.

The offshore is 74.22%. I'm not arguing with your methodology or anything, but over here, I have a graph that shows 40% offshore in 1978 and 60% inshore.

The redfish quota is like a game of musical chairs. Is it a quota that's ever been structured between inshore and offshore? Has it ever been fixed and how did you come up with the...? History is history. It can't be a snapshot of one year—1994.

How did you come up with the historical allocation? If there was a number of 60% for the inshore back in 1978, that should be a factor in what you would call a historical allocation, should it not?

Mr. Adam Burns: The structure of the fishery certainly evolved over time. The minister's decision and the relative changes to the various fleet shares that were part of her announcement related to the allocation key that was in place at the time the fishery was put under moratorium in 1994.

• (1705)

Mr. Clifford Small: Okay. I just had to ask that question, that's all, because numbers are numbers.

When will harvesters know what their allocations are going to be? They have to gear up.

Is it going to be mid-June or July 1, like the northern cod announcement that comes out usually about that time? Is it going to be timely?

Is your department making strides to announce quotas and allocations earlier? I mean, in the last five or six years, it's been unbelievable how late the announcements have been coming out.

How soon will various fleets know how much redfish they're going to have for 2024?

Mr. Adam Burns: The fleets themselves know the percentage of shares that they'll be getting now, based on the minister's announcement.

The consultations will occur next week and the minister will take a decision, informed by those consultations, after that.

Mr. Clifford Small: You have 25% here, basically, for the mobile otter trawlers and the shrimp fleet combined, pretty much.

Is it possible that you could give them their full 25% of the maximum quota allocation, if some other fleet sector is not ready to prosecute it and this fleet is?

There's a market for bait, of course. This year I'm hearing talk of squid imported from Argentina being sold to Atlantic crabbers for over \$3 a pound. There are \$2-dollar-a-pound mackerel from Norway. This doesn't have to be, when redfish has been proven to work so well.

Is there any way that you can expedite the allocation for the inshore fleet to support their coastal communities?

Mr. Todd Williams: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for that question.

I think it's important to recognize that next week, we are seeking the views of harvesters. We know that some will be ready to fish immediately. We know others won't. We want to maintain flexibility, be adaptive and pivot where need be, and respond to the interests of those harvesters that are ready.

We know in phase one, there will be some adjustment from year one to year two, and then into phase two.

Mr. Clifford Small: Will it be an IQ fishery or an index fishery?

Mr. Todd Williams: We're going to look at a number of options, and I want to hear the views of those stakeholders and those harvesters to see what they have. It might be different based on the fleets, as well, and their situation.

Mr. Clifford Small: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Small.

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

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Mr. Burns, unfortunately, opening the redfish fishery may not yield the desired results because of what I was telling you earlier about markets and resource processing, among other things.

Will you commit to recommending other options to the minister to help the shrimper fleet in particular, which is the most affected, because of the decline in the shrimp biomass?

Mr. Adam Burns: Right now, we don't have the mandate to provide that kind of assistance. However, we're working with the other departments to ensure that the programs are available.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Mr. Burns, you are an assistant deputy minister, you have a team, and it is your job to do that.

Are you going to look at other options if the redfish fishery unfortunately does not go as planned?

Mr. Adam Burns: All I can tell you is that, right now, we don't have the mandate to establish that kind of program. However, we're working to ensure that existing programs are available to fishers.

In addition, we're working to implement the decisions the minister makes regarding the redfish fishery and the quotas allocated to shrimpers.

• (1710)

[English]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Mr. Chair, I'm going to give my time back to Mr. Kelloway.

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

How much time do I have? I have three minutes.

Let's stay with MP Cormier's line of questioning. We'll go beyond the economic assistance with respect to fishers.

Are there any tools or regulatory changes that the minister and DFO could put in place to help shrimpers lower the cost burden of their work?

Mr. Adam Burns: My colleague Sylvain Vézina could speak to that in more detail, but we've certainly been working with the shrimp fleet on various policy flexibilities that might be able to assist the industry in adjusting and adapting to the changes in the ecosystem that have resulted in this significant reduction in the shrimp biomass.

My colleague can speak in more detail to that, if you'd like.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Can you elaborate on that, please?

[Translation]

Mr. Sylvain Vézina: Some of the measures allow quota shares to be transferred to other boats. It can be as much as 100% of the shares, which makes each fishing trip more profitable. There's also what we call collective fishing. This allows a number of fishers to get on the same boat in order to reduce costs. Those are the main measures we're offering at the moment.

We're also listening to fishers. We're willing to be flexible, as much as we can, to help them.

[English]

Mr. Mike Kelloway: I lost a bit in the translation, so you may have touched upon this. On January 26, I think, the minister instructed officials to be more flexible with shrimp licence-holders, allowing them to twin up.

I'm not sure if you brought that up in your answer, because I lost a bit in the translation, but I wonder if you or people here, on Zoom and in person, can elaborate on that in terms of the practice and the benefits of potentially doing that.

[Translation]

Mr. Sylvain Vézina: Mr. Burns, would you like to respond?

[English]

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Please, go ahead, Sylvain.

Mr. Sylvain Vézina: I'm sorry. I didn't understand the question, so that's why I asked—

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Sure.

Mr. Adam Burns: I can answer.

Mr. Chair, we certainly have been working with the industry on what policy flexibilities within the management of that shrimp fleet would be useful for them because we are mindful that the harvesters themselves are better able to identify the flexibilities than we are. We are working on that.

I think my colleague did reference buddying up, where two harvesters can operate from the same vessel, thus reducing their costs.

Some of those measures have been put in over the course of the last decade as the stock has been coming down, so we're working with the fleet on what else might be of use for them this year.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

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

Mr. Rick Perkins: Mr. Chair, I'll start first with a question from Mr. Small, and then I'll come back.

The Chair: It's your time. Do what you like with it.

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

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

There have been some rumblings that the PMO directly interfered with this redfish allocation. Is that possible?

Mr. Adam Burns: I wouldn't be aware of such political discussions.

Mr. Clifford Small: Is that why the minister is not here today? Is it because it wasn't her decision and she doesn't feel like she has to answer for it? Maybe the Prime Minister should be here.

Mr. Adam Burns: I can't speak to the minister's availability, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Clifford Small: Well, that's what I'm hearing from stakeholders—that the PMO got directly involved in this decision and that the direction came down from the PMO.

I have a question for you. How much say are the NGOs, such as Oceans North and Oceana, having? They're coming out now and saying that we shouldn't fish this redfish. Do they have a seat at the table on this decision?

Mr. Adam Burns: Environmental groups do, indeed, participate in some of our advisory committees, and their perspectives are also shared with the minister and are used to help inform the minister's considerations related to the sustainable management of fisheries.

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

I'd like to go back to a question that some of us have been asking about timing. The officials probably have a more precise thing, but my understanding is that there's a sort of prime period—like for any species—for fishing redfish, which starts, I guess, in late spring to early summer. I don't know about the summer, but then there's another period again in the fall. In order to do the consultations that you're doing and to make the decisions that you have to on the TAC and the allocation per licence, will all of that be done so that there can be a spring season, or is the spring to early summer season gone and we're now really talking about a fall season?

• (1715)

Mr. Adam Burns: I'll just correct myself with regard to the last question. The environmental groups in the case of the redfish advisory committee are observers to that committee and are not direct participants.

In terms of the member's question, Mr. Chair, there are a number of considerations that will need to be taken into account in terms of the management measures to avoid bycatch, protect the spawning occurrence and so on. However, our objective and what we're working towards—and I see no issue with achieving that—is that there would be a summer fishery. The spawning closure isn't until June 15, so the first actual fishing opportunity would likely begin then.

Mr. Rick Perkins: It would begin then but not before.

So, do you think that you can get through the process you're going through, allocate the quota to the individual licence-holders, and then actually start the season in time?

Mr. Adam Burns: Yes. The minister would need to take the sub-allocation decisions, as well as the other management-plan decisions. That is the plan that we're working towards: to have the fishery able to be open for June 15.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Obviously, there's been some discussion of the minister's announcement on the allocation of percentages in terms of access to licences, 20% mostly going from the offshore to the inshore, to two different commercial groups.

All of this current structure and arrangement goes back to the Atlantic sharing arrangement—I think it was in the 1990s—when this was set out for redfish, was it not? How did we come to the stage where the allocations or the percentages are what they are? Now there's a shift, and we're having some discussion about whether that shift is enough.

Mr. Adam Burns: I can't speak to the specifics of the evolution of the quota key through the eighties and early nineties. I can say there absolutely were changes. There was the establishment of a fleet structure that occurred I think in the eighties, but I'm not able to speak to the specifics of that. But certainly by the time the fishery went under moratorium in 1994, there was the established quota key we're referring to now, with the offshore and the various mid-shore and inshore allocations, which is the basis upon which the minister's decision is founded.

Mr. Rick Perkins: We've always gone by a willing buyer/willing seller policy at DFO. If there are going to be more allocation changes, will DFO consider the willing buyer/willing seller policy or will that be disregarded as it has been with the elvers?

Mr. Adam Burns: In the case of the redfish fishery, it's been a fishery under moratorium for about 30 years—almost exactly 30 years I think if my math is correct. On that basis—that generation that has passed—there is not that economic dependence on this fishery, and so the minister did take the opportunity to advance some policy objectives, including supporting the gulf shrimp fleet. But to answer your question, willing buyer/willing seller remains the preferred approach in transitioning access to indigenous communities in response to their rights-based harvesting activities.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Perkins.

We'll now go to Mr. Morrissey for five minutes or less, please, or to Mr. Kelloway. Okay, it will be the "new Mr. Morrissey".

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Okay. We're back to me. That's good stuff.

I want to go back to some facts here.

How long are the consultations? We're getting mostly good feedback in terms of ideas, suggestions and recommendations from many members here. What's the length of time of the consultations that will help inform further decisions that will be made potentially by the minister?

Mr. Todd Williams: I can speak to that question.

Looking at consultations, next week there are four days of meetings in Halifax, the first two days focused on fisheries management measures, including TAC recommendations from harvesters, and the other two days focused on suballocations for those various fleets. We'll provide them another week for written commentary. The minister will be making a decision on the TAC, and any other key fisheries management decisions, to get this fishery operationalized and under way by mid-June.

I would just add that, of course, the consultation period does extend beyond that. For example, with indigenous consultations, one could not expect to start and complete these consultations within the next couple of months. That will continue on—again in time for phase two of the minister's announcement—in a couple of years, for those suballocations as an example.

• (1720)

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Right.

For those watching at home and for us here, who's being invited, who's being engaged, to come to these consultations to provide feedback from an offshore perspective, an inshore perspective and a first nations' perspective? If I'm missing other groups please tell me. I want to try to get this back into a facts box.

Mr. Todd Williams: Sure.

Over the past two years we've engaged and consulted anyone who has had a stake in the fishery historically or wished to gain access to the fishery, for example, first nations, which represents dozens of various groups. Those are the same groups that we're continuing to engage and consult with.

The terms of reference of this advisory committee are not yet established, just as the fishery is not yet established. The environmental non-governmental organizations are listed as observers. In some committees they are members.

We'll discuss that as a group once things get solidified in terms of that advisory committee. Provincial representatives are also there.

Our goal is to be inclusive, but to, obviously, keep it directed as to those who are most impacted by this fishery and have a stake in this fishery.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: It's more of a comment.

If you look at reopening the redfish quota, it's a pretty big deal. We've heard today about the need for consultation. That's also a pretty big deal. We have groups like the shrimpers who are having a difficult time and will continue to have a difficult time if we don't look at innovative ways to help that particular fishery.

That's why it's really important to get this information out from this committee to you folks, and also to inform the people who will be consulted.

Let's highlight that again. It's important to this committee to not play he-said-she-said. We need to know exact facts. There's too much at stake here with respect to a new fishery, which is good news, but how do we help other fisheries? That's where your consultation comes in. I think it's important to clear that up because there will be consultation.

A lot of thought went into the minister's recent decision, but there's more information to come and there's more feedback to be had. That's very important as we highlight what's been done, what needs to be done going forward on redfish, and the support and help for fishers—in particular, the shrimpers who were here today to talk about it.

I yield my time, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: You're close enough for me to cut you off. Thank you for that, Mr. Kelloway.

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

[*Translation*]

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

I personally made this request because urgent action is needed at home, in Quebec.

Earlier, you were talking about a collective fishing system. They take all the licences and quotas, concentrate them on three boats, leave all the other boats at the dock and go offshore to try to make the fishing season profitable, or at least get through a more difficult fishing period. That's one solution.

The other solution is to keep waiting on what we've been waiting for since October. We had the shrimp measurement data, and we knew that shrimp stocks were declining significantly. We're now waiting again for next week.

In our area, some fishers tell us that they would at least like to know the value of their licences. They say that if they could buy the

licences of people who are about to retire, for example, those people might be able to readjust their lives.

Do you think that's possible? Are you looking at those kinds of things?

• (1725)

Mr. Adam Burns: Currently, the department doesn't have a mandate for that kind of—

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Who has the mandate?

Even if there's no mandate, a crisis situation calls for creativity. We have to find solutions. Boats are being put up for sale, particularly in my colleague Mr. Cormier's riding. There will be some up for sale in Quebec too.

Let's be creative. That's why we're here.

Are you open to that at all? Have you thought about it?

I understand that this isn't part of the department's mandate, but we will have to find some mandates. Some people will be out of work and their boats will no longer be worth anything. They will no longer be able to sell their boats, they have no buyback value for their licences, and they can no longer fish.

I understand that fish are important, but people are important too. This has to be dealt with. These individuals have paid taxes all their lives, hoping to get some kind of service in return.

Mr. Adam Burns: Of course, we work with the other departments that offer support programs. We're working together to ensure that all these programs are available to people in the industry and shrimpers to help them during this transition.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Desbiens.

We'll now go to Ms. Brown for two and a half minutes or less, please.

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

Mr. Williams, can you explain in more detail your response to the first question I had?

I know you said that the process has not been undertaken yet to sit down and consult with indigenous communities. Can you please share more about what that process is going to look like, what indigenous communities can expect and how there is going to be an assurance that this is not, for lack of a better word, a tokenistic activity, but more of a deep, meaningful consultation with indigenous communities?

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

Indeed, that's exactly the approach we wish to take. We have engaged with first nations and indigenous communities over the past two years. Now that we have a set amount, we are in a much better position to consult fully with those first nation communities that have identified an interest in the fishery itself. In fact, there are several first nation communities that have participated in this fishery over the past number of years, either in an index fishery or the experimental fishery, and wish to continue in that.

We will be consulting them in a meaningful way, and again over the next couple of years towards phase two, to lock in those sub-locations.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

This is my last question.

We were talking about the closure generations ago. We haven't talked about the learning, but we talked about that process and where we are today. I'm wondering, without having to get into too much of the science, what key things the minister is going to be looking at to ensure we are not making the same mistakes of the past.

Can you share the top-level things that are going to be considered in this process?

Mr. Adam Burns: Certainly, over the last 30 years, the department has implemented a variety of policy frameworks to help ensure the sustainable management of fisheries. There's the precautionary approach framework, among others. In 2019, the Fisheries Act was amended to create the fish stock provisions. It places new requirements on the minister in terms of her management decisions related to stocks in the critical zone, in particular.

As I mentioned earlier, we are also now embarking on advancing work related to ecosystem approaches to manage fisheries. It will allow us to better take into account species' interactions, environmental changes and other factors. This is cutting-edge work. It's not an approach that is broadly used anywhere in the world. We are working on advancing that, as well.

All of those lessons and all of that progress mean we're in a very different place, in terms of our knowledge and ability to sustainably manage fisheries, than we were 30 years ago. Because of that, we are able to establish a much more robust management regime for this fishery and for other fisheries that will hopefully open in the coming years. We'll be able to therefore manage them in a much more sustainable way and for the long term, if possible.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Barron.

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

• (1730)

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

I don't think I'll need my full five minutes. I will share with Mr. Perkins or Mr. Small.

I will start by asking Mr. Burns this question.

The minister set a quota of only 25,000 metric tons while scientists recommend a maximum total allowable catch of 85,000 and up to 310,000 metric tons. That's less than 10% of potential TAC set by the minister.

Why is it such a low TAC?

Mr. Adam Burns: The minister's announcement was related to a minimum TAC. She has indicated she's open to a TAC higher than that, but wanted—

Mr. Mel Arnold: I thought you said earlier that the TAC had been set—that it was set in stone.

Was I mishearing what you stated today?

Mr. Adam Burns: The fleet shares have been established by the minister. That is the overall percentage going to the offshore, mid-shore, etc.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Would it be different from the TAC?

Mr. Adam Burns: The minister's TAC—the total allowable catch—would then be divided based on the fleet shares.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Even if she increased the TAC, the percentages would not change from what has been mentioned.

Mr. Adam Burns: The percentages would guide how the TAC is divided.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Guide, or—

Mr. Adam Burns: It would be how it is divided.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Would the TAC percentages not change?

Mr. Adam Burns: The fleet shares would not change. The TAC is the total allowable catch, which is the quantum of fish that can come out of the water. The fleet shares are how that quantum is divided among the different interests in the fishery.

Mr. Mel Arnold: It's back to my initial question.

Why was the TAC set so low? Was that to allow the minister leeway to potentially appease those who didn't feel they were receiving enough TAC?

Mr. Adam Burns: The minister hasn't set the TAC yet.

She indicated that the minimum would be 25,000. She directed the department to undertake further consultation with industry, including the processing sector, in order to inform a final TAC, which will be established following next week's consultations.

One of the concerns the minister expressed is processing capacity, which links to market development. It's the importance of ensuring fish isn't just coming out of the water and not generating economic benefit. We'll be working with the fishing industry, including the processing sector, next week to help inform the minister's final decision on an appropriate level of removals for this year.

Mr. Mel Arnold: I want to go back to other questions.

You were questioned about what the minimum harvest TAC for the sector or vessels would be. You couldn't even provide a range for that. Yet, you're able to provide a range of anywhere from 85,000 to 310,000 metric tons as a TAC. You can't provide a range for a vessel that makes it viable for them to gear up, hire crew and go out.

Mr. Adam Burns: The department isn't privy to the specific operating costs of a particular vessel. That's commercially confidential information that isn't shared with the department. We are also not privy—

Mr. Mel Arnold: Is nothing done in the economic department within DFO to determine any of that information?

Mr. Adam Burns: We have general data that would inform at a fleet level what different cost structures might be. In the case of the redfish fishery though, because the market is underdeveloped and what the overall value of the removal of the processed product, if it was processed further, would be is still unknown, it's very difficult for us to identify a specific quantum that would lead to viability for a specific fleet.

Mr. Mel Arnold: With the millions and billions that this department receives in the budget and the estimates transfers, I'm shocked that they cannot even come up with some of these numbers.

I'll pass the rest of my time on to Mr. Perkins.

The Chair: Mr. Perkins, go ahead.

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

I'd like to follow up on MP Arnold's question. I'm curious. Why, when the lower end was 85 or 88 kilotons and the upper end by science was 312, did the minister's press release not say there would be at least 85 or 88 kilotons as opposed to the arbitrary number of 25 that was picked. To me, that seems very arbitrary and totally unrelated to science.

I can guarantee you that in Nova Scotia the plants are ready to go to process the fish, so that's not a barrier. There seems to be a massive disconnect. There is this minimum of 25, and it feels as though it's going to be like pulling teeth to get fisheries to go above that even when the science is saying to do something much larger.

The Chair: Could you give us a quick answer, please?

Dr. Bernard Vigneault: Mr. Chair, I can speak to that question.

Basically the amount that science has arrived at is the potential removals in total for those three cohorts that we saw appearing, so it's not an annual TAC recommendation; and it's the maximum amount—

• (1735)

Mr. Rick Perkins: That's not what it says.

Dr. Bernard Vigneault: —of that biomass that could be removed so the stock would remain in the healthy zone. The different assumptions we're making with respect to natural mortality in part explain the two end numbers.

Mr. Rick Perkins: That's not what the DFO presentation says.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Perkins.

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

Go ahead, please, Mr. Morrissey.

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

Mr. Burns, it's no surprise that the redfish fishery would be considered for reopening this year. It's been a discussion point for a couple of years that the redfish stocks had recovered to the point where a fishery would be open. Am I correct about that?

Mr. Adam Burns: That's correct. We've been working with the industry for a number of years on the potential reopening.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: It's the same with the industry. There was no big surprise here. Everybody was getting ready. I was get-

ting lobbied about it, so the industry was certainly prepared on the processing side.

I believe you had an earlier answer about the shrimp starting to decline. When did your concern with the level of shrimp start?

Dr. Bernard Vigneault: The shrimp stock started declining in the mid-2000s.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: When exactly was that in the mid-2000s? Do you have a clear answer?

Dr. Bernard Vigneault: I don't have the graph, but it was in the mid-2000. Years before that we started to see the three cohorts of redfish appearing, so even at the time when the biomass of redfish was critically low, we started to see a decrease in our indices for the biomass of shrimp in the gulf, which speaks to broader environmental factors and not just to the predation by redfish as a contributing factor in their decline.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Okay, so successive ministers were aware that there were some issues with the shrimp.

Dr. Bernard Vigneault: Yes, and actually an example of the application of the ecosystem approach that we alluded to earlier was that, with the changing conditions in the gulf, there was a realization that our framework to assess was not valid, so we have reviewed the assessment framework to specifically take into account those environmental changes.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Okay.

Mr. Cormier, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier: I became an MP in 2015. Ever since then, I've been hearing about the massive increase in the number of redfish in the Gulf. I've been very critical in the media about Fisheries and Oceans Canada's work.

The Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development appeared before the committee a few weeks ago, and he said that DFO hasn't been doing enough on species recovery plans. The spring herring fishery is closed. The mackerel fishery is closed. The shrimp fishery is probably going to close.

What is your plan to help these stocks recover?

Mr. Adam Burns: In 2019, the Fisheries Act was amended to implement measures to ensure that species in the critical zone are well and sustainably managed.

These changes mean we now have a regulatory obligation to have rebuilding plans for prescribed fish stocks. I believe we'll have robust rebuilding plans for a number of fish stocks that are in the critical zone ready by April 4, which is just a few weeks away.

Mr. Serge Cormier: When are you hoping shrimp stocks will be adequate, as they were in the good years?

Can you give us an estimate? Will it take one year, three years, 10 years, 20 years?

Dr. Bernard Vigneault: Mr. Chair, I thank the member for his question.

Environmental factors and climate change are the dominant factors, so we don't expect Gulf shrimp—

Mr. Serge Cormier: That's what happened with redfish, right?

Dr. Bernard Vigneault: Yes.

We don't expect stocks to return to what they were in the 1990s, when they were at their peak.

• (1740)

Mr. Serge Cormier: That's why we're saying we need a plan to rebuild this species and other species, such as herring and mackerel, that are struggling.

Coastal communities are the ones suffering. I hope you'll get to work on this. That's what we want.

I'll give the rest of my time to Mr. Kelloway.

[*English*]

The Chair: There's 17 seconds. That's hardly worthwhile taking.

That concludes our two hours of committee business with our witnesses.

I want to thank Mr. Adam Burns and his staff for coming once again today and for actually staying for the full two hours to answer questions and participate in our study on the redfish.

We'll suspend for a couple of moments now to switch the meeting to just ourselves.

• (1740)

(Pause)

• (1740)

The Chair: We have some budgets to approve.

I know we did instruct the clerk to prepare a budget for the Yukon travel and submit it once again. We are past the deadline for submitting it, but they are prepared to let us submit it and include it in their deliberations with the Liaison Committee.

I believe that's for a budget for \$206,612.40.

An hon. member: That's expensive.

The Chair: Yes, it's expensive.

I'm asking for permission to submit that to the Liaison Committee or wherever it goes.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: We'll submit it and see where it goes this time.

There's a budget, as well, that was done up for the elver study. Is it the will of the committee to adopt the budget in the amount of \$1,500?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: All right.

Then there's the adoption of the redfish quota study budget, which is up to an amount of \$6,000. Is everybody in agreement with that?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: At our next committee meeting, of course, we will finish our study on redfish quotas with witnesses from organizations.

The deadline to submit your witness list to the clerk for the derelict vessels study is Friday, March 15, at 5 p.m.

An hon. member: Can you say that again?

The Chair: The deadline to submit your witness list to the clerk for the derelict vessels study—put forward by Ms. Barron—is Friday, March 15, at 5 p.m.

Mr. Perkins.

• (1745)

Mr. Rick Perkins: Can I ask you a question or maybe propose...? I know there's no such thing as a friendly amendment, but can we make the derelict vessels study include Atlantic Canada as well?

It's only British Columbia and the north—

The Chair: Ask Ms. Barron. She's the one who moved the motion. If she's okay with adding it...

Ms. Barron.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Chair.

I appreciate your bringing this forward because clearly there are derelict vessels along all coasts, including the Arctic and absolutely on the east coast. The reason I had it narrowed down to just the west coast is that we had agreement to allocate only four meetings, which would never be able to entail all of the information we would need to cover the east coast and the Arctic as well.

I would be more than happy to accept an amendment by one of my colleagues to add two meetings to the study to include the Arctic and the east coast, if that's the will of the committee.

The Chair: I'm seeing the nodding of heads to add the extra two meetings if we can for the derelict vessel study to include the Arctic and the east coast. Okay.

We might have to change the budget amount as we go. I'll come back to you on that.

I said the next meeting is on that.

We have Mr. Arnold.

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

I hope that this will only take a couple of minutes as well.

I would like to move the motion that was put on notice. I move:

That, the Committee invite the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard to appear for no fewer than 2 hours regarding the Supplementary Estimates (C) 2023-2024 and that this meeting take place as soon as possible, but no later than March 21, 2024

That is the deadline for reporting it to the House.

The Chair: For tabling it.

Okay. We've heard the motion. Is there any discussion?

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

I would also like propose, because the drafting instructions for the IUU study seem to keep getting kicked down the road, that if everyone is in agreement, we have them submitted electronically to the clerk by Friday, March 1. That's this Friday by 5 p.m.

The Chair: That's a bit tight, but I'll leave it up to the members.

Mr. Mel Arnold: We've had weeks to prepare for this, so it shouldn't be short notice. That's why I wanted to make sure it was presented today.

The Chair: Ms. Barron.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Chair.

I'm not opposed to the idea. I just want to see if I can get some clarification, through you from the clerk, around the process.

Do we need to have oral drafting instructions in a meeting? Is that part of our standard process?

Could somebody answer and clarify that for me?

The Chair: I'll ask Mr. Arnold to explain what will be done. I think it's the recommendations.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Mr. Chair, I'm sorry. I'll explain.

I'm not asking for clarification on the contents of the motion. I'm asking for clarification from somebody—either the analysts or the clerk, who are process experts—on whether it is a requirement that we have oral drafting instructions in a meeting or this is an appropriate process to move forward with.

It's more about the process.

The Chair: I think that's a decision of the committee. If the committee agrees to accept written submissions, it will avoid chewing up another meeting to do it.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Yes. With respect, Chair, I'm wondering if I could get clarification about that from the clerk or the analysts.

Thank you.

The Chair: Okay.

I'll ask the analyst or the clerk.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Geneviève Dubois-Richard): There's nothing in the Standing Orders that prevents us from doing it by email.

The Chair: Mr. Cormier.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Just to make sure, what do we want to do by email?

Mr. Mel Arnold: Submit drafting instructions for the IUU report so that the analysts will have them to work on while we're not here for two weeks.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Isn't this something we usually do in camera or...?

• (1750)

The Chair: We usually do it in committee business.

Mr. Serge Cormier: In committee business. Yes.

The Chair: It's up to the committee.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Can we come back to the next meeting with that, just so we can think about it, or do we have to...?

The Chair: Yes, it can be dealt with on Thursday.

I won't be here on Thursday. Mr. Arnold will have the chair. I have my medical procedure on Friday, so I'm going home tomorrow morning.

Mr. Arnold.

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

We should have all been prepared for this. It was on the notice of meeting for the February 8 meeting that we were to provide drafting instructions. I don't believe we're cutting anybody's time short to prepare for this.

I'm just trying to get some process under way so that the analysts can start working on a draft. Hopefully, we'll have a draft back to us in a reasonable amount of time when we return here.

The Chair: Mr. Morrissey.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: It was on the agenda, but we didn't get to it. In fact, we're over now.

We didn't have that fulsome discussion on drafting instructions. This is a very important study that covered a lot of serious material. I, for one, want a full discussion. I want to hear from my colleagues on the points that are important to them, that have to be covered in this study and that should be highlighted.

Yes, it was on the agenda, but we're five minutes over. We're now in overtime.

The Chair: Mr. Arnold.

Mr. Mel Arnold: I then ask that the chair set aside time in Thursday's meeting to ensure that we get to the drafting instructions on the IUU report before we go into a two-week break with only one week when we return and then another two-week break following that.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: I agree with you, Mr. Arnold.

The Chair: How much time do you think we need carved off?

Mr. Serge Cormier: Five minutes.

An hon. member: We would need a maximum of 15 to 20 minutes at Thursday's meeting.

The Chair: Okay.

We'll make 15 to 20 minutes maximum available at Thursday's meeting. That will give people time to get their thoughts together between now and then. They can be prepared and good to go.

I want to say thank you to the clerk and our analysts again today, and thank you to the translators.

I want to recognize somebody who's here with me every week, and that's my staff person Liam O'Brien. He just got accepted to do his Ph.D. at Carleton.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

An hon. member: He's going to cost you a lot more money when he gets it, too.

The Chair: No, no. He owes me too much now.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: He already has two master's done from two different universities.

Go ahead, Madame Desbiens.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: I just want to make sure we don't cut into our witnesses' time next Thursday.

I'm talking about the time set aside to discuss this. I wouldn't want it to interfere with the shrimpers' testimony next week or that of our colleagues' witnesses.

We could do like we did today and just—

[*English*]

The Chair: We would have to add time to do that. Today it was possible for us to add almost half an hour. We'll be able to look at that Thursday in terms of what's on the agenda, and if we can add time, we will. That will be Mr. Arnold's decision in the chair.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Okay.

I'm watching you, Mr. Arnold.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: All right. Done.

Thank you, everyone.

The meeting is adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>