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# Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

EVIDENCE

**NUMBER 103**

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Chair: Mr. Ken McDonald





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• (1535)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 103 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans.

This meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders.

Before I proceed, I 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 mic, and please mute yourself when you are not speaking. For interpretation for those on Zoom, you have the choice, at the bottom of your screen, of 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.

Before we proceed, I simply want to remind members to be very careful when handling the earpieces, especially when your microphone or your neighbour's microphone is turned on. Earpieces placed too close to a microphone are one of the most common causes of sound feedback, which is extremely harmful to interpreters and causes serious injuries.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted on February 27, 2024, the committee is studying the subject matter of supplementary estimates (C).

On our first panel today, we are welcoming back to committee the Honourable Diane Lebouthillier, Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, accompanied by Annette Gibbons, deputy minister; and Luc Robitaille, director general, budget planning and financial management. From the Canadian Coast Guard, we have Mr. Mario Pelletier, commissioner.

Thank you, Minister, for taking the time to appear today. You will have five minutes or less for your opening statement. The floor is yours.

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would first like to say that I am very happy to be here with you, colleagues, on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin

Anishinabe people, to present supplementary estimates (C) 2023-2024 on behalf of my department, the DFO.

In these supplementary estimates, I am seeking a majority of the funding for three key sectors of the department, a total of \$102.3 million. First, \$50 million will be allocated to the Salish Sea Initiative. That figure, which is carried forward from the previous year's department budget, will be used to establish an investment fund managed by indigenous people with the aim of providing long-term support for priority projects for the first nations, which seek to improve the health of the ecosystems in their traditional waters. Second, \$30 million dollars will be devoted to the increase in the cost of marine fuel associated with the Canadian Coast Guard fleet. This funding will enable it to carry out the activities planned for this year, including by supporting conservation and environmental protection programs and undertaking law enforcement oversight activities at sea. Third, \$11.6 million will be used to protect and promote the health of at-risk whale populations, such as the North Atlantic right whale, southern resident killer whales and the St. Lawrence Estuary beluga. If committee members have questions about these investments, my officials and I will be happy to provide more details after my presentation.

Before we do that, however, there are several points I would like to address. I am well aware that the members of this committee would like to talk about numerous other topics of discussion today.

I will start with redfish. In January, as you know, I announced the reopening of the Unit 1 commercial redfish fishery starting this year. Since this fishery had been under a moratorium for almost 30 years, I have to tell you that in the circumstances, this can only be good news. The first phase of the reopening of the commercial fishery will last two years. During that period, the redfish quota will be at least—and yes, I said at least—25,000 tonnes or more, based on the recommendations that come out of the meeting of the Redfish Advisory Committee that was held at the beginning of the month. I know there was also discussion of how the quota will be allocated among the fleets and measures for managing the fishery.

The department is currently compiling all of the comments on which certain decisions that must be made before the Unit 1 redfish fishery opens for the 2024 season will be based. While we are now in the very early stages of this reopening, I am sure that ultimately, when the industry has buckled down to the job, developed markets and strengthened its processing capacity, the redfish fishery will be a formidable economic development tool for our coastal communities. We know that between then and now there is work still to be done; that is why I have repeatedly said over recent months, and this is particularly true in the case of the shrimp boats, that the redfish fishery will not solve everything.

That brings me to my second point: the difficult situation currently facing shrimp fishers. First, allow me to express my full support for everyone who is affected, whether directly or indirectly, by the closing this week of the Fruits de mer de l'Est processing plant in Matane. I have to tell you that the closing of a fishery company is never good news, period.

As we know, the industry is facing multiple problems and challenges, and with climate change and the resulting heating of the oceans, everything underwater is in flux right now. The data presented by Fisheries and Oceans last week speaks for itself. The climate crisis is real and its effects are already being felt in our marine ecosystems. Shrimp has fallen victim to it, but other species will have to live with similar disruptions in the years to come. That is why a broader examination of the future of the fisheries is called for. We owe it to our children, our grandchildren and our great-grandchildren.

Just last week, I had a constructive meeting in Ottawa with representatives of the Association des capitaines-propriétaires de la Gaspésie, the Fédération régionale acadienne des pêcheurs professionnels, and the Fish, Food & Allied Workers. We addressed the difficult situation that shrimp boats in the St. Lawrence estuary and gulf are currently facing, and also the great importance of supporting fishers and processors in the region.

You may rest assured that between then and now, I will continue to keep open the channels of communication with the industry and with the indigenous communities and my provincial counterparts, in order to overcome, together, the climate challenges our coastal communities are facing at present.

Last, I want to talk about the eel fishery. As you know, I made the difficult decision last week to not open the 2024 eel fishery in the Maritimes and to not issue eel fishing licences. In recent years, the eel fishery has faced very serious challenges related to unauthorized fishing and impacts on conservation of the species, as well as threats and violence committed against fishers, fishery officers and other people.

I am perfectly aware that this fishery and the fisheries of other species are important to the economic health of our coastal communities. I want to stress once again that this decision was neither easy nor pleasant to make. However, responsible management of resources and public safety must always take precedence over everything else. That is why anyone who tries to fish for eels will be subject to law enforcement measures taken by fishery officers who are cooperating with other agencies to combat the unauthorized fishing, sale and possession of eels for export purposes.

Since last week, fishery officers have arrested at least 34 people and seized a considerable amount of equipment. In other words, fishery officers are doing their job: They are patrolling the rivers, facilities and points of export as we speak. Not only is it wrong to claim otherwise, it also encourages other people to commit illegal acts, which will lead to more arrests. Allow me to say that I find that despicable and downright irresponsible.

The department is continuing its work to make the necessary changes to the regulations and management, to ensure the safety and sustainability of the eel fishery for all fishers. The fishery will reopen only when these measures have been fully implemented.

On that note, thank you. I am now ready to answer your questions.

● (1540)

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

Before I go to questions, I want to welcome a colleague to the fisheries and oceans committee. I don't know if he's been on it before. I don't think he has, but he might learn something today about fish. I don't think there are many fish around his riding in Toronto, but I welcome James Maloney to the committee today. I remind him to behave himself here, or he'll get in big trouble.

For our first round of questioning, 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 welcome the witnesses here today, especially the honourable minister.

Last year, the logbook data for northern cod was not analyzed. When was the last time the catch rate data for northern cod, the per-unit data from the logbooks, was analyzed?

**Ms. Annette Gibbons (Deputy Minister, Department of Fisheries and Oceans):** We'll have to come back to you. I can't answer.

**Mr. Clifford Small:** I submitted an Order Paper question in October on fishermen's logbook data to get per-unit catch rates for northern cod, and they have not been analyzed since 2019.

I was told it would be all analyzed for the assessment. If you had four years and it wasn't analyzed in four years and it wasn't analyzed as of October, how is that data going to be available to be used in this year's stock assessment in three short months?

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** In the survey we're doing, we've had the science discussion, so—

**Mr. Clifford Small:** No, these are the logbooks that the fishermen take their time to fill out as accurately as they can, so why is that data not important to DFO? Do you not trust the fishermen? Do you not have enough budget with the doubling of the budget since 2015 and 50% more employees?

Logbook data that's four years old could have helped last year to give an increase in the quota, because the groundfish council wanted a 17,000-tonne quota and the FFAW asked for 25,000 tonnes, yet you're sitting on that data, not tabulated. The fishermen know, DFO people back home know, they tell me, that northern cod is quite plentiful, based on the catch rates.

Why has that not been used in setting the quotas since the cod came out of the critical zone in 2016?

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** Mr. Chair, we do use various sources of data to provide our stock assessments. I will come back on the specific question of the use of this particular data series.

**Mr. Clifford Small:** Last year, the vessel patrol days on the nose and tail of the banks were less than half of what they would be in a normal year. Will you commit to bringing those patrol days back up, especially given the fact that the northern cod quota could go to a level where you're going to give 5% to NAFO to give foreign vessels the opportunity to direct for northern cod again? Are you going to bring those vessel patrol days back up to the standard 500 days a year?

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** I have just come back from a tour of the United States where I had occasion to meet with the American coast guard. We gave mutual assurances that we would collaborate on protecting our borders from illegal fishing specifically. There is important work that will be done with the United States to protect our borders and protect ourselves from illegal fishing and vessels engaging in night fishing.

• (1545)

[English]

**Mr. Clifford Small:** Thank you, Minister Lebouthillier.

I'll turn my time over to Mr. Arnold now.

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

Thank you for being here, Minister.

Minister, your department was a funding partner of B.C.'s invasive mussel defence program that inspects watercraft at B.C.'s borders, but you allowed that funding to lapse last year, and that decision has directly weakened the most effective protection of B.C.'s waters against aquatic invasive species, especially zebra mussels and quagga mussels.

In 2022, your government supported the B.C. mussel defence program with \$475,000. This was completely cut in 2023, and for 2024 you've announced only \$90,000 for the program, a reduction of over 80%.

Why has your government abandoned B.C.'s invasive mussel defence program?

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** Thank you for your question.

I can tell you that Ms. Barron, MP, sent me a letter on March 7. We had announced additional funding of more than a half million dollars on February 14 for combatting zebra and quagga mussels. I think this is a step in the right direction, but we must continue to work together and do this important work to combat invasive species, which really are a problem all over Canada.

[English]

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** You must be aware of the costs in Ontario lakes. The British Columbia government did a study estimating that it could be up to \$120 million for the province just in annual maintenance costs. Why are you continuing to expose B.C. taxpayers to these permanent costs and damages that could be prevented with a strong preventive defence program?

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** We are working to combat invasive species and funds are being allocated to this. I can tell you that zebra mussels are found everywhere in Canada, in lakes, and even in Lac Saint-Jean.

[English]

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** It's not all over Canada. It's not in the western provinces.

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** Important work is being done on various species. I will let the deputy minister give you more detailed information.

[English]

**The Chair:** Time has gone a little bit over, Mr. Arnold.

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

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

Thank you, Minister and officials, for being here.

At our last meeting, the issue of the carbon tax came up, and I was hoping that word got to you, Minister, to give us a definitive answer on the impact of the carbon tax on marine fuels. What can you tell us about that?

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** Thank you for your question, Mr. Hardie.

On the subject of pollution pricing, you have been sent some very good information by our colleague, Mr. Morrissey, showing that the fuel used for fishing activities is not subject to the carbon tax. I really want to stress, as Mr. Morrissey did, that climate change is a major concern for Atlantic Canadians, Quebecers and Pacific Canadians. At present, we are experiencing the effects of climate change on all of the oceans on the planet.

However, as I said earlier, the fuel is not subject to the carbon tax.

[English]

**Mr. Ken Hardie:** Thank you for that answer, Minister. I hope that clears things up for the Conservative leader and a few others.

A number of us have been on this committee since 2015 or early 2016, and over that time I have to say that, as a group, this committee, with its various members, has been almost unanimous in focusing on the issue. The partisan stuff, of course, comes up every now and again, but the real focus is on doing what's best for our wild fish stocks and for the people who make a living from that and whose culture depends on it.

We have come up with any number of excellent reports with very solid recommendations. We have a concern that very few of those recommendations are ever acted on. I am wondering if, in your short time as minister, you've had the time to go back and assess the performance of the DFO in addressing the concerns that we've raised and our suggestions for how to resolve them.

• (1550)

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** Thank you for the question.

I want to remind all my colleagues here today that I come from the Gaspé. As everyone knows, my riding is Gaspésie—Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine. I live with climate change. The fishers I meet with, whether in the Atlantic region or in Quebec, on the west coast, or even in the Arctic, are all concerned about the consequences of climate change. Even for fisheries that are doing well, like the lobster fishery, I hear concerns from the associations and the fishers.

I take into consideration all the work done by the committee. That work is important, as are the recommendations you make. I want to tell you that the work you did on foreign ownership and protecting the master owner model is really important to me. I also hear on the west coast about the importance of restoring a master owner model, and on the east coast about the importance of giving that model more teeth.

The committee's work is thorough and is accompanied by important recommendations. In the work I will be continuing to do, I am really going to take those recommendations into account.

[English]

**Mr. Ken Hardie:** I would note that your colleagues up there have quite often been present and have heard, directly, our frustration that actions that we feel are necessary and valid are not happening, or certainly not happening quickly enough.

Minister, if you look at all the recommendations, all the things that we have studied or suggested and that have surfaced in terms of issues and resolutions, are the resources of the DFO sufficient to deal with those effectively and in a timely manner, on top of all the other things that it is also expected to do, like stock assessments, which in many cases are far behind schedule?

Does DFO have enough resources, and are those resources managed effectively?

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** It is important for the department to have the necessary resources, if only for the small craft harbours. This is an important economic development tool for the fishery sector, which must also be seen as a vector of economic development. In the Maritimes, for example, there are all the products of aquaculture, like mussels and oysters. We have high-quality products. The same is true on the west coast. It is important to work in a more coordinated way.

As I said, climate change is going to present a challenge in terms of food security. There have to be people on the ground who will enable us to do our work even better. We spoke about invasive species, for example. It will be important to look into that and work even more closely with scientists and people in the fishery sector to make the best decisions possible about catches and so that our products have added value. We cannot allow ourselves to engage in food waste in the fishery sector. We have to use our products in their entirety, in the best way possible.

Last week, we provided information through the media. All wild species in the world are in danger at present, and we all share the same pantry. Forage species provide nourishment for other species, which provide us with nourishment. Our government must therefore consider the fishery sector to be a vector of economic development that will provide an income for our people and businesses and create jobs. We have high quality products and we are capable of doing even better at our department.

• (1555)

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

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

[Translation]

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

Thank you for being here, Minister. I am glad to see you and your colleagues.

I think climate change is a catch-all excuse. We heard about the owner-operator model earlier. I can tell you that it is not just shrimp that are becoming extinct; owner-operators are too.

The fisheries are in crisis. In the Bloc Québécois, we obviously speak for Quebec fishers. The plants are closing down, there is no openness to the idea of licence buy-backs, the quotas are insufficient, and the proportion allocated to offshore trawlers is of great concern since that is what contributed to the decline in the resources 30 years ago.

Do you and your colleague, the Minister of Immigration, think that creating a crisis unit is an option to be considered in order to quickly remedy the foreign workers situation and apply measures to prevent bankruptcies? There are boats for sale but no one will buy them if there is no fishery.

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** First, I do not agree with your premise that climate change is a catch-all excuse. This year, we saw that there is no ice in the St. Lawrence River and the gulf and on the east coast, which is catastrophic—

**Mrs. Caroline Desbiens:** We have seen that coming for a long time, and investments in oil do not help to combat climate change.

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:**—and this year it is different. I come from the Gaspé and this is the first year there has been no ice, and it is because of climate change.

As you said, yes, species are endangered. That is the case for capelin, smelt, mackerel, herring and shrimp, and there will be others. The gulf is in a unique situation. We have seen the effects of climate change in Newfoundland and Labrador and in Nova Scotia, where the temperature has risen by 1.7°C or 1.9°C. These changes will mean that the gulf is going to continue to warm.

So I think the important thing is to stay in touch with the people in the fishing industry and find different ways of fishing. Some species are going to disappear and others will reappear, and we will have to know how to manage this. We are in a transition period at present. I think the important thing is to stay in touch with the sector and continue to work together.

**Mrs. Caroline Desbiens:** Thank you for your answer.

I agree with you on some issues. Climate change is not something new this year. We have been talking about it for some years, since 2015, according to Mr. Hardie. I am sure that we have been talking about it around this table since at least then, and that it has been much longer than that, in fact.

In reality, the department must be one of the first to have read about the repercussions of climate change we are seeing today. As a result, the word "predictability" is a fundamental, strategic word. It has to be at the forefront of what each of your employees in the department does. We are focused on it now, and we have the feeling that predictability does not seem to have been a factor in your department. We have seen this repeatedly on the part of the witnesses we have heard. I do not hold that against you, because you have not been in this department for very long.

However, based on the facts, I would reiterate that we are in a crisis. First, we have plants closing down. Workers are not coming in as planned. We have confirmation that in Quebec, the workers had been recognized and identified and were ready to come and work. We have to get down to this quickly, before more plants close. If that happens, it means people out of work who will not

even be eligible for employment insurance. It will be over for some of them in a week.

I think we are in a crisis. The industry is calling for a crisis unit that you would be part of, along with the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, owners-operators and plants. You could work together on how to respond to the crisis. I would like to have an answer, please.

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** I can tell you that I have been fully engaged in this issue for several years. You are entirely correct when it comes to predictability. I do not think there is shrimp fishing where you live, but there is where I live. As I said, four years ago, we were doing everything possible to keep the same shrimp quotas. I went through that as an MP. Quotas are part of the discussions I have had with the industry. Even though we listened to the industry, this year, we would have liked to keep the same shrimp quotas.

In the discussions I have on the ground, I realize that fishers are not necessarily aware of all this information, even though the associations receive the information. There is therefore work to be done on ways of collaborating so that the information percolates through the industry.

• (1600)

**Mrs. Caroline Desbiens:** I have ten seconds left.

Can I hope that we can create—call it what you will—a crisis unit, whatever, to get out of where we are stuck right now: the lack of temporary foreign workers?

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** We had all the temporary foreign workers we needed, and the Quebec government has made repeated requests, but we now find ourselves in a crisis because we are unable to bring in the Mexican workers to our plants, even though, for almost a year, the processing plants were prepared to bring them in over the next few years.

We know that the population outside our urban centres is aging. Where I live, the average age in the plants is 60. We even have workers who are 70 and 72 years old.

**Mrs. Caroline Desbiens:** My time is up, Minister. That has nothing to do with what I wanted.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madame Desbiens.

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

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

Welcome to the minister and, of course, to the department officials who are here today.

First of all, I want to acknowledge and thank you for bringing up the letter that I had sent to you relating to the questions that MP Arnold was asking, urging you to provide a detailed response to BCWF's urgent request to treat the problem of invasive species in British Columbia with the seriousness it deserves. I'm looking back at letters that they had sent around. I see November, December and February, and then of course my letter followed in March.

I'm not going to dig into it any more, because I have other things I want to ask, but I just want to ask this: Will you be providing a very clear response and plan forward to treat this problem that B.C. is now experiencing as a result of a lack of funding and a lack of attention that needed to be paid to it?

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** Ms. Barron, I really want to thank you for your question. I have only recently been with the department and I am going to let Ms. Gibbons give you the information.

I also want to tell you that I met the Ambassador of France last week. In Nice, in 2025, there will be a meeting on oceans and on the agenda we will be able to talk about invasive species and how we can deal—

[English]

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Minister, I'm sorry to interrupt you. It's just that I have other questions that I need to get to.

Can you just tell me if they'll be getting a response in the near future that clearly articulates the plan for it? I'd then like to move on to the next question.

I do appreciate the details, but not right now.

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** Yes, we are going to get you an answer in the near future.

[English]

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

Minister, I know that the Prime Minister had provided a mandate to your predecessor, former minister Murray, with a clear mandate to transition away from open-net pen fish farms by 2025. I'm wondering if you could please share whether this mandate has changed. Are there any updates on this mandate that I should be aware of?

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** Yes, I am very aware of the fish farm issue. Do you have another question for me?

[English]

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** No, I was asking if the mandate that the Prime Minister had provided for you to transition away by 2025 had changed.

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** As I have said publicly, I was in British Columbia in December, to meet with industry people. In the consultations—

• (1605)

[English]

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

It sounds like the mandate from the Prime Minister is still the same.

I know that the consultation process, and the ability to give input around this process, has ended. I'm wondering if you can tell me how many times the department has consulted with the Norwegian-owned companies operating open-net pen finfish farms in Canadian waters. How many times has the consultation process included those from these Norwegian-based companies?

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** We would have very detailed records of all the consultation phases. We're happy to provide that to you.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Okay, thank you.

Through an Order Paper question that was dated and received on November 2, I can let you know that there have been 52 times when the main operating companies Mowi, Grieg and Cermaq have all been consulted to date. The reason I'm asking is that I'm curious to know how many more times they have been consulted since November 2.

Thank you, Ms. Gibbons.

In a conversation I had yesterday with the Namgis chief, Chief Ho'miskanis—his English name is Chief Don Svanvik—he discussed with me a meeting that he recently had with the DFO lead of Pacific aquaculture transition, Andrea Cyr, where he, along with other Broughton Archipelago first nation chiefs, was told that the plan forward is a renewal of two-year to six-year licences prior to a transition plan even being tabled.

Minister, could you please clarify if this is accurate information?

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** What I can say is that we are currently holding consultations. In fact, people from my team are going to be in British Columbia next week. At present, nothing has been decided; we are holding discussions.

Personally, the way I work is this: I want everything to be on the table, I want to have discussions in order to get the best plan. It will not be a definitive transition plan, but we have to have a temporary transition plan we can work on before getting to a permanent plan, in 2025.

[English]

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

Are you aware of the renewal of licences for two to six years that is being articulated to chiefs in British Columbia?

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** Yes, I am aware of that. Last fall, we were talking about zero to ten years. At present, what people are proposing to us is two to six years. That is part of the discussions and I am aware of it.



[English]

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** I have one final question, Minister.

If the chiefs are being told that this transition plan for the open-net fish farms to be removed from the water is that they're going to be given renewed licences for two to six years, but there isn't a transition plan currently available for those who are impacted by these farms, can you see how a predetermined date of licences being provided can be contrary to a transition plan?

If those dates are already predetermined, how is a transition plan going to work?

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** As I said, it is incorrect to say that the fish farms are going to be closed in 2025. I said that last December. At present, we are working on a transition plan that will provide a discussion tool over the next year, and we hope to have a definitive plan in 2025. In the meantime, we are going to have to discuss the renewal of salmon farm licences. The final date is in June 2024. As I said, the fish farms will not be closed in 2025. That is neither realistic nor responsible.

Right now, we also have to discuss the issue of food security. That is why it is important to me that we hold consultations with the industry about fish farming, with the people who are for and the ones who are against, with the indigenous communities that are for and the ones that are against. We will have to look at the data with the politicians and scientists.

• (1610)

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

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

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

Thank you, Minister.

Liberal fisheries minister number four, whom I defeated in the 2021 election, did a complete moratorium in 2020, as you have done, on the elver fishery. In 2021, how much did poaching decline as a result?

Am I getting extra time?

**The Chair:** Your time is your time. You have to make sure—

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** I can't wait for interpretation for a minute. Come on.

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** Mr. Perkins, before answering your question, I would like to know whether you have taken the time to speak with your Toronto colleagues about defending the lobster industry, which is very important for eastern Canada.

[English]

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** I have limited time. Please answer the question.

Okay, I'll ask the next one.

Fisheries minister number five, your predecessor, closed the fishery 18 days into last year's season. After the 18 days, how much did poaching go down? It's a simple question. Apparently, it didn't go down after fisheries minister number four. How about number five?

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** What I can say is that 34 arrests were made in the last week and a half.

[English]

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** I asked about 2023.

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** I am talking about what has happened since I have been in office. Ms. Murray did a very good job of stopping eel fishing. When I see what is going on at present, I realize that she made an excellent decision.

[English]

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** Let's talk about that. There were 68 arrests last year during 120 days of illegal fishing on 300 rivers, with thousands and thousands of harvesters. How many charges were laid?

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** I am very glad to have gone to Portland, Maine, to meet my colleagues in Portland who have been working on the issue for ten years and determine the best actions to take. I can assure you—

[English]

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** You don't know the answer. The answer is zero.

The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again. The previous minister, number four, did this. It didn't work. Number five tried to end it by shutting down the legal fishery. It didn't work. Now you are doing the same thing hoping for a different result. It just sounds crazy.

You said in your opening that the legal fishery will stay closed until you have your regulations in place. Two weeks ago, in this committee, your deputy said that will take at least two years. If there is no fisheries minister number seven and you remain in place, is it going to be at least two years before this fishery opens?

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** I am going to ask the deputy minister to answer that question. However, I want to assure you that the fishery will be open in 2025. There will be regulations.

I hope you are going to defend the lobster industry. Honestly, it is really a shame for the east coast, the Gaspé and the Maritimes. Please, talk to your colleagues, since it creates jobs in the industry.

[English]

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** I think what's shameful, Minister, is that you're favouring the poachers over legal harvesters and putting a thousand families out of work, while bragging at the Boston seafood show that somehow you're defending the fishery, when all you're defending is the poachers. Also, the deputy didn't come here to testify. You did. I expect you to answer questions.

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** As I said at the outset and you very clearly understood, we are going to make sure we have a fishery that will be responsible and safe.

[English]

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** Mr. Bragdon, I'll turn it over to you, since I can't seem to get any answers out of the minister.

**The Chair:** You have one minute.

**Mr. Richard Bragdon (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC):** Minister, I have just one question.

Obviously, one of the primary roles of the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans is to hear from the stakeholders, the harvesters and those who will be most affected by your decisions. I think the input we've been hearing in studies and at this committee for a long period of time has been very clear. They feel like the government has not been hearing or responding to their direct input and advice.

As one example of that, over the last eight years, this government has hired no less than 400 additional HR employees and roughly only a net of 60 new enforcement officers, according to the conservation and protection program. That is an absolute indictment on the government and is missing the priority. Do you have any answer to that?

• (1615)

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** What I can tell you is that we have hired 101 new officers so they can handle protection.

[English]

**Mr. Richard Bragdon:** That's 101 compared to 400 in HR. I don't think that matches the priorities of the harvesters.

**The Chair:** Your time is up, Mr. Bragdon.

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

[Translation]

**Mr. Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.):** Welcome, Minister.

[English]

I would like to use the French version of "seals", but I'll stay away from it.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** I've always wanted to use that in parliamentary language.

Canada used to have a very successful seal hunt, and certainly that stock is exploding. Do you think Canada should support an ef-

fort to renew a commercial seal harvest? What could you tell the committee we are doing to begin utilizing that resource?

[Translation]

You can answer the question in French.

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** Yes, I am going to answer the question in French.

I am very proud to be able to talk about a species. We should not say it is a new species, because it is a species that was exploited in the past. Work is being done on this invasive species, which is what seals are. Meetings have been held on the east coast and a lot of work is also being done with the indigenous communities, the Innu and Inuit, who are in full agreement about exploiting this resource in a responsible way and, as I said, being able to utilize the product to its full capacity, since 98% of the product is usable. That will also improve economic development for women and indigenous communities. In addition, work has been done and meetings have been held with ambassadors, particularly the Japanese ambassador, and that work is ongoing. I think it is important to be able to talk openly about it. We need not hide, we need not refrain from telling it like it is. Some countries are open to the possibility of working together.

At present, in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, seals are like a fleet of evil, lawless fishing vessels that come to feed in the same pantry as we do. The objective is not to eliminate seals, it is to make them a new resource that will be profitable to the economy outside our urban centres.

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

[English]

Minister, one issue on the east coast, your area and mine, is the frustration that Atlantic fishers have when we close down the spring mackerel fishery and the Americans choose to adjust their quota to accommodate for the mackerel we don't fish. Do you care to opine on how you are going to approach that this year?

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** We are also going to use science. My objective is to make a responsible decision. As I said earlier, personally, I am not going to be more Catholic than the Pope. If we need to get a bit more information and have exploratory fisheries, I am open to that. We are going to look at what is being done in the United States and consider how to do things properly.

I want to let everyone around the table know my primary objective. The challenges associated with climate change and what is currently happening in the gulf call for everyone to work together to become architects of the fisheries of the future. We have to know how to give the next generation access to fishing licences. We have to reassess the Fisheries Act, and I congratulate the committee for its work on that subject. It is work that is important for all our communities. As I said, it is in the interests of our children, our grandchildren, and, I hope, our great-grandchildren.

• (1620)

[English]

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

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Morrissey. Finally, somebody went a bit under time.

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

[Translation]

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

Minister, this is about fishers in the pelagic fishery for mackerel, herring, shrimp, redfish and crab, and the processing plants. Things are going well for lobster, but it will be a problem if it gets eaten by seals.

In your budget, there are millions of dollars that come in part from our fishers' income taxes. Is there money to support the fisheries that are affected by all of the circumstances we see today, including the lack of predictability at the Department of Fisheries and Oceans? Everyone here has observed this. Is there a budget to remedy or support it, to improve the fate of all the fishers who are dying right now? It is very serious.

You seem to be saying that since I was not born in the Gaspé, I do not understand the ocean. Well, my father and my grandfather fished for 37 years. Don't worry; I can tell the difference between shrimp and crab.

Is there something in your budget to help these people? People are constantly shouting at me and both my telephones ring all the time.

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** What I want to tell you is that I am in touch with the industry. I go out to speak with them and I will keep doing it.

**Mrs. Caroline Desbiens:** The industry is not being heard by the Minister.

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** I am continuing to be in touch with the industry. Last week, I met with the union people. We will do the same thing with the associations. For me, this is work that is going to keep going.

As I told the people I meet with, having a licence is a privilege. That privilege provides the ability to exploit a public resource, a resource that belongs to all Canadians.

**Mrs. Caroline Desbiens:** And yet 85% come from outside Canada.

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** It is a resource that has to be exploited properly. There has to be market access. Can things be done differently? I think that will be important for the next version of the Fisheries Act and the work we have to do to preserve our future in the fisheries sector. As I say, we have to be architects.

**Mrs. Caroline Desbiens:** When is the next Fisheries Act going to be put into effect?

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** We have to be fisheries architects.

**Mrs. Caroline Desbiens:** Those are very big words. We look forward to it.

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** We have to have high hopes.

**Mrs. Caroline Desbiens:** We look forward to it anxiously.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

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

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

Minister, one of the recent times the department officials were here, I was asking about the British Columbia government, which is moving forward with some really strong actions around watershed protection. Now more than ever we need leadership at all levels of government to protect our watersheds, given the lower than ever snow and rain and worsening droughts. They're essential as we move forward with climate action, and I see you nodding and agreeing with that.

The NDP government in British Columbia is seeking support from the federal government to match the funds for a watershed security fund. A letter went out to your colleagues the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Emergency Preparedness, and I noticed that you're not included on it, but I will certainly forward it your way so that you are aware of it.

I was hoping to get your response on the importance of us having the leadership at all levels of government working together to protect our watersheds.

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** Your point is well taken. We have seen that there was little or no snow this winter and I think that is the case more or less everywhere. We are afraid there will be more forest fires. It was catastrophic last year.

It is really in our interests to all work together to protect our watersheds, in order to protect our drinking water as well. There are certainly concerns in that respect, regarding groundwater, and questions about how to best use the water in our watersheds that flows into our rivers and oceans. I think this must be done collaboratively.

• (1625)

[English]

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** If you can, review the letter I will send your way. Your colleagues have received it already. The letter is from all NDP members of Parliament in British Columbia, who are seeking support from the federal government to match the funding of the province and to see a path forward on this. Perhaps I can loop back to you and we can work together on seeing this through in the hope that your government can fund it.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Barron.

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

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

Mr. Hardie mentioned earlier the reports coming out of this committee, and it seems to us they're collecting dust. We've had the mackerel report, which was completed last year, and the pinniped report. You recently said, Minister, that seal meat would become the new lobster, so I guess you've been hopping on the marketing plan.

The report recommended a whole-of-government approach to developing markets. Can you name the government departments you've worked with so far? Marketing was identified as the most needed thing to bring back a viable sealing industry. Which government departments were they? Just name the departments, please.

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** As I said when I took office as the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, seals are one of my priorities—

[English]

**Mr. Clifford Small:** My time is limited. I'd just like the names of the departments that you've engaged so far in helping to develop markets, please.

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** I have had discussions with Mary Ng, Minister of Export Promotion, International Trade and Economic Development.

[English]

**Mr. Clifford Small:** I hope she's helping you out. She needs to.

Minister, when is the crab management plan coming down? The fishery in Newfoundland and Labrador is 10 days away. When can we expect the crab management plan in Newfoundland and Labrador waters? Is it May?

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** Soon.

[English]

**Mr. Clifford Small:** Okay. Hopefully it's within 10 days.

I want some yes-or-no answers.

With the budget cuts that were requested of your department—\$15 billion, to be shared among everybody—by Minister Freeland in the fall, will you commit to not cutting fisheries management science funding?

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** I will come back to you to be absolutely sure, because I don't want to mislead the committee. I don't believe there are impacts.

**Mr. Clifford Small:** Will you commit to not cutting DFO enforcement funding?

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** There is no impact on enforcement funding.

**Mr. Clifford Small:** Will you commit to not cutting small craft harbours funding?

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** We are going to tell it like it is: we cannot do worse than what the Conservatives did when it comes to budget cuts.

[English]

**Mr. Clifford Small:** Thank you. That's the end of my questioning. I'll turn it over to my colleague.

Mr. Arnold, have at it.

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** Minister, I'd like to inform you that at this point, zebra and quagga mussels are not all over Canada, at least not that we know of, contrary to what you said earlier in the meeting. We need prevention programs in place, which your department has been cutting funding to.

Why do you continue to ignore the threats of aquatic invasive species, especially zebra and quagga mussels, and the risks they pose to fish populations, including wild salmon, and ecosystems in British Columbia and western Canada?

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** As I told you on February 14, we have allocated more than a half million dollars to combat zebra and quagga mussels in British Columbia. That is a step in the right direction. Should we be doing better? Yes, and we will have to do so because of invasive species like green crab, sea lamprey and mussels. There will be awareness campaigns and work to be done with the public.

• (1630)

[English]

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** We need prevention.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister, for appearing before the committee again today. I understand that you have to leave after the first hour and that some of the officials are staying and a couple more are going to be added to the table.

We'll suspend for a moment as we switch out some of the panelists.

• (1630)

(Pause)

• (1630)

**The Chair:** Welcome to our second panel.

Deputy Minister Annette Gibbons and Mr. Pelletier are staying from the earlier hour.

I'd like to welcome Niall O'Dea, senior assistant deputy minister, strategic policy, and Doug Wentzell, regional director general, gulf region.

I don't believe there's an opening statement. There are just questions from the participants.

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

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

I'll be splitting my time with my colleague Mr. Perkins. We have the clock going, so we're going to keep it nice and organized.

My first question is for Ms. Gibbons.

Ms. Gibbons, is the logbook data that I referenced in the last round tabulated and analyzed for northern cod for the years 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023? It wasn't as of the end of November or mid-December.

It's been three months since I received an answer to my Order Paper question, which told me that the four years of data hadn't been touched. However, the same Order Paper question also told me that the data would be analyzed and ready to be incorporated into the stock assessment in April. That's no small feat. Is it done?

• (1635)

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** We do incorporate logbook data. I will need to return to the committee with the specifics of the use of this data series.

**Mr. Clifford Small:** Ms. Gibbons, last year I asked the minister's office what data they were going off when they set last year's quota. When they came out with it at the end of June, I asked them what they were going off, because they didn't have the trawl survey. They said they were going off the sentinel survey.

Now I know why. It's because for some reason, fishermen's logbook data is not important enough to be analyzed. Surely to goodness you have enough people and enough budget to get it done. Considering the fact that there was no trawl survey data to be analyzed, this is simply disgraceful and disrespectful to the harvesters who fill out those logbooks. Now you're coming out with a new electronic logbook system, when you don't even use the old logbook system. It's unbelievable.

Will you commit your department to tabulating and analyzing fishermen's logbook data in a timely enough manner so that it impacts management decisions in the upcoming seasons?

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** Logbook data can have multiple purposes. It is a compliance tool to make sure that we're able to track what removals are. It may also be used in stock assessments. It's not necessarily used every time. That would really come down to the particular approaches of the scientists in any given fishery.

I'm happy to return with more detail on that.

**Mr. Clifford Small:** I'm going to turn the rest of my time over to Mr. Perkins. Thank you.

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

I have a couple of quick questions.

The CBSA told us last week that there has been no ban on the export of elvers leaving Canada, which makes it difficult for us. Have you done any work with GAC or anyone else to make sure there's an actual trade ban on this?

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** We are looking at what measures we need, as part of the new framework for the elver fishery. Right now, we have the regulatory framework under the Fisheries Act, which requires possession—

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** There's no ban.

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** —of a licence at the point of harvest.

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** What's the minimum range, in nautical miles, that the Canadian Coast Guard requires for NAVTEX?

**Mr. Mario Pelletier (Commissioner, Canadian Coast Guard):** I'm not sure of the exact answer. I know we're working on updating our NAVTEX network, but I would have to come back. That's very technical.

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** Why has the Coast Guard chosen an old technology that can't reach the range of the new ITU standards?

**Mr. Mario Pelletier:** Again, we're updating the equipment as we speak. There's a project approved as part of our investment plan. I don't know the—

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** You chose a company that has old technology. It's not the new technology. It has limited range. It doesn't go as far as required. In fact, your tender says that you might change to the new technology in the future.

I've met with the companies involved in this. It's impossible to take the existing technology and change it to the new technology. You have to buy new technology. Why would you be spending taxpayer money now to replace a system with old technology that within two to three years, when the international standards are agreed to, will have to be replaced again? It's a total waste of taxpayer money.

**Mr. Mario Pelletier:** I appreciate your concern. We're going to look into that. I was not aware of that issue.

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** Do we have somebody on the ITU international council who's negotiating the standards? They have not yet been set, by the way.

**Mr. Mario Pelletier:** We are part of many international associations for standards, such as the international association of lighthouse—

• (1640)

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** I'm not asking about lighthouses. In this case, on critical, life-saving communications, is DFO on the international committee? They have not set the standards, yet you're buying new equipment that doesn't meet the new technology.

**Mr. Mario Pelletier:** I'll have to seek some details and come back to you.

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** Ms. Gibbons, just one more time, why isn't there a ban? How can CBSA do their job if there isn't a ban? They don't have to wait two years for regulations. GAC can issue an order on an export permit prohibition now.

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** I can speak to the Fisheries Act and the authorities we have under the Fisheries Act. I can't speak to other statutes.

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

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

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

My first question is for Mr. Pelletier of the Coast Guard.

It's been a while since the committee was updated on the progress of your near-shore Coast Guard fleet. We're well into that program. Could you quickly tell us how many new vessels have been delivered under that program and how many you have left to go?

**Mr. Mario Pelletier:** Are you talking about the entire national shipbuilding—

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** No, I mean the small fleet.

**Mr. Mario Pelletier:** As you know, we got the approval for the money just last year, and we made an announcement last year on the construction of the new near-shore fisheries science vessel, which is going to be the first science vessel that's hybrid in Canada. The contract was awarded to Forillon.

We're progressing on a number of—

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** Did you say it's the first in Canada?

**Mr. Mario Pelletier:** Yes, it's the first in Canada that will use hybrid propulsion, which is actually a huge advantage for science because it's very quiet, so it allows for the data collected to be very precise.

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** Okay, good.

What about the smaller vessels that are in a lot of the small communities around the west coast and the east coast? You've been upgrading those. How many have been delivered? How many are yet to come?

**Mr. Mario Pelletier:** The project was for 20 units. I think we are taking delivery of the 16th one, so it's going extremely well. Those have proven to be very efficient, and both the users and those receiving the service are very appreciative of the boats.

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

Obviously, the Coast Guard provides a very valuable service, not only to the east coast fishery but to the population in general, with the timely rebuilding of the fleet.

Ms. Gibbons—or whomever you want to direct the questions to—I have a series of questions, and you may have to get back to the committee on these.

Earlier, when the minister was here, we had a series of questions on small craft harbours. I would like you to provide to the committee the total budgetary expenditure of small craft harbours beginning in fiscal year 2016, up until fiscal year 2023, and how it compares with the eight years prior to fiscal year 2016.

If you can, please also do that, Ms. Gibbons, in the area of the department's capacity to provide adequate protections. The department provides protection personnel, and I want to see a comparison, because a lot of questions were raised about capacity. They did not want to see a negative impact from any cost reductions. I want

to look at the same period for the protection personnel part of the department and how it compares to the previous time frame.

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** Do you mean conservation and protection?

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** Yes. I want to know what the budget was and what the number of personnel was. Then, if you could get back to the committee on this, I want to look at the key science area of the department—what the personnel and budget allocation were in that period compared to the previous eight-year period.

Is that something you could provide the committee with?

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** Yes.

• (1645)

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** Madam Deputy Minister, from where you sit, you have to oversee a complex department with many regulatory challenges and challenges in the enforcement of the law on species. As the committee is going to review the Fisheries Act, what areas of the act could be improved to assist the department in its ability to better enforce the conservation and protection of various species?

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** I won't speak to—

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** Let me go back. Here's what I want you to focus on.

Numerous witnesses who have appeared before the committee have pointed out that the penalty is insignificant as it relates to the crime, whether it's for elvers or others. We've had fisheries become extremely valuable—the lobster fishery, for example. Sometimes getting caught is the cost of doing business, so it's not really a deterrent.

Since it's very difficult to have fishery protection personnel in every backyard, I firmly believe that the penalties and the implications for the person doing the wrongdoing must be much higher. In the time I have left, could you give me your opinion on that, since you're the chief administrative person in the department?

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** I think with the work we're doing on elvers, we've clearly identified an area where we need a more full-some regulatory approach than we currently have. It's not at the level of the act, of course.

In general, I would say the minister has a very strong focus on being adaptive in the context of climate change and the impact on fisheries. She thinks a lot about the renewal of the fisheries, the new generations coming into the fishery and the opportunities for them. You heard her speak about the owner-operator side and making sure we have the right kinds of controls that we need there.

Those are some of the priorities that I would say are top of mind for the minister and the department.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Morrissey.

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

[*Translation*]

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

Before getting back to the question of foreign workers, I first want to address you, Mr. Pelletier.

We have again received more complaints about harassment and intimidation in Quebec. I wondered whether that was not a result of the fact that people may not have understood. No progress is being made; nothing is happening.

A unilingual anglophone has been appointed to the Canadian Coast Guard. Maureen Kelly was appointed to the position of Marine Superintendent. That is a position that, my goodness, requires that she deal with francophones. Do you think it is reasonable to have a person who speaks only English in your organization when it comes to serving francophones?

**Mr. Mario Pelletier:** The person you are referring to works in Sarnia. She also handles coverage of Quebec. However, she has an assistant in Quebec who is also a superintendent, who handles personnel deployed in Quebec. She has another in Sarnia, who handles the same thing in Ontario.

**Mrs. Caroline Desbiens:** That person is bilingual, so he may be able to explain to Ms. Kelly in English what is happening in Quebec in French.

**Mr. Mario Pelletier:** I would add that Ms. Kelly has started her French courses. She speaks a little French, even though she does not have the required level of competence. However, she is committed to achieving that level.

**Mrs. Caroline Desbiens:** We see the same thing with pilots. The St. Lawrence pilots may now be trained by private corporations, which means without regard for the language of work on the St. Lawrence. The St. Lawrence pilots are very worried about that. I wondered whether you had such a disturbing reading of the situation, since the St. Lawrence is an extremely complex river to navigate, particularly off Isle-aux-Coudres heading toward Quebec City. I am sure I am not telling you anything you do not already know. The pilots have been sounding the alarm to me, and I wondered what your reading of the situation was, now that the St. Lawrence pilots no longer have any say about the quality of the training received by these other pilots, whom they are obviously going to encounter on board, with oil.

**Mr. Mario Pelletier:** We are not involved in pilotage reform, but I can assure you that our maritime traffic communication services all have completely bilingual officers who are able to oversee navigation, traffic, transit of a vessel and so on.

With respect to the reform of the Pilotage Act, I cannot really comment. It would be more up to the people at Transport Canada to do that.

• (1650)

**Mrs. Caroline Desbiens:** We will let them know.

Ms. Gibbons, I have informed the Minister frankly of my concerns, and I speak for the fishers of Quebec.

The fishery in Quebec, apart from the lobster fishery at the moment, is in the process of extinction. I know you have not been involved for very long and I also understand that the idea of pre-

dictability has been around for a good ten or 15 years. How do you want to remedy the situation? It has to be remedied, and I hope you want to do it.

I wanted to do a study on small craft harbours. We are chatting right now, but we will soon not be needing any harbours because there will be no more boats. We have got to that point. Do you have an idea of what budget might be allocated for support, licence buy-backs, or crisis units to bring workers in quickly?

Does the Minister talk to the Minister of Immigration? I ask that question because that minister says it is because of Mexico and the Minister says it is because of Quebec. I think that somewhere in the middle, somebody has to deal with this.

[*English*]

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** Mr. Chair, there are several things that I would say in relation to what the member has raised.

[*Translation*]

I'm sorry, I should be speaking in French instead.

Regarding predictability, we have a set of scientific data and data from surveys we do, as in the case of shrimp. We have been observing a decline in shrimp stocks for the last ten years. We have committees where people from this sector can discuss changes in the situation. Regarding specific fisheries, we are holding discussions concerning changes so that fishers are able to predict what might happen.

We also do a lot of more general studies. We have just published a study on the state of the Atlantic Ocean. We produce various reports every year on the oceans that border our three coasts. The report we have just published talks about temperature trends in the Atlantic. So that is another route for the industry to obtain information—

**Mrs. Caroline Desbiens:** Ms. Gibbons, I have to interrupt you, since I have only one minute left.

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** Okay.

**Mrs. Caroline Desbiens:** I would like to ask this other question: in your budgets, are you going to release a certain amount of money in order to be able to offer financial support to the fishers who are affected right now, through licence buy-backs or other measures?

All these families are heading for the wall. While I do not want to engage in populism as my neighbours do, there are children, young people, huge numbers of families who will be affected by this, which means the economy of the Gaspé Peninsula is mortgaged to the hilt.

Since we are talking about budgets today, I want to ask you whether any support is provided in your budgets to remedy the situation in the short term, that is, before the studies and consultations, which take a huge amount of time, are finished. We have time to close all the plants and see all the boats beached if something is not done quickly. Do you understand?

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** As the Minister said when she was here, she had discussions with people in the industry last week. She said she was going to come back.

I can provide another detail about fisheries funds, for adaptation in the fisheries sector, both for processors and for fishers. That is something the Minister said. Funds will be available for purposes that include transition from the shrimp fishery to the redfish fishery.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madame Desbiens.

We will now go to Ms. Barron for six minutes or less, please.

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

My first question is for Ms. Gibbons.

As you know, we conducted a study recently with the Great Lakes Fishery Commission, and I wanted to do a follow up on that. The committee recently conducted a study looking at the allocation of resources to the Great Lakes Fishery Commission. As you know, the commission has been paralyzed, for lack of a better word, around uncertainty of funding.

I know that the funding has been allocated, but my question is about one of the recommendations that came forward as a result of this study, which is that the portfolio management responsibilities and machinery of government functions for the Great Lakes Fishery Commission be transferred from DFO to Global Affairs Canada. As far as I know, the Great Lakes Fishery Commission has not received a clear response on this. I don't think we've received a clear response as a committee as to the status of this transfer.

Can you please provide an update?

• (1655)

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** Mr. Chair, I'll respond in two parts.

First, on the budget funding, we do have a memorandum of understanding with the GLFC now—since November, I believe—and we've had a lot of very constructive discussions in recent months to make sure that we have a good, strong working relationship with the commission and the commissioners. I think much progress has been made there.

On your particular question around a transfer of the mandate from DFO to Global Affairs, that really is a machinery of government issue and not within the purview of DFO.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Ms. Gibbons, just to follow up on that, because we did look at it extensively, what would you recommend to the Great Lakes Fishery Commission and also to the committee members, who had this as recommendation number eight? What would you recommend then as the next steps to see this happen?

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** This is something that is well understood within DFO and Global Affairs. We've engaged with Global Affairs on it.

At the end of the day, machinery of government decisions are the prerogative of the Prime Minister, so I don't really have any specific recommendation for you. It is not really part of my remit to do anything to move that forward.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Would the question be better posed to the minister?

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** You would have the same response from the minister. It really is outside of DFO's—

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Okay. Well, somebody has to be able to make it happen. Perhaps the minister can apply the pressure necessary to the Prime Minister to see this move in the right direction.

Ms. Gibbons, perhaps you could provide some clarity. In my questions to the minister—and we all wish as MPs that we had more time with the minister to be able to fully understand—one thing I was confused by was the consultation process happening with the open-net pen fish farms out of the water, and what that looks like in terms of the consultation process.

My understanding of the dates, I think, is different from the minister's, so perhaps you can provide some clarity. My understanding was that March 8 was the deadline for consultations around two-year to six-year licence extensions, that March 15 was the end of consultations for phase four of the transition planning process in total, and that the current licence will expire for all....

Can you clarify, please? Provide some clarification on these dates and how far we are with the consultation process. I didn't get that clarity.

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** Mr. Chair, there are really two separate consultation processes. Obviously, they're linked, because they're dealing with salmon farms.

The transition plan is about the future direction for the industry writ large, for the sector and what we do. The government's commitment was around transitioning away from open-net pen farms.

The licence renewals are the specific permits that allow particular activities to happen at particular sites. From a legal regulatory perspective, we need to treat those as distinct activities and to consult on them. That is why we have two different consultation exercises going on, and two different dates.

The phase four consultations refer to the transition plan consultations. The licence renewal consultations are distinct. Obviously, we're talking to the same people, but we're talking about the licence renewals separately from the transition plan.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** What I'm hearing are concerns from indigenous chiefs and from members of the community that there is a discussion that it's going to be an extension of licences on the higher end of that spectrum of two to six years. It presupposes, I guess, what that transition plan will look like. Can you see...? Using logic here, if we put a licence in place for six years, again, that's going to provide the framework of what that transition plan is going to look like. It should be the other way around. That's a concern that's being brought to my attention.

Can you speak to that, please?



• (1700)

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** Yes. We've heard a variety of views on this issue. As the minister noted, there are different perspectives on licence renewals, just as there are different perspectives on the transition, the future of the sector and how it is regulated. As she noted, she heard about one year to 10 years. It's quite the spectrum. The range settled on for consultation purposes for the licence renewals was two to six years.

There is no decision at this point on what the licence renewal period will be. That is the purpose of the consultation. We gave a band so that people would have something specific to react to.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Barron.

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

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

I regret that our time is so short here, but since we are discussing estimates, I have a motion to move regarding estimates. It reads as follows:

That, the committee invite the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard to appear for no fewer than two hours regarding the 2024-25 Main Estimates and that this meeting take place as soon as possible, but no later than April 12, 2024.

That motion is being sent to the clerk right now for distribution. It's simply another invitation for the minister to appear on the main estimates before the budget is released.

**The Chair:** Mr. Kelloway, go ahead.

**Mr. Mike Kelloway (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.):** I'm wondering if we could have a few moments, maybe two minutes, for us to chat over here. Perhaps we could suspend for two or three minutes.

**The Chair:** Okay, we can suspend for a couple of minutes to allow some conversations to take place.

• (1700)

(Pause)

• (1705)

**The Chair:** We're back.

We have a motion on the floor.

I don't know if there are any comments.

We'll go to Mr. Morrissey.

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** I thought that at the last meeting we agreed for the subcommittee to hash out an agenda going forward that we'd stick to. Now we have somebody coming, and the minister was just here. That's my point. That was the whole debate that we had here. Was that at Tuesday's meeting? What meeting was it, about the subcommittee? Our agenda was pretty jammed with a host of studies and reports that hadn't been dealt with. This would be another two-hour meeting. If it went ahead, it would occur, I believe, before the budget even comes down.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Small.

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

With all due respect to Mr. Morrissey, this committee is basically the only outlet in Ottawa that gives any voice at all to the fishing industry. The stakeholders would love nothing more than to hear

from the minister. I must say, she doesn't need anyone to carry her water for her. She's quite capable of throwing her own smacks.

I think there's no better use of committee time than to have the minister here defending her decisions and maybe enlightening us on why she made some of her decisions.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Mr. Arnold, go ahead.

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** I hear Mr. Morrissey. If we can pass this motion, then it can be forwarded to the subcommittee as part of that discussion on what we're going to study as a committee. I think that, by having it there in the mix, we can determine further if it's valid to have her.

It is traditional that we invite the minister on the main estimates, so I don't think there's anything out of the ordinary here.

Thank you.

• (1710)

**The Chair:** You're next, Ms. Barron.

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

I just wanted to speak in favour of this motion. I was the mover of the motion to have a subcommittee meeting—

[Translation]

**Mrs. Caroline Desbiens:** Mr. Chair, I am sorry, but I am not getting the interpretation.

[English]

**The Chair:** Please hang on a second, Ms. Barron. I'm getting translation from English to French in my ear, and I can't understand a word that you're saying.

Okay, now there's no problem.

Ms. Barron, could you start again, please?

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

I feel like it's always a good opportunity to acknowledge the incredible work of the interpreters. Thank you for everything you're doing.

I want to speak in favour of this motion. Any opportunity to get the minister here and to be able to ask her the very important questions that we have is a good opportunity. As the mover of the motion for the subcommittee, I want to reiterate that. Absolutely, we need to have a subcommittee meeting to ensure that we're all on the same page around our priorities as a committee, but I will always make room for the minister to come. That is a priority. I wanted to make my voice heard on that.

Thank you, Chair.

**The Chair:** Mr. Perkins, you have the floor.

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** I have a quick comment, which is unusual for me. I thought I'd save it for you.

I just want to remind everyone that estimates take precedence over everything. Estimates are the priority over government legislation, private legislation or anything else we're doing, so when a motion is moved to have a minister come on estimates, then I think it's for the committee to put that in. It's over government legislation.

This is to make sure that that's the priority and that everyone knows that, because when I got here, I certainly wasn't aware of that.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Hardie.

**Mr. Ken Hardie:** I think the motion is a little aspirational in terms of the timing requested, particularly because the budget isn't going to come down until the 16th, and the minister may or may not be able to attend. We can pass it, but in the knowledge that the timing we're requesting may be subject to change.

**The Chair:** Mr. Kelloway.

**Mr. Mike Kelloway:** I think I may be the last person speaking to this, by the looks of it.

It was mentioned that the minister doesn't need anyone to hold her water. You bet your bottom dollar she doesn't. She'll come to speak to the main estimates.

To MP Hardie's point, whether it's on the 12th or somewhere around that time frame, I think we all believe it's important for the minister to come to speak to that. She came here today for an hour. The main estimates are a key point of government, of the ministry and of the department in terms of funding, what we do and do well.

I would like to go back, if I can, to Mr. Arnold. He touched upon the motion and passing the motion with—I don't want to put words in his mouth—some flexibility. Would that be fair to say? If it's not the 12th, let's say sometime in April. Is that doable?

I want to make sure that we are concrete on what our asks are so we can plan accordingly. As MP Barron said, we're going to have a subcommittee meeting to give, I think, greater direction to where we go.

Maybe we could go through you, Mr. Chair, to Mr. Arnold in terms of what I think I heard. I want to make sure that's accurate.

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** The motion is to invite the minister. We're not summoning her. We're not demanding. We're inviting her to appear, and inviting her to appear no later than April 12.

**The Chair:** Mr. Bragdon.

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

I think we can move to a vote quite quickly on this, if it's needed or required.

Let's go to the vote.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0)

**The Chair:** We'll get that letter off to the minister and see what kind of response we get.

Now, Mr. Arnold, your time has expired.

Can we check to see if that's the 30-minute bells?

Let's finish at 5:30, if everyone is in agreement

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Mr. Kelloway, you're up for five minutes or less, please.

• (1715)

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

I want to direct my questions to Ms. Gibbons or Mr. Wentzell.

Just to go back to elvers for a second, I want to go back specifically to the research and the discussions that have happened with the Maine representatives on how they changed—I wouldn't say perfected—how they regulate the elver fishery and how they enforce the elver fishery. I guess my question is, what are the top three or four best practices that we have learned from our discussions with the Maine counterparts, and how might they fit into the new regulatory framework that we're proposing with the hopes for next year's fishery?

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** Maybe I can start, and then ask Doug to complement.

As a general principle, Maine's regime requires a licence to possess elvers all along the supply chain. It's that stem-to-stern kind of approach that ensures that there's an ability to control it in a very granular way.

Maine has some particular features that are really detailed. I visited Maine with the minister and Doug a couple of weeks ago. Every transaction has to be recorded as a debit or a credit as elvers pass from one person in the supply chain to another. They require that to happen, so there is that record, but there is also a record of the payment, and the payment has to be by cheque. That is an additional requirement that they have, to really ensure there's evidence. There's no cash allowed in elver sales in Maine.

Another thing they did to try to tighten the controls was to require that sales be at an establishment, a place of business that is registered. You cannot sell elver out of the back of a truck or at a wharf—it's not a wharf; it's rivers. Nonetheless, you can't do it on a river bank. Again, that is a very tight requirement.

Also, when the elvers are leaving the state of Maine, there is an export event that takes place, and that is a regulated, overseen activity. You have to apply for a permit to export elvers, and there will be an event for the export that is very tightly controlled.

There are a number of things along the supply chain, and they have, of course, evolved with time.

**Mr. Mike Kelloway:** Thank you for that.

I want to look to today. With the season closed, for those watching back home or across Canada, or across the street for that matter, I want to get a sense of the enforcement, the actual numbers. That's number one, if we can highlight what's happened in the last two weeks.

Also.... I don't know if this is appropriate or not—you can tell me whether it is or it isn't—but many of the comments we've had around this table with different stakeholders government-wise, for example CBSA, really highlighted that we need to tighten our game in terms of the supply chain. Obviously, that's why we're looking for new regulations, but I want to get a sense of whether we are doing any work focusing on the transport of elvers, for example, to airports and ports themselves.

Is there any activity happening that you can share, either in part or in whole, to give us some indication of what's happening now? It is being transported, and I know that's not simply a DFO prerogative, but I wonder if you could provide any details on that.

• (1720)

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** I'll ask Doug to give the numbers for this year, but I will say one thing. We have seized more vehicles this year than we did all of last year, and the season is just at its start. That's one thing I would note.

We absolutely are doing surveillance at the point of export and along the supply chain that is part of our.... We have the rivers, as well as the sales process from one buyer to another, and then at the point of export, but Doug can provide more.

**Mr. Doug Wentzell (Regional Director General, Gulf Region, Department of Fisheries and Oceans):** Thank you for the question.

Broadly speaking, we've dedicated more resources again this year to the elver fishery, including bringing in a number of fishery officers from other regions across Canada. Over the last two weeks, we have arrested at total of 34 individuals, as well as seizing a number of different assets and countless pieces of fishing gear, as the deputy minister has alluded to.

We don't just work riverside. Obviously, we want to make sure our frontline efforts are the priority, but we do work at major ports of exit and at airports, including an operation last night at one of the key airports. That work will continue to augment the work that's on the ground riverside.

**Mr. Mike Kelloway:** That's very encouraging. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, 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.

Ms. Gibbons, I would like to make one last attempt and convey all the hope felt by fishers. When I talk about fishers, I am referring to master owners, deckhands, workers in the processing plants and plant owners. I want to convey all the hope those people are placing on collaboration between the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and the Department of Citizenship and Immigration to apply pressure in order for the foreign workers to arrive in time.

In the present circumstances, with the shrimp fishery experiencing a drastic decline in stocks that jeopardizes the very existence of some economies in the Quebec fishery sector, I am trying again. Does an emergency unit seem to you to be an option that could

quickly resolve the issue of foreign workers? That is the most immediately urgent thing at this time. Second, could that emergency unit, that crisis unit, quickly look into putting support in place?

Of course, some of those people have a little cushion, some savings, but some of them are really up against it. The boats will not get sold and a lot of people are going to go bankrupt. Can this be avoided? Can there also be assurance that the know-how will still be available when fishing resumes, when solutions are found for these fishers? This is all fundamental. In these circumstances, could a crisis unit be put in place to deal with the various pressing problems in the Quebec fisheries, but also in the Maritimes, in the short and medium terms?

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** Regarding temporary foreign workers, we are in constant touch with the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, with the plants in every province, and with the companies that serve the plants, which coordinate all the applications. We are in touch with all these people to make sure that applications are processed efficiently.

• (1725)

**Mrs. Caroline Desbiens:** Are you able to tell us that it is going to happen, that they are going to be there in the—

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madame Desbiens. You've gone over time.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Caroline Desbiens:** Already?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Yes.

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

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

Thank you again, Ms. Gibbons, for being here.

My question is around the First Nations Fisheries Council. As I'm sure you're aware, the first nations caucus is, in effect, a key participant in the Pacific Salmon Treaty process. As you know, the first nations caucus is vital to Canadians and indigenous people participating in this process. They are a key part of this process.

Unfortunately, something I brought to the minister's attention in 2023 was that the First Nations Fisheries Council was reaching out with concerns that, despite the immense role they take on in this process, the funding they receive is minimal. They don't have the funding to truly participate and make sure they are speaking with members of the first nations to bring forward the information and have the meetings required for them to ensure that they're all on the same page in order to participate fully in the process.

I did write a letter to the minister a year ago, asking for this funding to be enhanced. The First Nations Fisheries Council is still reaching out with concerns around the funding being allocated.

I'm wondering if you could speak to this and share the steps forward to ensure that this participation can be done in a fulsome manner.

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** I'm happy to take that away and look at it.

I would say that, as a general principle, under our broad Pacific salmon strategy initiative, which is close to \$700 million over five years, there are a lot of different initiatives that engage B.C. first nations in salmon restoration and in discussions around the status of stocks and things like the BC Treaty Commission. There are various initiatives that would provide funding for engagement of first nations. I think that's something that's important to consider in this context.

We can come back with more specifics in response to the correspondence you raised.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Barron. Your time is up. The two and a half minutes aren't long going.

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** Mr. Chair, in the last two minutes that are left—

**The Chair:** I have something to say, so I'm going to speak first. We'll see if we have any time left after that.

I'm going to say thank you again to the officials for being here today, sharing their knowledge with the committee and answering various questions. I want to say thank you to the clerk, the analysts, the interpreters and, of course, our electronics people, who make this all a success each and every day that we have a meeting. Again, I want to say a big thank you to everyone.

We have about 30 seconds left, Mr. Arnold.

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** I'll be quick, Mr. Chair.

I want to move the motion that was put on notice on March 15:

That, given that the carbon tax is hurting fishermen—

**Mr. Robert Morrissey:** On a point of order, Mr. Chair, the meeting is over.

**An hon. member:** I second it, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** We are adjourned.

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