



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

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# Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

EVIDENCE

**NUMBER 110**

**PUBLIC PART ONLY - PARTIE PUBLIQUE SEULEMENT**

Thursday, May 9, 2024

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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 110 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans. This meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the Standing Orders.

Before we proceed, I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of witnesses and members.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking, and please address all comments through the chair.

I would like to remind all members in the room of the following important measures to prevent disruptive and potentially harmful audio feedback incidents that can cause injuries.

All in-person participants are reminded to keep their earpieces away from all microphones at all times.

As indicated in the communiqué from the Speaker to all members on Monday, April 29, the following measures have been taken to help prevent audio feedback incidents.

All earpieces have been replaced by a model that greatly reduces the probability of audio feedback. The new earpieces are black, whereas the former earpieces were grey. Please use only a black, approved earpiece. By default, all unused earpieces will be unplugged at the start of the meeting. When you are not using your earpiece, please place it face down on the middle of the sticker for this purpose on the table, as you will see indicated. Please consult the cards on the table for guidelines to prevent audio feedback incidents.

The room layout has been adjusted to increase the distance between microphones and to reduce the chance of feedback from an ambient earpiece.

These measures are in place so that we can conduct our business without interruption and to protect the health and safety of all participants, including our interpreters.

Thanks to all of you for your co-operation.

Pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), the committee is beginning its study of main estimates 2024-25, votes 1, 5 and 10 under the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

Before we start with the minister, I want to let the committee know that we will take possibly a 10-minute break for the minister

to have a bit of a break between the two hours, but during that time, we'll do some committee business.

We will start by welcoming Minister Lebouthillier back to committee again and the officials who are with her.

Minister, you have five minutes for your opening statement, when you're ready.

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you for inviting me to appear before the committee to discuss a number of important subjects.

Before I begin, I want to acknowledge that we are gathered here on the traditional territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

I'd like to start by presenting the Main Estimates 2024-25 on behalf of Fisheries and Oceans Canada and the Canadian Coast Guard. For the 2024-25 fiscal year, the department is seeking \$4.7 billion in planned spending. Funding for key initiatives includes \$506 million for projects related to the Canadian Coast Guard fleet, including the acquisition of new vessels, \$127.7 million related to signing new collective agreements with employees, and \$52.7 million to continue our work under the Fisheries Act. If you have any questions on the Main Estimates 2024-25, officials in my department or I would be pleased to respond at the end of my remarks.

I'd like to touch on a few points, starting with the elver fishery. As you know, in March, I made the difficult decision not to reopen the elver fishery in 2024 in the Maritimes. I want to remind you that anyone caught elver fishing will be subject to enforcement action by fishery officers, who are working with other agencies to combat the unauthorized fishing, sale and possession of elvers for export. Since March 6, no fewer than 132 individuals have been arrested and 21 vehicles seized, along with 350 pounds of elver, 105 fyke nets and 249 dip nets. Whatever we say or do, the numbers speak for themselves: Fishery officers are out there, doing their job, patrolling rivers, facilities and export points as we speak.

The department is continuing its work to make the necessary regulatory and management changes to ensure a safe and sustainable elver fishery for all harvesters. The fishery won't reopen until these measures are fully implemented. That said, we're working hard to open the elver fishing season in 2025, because I don't want this fishery to be closed for another year.

In January, I also authorized the reopening of the commercial Unit 1 redfish fishery, following a nearly 30-year moratorium. The first phase of the reopening of the commercial fishery will last two years. I'd like to take this opportunity to update you on the current status of this work. From March 4 to 7, DFO held a series of productive meetings with the redfish advisory committee in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Many important topics related to sustainable fisheries management were discussed during these meetings, in addition to key issues that will have an impact on the next steps related to redfish sub-allocations.

Feedback from advisory committee members is currently informing decisions on the Unit 1 redfish management plan for the 2024 season. DFO is currently sharing its recommendations with me, and a decision will be communicated in the coming weeks, prior to the opening of the redfish fishing season. At present, the earliest the fishery will be ready to open is June 15, after the annual redfish spawning season.

In the meantime, as an experimental fishery is already in place, I have some excellent news for members of this committee. Indeed, as of this week, redfish caught in the St. Lawrence and processed in the Gaspé region can be found on the shelves of some 200 Metro stores in Quebec, and that's only the beginning. It's time for us all to do our part, choose redfish, include it on our menus, give it added value and, by so doing, further develop the market. I've tried it, and it's excellent.

More recently, I was pleased to announce the opening of a 470-tonne personal-use Atlantic mackerel bait fishery. This announcement strikes the right balance between protecting the resource and equipping our fishermen with the affordable bait they need, while at the same time providing recent field data that will further inform future decisions on these fisheries, so vital to our coastal communities. According to the president of the Maritime Fishermen's Union, we're even talking about savings of several thousand dollars on bait for our fishermen, who will no longer have to engage in the absurdity of buying high-priced mackerel from the United States every season. In the medium term, my department is firmly convinced that Atlantic mackerel stocks can recover, which is why I'm more determined than ever to support the eventual reopening of this fishery.

The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance tabled the 2024 budget on April 16, and I'm delighted to see some excellent measures that will support the fisheries sector, starting with a massive investment of nearly half a billion dollars over three years, starting this year, to upgrade and maintain small craft harbours. As the nation with the longest coastline in the world, Canada has a duty to invest in resilient port infrastructure capable of meeting the climate challenges of today and tomorrow. This is not just a question of economic development, but of food security as well.

Today, fish and seafood are among Canada's leading food exports. This means jobs for more than 45,000 Canadians, and landings estimated at nearly \$4.2 billion in 2022 for the commercial fishing industry alone. That's why, once the 2024 budget is adopted, DFO will work to identify each region's priorities, before announcing in due course how this investment will be allocated.

Our government is also planning to inject an additional \$263.5 million into the EI program, extending benefits for eligible seasonal workers in 13 economic regions of Atlantic Canada and Quebec by five weeks until October 2026. As a proud representative of one of those 13 regions, I can tell you that this measure is a game changer for many of our workers, who depend on those benefits to make ends meet before each tourist season.

Budget 2024 also contains a number of investments that will help support our blue economy. In addition to the financial support earmarked for small craft harbours, the federal budget provides funding that will be shared among key departments, including DFO and the CCG, including more than \$1.6 billion to support Canada's national adaptation strategy, which will help protect people and communities from the effects of climate change. In addition, an investment of \$25.1 million over two years in the Canadian shellfish safety program to help communities harvest shellfish safely for food, social and ceremonial purposes will contribute to food security. In addition, \$44 million over three years will be earmarked for programs to enable indigenous communities to continue to identify common priorities. Finally, Budget 2024 contains a very interesting measure to ease the tax burden on fishermen.

In short, with Budget 2024, we are giving ourselves the means to achieve our ambitions by equipping our fishermen with the tools they need, as well as modern ports where their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren will continue our finest maritime traditions.

Thank you and I'm now prepared to answer questions from members of the committee.

• (1545)

[English]

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

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

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

I'd like to ask the minister, Mr. Chair, if she's the minister responsible for all of Canada's 950 small craft harbours.

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** Yes, I'm the minister responsible for small craft harbours.

[English]

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

Minister, how many projects do you have planned for the 2024-25 season in small craft harbours across Canada?

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** I want to mention that the 2024-25 budget has to pass to allow the necessary investments in small craft harbours.

[English]

**Mr. Clifford Small:** Minister, this publication came from the DFO website, and it outlines 41 projects for the upcoming year.

How many of these 41 projects are in Liberal-held ridings, Minister?

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** The deputy minister will be able to give you an answer.

[English]

**Mr. Clifford Small:** You're the minister. You had to sign off on all these.

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** I said that the deputy minister would be able to answer.

[English]

**Ms. Annette Gibbons (Deputy Minister, Department of Fisheries and Oceans):** We do a list of projects for which we have money, and I think that's the list that you're referring to. As the minister said, regarding the new money in the budget, there needs to be an exercise to figure out the priorities for that.

**Mr. Clifford Small:** These projects are out, gone. These harbours are here.

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** We try to start projects at the start of the year, because there are things that need to be done immediately. That's what you're seeing.

**Mr. Clifford Small:** I think, I'm not sure, that 37 of the 41 projects here are in Liberal-held ridings. That's quite the percentage.

Minister, there are some harbours here that I'm not familiar with. I'm not sure which riding they're in. Maybe you might be able to help me out with some of these names you might be more familiar with, like Millerand? Do you know which riding that's in?

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** I want to tell you that, among the priorities that I brought to the attention of the Prime Minister last year, small craft harbours are really important throughout Canada.

[English]

**Mr. Clifford Small:** Millerand, which riding is it in?

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** Furthermore, we know that our small craft harbours have long been underfunded. It's important to have infrastructure that will allow our fishermen to work safely—

[English]

**Mr. Clifford Small:** That's fine, that's understood.

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** —everywhere in Canada.

[English]

**Mr. Clifford Small:** We understand the purpose of small craft harbours, but I've got Millerand and Pointe-Basse. Do you know which riding that one is in?

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** There are small craft harbours right across the country. I can assure you that the small craft harbours in which we are investing are used by fishermen—

[English]

**Mr. Clifford Small:** I would like to know where some of these harbours are located.

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** —and will help defend our economy.

[English]

**Mr. Clifford Small:** St-Godefroi, Grande-Entrée, Grosse-Île, Ile-d'Entrée, L'Anse-à-Beaufils, Pointe-aux-Loups, L'Anse-à-Brillant, Port-Daniel-Est and Bonaventure.

Where are all those ports located? Which ridings are they in, Minister?

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** I'm very happy to be able to provide you with that information.

You know that the Gaspé and the Magdalen Islands make their living from fishing. What's more, there's been a real lack of funding, both in my region and throughout the east coast and Canada.

● (1550)

[English]

**Mr. Clifford Small:** I have one here as well, Les Méchins. I think that's about to be added to your riding after the redistribution.

Minister, 12 of the 41 projects scheduled for 2024-25 are in your riding. That's quite the percentage. For those who are missing out on funding for small craft harbours in their ports throughout Atlantic Canada, B.C. and the Great Lakes, what would you say to outside observers who might think that you've made partisan decisions here?

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** I've made decisions to ensure the safety of fishermen and economic development throughout the country. It's work I'm going to continue to do with integrity, as I have done from the start. I will continue to do this work, and I have no—

[English]

**Mr. Clifford Small:** Twenty-nine per cent of these ports are in your riding, 29% of all the Canadian projects—

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP):** Mr. Chair, I have a point of order, please.

**The Chair:** Ms. Barron.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Mr. Chair, with all due respect, I would like to ask my colleague and the minister to please not be talking over each other with the microphones on. It's really challenging for the interpreters. Perhaps the chair could help everybody to be reminded of that.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Yes, I will remind everybody that it's one person speaking at a time. Even if you're sitting next to the person who's speaking, please don't be shouting or conversing with someone else around the table, because the mic picks it up and then the translators don't know which one they're supposed to translate, whether it's Mr. Small speaking or whether it's Mr. Perkins, Mr. Bragdon or Mr. Kelloway, whoever it is. Please, speak one at a time. That's all I ask.

Go ahead.

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

As for the towns of Harbour Breton and Hermitage in my riding, and the town of Shelburne and the village of Pubnico in south and west Nova Scotia, each community has a higher landed value in the fishery than all 12 of the ports that are receiving funding, if you combine them all, in the minister's riding. I wonder what the minister has to say to the folks in the fishing industry in those harbours that didn't get a nickel and that are not projected to get a nickel in the upcoming year.

**The Chair:** Unfortunately, Mr. Small, you've gone way over time.

We'll go now to Mr. Hanley for six minutes, please.

[Translation]

**Mr. Brendan Hanley (Yukon, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the minister and her officials for being here today and spending two hours with us.

[English]

I'm going to ask my questions in English for the benefit of my constituents for the most part.

The first thing I'd like to talk about, especially in view of our ongoing study on the Yukon River salmon stocks, is about some concern I have, and maybe you can alleviate my concern.

I noticed that in the main estimates there's just over a \$1-billion decrease in planned spending for the next two years, including, according to the department's planning document, funding changes in planning for the Canadian Coast Guard, marine conservation targets and the Pacific salmon strategy.

Of course, I'm concerned about the funding for the Pacific salmon strategy initiative, PSSI. I wonder if you could clarify whether there is a determination to cut funding to the PSSI.

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** Mr. Hanley, could you repeat your question? The deputy minister couldn't hear it.

[English]

**Mr. Brendan Hanley:** Certainly. My question is about the funding and estimates for the Pacific salmon strategy initiative. Could confirm or clarify whether there's an intent to reduce funding for the PSSI?

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** Funding for the PSSI expires at the end of 2025-26. It was a five-year program. What happens after that is still to be decided, so there will be an evaluation of everything that's been done and then a determination on the next steps in that program and the funding levels.

Right now, it is a B-based program, with funding allocated over five years.

• (1555)

**Mr. Brendan Hanley:** Okay. Really, when it says, "planned changes in funding for the Pacific Salmon Strategy Initiative", that means the current funding commitment is intact, but there will be some consideration of future funding. Is that what I'm hearing?

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** Yes, but I think another—

**The Chair:** Ms. Gibbons, could I ask you not to touch the...? The interpreters hear tapping.

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** I'm sorry. I don't want to do anything to hurt the interpreters.

There are also year-over-year changes in our programs where we may not spend as much as we thought in one year and we'll reprofile it to the next year, or we may take money in one year and actually move it to an earlier year depending on what we're seeing across the suite of programs.

The PSSI is a large, complex program with a lot of external partners, for example, so we do move money across different elements and across fiscal years.

**Mr. Brendan Hanley:** Thank you.

Finally, on that point, and perhaps for you again, Deputy Minister, I know I've asked this before, but could I get clarification on how much of the PSSI is being directed toward projects along the Yukon River in view of the clear need for restoration of the salmon?

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** Absolutely, there is activity happening with respect to the Yukon River. I will have to return to you with an answer in writing on the specific amount.

**Mr. Brendan Hanley:** I'd really appreciate that.

The minister and I have discussed how pleased we are with the recent seven-year moratorium on fishing as an international agreement between Alaska and Canada. I know that my constituents have really welcomed that. They have also pointed out that this is the beginning and that the moratorium itself will not be enough. We certainly are hearing our witnesses encourage continued engagement with our partners in Alaska and, at a federal level, with the United States.

I wonder whether you are formally engaged with counterparts in the U.S. federal government and with the Government of Alaska on Yukon salmon or whether this is being considered. Do you think more formal engagement with all stakeholders is critical to moving forward on this issue?

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** Thank you, Mr. Hanley.

Before I give the floor to the deputy minister, I'd like to highlight the work you've done on such an important file. It confirms the importance of collaboration in the fisheries sector, to save not only wild salmon but all wild species that live in the ocean.

I went to the U.S. to meet our partners and intensify our efforts and our work to protect wild species, including salmon.

[*English*]

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** We absolutely work with the U.S. federal government and the State of Alaska. The State of Alaska has a lot of authorities with respect to salmon, but so does the U.S. federal government. We work with them in various venues, including the Pacific Salmon Commission, which is a very active forum for negotiations and joint work. Of course, we work intensively with indigenous communities in the Yukon and throughout B.C. on Pacific salmon issues as key partners.

**Mr. Brendan Hanley:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Hanley. You're right on time.

We'll now go to Mr. Blanchette-Joncas, who is subbing in for Madam Desbiens, who's the usual person from the Bloc.

You have six minutes, sir.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Greetings to our witnesses.

Madam Minister, it's a pleasure to welcome you to the committee today.

I, too, have tried redfish. It's a really delicious fish. You know, it swims up not too far from my region, in Rimouski. So we have the opportunity to taste it and process it, and this fishery is excellent news.

My question today concerns the allocation of the redfish quota. DFO allocates a quota of 25,000 tonnes, of which 58.69% goes to offshore vessels, according to the quota breakdown. As you know, offshore vessels are over 100 feet long.

I'd like you to confirm how many offshore vessel owners reside in the riding of Gaspésie—Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine.

• (1600)

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** I'd like to remind you that the quota of 25,000 tonnes we've set is a starting point. As I mentioned in my opening remarks, meetings have been held with the redfish advisory committee. I recently received a report and decisions will be made shortly. When we announced the reopening of the fishery, I committed to following the advisory committee's recommendations.

A 10% allocation will go to inshore fishermen, as well as to indigenous communities. The advisory committee also made recommendations in response to concerns about bycatch, other species caught in the redfish fishery. We're really working on that, and we're also discussing how the quotas were allocated.

Following our consultations, the provinces asked us to respect historical quotas, which we did.

**Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas:** I want to understand your personal opinion. You know coastal communities well. You've been the Member for Gaspésie—Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine since 2015.

As you know, 60% of the redfish quota goes to offshore vessels, the same vessels that were banned in recent years during the redfish moratorium. We can count on the fingers of one hand the number of owners of offshore boats in the Gaspé and Magdalen Islands. This means that the lion's share of the quota is going to big companies, instead of helping small-scale fishermen who really need it and who are subject to restrictions in other fisheries, such as the shrimp fishery.

I'd like to know if you agree with helping big companies more instead of helping those who make their living from fishing and who really need support.

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** In Quebec, we don't have any big companies, as you said. I can assure you that the Magdalen Islands have no intention of building new boats, and that they're ready to work with indigenous communities and the people of Gaspé so that Quebec can catch its quota of redfish.

**Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas:** Fishermen are telling us that the historical quotas are no longer relevant. Just because it was good 25 years ago doesn't mean it's good today. Right now, you're helping the big companies instead of the communities that really need it.

What studies led you to make that decision, which in my opinion makes no sense in terms of distribution?

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** The consultations that took place throughout Atlantic Canada and Quebec are not outdated consultations, because they took place last year. The Quebec government and the people of Quebec asked that the historic redfish quotas be maintained, and that's exactly what has happened. The fishing boats are putting people to work in plants in their region. It's important to try to get things right, in addition to the recommendations that will be made by the redfish advisory committee.

What I'm hearing on the ground and what the various associations I work with are telling me is that, for once, there's a minister who wants to work with the fishing industry and listens to fishermen. We can continue to work with our people.

**Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas:** I appreciate you being so open, but I'm quoting the fishers. They say that there are very few offshore vessels greater than 100 feet in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. In fact, there are none at the moment. However, you allowed these offshore vessels to come back, even though they depleted the resource in the past.

That's what the fishers are saying. They don't understand that the mistakes of the past are being made again. They're afraid that the offshore vessels will deplete the redfish resource in a few years. Have you done any studies to confirm that's not going to happen?

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** It's a quota fishery: As soon as the quota is reached, fishing stops.

**Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas:** Do you have any evidence that people are monitoring the quotas?

• (1605)

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** That's one of the Redfish Advisory Committee's recommendations. I can assure you that we will follow the recommendations.

**Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas:** Do you also have data on by-catch?

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Blanchette-Joncas.

You're a couple of seconds over the six-minute allotment.

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

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

Thank you, Minister, for being here, and thank you to the other witnesses as well.

Minister, just yesterday, which was perfect timing, I met with representatives from Ecotrust, Coastal First Nations and UFAWU to talk about the necessary work towards a B.C. owner-operator licensing system.

As you know, our committee has completed two in-depth studies—one prior to my time and one during my time—that were unanimously recommending the implementation of a made-in-B.C. owner-operator licensing regime.

We also know that there is broad support in first nations, industry and communities for this change. We even saw the premier of my home province, Premier Eby, write a letter to the Prime Minister, and included you, urging the Government of Canada to work with

the Province of British Columbia to develop a made-in-B.C. owner-operator licensing policy.

Minister, we know what needs to be done.

When will you direct the department to end the delays and begin working with first nations, industry and the province to implement this long-overdue policy reform?

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** I was in British Columbia in December, and I also met with some owner-operators. The consultations therefore began in British Columbia.

[English]

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** It's great that conversations are being had. A wealth of work has already been done in this area; witnesses came in for the study we did recently, and there are recommendations from the 2019 report. There's endless testimony and information that shows the direction forward. It seems as though there's a bit of a delay tactic happening here. Perhaps you can clarify. We know what needs to be done. We don't need to be asking the basic questions anymore. We need to be moving forward with actions. When will those actions be taken?

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** I certainly don't think we should start from scratch. We have to take into account the work the committee has done, as well as the work being done in the consultations to promote owner-operators and keep moving forward.

Perhaps Ms. Gibbons would like to add something.

[English]

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Minister, perhaps I could continue with my questions, and if Ms. Gibbons would like to follow up with some written information, that would be helpful.

This will be my last question in this section, Minister. I'm wondering if you're waiting for permission from the corporations and from foreign owners who now control the licences before you move forward with this desperately needed change.

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** Waiting for corporate support isn't my way of doing business at all. What's important to me is that we get it right and work with the community so that the process goes smoothly in the future.



[English]

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** I do appreciate your diligence in making sure you're getting it right. We know what needs to happen. What I'm asking today, Minister, on behalf of so many who are relying on this change to be made for the B.C. fisheries in order to ensure that there are fisheries for generations to come, is that you move forward with the actions necessary and use the recommendations that have already been provided to do the work that's necessary.

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** I really want to reassure you. As I mentioned in my opening remarks, my goal is to ensure that my children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren have access to resources and that we sustain the fisheries properly. That's why it's important to work with people in the industry and to see what we can do to be the architects of the fisheries of the future.

That's also why it's important to depoliticize the fishery, because all of us around this table are affected by its future. I'm having these discussions with fishers and their associations on the east and west coasts.

• (1610)

[English]

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Thank you, Minister. I was going to move on to my next set of questions, but I have just one last question around that. We know there are very different policies in place on the Atlantic coast. Why is it good enough for us to move forward with policies that are putting the owners and local fishers at the forefront on the east coast but not on the west coast?

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** As I was saying, we have to work with people on the east and west coasts at the same time. Indigenous communities on the east coast will soon be travelling to the west coast to see how the fisheries there work and how they do aquaculture in particular. Fishers and their associations really want to be part of future solutions. I was talking about the importance of being the architects of the fishery of the future, and fishers and their associations want to be part of that. As we've always said, when we act alone, things definitely move quickly, but we create irritants. For me, it's important to work with everyone to make the fisheries sector sustainable.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

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

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

Thank you, Minister and department officials, for being here today.

Minister, in your last appearance, you mentioned a meeting with the ambassador of France and discussing a conference in Nice, France, in 2025.

Do you recall that?

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** Yes.

[English]

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** What is the ambassador's name?

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** Yes, I did meet with the French ambassador. In 2025, there will be a meeting on the oceans—

[English]

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** Do you recall his name?

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** I couldn't tell you off the top of my head. For me, the important thing was to add seals to the list of species—

[English]

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** That's fine, Minister.

Who's your counterpart in the United States' federal cabinet?

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** If you want a name, I can't give you one, but I don't know how that would get us anywhere in the fisheries sector right now. I've met with the U.S. ambassador and the Japanese ambassador, but if you ask me for their names, I surely can't tell you off the top of my head.

[English]

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** How many times have you met with your American counterpart, and who is your point of contact?

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** I couldn't tell you, but how would that get us anywhere with the fisheries?

[English]

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** You are the key point for Canadian fisheries, and we are hearing from coast to coast about issues that require international co-operation. If you haven't met your American counterpart or don't even recall their name, we have to question why you aren't doing your job.

Minister, I'm going to change topics slightly.

Of the \$4.7 billion proposed for DFO in the main estimates for this year, how many dollars will support commercial fishing licence and quota reform in British Columbia, which this committee has repeatedly recommended changes to?

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** Are you asking me about the next budget? We would need to adopt the budget, but you want to vote against it.

[English]

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** This should be in the main estimates. There's \$4.7 billion proposed in this budget. How much of that is aimed to support commercial fishing licence and quota reform in British Columbia?

If you don't have it right now, we can wait for it in writing. My time is limited.

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** I can respond.

The funding for the moment...the activity we're doing, as the minister said, is consultation. We've heard, and certainly had reports of the committee—

• (1615)

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** Just how much is it? We're talking about the main estimates.

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** That would be the operational budgets—

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** How much?

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** —and the staff who work on these issues.

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** How much is it, please?

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** They would be people who are doing a lot of different fisheries activities.

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** How much is targeted, if anything? Thank you. If you can, provide that in writing.

I'll move on now, Minister.

When it comes to DFO science, are you aware of the 2023 report from the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development that examined the department's monitoring of marine fisheries catch?

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** In the meetings I had with the various associations, people spoke to me about global warming and the concerns those in the fishing industry have about forage species, be it herring, mackerel, capelin, smelt—

[English]

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** Excuse me. This was the commissioner's report on monitoring fisheries catch. It's the report on monitoring fisheries catch—not climate change or anything else.

Are you familiar with that report?

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** Yes.

[English]

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** Okay. Thank you.

In that report, the commissioner made it clear that your department continues to fail to monitor fisheries catch, and this causes a data gap for DFO science processes.

Your own response to the committee's pinniped report states that there are science gaps for pinniped management. I cannot recall a single witness—indigenous or non-indigenous, who was not a DFO official—who told this committee that DFO has adequate science.

Minister, you previously told this committee that since coming to power, the government has rebuilt confidence in the science.

Can you tell us who, outside of DFO, has confidence in DFO science?

**The Chair:** I'm going to have to ask for that to come in writing, Mr. Arnold, as we've gone over time.

We'll now go to Mr. Cormier, who is online, for five minutes, please.

[Translation]

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

Welcome, Madam Minister.

I must say that I almost fell off my chair earlier when I heard the Conservatives talk about small craft harbours, since we were so neglected when they were in government. Perhaps that's why the needs in our regions are much more pressing than theirs.

The federal budget includes \$463 million for small craft harbours. The Conservatives will oppose this budget, and the Bloc Québécois will also vote against these investments in small craft harbours.

Can you tell me what else we'll be able to do with the investments? As you know, we will clearly need to do some dredging and repairs to ensure fisher safety and that we don't have any more fatalities in certain regions. What's the government's vision for these investments to help fishers in our region?

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** Mr. Cormier, thank you so much for that question.

I see small craft harbours as a priority. We know that they're bearing the brunt of climate change, and after Hurricane Fiona, we saw just how hard climate change could hit. We know that there will be more storms, that they will be more intense and that sea levels are rising.

Small craft harbours are also becoming industrial parks. There's a whole economy around small craft harbours. These harbours need dredging, and the cost of that has gone through the roof. Some small craft harbours require two to three dredgings per fishing season because fishers must be able to fish safely.

We also need to help the industries that support fishers. Think of electronic equipment on boats and people who can help fishers with their boats. In our rural regions, the entire economy revolves around the fishing industry, so it's important to work with the fishers and the harbour associations, which are very dedicated. We have to do even better and even more when it comes to investing in small craft harbours so that this economy can flourish.

For me, fisheries are important not only for food security, but also for the economy. The direct and indirect spinoffs from the fishery are work, employment and skilled trades now too. There's a whole economy around fisheries.

• (1620)

**Mr. Serge Cormier:** Thank you, Madam Minister.

I think that in 2017 and 2019, the fishers in my area saw how more funding produces more projects. So the funding announced in the budget will help us do more.

You were asked about the seals, and I know how important that is to you. We know that the seals are causing an imbalance in the ecosystem and something has to be done about that. Based on recent reports, we need to find solutions to reduce the seal population. However, if we wanted all the fisher associations to sign a letter asking that the seals simply be culled, none of them would want to sign it.

However, as you know, we now risk losing some of our major markets. I know that you're working on it and you've discussed it at length. Can you update the committee on the status of this? I think we need to act quickly to keep from losing our resources.

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** A lot of work has been done with indigenous communities so that they can take the lead on initiatives related to the seal economy. For me, it's not just about slaughtering seals. It's also about processing seals and creating added value.

In the fisheries sector, I think it will be important to use artificial intelligence and the Mer numérique AI tool. We need to be able to get more evidence and predict what's happening underwater. That's being developed right now.

The Fonds des pêches du Québec is very much appreciated in the sector. We're working on improving it so that it uses all the latest technologies, enables development and brings us even more scientific data.

We were talking earlier about quotas and bycatch. We must have all the tools at our disposal to ensure sound management of the harvest. As I mentioned, fish feed on fish. If we want to sustain the fisheries of the future, we have to let the species feed. We need an environmentally responsible harvest.

**Mr. Serge Cormier:** Thank you, Madam Minister.

[English]

**The Chair:** We'll go to Monsieur Blanchette-Joncas for two and a half minutes.

Go ahead, please.

[Translation]

**Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Madam Minister, according to the current distribution of the redfish quota, 60% of the quota goes to offshore fishers, which favours large companies at the expense of small fishing fleets like shrimpers, who have been abandoned, small fishers and owner-operators, who could have used this support. Would you agree?

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** I would remind you that 10% of the redfish quota has been allocated to inshore fishers and shrimpers, as well as indigenous communities. As I mentioned, this is a quota fishery, which ends as soon as fishers catch the quota to which they're entitled. This fishery employs people in the plants, people on land and people in the processing plants along the coast.

**Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas:** It mainly puts the employees of big companies to work. You said you didn't want to encourage the slipper skipper system. However, small fishers are going to have to work for big companies if you give 60% of the redfish quota to offshore vessels greater than 100 feet. You know it's true.

Are you the member for Gaspésie—Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine to support the economy and fishers, or are you the member for big business?

• (1625)

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** Offshore fishers were given smaller quotas so that inshore fishers could catch more. Our inshore fishers will be able to work. That said, the people on the offshore vessels are also workers in our communities. The most important thing is developing the economy in the communities, and that's what we'll continue to do for all the regions.

**Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas:** You're confirming that you favour big companies at the expense of small fishers and small fleets.

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** If that's your understanding, it's because there's a distortion between what I'm saying and what you understand. We were asked to preserve the quotas in Quebec, and that's what we did.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll now go to Ms. Barron for two and a half minutes.

Go ahead, please.

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

Minister, the Gitanyow First Nation in British Columbia has been at the forefront of efforts in the region to secure a vibrant wild salmon future for the benefit of all. They're currently awaiting DFO approval for two initiatives. On one, they've spent years negotiating a term sheet with DFO for a DFO fisheries reconciliation agreement. On the other one, they're awaiting funding for a conservation hatchery. Both of these initiatives have been supported by the regional director general, but department approval has yet to come through. Minister, why is there a holdup, and when should the nation expect final approval?

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** We have been negotiating with the Gitanyow for some time now and we expect to be in a position to advance in those negotiations very shortly.

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

Minister, DFO's ghost gear fund ended on March 31, as you know, and groups who rely on this funding are extremely worried about the fact that no new funding has been allocated in budget 2024. Can you clarify? Has any new funding been allocated and, if not, when will it be?

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** The Ghost Gear Fund has been important. Work has been done, but right now, we need to analyze what happened and then see how we can improve how we work in the future and how we can create a circular economy around ghost gear by adding value to what we recover on the ocean floor. We're giving ourselves a certain amount of time to do an assessment. It's part of the work to be done in the next steps.

[English]

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

Every time I think my French is good enough to understand, I realize it's not.

Is the funding cut? Will we see funding? Just to clarify, will we see funding being allocated to the ghost gear fund?

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** It's too early to tell, but we're working on the next steps. That's why it's important that we analyze the results. We have to look at what happened, what was created and how we can continue to do things even better.

We also need to look at how we can involve people from the fisheries sector, including fishers, and establish everyone's responsibilities. In some parts of my riding, which I'm perhaps a little more familiar with, I'm told that 8,000 lobster traps have been recovered. If 8,000 lobster traps were recovered in just one area of my riding, imagine what could be recovered where there's a lot more lobster fishing, like in Nova Scotia. The numbers would increase exponentially.

It's a matter of figuring out how to involve fishers and public funds, how to create a circular economy and how to educate people even better to protect the seabed.

• (1630)

[English]

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

That brings us up to the 10-minute break that the minister requested. That gives 55 minutes on the dot in committee business in public, in camera, whichever way you want to look at it.

We'll allow the minister a 10-minute break, and we'll reconvene again at 4:40.

• (1630)

(Pause)

• (1635)

**The Chair:** I call this meeting back to order.

We'll start our second round with Mr. Perkins for six minutes. I think he indicated that he may be sharing his time, but I'll leave that up to him.

Mr. Perkins.

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

Thank you, Minister, for coming for two hours today. We appreciate it.

On April 29, DFO began a two-month public consultation on proposed new marine protected areas in principally Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. I have a couple of questions about some of those.

This is just so people know what I'm talking about, because not everyone knows the geography. I'd like to ask you first about Browns Bank, which is the area on the southern tip of Nova Scotia. That is located as an area of interest in your consultation. It's lobster fishing areas 34 and 40 and also scallop fishing areas 29 C and D. There are other fisheries in there. It's an important fishery for Clearwater, which is owned by Membertou, who fish lobster, scallops and surf clam down there.

Now, as you look at your pictures, the fishing companies tell me that 90% of the bottom there is mud, but you claim to be protecting something called Gorgonian coral in the proposal. That's the coral that people see in fish tanks. It's not something that's endangered. You say there's a dense concentration of sponges. Sponges are also not endangered.

I wonder if DFO would provide the committee with the science that shows that those things you're trying to protect there are actually in decline in that area.

• (1640)

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** These are marine protected areas. What's important is all the concerted and collaborative work with the sectors and with users in the sectors. As I mentioned, the goal is to get it right. We also need to look at the impacts, and we need to have science to protect the fisheries of the future. That work needs to be done with fishers' associations and organizations, all together.

[English]

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** Minister, I appreciate that, but that wasn't my question. My question was that this is an area of interest, which is the next step shortly to being a marine protected area. All the marine protected areas that DFO has designated so far in Nova Scotia are no-take zones where you can't fish. Will you provide the committee with the science of what's in decline in this area and the proof that it is interaction with mankind that's causing that decline in order for this to be protected?

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** I'm happy to provide the science. MPA zones obviously are very much based on the science around what is sensitive in a zone, and—

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** I appreciate that. So you do have science that proves that these things are in decline.

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** I'm not sure if there is science to your very precise question, but certainly there would be science on the—

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** One would think that specific science would be done, in any area where you're looking at doing this, that shows there's a decline of something that needs to be protected.

Area 2 here is the eastern shore. That has a lobster fishing area, LFA 32, with only a two-month season of April to June. Your documents publicly say that eelgrass beds and kelp seaweed, which are also not endangered, need to be protected, and that there's salmon habitat there. There's no salmon habitat there. Most of the eastern shore rivers have been killed by acid rain. Very little salmon goes up any rivers there. There's a few that will go up St. Mary's River, but there's very few and they breed in the river.

Would you provide the science on what is being protected, what's in decline and whether or not it was mankind doing that for this area?

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** We'll provide what we have.

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** Okay.

I'll go to number three, Georges Bank, the richest fishing ground in Atlantic Canada. It is incredibly important to both Canadians and Americans. You're proposing again that it be closed in a marine protected area. Could you provide the committee with the specific science showing that the things you're trying to protect are actually in decline over a period of time for that area?

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** Yes.

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** That's a yes...? It's the same for Sambro, up here in my riding. It's an important lobster fishing area. You've designated it to be closed. Will you provide the science for that?

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** We'll provide the science we have available. Absolutely.

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** I have all of these. I'll cobble together all of the blue and the red areas. Will you provide what's specifically in decline and the science behind all of it for this committee?

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** I will provide, as I said, the science that we have available. I'm not able to commit to new scientific work, but the science we have we'll provide to you.

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** I appreciate that.

Thank you.

I'll turn the rest of my time over to Mr. Bragdon.

**The Chair:** You have 45 seconds, Mr. Bragdon.

**Mr. Richard Bragdon (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC):** I have a quick question for the minister.

Thank you for being here.

The Great Lakes Fishery Commission stated that DFO was in clear conflict of interest by acting as the Great Lakes fishery.

We unanimously recommended in our report that the GLFC as a contractor be moved over to Global Affairs, that you ensure that it receive its full funding and that DFO not try to withhold it.

Are you going to follow the recommendations of this committee, which were very clear in what they recommended and which we received directly from the stakeholders involved? A letter was sent to the Prime Minister from 25 U.S. congressmen. It's on his desk now. Have you spoken to the Prime Minister about this, and is it being dealt with?

• (1645)

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** I assure you that we're not in a conflict right now. I even met with the U.S. ambassador, who was pleased to see the investments that had been made. We continue to work together on the Great Lakes.

[*English*]

**Mr. Richard Bragdon:** Have you followed the recommendations of the committee, and have you spoken to the Prime Minister?

**The Chair:** Mr. Bragdon, you have gone way over your time.

We'll now go to Mr. Kelloway for six minutes.

Go ahead, please.

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

I'll be splitting my time with MP Morrissey.

I really didn't know that we could bring in charts. I have put together a little makeshift chart of my own. I'm not an artist and certainly not a scientist, but I'll get to that in a minute.

We talked about small craft harbours and the importance of small craft harbours. They're, in essence, the hub of a community economically, socially and culturally. How many Conservatives are going to vote for the \$463 million in the budget, to invest that money over three years? I can probably answer that question. It's zero.

There's my chart.

I want to go back to a really important item in relation to my neck of the woods. I think this would apply to a lot of coastal areas. The temperature of the gulf in the last 15 years, I believe, has increased by two degrees. Right now this is having a tremendous impact on coastal communities, fishers and the economy writ large.

The previous government had a different stance on science, and they did reduce their budgets on science and whatnot. How much do you think that's put us back in terms of having the science to be able to protect the ecosystem?

I'll hand it off to Mr. Morrissey after this.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** Thank you very much for those questions.

If the Conservative Party and the Bloc Québécois don't want to vote for the budget allocated to small craft harbours, they might not be so important to them. For us, however, they're very important, because there's an entire economy linked to them.

In addition, there's important scientific work to be done on the warming of the Gulf of St. Lawrence. We've noted a great deal of concern within the fishing industry. This winter, there was no ice in the gulf and the fishery started much earlier. There's also a drop in oxygen in the gulf waters, and that's hurting forage species such as capelin, smelt, herring and mackerel, which feed other species.

That's why I think it's important to really depoliticize the fishery. We all need to work together to protect the fisheries of the future. That's also why it's important to have marine parks and marine protected areas. They are our nurseries. They will allow the species to reproduce, and that's how we'll be able to sustain the fisheries. Who would think of going fishing in their nursery? My goal is not to kill fisheries. No one wakes up in the morning wondering what they can do to make life unbearable for our fishers. That would make life unbearable for us, the people who live in the fishery. So everybody has to work together to make sure that we have a sustainable fishery.

[*English*]

**Mr. Mike Kelloway:** I'm going to hand it over.

**The Chair:** Mr. Morrissey, you have just short of two and a half minutes.

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

Madam Minister, I'll follow up on some of your earlier answers. By the way, I support your decision of allowing a limited mackerel bait fishery this spring.

Could you explain to the committee the importance, as you see it, of having input from and the perspective of commercial fishers on how they view stocks, when you are faced with making decisions...that the department provide you with data and you have to make the ultimate decision? What's the importance of having the perspective of commercial fishers?

• (1650)

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** Yes.

That's why it's important to me to consult and meet with the associations. Fishers knew there was a moratorium on the mackerel fishery in Canada, but mackerel was still being fished on the U.S. side, so they couldn't understand.

It's important to listen so we get it right. Fishers told us that they were seeing schools of mackerel. They see what's going on, hence the importance of focusing more on a bait fishery. It's not worth it to fishers to go further to catch mackerel when they only get \$1.79 a pound. We know that bait is important for lobster and crab pots, so we enable fishers to work better.

There's also the whole issue of affordability. When bait costs more, the price of the product goes up, and fewer consumers can afford it.

We are working with the community. I can tell you that the associations are actually pleased with the decision that was made.

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

[*English*]

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

We'll now go to Monsieur Blanchette-Joncas for six minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Minister, I want to set the record straight. In 2017, your government wanted to sell 25 ports in eastern Quebec and many more in the rest of Canada. Now you're saying your government wants to help small craft harbours, but that is not true. You know very well that the Government of Quebec is required to buy back four ports in eastern Quebec, the ones in Gros-Cacouna, Rimouski, Matane and Gaspé.

Why don't you come to my riding, Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques? The quay at the west jetty in Rimouski has been closed since 2015 because the federal government is ignoring it and failing to put up the cash or maintain it. Do you know what's going to happen to that quay? It's going to be filled in with rocks. A quay was built and, now that the feds are no longer supporting it, it's going to be filled in with rocks. You're telling me that looking after quays is one of your government's priorities, but when something is a priority, you don't just get rid of it for a dollar. Those are the facts I want the committee to know.

Ms. Gibbons, on behalf of your department, when did you first recommend lifting the moratorium and reopening the redfish fishery?

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** Are you asking me the date?

**Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas:** Yes, I'm asking for the exact date. When did you first recommend the reopening of the redfish fishery based on your scientific data?

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** There were various stages and discussions. We do the science, we do the analysis, we have meetings with committees—

**Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas:** Ms. Gibbons, I don't want to understand the process, I want a date. If you don't have it, you can provide us with an answer later, in writing. Time is short, I'm sure you understand.

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** I understand. What I mean is that there are different stages and we provide advice at different stages. This fishery has been closed for a long time. I was not in the department for that whole time. However, I can say that stocks have made a comeback in recent years, and there have been briefings at various stages.

**Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas:** To clarify my question, when did DFO's scientific data indicate it was possible to reopen the redfish fishery?

I would like an answer in writing.

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** I can tell you that it was recent, because we wanted to have several years of scientific data.

**Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas:** I trust the data, so I'll wait for your written response about the date on which the recommendation was made.

DFO awarded a contract to Mersey Seafoods, which owns the *Mersey Venture*. It's a lucrative contract, \$800 million, to capture redfish data. The fishers are also the ones who will host the scientists gathering the data.

Do you see a conflict of interest there?

• (1655)

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** We have a lot of agreements with companies and fishers to collect data on fish stocks. We don't use Canadian Coast Guard or DFO vessels for everything. We have a lot of agreements and we get a lot of recommendations from the sector. One such recommendation is to develop more partnerships with the industry to collect data because fishers are already out on the water. These partnerships benefit both parties, the government and the fishers.

**Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas:** How do the partnerships benefit the government? Clearly it's using the property of parties it is responsible for monitoring. How does the government ensure true scientific independence?

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** Our scientists are involved in these activities because they're on the boats. That means we need fewer federally owned boats because we can use boats belonging to fishers and companies.

**Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas:** Thank you.

I have another question about the redfish quota.

The DFO model seems to be pretty much the same as what's happening in western Canada. Granting larger shares of quota to big companies means less work for the department. Does your analysis suggest that DFO wants to replicate the western Canadian model for eastern Canada?

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** The approach on both coasts is extremely different, because it evolved very differently. The east coast owner-operator model doesn't exist on the west coast. The east coast approach has been based on the owner-operator model for decades. We've recently done a lot of work to codify that in the regulations. The way things are done on the west coast evolved differently.

As the minister said, we've received requests from certain parties. It's complicated. Not everyone agrees. Some west coast stake-

holders want to emulate the east coast owner-operator model, but no one in the east wants to introduce the west coast model.

**Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas:** I agree with you. That's why I asked the question. You can see that giving 60% of the redfish quota to big companies looks a lot like what's happening in the west.

I have one last quick question for you. Do you have any scientific analysis of bycatch in the redfish fishery? Given the quota that will be allocated to offshore vessels over 100 feet, I'm sure you can see the importance of what I am asking.

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** Yes. There are a lot of discussions about this with the Redfish Advisory Committee, because we have concerns about certain species.

**Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas:** Can you send us those studies? Is it confidential information?

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** No, we can send you information about the discussions we've had regarding the species we're prioritizing and the management measures we're considering to limit the bycatch.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

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

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

For my colleague, I would like to acknowledge that the map was very well done.

Now that the chair is setting a precedent that we're allowed to bring props—

**The Chair:** I didn't say that.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** —I'm looking forward to the many items I'd like to bring to FOPO. I'm thinking of perhaps some video footage of the damage done by open-net fish farms to the surrounding marine ecosystems as one example, but that's for another day.

Moving on to the minister, I stood up in the chamber, Minister—the days are blending together now, but I believe it was the day before yesterday—and asked you a question about the newest accusations that senior DFO officials are muzzling scientists regarding their research into the threats posed by open net-pen Atlantic salmon farms in B.C. waters and that there's now an investigation by the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner happening.

Minister, are you aware of any senior officials at your agency who are doing anything to suppress science that they didn't want to get out, in particular around fish farms, or around anything else?

• (1700)

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** When I took up this position, the important thing for me was to meet with everyone, both those who were for it and those who were against it. Since this is an internal management issue, I think it's best to let the deputy minister answer it. I was told that this was not new news. It's old news.

[*English*]

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Just the translation...I missed the last couple of words there, but I don't believe there was a clear answer to that.

I know it's going through the process of an investigation. Minister, will you be co-operating with the investigation of the Integrity Commissioner and publishing the findings of this investigation once it is finalized?

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** Before I let Ms. Gibbons answer, I can tell you that we'll co-operate fully with the investigation to ensure that things go as smoothly as possible. I certainly won't muzzle anyone.

[*English*]

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** I'll just add that the commissioner has a very well-established process for carrying out these kinds of investigations and seeks the co-operation of the department, which, of course, we provide.

Decisions on publishing findings are at the discretion of the commissioner, because it's an independent organization, so that really is their purview.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Right. The reason I'm asking is there is a pattern, unfortunately, that we have seen whereby science has not been brought to light for many years. I'm thinking of the science of Dr. Miller-Saunders—I believe that's her name; I can get confirmation on that—that didn't come out for 10 years, for example, around the PRV virus, so there is a pattern of science not coming out.

We know, through the study we did as a committee, that key to this is the way in which the CSAS process is undertaken, who's at the table in that decision-making process, and the information that's being made available to the minister.

Now, I'm unsure if the minister has had a chance to look at the process by which science is brought forward in decision-making processes. I'm wondering if she can share what improvements are being made to ensure that science is not only made available for decisions being made, but that accurate science is being made available.

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** Just in general, I would say that all departments that have science in their mandate follow the science integrity policy of the government—DFO has its own—to make sure that scientists are free to carry out and speak about their work, and that there isn't interference in that process.

In terms of changes that were made, certainly at DFO, it's not lost on me at all that there is criticism of science and DFO in different areas. There's criticism on the aquaculture side. There's also

criticism of fish stock decisions, and there are changes that are being made to DFO science—

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Ms. Gibbons, with respect.... Thank you very much. Perhaps you could send the remainder of your response in writing. I hate to cut you off, but my time is limited.

My next question, Minister, is on the increase in derelict and abandoned vessels that we're seeing along all coasts of Canada, east and west. The west is being particularly hard hit with the large number of derelict vessels that are being left to sink and pollute our waters.

Not only is this an issue, and something that's coming up in a study coming forward, but it's been brought to my attention that there have been derelict vessels imported from the United States and brought into biologically sensitive ecosystems to be broken down. Of course, as you can imagine, there are many toxins and hazardous materials that are seeping into the ocean. In particular, the one that I'm referring to is in Baynes Sound.

Why are we importing hazardous derelict vessels from the U.S., when we can't even clean up the ones that we have here in Canada?

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** You're absolutely right. Abandoned vessels are a major problem. We're making progress, but we have to keep working very hard to hold vessel owners, including small craft owners, accountable. They have a responsibility. They can't just abandon their boats wherever they please and expect the government to look after them.

I think Mr. Pelletier can give you more information about that.

• (1705)

[*English*]

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** Minister, I so appreciate your input and the very important input from Mr. Pelletier, but we know that the accountability mechanisms are not in place.

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

We'll go to Mr. Arnold for five minutes.

Go ahead, please.

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

Again thank you, Minister.

I just want to comment on Mr. Kelloway's comment about voting for this budget. There are a number of reasons we do not support the budget, but when 29% of the funding for small craft harbours is going to the fisheries minister's riding, it's pretty hard to support that when we're here to represent all Canadians.



Minister, I'd like to follow up on your government's failure to deliver effective diplomacy for Canadian fish harvesters. Many reports written by this committee have told your government that Canadian fish and seafood need a strong advocate to engage with the U.S. government on issues such as Pacific salmon of B.C. and Yukon origin, the North Atlantic right whales, pinnipeds, the Great Lakes Fishery Commission, transboundary mackerel, illegal trade of lobster and elvers, and the list goes on and on. These are issues that directly impact Canadians and that require diplomacy with our largest trading partner.

Your response to this committee's pinniped report mentioned only complying with American regulations. Canada needs a government that will stand up for Canadians. If my office requests, on your behalf, a meeting with Gina Raimondo, the Secretary of Commerce responsible for the federal fisheries agency at NOAA, will you make yourself available to meet with her to discuss American policies that are hurting Canadian harvesters?

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** The first thing I want to tell you is that Quebec's fishing industry is very present in my riding, which has the most harbours and the most fishing. My riding accounts for 33% of Quebec's entire fishery. Investments in small craft harbours are important, and I have no problem with that.

The second thing I would point out is that I spent nine days in the United States recently. I went to Maine, Boston, and Washington. I can tell you that we talked about fishing and conservation. I also talked about seals with everyone I met. As I have said and continue to say publicly, we have a problem with the seal hunt, or seal fishery, depending on the province and depending on whether seals are classified as fish or meat.

This is going to be important. We're working on this with provincial fisheries ministers.

[English]

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** Did you get any concessions from your U.S. counterpart on the U.S. positions that are hurting Canadian harvesters? Can you name any concessions you got from our U.S. counterparts?

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** I can tell you that the work has begun. Departmental officials are working hard and building the relationship. There's work going on internationally as well—

[English]

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** I'm not asking about your department; I'm asking about your work.

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** —with Japan and with other countries.

[English]

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** I have to pass my time now to Mr. Perkins.

Thank you.

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

Thank you, Minister.

I guess that's a no to Mr. Arnold's question.

I have two quick questions. First, this committee passed a resolution asking if you would open the elver season this year before it's too late. Will you—yes or no?

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** The answer is no for this year.

[English]

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

Because you've chosen to close it, not for conservation reasons but because of the department's inability to enforce the law, will you compensate the legal licence-holders for the living that you took away from them, the 1,100 harvesters that you've thrown out of work, not for conservation but because you couldn't do your job?

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** I was just in Portland, Maine, to meet with people in the fisheries sector and learn from their expertise, to find out what had to be done to protect the resource—

• (1710)

[English]

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** I'm sorry, Minister, but I have little time. I wasn't talking about the United States. I was talking about the 1,100 harvesters in Canada you put out of work. Yes or no, will you compensate them for putting them out of work?

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** It's very bad for the interpreters when two people are talking at the same time.

[English]

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** Will you compensate them—yes or no?

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** We closed that fishery for conservation and product traceability reasons, and I think the numbers I gave you earlier show that it was the right decision.

My priority is working to ensure we have an elver fishery in 2025—

[English]

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** I take it that's a no.

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** —for traceability and protection.

[English]

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** You don't care about the 1,100 families. You won't compensate them for the work that you put them out of—

**The Chair:** Mr. Perkins, your time is up.

We'll now go to Mr. Hardie for five minutes, please.

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

I want to continue on with elvers as an issue.

Minister, you closed the fishery, which means that anybody who's out fishing elvers is doing it illegally. The enforcement piece should be—pardon the pun—like shooting fish in a barrel.

In our studies, including the IUU study that we're just wrapping up now and the look that we did at elvers, I had a lot of concerns, as did others, about the actual safety of people—the people in the community, even the enforcement officers who had to live in the community and perhaps deal with some pretty rough elements who stood to make a lot of money through the illegal trade of elvers.

Can you talk a little bit more about the steps that were taken to provide the enforcement to see if it's possible to shut this fishery down, the illegal one?

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** I want to say that closing a fishery is never a nice thing. It's a tough decision to make because we know it has an impact on the communities that depend on that fishery.

Our data show that 132 individuals were arrested and 21 vehicles and 350 pounds of elvers were seized, along with 150 fyke nets and 249 dip nets. Elvers sell for \$5,000 a pound. For some people, that's a huge incentive to break the law and the rules and jeopardize this resource for the next few years. My goal was to protect the resource as well as people and fishers so things can be done properly.

We're on the ground and we want to get it right. The message I want to convey is this: There must be no illegal elver fishing. We need rules. We need to be able to trace the product. We need to be able to ensure the safety of people who are fishing responsibly.

To achieve that, we had to put a moratorium on the elver fishery for another year. We will follow best practices. We discussed it in Portland when we met with the people in Maine, who have also faced this challenge. As I said, we're going to do what it takes to ensure that the elver fishery can happen properly in 2025.

[English]

**Mr. Ken Hardie:** The fact is that you seize somebody's truck, and there might be a fine. However, when they can go out and make \$5,000 per night illegally fishing, in three nights they can buy a pretty decent used truck again. I think that is the attitude that we see in a lot of areas where enforcement and penalties don't necessarily correspond with the value of the activity of the people who are prepared to break the law.

Are you dealing with the Minister of Justice and Attorney General and with the authorities in the Atlantic provinces to get people through the court system better, to bring in some heftier penalties for doing this? There has to be a point at which it has to hurt enough that they're going to find something else to do. Is that activity under way?

[Translation]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** I'm working with several colleagues. I get quotes from elver fishers. People were talking about Stanley King, who told the Toronto Star that the department had stepped up its actions and that poaching was down this year. Another elver fisher, Mike Townsend, told CBC/Radio-Canada that he was satisfied with what he was seeing this year and that the department was doing regular patrols.

We're working on it. The provincial government, the federal government and various departments are working to ensure that the fishery is sustainable and safe and that we can ensure product traceability.

• (1715)

[English]

**Mr. Ken Hardie:** Now we did hear—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Mr. Hardie. Your time is up.

We'll now go to Mr. Blanchette-Joncas for two and a half minutes, please.

I'll remind members to please not talk over the people who are talking or are recognized to speak.

[Translation]

**Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas:** Minister, I have a bit of a headache. Earlier, you said that the small craft harbours program was important, but I notice its funding has been cut dramatically. Approximately \$2.4 million was allocated to the program in the 2023-24 budget, but that amount dropped to \$750,000 for the 2024-25 fiscal year.

As you said, your riding accounts for 33% of Quebec's fishing economy. If this program is important to you, why has its funding been cut so much? It's a vital program for port and marine infrastructure.

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** There was no budget cut. There's almost half a billion dollars in the upcoming budget. We've always made significant investments.

To get back to what you were saying about Gaspé, it's important not to mix up industrial port zones, which are federal ports governed by Transport Canada, with small craft harbours.

Regarding what was done at DFO, yes, some ports were closed, because we work with ports where there's commercial fishing. That's where we're making investments.

**Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas:** I'll carry on with my questions, Minister, but I'd still like you to provide the committee with a written response from your department, because this information is from the Library of Parliament. Maybe somebody isn't telling us the truth. It could be the analysts, your department or you, yourself. It's important to check the data, because it says here that funding for this program is being reduced to \$750,000 for the 2024-25 fiscal year.

Ms. Gibbons, why are dulse fishers, *palmaria palmate* fishers, subject to different criteria in southern New Brunswick than in Quebec? Many of them have told us they're afraid of being fined because the regulations aren't the same everywhere.

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** You're not talking about a number of people. I think you're talking about one person.

**Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas:** I'm talking about *palmaria palmata*, Madam Minister. This person, whom you must know well, since she lives in your riding, says that she is concerned and finds it unfair that the regulations in southern New Brunswick are not the same as those in Quebec.

Madam Deputy Minister, are algae in Quebec different from algae in southern New Brunswick?

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** I can't give you a specific answer.

**Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas:** Could you provide us with an answer in writing, please?

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** This can be explained by the fact that the provinces have different responsibilities for algae, but I would have to get back to you with a precise answer.

**Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas:** Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Blanchette-Joncas.

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

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

Minister, I am following up on a question that I asked at a previous meeting. I'm unable to see that a response has come in. Perhaps if you have responded you can tell me what it is, but I'm not able to find one.

My question was around the first nations caucus within the Pacific Salmon Commission. Specifically, the first nations caucus, I'm being told, is not being provided adequate funding to be able to take on the role that is needed in order to fulfill why the first nations caucus is there: It was to be able to get elders physically to the meetings and to get people contributing to the capacity they need to ensure the amount of consultation with indigenous people within the nations is being done.

I'm wondering what is being done to ensure the first nations caucus within the Pacific Salmon Commission has adequate funding to be able to do the important work that they are being assigned to do.

● (1720)

**Ms. Annette Gibbons:** We have a lot of different programming that is intended to provide support to our indigenous partners to participate in processes. I think there's always a negotiation of what the amounts are, because there are so many different issues that we're involved with in so many communities. I'd be happy to take that back and provide you with a little more detail.

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron:** I for sure would like to get that information. I will tell you that I have people who are reaching out, who are consistently worried about the fact that we have indigenous people who are being asked to contribute but who aren't being provided with adequate funding to be able to do so. This is a big issue that needs to be mitigated.

We've had witnesses here recently talking to us about the Alaskan interception of salmon. We know we have the lowest returns on record for many salmon populations across British Columbia. We're at a critical point for managing this keystone species. Witnesses have indicated to us that the Pacific Salmon Treaty is failing to meet the core principles of preventing overfishing and ensuring that each party—Canada and the U.S.—receives benefits equal to the salmon originating in the waters. We know that this treaty is up for renewal in 2028. However, urgent action is required now. We know the waters are warming. We know that migratory patterns are changing as a result and that they will not be able to fully get through migratory routes that are in place.

What is being done to ensure that we are working with our U.S. partners to ensure that our salmon are being protected?

**The Chair:** Perhaps we should get that in writing, because we've gone over time for your questioning by about 22 seconds.

The next name I have is Mr. Bragdon, but he's not here.

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** No, it's Mr. Small.

**The Chair:** We have interpretation only until 5:30.

Mr. Small, you're up for five minutes.

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

Mr. Chair, in October of last year, the minister assessed northern cod as being out of the critical zone and into the cautious zone and she said it has been so since 2016. One fish processor in Newfoundland and Labrador who relies solely on codfish to run his operation told me that, as a result, eight years of opportunity to have higher cod quotas has been lost. He's had to rely heavily on imported Norwegian cod. The FFAW has asked you to increase the northern cod quota from 13,000 tonnes to 25,000 tonnes, and the Atlantic Groundfish Council has asked for that quota to be increased to 26,000 tonnes.

Will you agree to either of these requests to increase the quota on northern cod in the upcoming season—yes or no, Minister?

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** As I mentioned, we were waiting until the end of March to have the most recent scientific data. We'll make a decision soon, but we will certainly be in the cautious zone.

We lived through the 30-year moratorium on cod fishing, so things are bound to go well and, as I said, this species will be prevented from being properly protected over my dead body.

[*English*]

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

I think you said you're waiting until the end of March. Well, we're a little bit beyond that. That was over a month ago.

In the recent stock assessment, it was revealed that once again last year the sentinel fishery for northern cod showed no improvement. You rely on data from the sentinel fishery. According to an order paper question that I received an answer to, the data from the stewardship fishery wasn't even analyzed for four years, and yet, you took this sentinel data.

I wonder if your department has ever questioned why the same fisherman in the sentinel fishery goes out and gets 20 fish out of a net on Monday and then goes out on Tuesday and gets 300 fish out of the same net.

Have you ever questioned the validity of the data you've received, for which you pay \$704,000 a year, that shuts down the cod fishery and denies opportunity to fish harvesters?

Have you questioned the validity of the sentinel northern cod fishery?

• (1725)

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** I want to start by answering your first question. I was waiting for the scientific data at the end of March. It then takes some time to compile the data, but we should have an answer for the cod fishery shortly.

However, I can tell you that all the fishers' associations want to participate in building the fisheries of the future and want to work with Fisheries and Oceans Canada. So we're going to get it right. With climate change—

[*English*]

**Mr. Clifford Small:** There's no doubt, but will you question why there's zero improvement in the data that comes in from the sentinel

fishery, which you pay \$700,000 a year to receive? Will you question why that data is not improving while the stewardship fishery has seen its per unit catch data go through the roof? It's the same fishermen who are involved one day in the sentinel fishery and the next day in the stewardship fishery. It's absolutely crazy.

Will you question that? Will you factor in why there are some discrepancies here when you set this year's quota and will you listen to the FFAW and their harvesters who are on the water and know that the stock has recovered? You've been quoted as having said that the fishermen are your "eyes and ears". Will you listen to your eyes and ears?

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** There will be collaboration. Ultimately, I will make the decision.

[*English*]

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

We'll now go to Mr. Cormier for three minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Madam Minister, thank you for being with us for two hours; my colleagues and I are extremely grateful.

I think we could end the meeting by giving you the floor on this important topic. As you said, the fisheries have changed a lot in recent years. Some species are doing better, but others are seeing their stocks decline. As you know, there is a new generation of fishers. Young people want to take over from their parents in order to continue the tradition. However, it is difficult in some sectors.

There will soon be a review of the Fisheries Act. How do you think we can support the new generation that wants to continue what is not only a tradition, but also a very important occupation for our communities, including yours and mine? Do you have any ideas on what the government or the Department of Fisheries and Oceans could do to help the new generation continue this wonderful job that my father did all his life?

**Hon. Diane Lebouthillier:** I think two things are going to be important for the future of the fisheries.

First, if we want to be able to ensure food security, it's important to be concerned about climate change and the warming of the oceans, the pace of which is accelerating around the world right now.

Second, it'll be important to look at access to licences. Who will be able to access a fishing licence? At present, the price of fishing licences is increasing so much that future fishers, the next generation, are going into debt. They can't afford a fishing licence. For example, in my riding, a lobster licence sold for \$10 million. What young person can pay \$10 million for a licence? So we need to know who is behind the buyers, who is going to be the guarantor of the buyer to the financial institutions. If we want to ensure that the owner-operators are really the owners of the licences, how should we go about it?

After hearing various associations talk about it, we want to put measures in place to enable fishers and families to make a good living from the fishing sector. That said, we also want to protect the resource for future generations.

• (1730)

**Mr. Serge Cormier:** Thank you, Madam Minister.

[*English*]

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

I want to say a huge thank you to the minister for coming today and to Mr. Goodyear, Ms. Gibbons and Mr. Pelletier for coming with the minister and providing such valuable information to the committee on the main estimates today.

Again, we'll allow our witnesses to exit, and then we'll continue with 10 minutes of committee business.

I'll suspend for a moment.

• (1730)

(Pause)

• (1730)

**The Chair:** With the time remaining, we have some voting to do.

In all, we have three votes on the main estimates. Unless there are any objections, I will seek unanimous consent of the committee to group the votes together for a decision. Is there unanimous consent to proceed in this way?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Shall all votes referred to the committee in the main estimates, less the amount voted in interim supply, carry?

DEPARTMENT OF FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Vote 1—Operating expenditures.....\$2,175,845,920

Vote 5—Capital expenditures.....\$1,826,755,893

Vote 10—Grants and contributions.....\$491,765,345

(Votes 1, 5 and 10 agreed to on division)

**The Chair:** Shall I report the votes back to the House?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** On division.

**The Chair:** We're now in committee to discuss the supplementary budget for the elver study that was distributed earlier today. Is it the will of the committee to adopt the budget in the amount of \$18,000?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** At our next meeting, on May 21, we will welcome Ms. Sylvie Lapointe and the Atlantic Groundfish Council for the first hour on the study of redfish quotas set by DFO. Then we will resume the review of version one of the IUU report.

Mr. Kelloway.

**Mr. Mike Kelloway:** Are we finished on this piece?

• (1735)

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Mr. Mike Kelloway:** I'd like to move a motion. I move:

That the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans acknowledge the importance of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to protecting the right of fish harvesters to protest government decisions with which they disagree and call on the Leader of the Opposition to publicly rule out the use of the notwithstanding clause to limit protests by both commercial and indigenous fish harvesters. Furthermore, the committee shall report its opinion to the House.

The motion is going around in both official languages.

Mr. Chair, I know our time is limited. I just want to take a couple of moments to discuss the motion on the table and explain to the committee why it's so very important that we have this discussion.

Over the last two weeks, we've seen the Leader of the Opposition openly attack the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the very document that protects Canada's fundamental rights. It is under assault by not just the Leader of the Opposition but also every member of the Conservative caucus who refuses to stand up to do the right thing.

The charter is not just a piece of paper. It's not a meaningless document that can be picked over by the government of the day—any government of the day—to choose which fundamental rights are less important than others. It's not a food menu, and I think it's been said that it's not a buffet of a Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The charter is also directly related to the work that we do on fisheries and oceans. There's not a person around this table, especially from Atlantic Canada, who doesn't understand that the fundamental right to protest is regularly exercised. Almost as a tradition, fish harvesters and their families express deep disappointment at times with governments of all colours.

The Conservative Party, its leader and its members around this table are threatening that right. Even if they protest and say that they won't, how are we truly to know what's in the heart of their leader? How are we truly to know what they would accept or not accept?

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** Have a chat with them.

**Mr. Mike Kelloway:** We've seen already that the Leader of the Opposition is willing to say different things in front of different groups of people. We've seen that he's willing to do anything for the taste of power.

It is abundantly clear, Mr. Chair, that we have a challenge here. I think there are opportunities for Conservative colleagues to have a choice. They can vote to support this motion and make it clear that overriding the rights of protesters is unacceptable, or they can choose to support a leader who demonstrates time and time again that he does not care and that he'll do anything to win.

They need to ask themselves clearly, Mr. Chair, this: Is a man who is willing to do anything or say anything to win power truly going to be stopped by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms if he disagrees with it?

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** I have a point of order.

**Mr. Mike Kelloway:** If squashing protest means gaining power, do you think he won't?

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** I have a point of order.

**The Chair:** Mr. Perkins.

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** I note that we've gone beyond the allotted time for this committee as the member reads his PMO talking points.

**The Chair:** We agreed at the beginning that we would have 10 or 15 minutes at the end.

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** Well, I didn't hear unanimous consent for that.

**The Chair:** We discussed that.

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** No, that was to do committee business at the end.

**Mr. Mike Kelloway:** I can finish up right now.

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** Finish your PMO talking points.

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

It's always interesting that they can give it, but they can't take it.

My Conservative colleagues can vote in favour of this motion and send a clear signal to their leadership that treating the Charter of Rights and Freedoms like a menu is totally unacceptable, or they can vote against it or filibuster the motion and show Canadians which side of fundamental rights and freedoms they're truly on.

In conclusion, I believe it's critically important that this committee adopt this motion and make its voice heard on an issue that aims at the heart of some fundamental rights in Canada.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** We have six minutes.

Mr. Arnold, you have your hand up.

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** I move to adjourn the meeting.

**The Chair:** A motion to adjourn is not debatable. It goes right to a vote.

**Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC):** Have you guys ever read the charter, section 33?

**Mr. Mike Kelloway:** Yes, we have books and paper...the Internet, too.

**The Chair:** We have a motion on the floor to adjourn.

(Motion negatived: nays 7; yeas 4)

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** Is there a speaking list? What time are we going until?

**The Chair:** We have until a quarter to. That's as late as I can go.

**Mr. Damien Kurek:** Who's on the speaking list?

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** We can keep going.

**The Chair:** I have Mr. Arnold, Mr. Kurek—

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** Let's go until midnight.

**The Chair:** I'm not going until midnight. I didn't even go to midnight last night.

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** Let's have a debate on this. What are you afraid of?

**The Chair:** I'm not afraid of anything.

Mr. Arnold.

**Mr. Mel Arnold:** I believe Mr. Kurek is up.

**The Chair:** Mr. Kurek, please go ahead.

**Mr. Damien Kurek:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'm glad to have the opportunity to enter into the discussion on this. It's fascinating that the government, in its reading of PMO talking points specifically meant to divide, distract and misrepresent what the Leader of the Opposition has said, misrepresents some of the fundamental constitutional principles of our federation. What's very interesting, Mr. Chair, is that while Mr. Kelloway was reading his remarks, the context that Canadians are missing is that he and members of the Liberal Party don't want to actually talk about what the Leader of the Opposition said to police chiefs last week.

What did he say? Let's review that.

I would remind my honourable colleagues—I hope they're honourable colleagues—across the way that what the Leader of the Opposition said was very simple and very clear. It was that the most heinous criminals in the history of our country, like serial killers and the Quebec City mosque shooter, should never leave maximum security, and that he would make sure.... He was very transparent on this.

While my Liberal colleagues are quick to have this tinfoil hat-informed discussion about conspiracies, the reality is—and the Leader of the Opposition made it very clear—that the most heinous predators and criminals should never see the light of day.

I think if the Liberals really want to have this discussion, they can go to their constituents and defend to their constituents how they support serial killers being out on day parole and how they support heinous killers like the Quebec City mosque shooter being allowed out, free, on our streets. That's the argument they're making. Mr. Chair. That's the context.

While they try to score cheap political points to fearmonger and scare Canadians, the Leader of the Opposition has been very clear and is providing the leadership that the Prime Minister has refused to provide.

When it comes to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, freedom is a sword that slices both ways. I think that's something my Liberal friends and colleagues forget about, because freedom means also those who disagree with you. I would remind everyone of two things.

First, I encourage members of the Liberal Party to read section 33 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Do you know what's included in section 33? Does anybody know? Interesting.

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** Tell me.

**Mr. Damien Kurek:** I would be happy to. What is included in section 33 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms is the notwithstanding clause.

Talk about gaslighting Canadians. Talk about misrepresenting not just what the Leader of the Opposition says, because one could say that is a political argument that can be fleshed out in debate.... No. What the Liberals are doing is truly misrepresenting what the charter says.

What's interesting is that even in question period today, the foreign affairs minister, Minister Joly, stood up in the House of Commons and said that no judge would stand in the way of her pursuing an agenda.

What's very fascinating is that while the Liberals are trying to score cheap political points misrepresenting what the Leader of the Opposition says, and trying to deface what the charter says, one of their own senior Liberal cabinet ministers is out, speaking about the possibility that she would provide leadership herself to invoke the notwithstanding clause. That is hypocrisy at its absolute height.

This Liberal government breaks records on a regular basis. They're certainly not records that most Canadians are proud of, whether they be record overdoses, as we were debating in the House of Commons today, or record debt. There are so many. There's the corruption, the crime and the chaos.

Specifically, because we're talking about the charter—this is very relevant to the issue at hand, and I hope Mr. Kelloway takes note of this—there is one government in Canadian history that has willfully ignored and taken away the charter rights of Canadians.

• (1740)

Mr. Chair, do you know what government that is? Well, it's the Liberal government led by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

**Mr. Rick Perkins:** What was the name of the other guy?

**Mr. Damien Kurek:** I'll get to the War Measures Act, but this is the invocation of the Emergencies Act.

• (1745)

**The Chair:** I'm sorry but your time is up.

The meeting is suspended.

[*The meeting was suspended at 5:45 p.m., Thursday, May 9*]

[*The meeting resumed at 3:39 p.m., Tuesday, May 21*]

• (30335)

**The Chair:** Welcome to part two of meeting number 110 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans; this is the continuation of the meeting on May 9 that was suspended.

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

Before we begin, I would like to ask all members and other in-person participants to consult the cards on the table for guidelines to prevent audio feedback incidents. Please take note of the following preventive measures in place to protect the health and safety of all participants, including our interpreters. Only use a black, approved earpiece; the former grey earpieces must no longer be used. Keep your earpiece away from all microphones at all times. When you are not using your earpiece, place it face down on the sticker on the table for this purpose. Thank you all for your co-operation.

We are now continuing the debate on Mr. Kelloway's motion, which was suspended on May 9. I'm using the speakers list of members who had raised their hands to speak at the last meeting in order to resume the debate.

We'll go to Mr. Kurek.

**Mr. Damien Kurek:** Thank you very much, Chair.

As I had highlighted before the meeting was suspended, there's a lot that I would certainly be happy to talk about in regard to this motion, but in the meantime, I would move to adjourn debate.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 6; nays 4)

• (30340)

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

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

I'd like to move that we go in camera and continue with our review of version one of the IUU report.

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** I'll suspend for a moment while we switch over to in camera.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]







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