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Chair: Mr. Ken McDonald



Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

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• (1630)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 127 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. For those in the room, you can use the earpiece and select the desired channel. Please address all comments through the chair.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and a motion adopted on February 8, 2024, the committee is resuming its study of derelict and abandoned vessels.

Welcome to our witnesses on the first panel.

We have in the room Mr. Richard Welsford, president of Port of Bridgewater Incorporated. On Zoom, we have Ian Winn, director of the Atł'ka7tsem or Howe Sound UNESCO biosphere region. We also have Mr. Leonard Lee, the board chair and director of Area A, Egmont and Pender Harbour, Sunshine Coast Regional District.

Thank you for taking time to appear today. You will each have five minutes or less for your opening statements.

Mr. Welsford, you can go first, please.

Yes, Mr. Kelloway...?

Mr. Mike Kelloway (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll make this brief.

First, happy belated birthday to MP Perkins. Happy 24th.

Mr. Rick Perkins (South Shore—St. Margarets, CPC): I'll pay you your hundred bucks later.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Mike Kelloway: I would like to put forward a motion, and I'm looking to seek unanimous consent on it.

Very briefly, because we have important witnesses here, the motion you see in front of you is simply based on having a lot of witnesses in terms of the Fisheries Act. We're looking to get a press release out along with using our other modes of communication with stakeholders to let them know of the Fisheries Act study.

I don't know if you want me to read it, but it reads, "That the committee issue a press release to inform stakeholders, indigenous people and communities that they can provide the committee with written submissions on the Fisheries Act review so that we can ensure all voices are heard on this important issue."

I'm just looking for UC on this, and then hopefully we can move right into the witnesses.

The Chair: Okay.

Does anybody have any objection or—

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): There is no unanimous consent.

The Chair: There is no unanimous consent. Okay.

Thank you.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Thank you.

The Chair: All right. Good try.

Now we will start off, as I said, for five minutes or less.

Mr. Welsford, go ahead when you're ready.

Mr. Richard Welsford (President, Port of Bridgewater Incorporated): Thank you. Good afternoon.

Today I'm offering information, questions and, perhaps, criticism of the current abandoned vessel practices. I have direct experience with the ship, the *Cormorant*, which began back in 2002.

The Canadian government disposed of the 240-foot former Canadian navy vessel and sold it to an American company. The ship was brought to the port for repair. Their financial difficulties caused the port to arrest and resell the vessel to a new American company in 2010. By 2013, we had the same problem back again. The ship was broken into at night in March 2015 and intentionally scuttled alongside the wharf. The Canadian Coast Guard intervened, raised the boat and removed the pollutants. The Canadian Coast Guard on-site manager, Mr. Seward Benoit, showed me the cause of the sinking and confirmed it was an intentional and a criminal event.

In 2016, the ship-source oil pollution fund initiated litigation on a subrogated claim for \$534,000. Their broad-brush approach named the port and all the various American owners that could be identified. The port also made a court application to take some management control and have it removed. The Canadian government, inexplicably, opposed this application. This demonstrated to me that there was something amiss about the whole situation. The port, its volunteers and the entire town of Bridgewater were being held hostage by Canada's opposition to dispose of the vessel. Concurrently, the ship-source oil pollution fund pursued a course of focusing on ownership. In 2018 a summary trial was held with no result, because the court could not decide on ownership.

The port applied again to remove the *Cormorant* ship in the summer of 2019, which Canada again opposed. Their position was that the boat posed no threat to the environment. Coast Guard employees Stephan Bournais, Keith Laidlaw and David Yard previously stated the vessel was not leaking, the pollutants had been removed and the ship was stable. The port was asked to support a government survey in July 2019.

As our last motion hearing for management control allowing for the disposal was opposed by Canada, the court prothonotary suggested that an out-of-court solution might be more timely. The port and Canada agreed that the port would take control and title of the ship—only for that agreement—and dispose of it, and any funds collected by the ship's sale would go to a guaranteed payment of \$400,000 within two years. Over the two months needed to get court ratification, one hurricane and the completion of unshared draft survey reports, a consent judgment was agreed upon. Within hours the Coast Guard then came back and seized the vessel, claiming it was a grave and immediate threat of pollution. The Coast Guard has withheld all documents required for discovery purposes, including ministerial decisions and financial disclosure.

These thoughts I'll leave with you. The vessel had pollutants removed in 2015, and the costs for doing so were reimbursed to the Coast Guard. Then, there were, all of a sudden, contaminants in 2019, and we're still asking, "From where?" The ship was being held in Bridgewater by actions of the ship-source oil pollution organization, holding the community hostage and incurring a considerable cost. We don't know why.

The ship-source oil pollution fund reports to Parliament through the Minister of Transport, and the Canadian Coast Guard reports to Parliament through the Minister of Fisheries. Are they all still considered the Crown, one Crown? If subrogation laws relate to these same two entities, are they expected to speak in one voice, co-operate fully and honour any legal obligations made?

Were survey reports produced, even as drafts? Were they withheld during a settlement negotiation for months, a discovery process, through a major hurricane and, even, an election, knowing the plan was to seize the vessel as soon as a deal was signed? Was the seizure made by ministerial decision, as is required? If the seizure was unlawful, the ship broken up and its contents disposed of, does it fit the definition of piracy? It is still on the books, in sections 74 and 75 of the Criminal Code.

I am pleased to answer your questions.

• (1635)

The Chair: Thank you for that.

We now go to Mr. Winn for five minutes or less, please.

Mr. Ian Winn (Director, Átl'ka7tsem Howe Sound UNESCO Biosphere Region): Good afternoon, Chair, and esteemed committee members. It is a privilege to be invited to meet with you today on the important topic of derelict and abandoned vessels.

I live on the sunshine coast close to the small community of Ch'kw'elhp or Gibsons, located in the traditional territories of the Squamish Nation. My personal journey of learning about and dealing with these vessels began 10 years ago when I was an elected director with the Sunshine Coast Regional District for Area F, West Howe Sound. A November storm was blowing, and a sailboat that was being used as a live-aboard had broken its mooring in Gibsons Harbour and beached close to a community dock, risking nearshore homes.

The Coast Guard determined that there was no life safety issue or obvious contamination to the marine environment, and that it was not a hazard to navigation. After a few more calls for help, we realized that no government agency was taking responsibility. The community rallied and, working under lights that night when the vessel was on the beach at low tide, the vessel was pumped out and the hatches and windows sealed shut. At 4 a.m. on the high tide, a local tugboat operator pulled the vessel off the shore to a safe harbour, where it could be cleaned out and disposed of. The learnings for me and our community were that if you have a problem with a derelict or abandoned vessel, you're on your own.

Fast-forward 10 years. Thankfully much has been done at the federal government level to protect our marine environment with the introduction of the oceans protection plan, the subsequent WAHVA and now the vessel remediation fund, but gaps still exist.

Through my volunteer involvement with the Átl'ka7tsem or Howe Sound UNESCO biosphere region, I remain committed to issues such as derelict and abandoned vessels, marine debris and the best management practices for marine docks. Our local communities carry out many beach cleanup events, and through the good work of organizations like the Dead Boats Disposal Society, Ocean Legacy Foundation and the Átl'ka7tsem/Howe Sound Marine Stewardship Initiative, the marine environment is in a much better condition today than it was five years ago. However, those learnings and challenges encountered 10 years ago still persist today. This jurisdictional quagmire of who has the responsibility for dealing with D and A vessels is still very real.

In many cases, time is of the essence to deal with a vessel before it sinks or breaks up on shore. Two such situations in Átl'ka7tsem or Howe Sound underscore this situation. The first one involved an individual who bought a powerboat on a trailer in Squamish but who only really wanted the trailer. It was towed to the B.C. park at Porteau Cove, where the boat was launched and set adrift. The boat ran aground, became lodged under the government dock, broke up and sank. The finger pointing as to who was responsible continued while the marine debris and pollutants accumulated on shore. B.C. Parks finally removed the boat.

A much larger situation exists in Andy's Bay on the west side of Gambier Island in Átl'ka7tsem or Howe Sound, a bay closely located between a rockfish conservation area and a protected glass sponge reef. An individual was paid by the owner of two large scows and a barge to take possession of them and dispose of them in a proper manner. The vessels were towed to Andy's Bay two years ago and have been left to rot and take on water. The barge broke free in a storm and washed ashore on a neighbouring island. One of the scows sank in 300 feet of water and the remaining scow ownership has, through a long process, been transferred through the TC receiver of wrecks to a person who continues to search for a place to properly dispose of it and has to check on it and pump it out regularly.

The root of this problem is that the individual who was paid to dispose of the vessels is known to Transport Canada and is a repeat offender for doing this with other vessels in southwest British Columbia. However, the behaviour still continues, and authorities appear to be hamstrung to deal with the situation in a timely manner while the environment gets polluted.

As evidenced by this parliamentary committee, the federal government is stepping up to face the challenges of D and A vessels, but there is still more to be done. However, other levels of government at the provincial and local levels don't share in this responsibility. At the federal level, TC, CCG and DFO must be empowered to address D and A vessels in a much more timely manner. Less bureaucracy is needed in order to prevent pollution in our challenging and diverse Canadian marine environments.

• (1640)

Thank you for this opportunity to speak. I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

Before I go to Mr. Lee, I have to ask the clerk to do a sound check for our interpreters, just to see if the connection is okay. I'm going to suspend for a moment while that's taking place.

- (1644) _____ (Pause) _____
- (1645)
- (1645)

The Chair: We're back.

Mr. Lee, you can start. You have five minutes or less for an opening statement.

Mr. Leonard Lee (Board Chair and Director, Area A - Egmont and Pender Harbour, Sunshine Coast Regional District): Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and committee members. I have to say thanks to all of you for serving on this committee and taking the time to listen to all the areas of Canada that are affected by the abandoned and derelict boat phenomenon, as I call it.

My name is Leonard Lee, and I turned 76 years old yesterday. I was born and raised in Pender Harbour, as were my mother and father. Pender Harbour is on the Sunshine Coast and approximately 60 kilometres north of Vancouver. I'm one of those guys who grew up on the water, as boats were the only means of transportation when I was young. Plus, my father was a commercial fisherman. I have lots of concerns about the health of our environment.

I logged and fished after high school, saved some money, went to vocational school, worked in telecommunications for Telus for 30 years and retired at 55. I've been full time on the Sunshine Coast since retiring. I've always been here. I'm active in many not-for-profit organizations, such as the chamber, the Living Heritage Society museum, the residents association and the Harbour Authority of Pender Harbour. I was strong-armed into running for the SCRCD director by those I now call my "so-called friends", and I've been at it for six years, the last two as chair of the regional district.

I'm very proud of the Sunshine Coast. It's a friendly place, isolated from Vancouver by ferry service, which runs periodically during the day. We're effectively an island, even though we are connected to the mainland.

The reason I mentioned Pender Harbour is that it's a very nice harbour. It has multiple bays and coves, and it stretches inland for five kilometres. It has over 60 kilometres of shoreline, 300 private docks and a very active boating community. It's popular with summer boating tourists. We also have a lot of derelict and abandoned boats.

Derelict and abandoned boats are a relatively new phenomenon and with many different causes. A main cause is that there's no longer anything called cheap moorage in our harbour. Increased regulations—including for limited dock size and construction standards—and the high cost of purchasing and owning waterfront property have pretty much eliminated any category called “cheap moorage”. Once you don't have cheap moorage, people can't afford to tie up the cheaper boats. The less affluent owners become guardians of those cheaper boats, and they resort to anchoring them in our protected bay. There are hundreds of them around the Sunshine Coast, the vast majority not insured or registered.

There are probably a hundred of them right now in Pender Harbour and Egmont, and there's a cross-section of boats. There are several large ex-commercial vessels owned by individuals. They're derelict. They were bought by guys who were going to make their fortune. Of course, that didn't happen. They're floating still, but who knows why they're floating. The owners don't have any money left to do anything with them. They're eventually going to rust out and sink.

We have a whole bunch of boats that are at legal mooring buoys and not a problem. They're generally in front of the owners' residences and maintained. However, the vast bulk of boats are almost-good, cheap boats. They're first anchored by owners who thought they were going to use them for recreation, but they're not in front of the owners' properties. They're only randomly used due to the difficulty in accessing them. Inevitably, a canvas will break or a boat battery will die, and the boat will fill with water and become immovable. If the owner can't afford to fix it, it's a derelict boat sitting at anchor, and it will eventually sink since the owners can't get to it.

The problem boats are now the ones that are illegally at permanent anchor. There are way too many boats in too small a space in many bays. The anchor is not a secure moorage, and it's prone to drag under heavy winds, scouring the sea bottom, damaging eel-grass beds and bouncing off other boats that are tied to wharves. Some end up on the beach. Most often, a local will rescue them and return them to anchor.

There are no mooring lights or anchor lights, which is a hazard for navigation. Boats have been known to collide with them, trying to drive through them at night. Near misses are common. A few of them are live-aboards with no liquid waste holding tanks. People simply dump their garbage over the side at night. Some are fixer-uppers, with owners trying to fix them up and make them livable and self-propelled, but all they do is end up selling them to someone who lives aboard them. Then they end up abandoned and eventually sink.

• (1650)

The problem we have now is that we wait until they sink and then do something with them. That's way too late. We should have some way of avoiding that in the first place and making sure they don't end up sinking. I have lots of ideas on how that could happen, but I think I'm pretty much out of time.

The Chair: Yes, you're a bit over, but not by much.

Before I go to questions, I want to remind members that there are two witnesses online and one here in person, so please identify who your question is going to instead of having everybody staring into space wondering who's supposed to answer it.

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

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

Thank you, witnesses, for coming for this important study. My questions in this round will be primarily for Mr. Welsford.

Mr. Welsford, if I'm right, you are the former owner of the Bridgewater Marina. Is that correct?

Mr. Richard Welsford: I'm currently the president of Port of Bridgewater Incorporated, but the asset, which was the port, has been disposed of.

Mr. Rick Perkins: The issue that you're here for—and it's always a pleasure to see a constituent before a parliamentary committee—has to do with several abandoned vessels that you were saddled with while operating that port. The main one that got most of the press was the *Cormorant*.

I want to ask you a question at the beginning before I get into this. Is it correct that you were the Liberal riding association president when my predecessor, Bernadette Jordan, was introducing legislation on this issue and when she was the fisheries minister dealing with it?

Mr. Richard Welsford: That's correct. Of course, I worked with them up until we started having disputes. I felt I was in conflict at that point.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Let's talk about those disputes.

The *Cormorant* sank twice. The first time it sank, the ship-source oil pollution fund said that all of it was cleaned out. Then it sank a second time, and they had to do it again. It cost millions of dollars.

If it was cleaned out the first time, why did they have to do it a second time when it sank?

Mr. Richard Welsford: I have a little correction. The only time that it actually sank—in our case it settled out and was never submerged—was in 2015. That was in March, in the middle of a snow-storm in the middle of the night with locked gates and locked hatches. As I testified, the Coast Guard eventually discovered that it was an intentional scuttling.

That vessel was due out of the port with new ownership a few months later, as soon as the ice had left the river. The costs for that were recovered from the ship-source oil pollution fund by the Coast Guard. Of course, all of us felt that they were reimbursed for removing the pollutants from that vessel. That's part of the deal. If you get support from them, you clean it up.

Mr. Rick Perkins: It seems to be the case, as in other witness testimony, that one thing that ends up happening is a dispute over ownership and who's responsible for removing the vessel and for cleanup. You went through years and years of court issues, it sounded like from your testimony. Is that correct?

Mr. Richard Welsford: We've seemed to have a court issue just about every month since 2015. Even up to the present, there are some ongoing issues that have not been nailed down.

Mr. Rick Perkins: The issue of ownership was one thing that got in the way. Who was the owner? It seemed to be mysterious.

Mr. Richard Welsford: Our focus was on getting somebody back in charge of the vessel and getting it out of there with management control or temporary title—doing anything to get what was left of it out of there. The ship-source oil pollution fund blocked that at every hearing we went forward with. Instead, they pursued the issue of trying to establish ownership. This was a bit tricky, because you had American firm after American firm...and it turned out one of them was from Nevada at the end of the day and had dissolved. It was like there was nobody for the ship-source fund to target except the poor volunteer community port in Bridgewater.

• (1655)

Mr. Rick Perkins: You took it upon yourself, as I understand it, with the support of DFO at the time, to seek control and ownership so you could deal with it and get it out of there. Is that correct?

Mr. Richard Welsford: We asked the Federal Court several times, and eventually the prothonotary who was supervising all our legal steps suggested to both of us that the most efficient way of doing this was to try to come up with some sort of negotiation whereby we get the ship out of there, the ship-source fund eventually gets compensated for some of their out-of-pocket expenses and life goes on.

Mr. Rick Perkins: You eventually got ownership of it in order to do that. Did you have somebody you could sell it to?

Mr. Richard Welsford: All along, we had people trying to purchase the vessel, and without a title, of course, nobody would take the risk to move it on.

Mr. Rick Perkins: You did get title, though, eventually, and then DFO stepped in. Is that correct?

Mr. Richard Welsford: As part of our negotiation to get management control, we asked for temporary title for the purposes of that agreement only, so that if we sold it, or when we sold it, we could give the new owner clear title. Of course, our mission was to get it out of there.

Mr. Rick Perkins: What did DFO do?

Mr. Richard Welsford: That exercise, the discovery process for getting what we thought was all the information on the table, was at the end of September 2019. Eventually, about November 8, we received a document with a judge's signature and, within hours, DFO came back, seized the vessel and wouldn't let us on it.

Mr. Rick Perkins: They took it—

Mr. Richard Welsford: They took it.

Mr. Rick Perkins: —with a submersible on it that was worth money and sent you a bill.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Perkins. Your time is up for that round of questioning.

We'll now go to Mr. Weiler for six minutes or less.

Mr. Patrick Weiler (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

I thank our witnesses for being here in person and joining virtually.

I think it's only appropriate to start by asking questions through Mr. Chair to the birthday boy here, Mr. Lee.

I appreciate how you've been able to walk us through some of the causes of the amount of abandoned and derelicts we're seeing in Pender Harbour, as well as some of the impacts: how that's impacting the marine environment and also the tourism side.

You referenced in your opening remarks some of the ideas you have on how to prevent these boats from sinking in the first place. I was hoping that you might be able to share with the committee some of what your ideas and recommendations might be for how we're able to improve some of the programming that we already have in place now.

Mr. Leonard Lee: Through the chair, thank you.

The fixed buoy program, where it can actually be licensed and put in correctly, holds a boat in place and does work quite well when there is a landowner who can keep an eye on the boat and look after it. Making a more elaborate program under federal navigation to authorize and license buoys is a good thing to do if you're going to anchor.

The other thing is to not allow anybody to anchor over a couple of days in any one place and to find a way of policing that. There are examples of where that does work—False Creek and Nanaimo Harbour—where there is a body that can monitor it, get people to move on when they stay too long and take care of boats that are basically abandoned at anchor illegally. That involves having an organization that will do it and also giving them the authority to do it, which doesn't happen in the rural areas where most of this stuff is occurring. It would require some changes in regulation if you went that way.

The only other way that would work would be to increase monitoring by the existing official bodies like the Coast Guard and start enforcing those regulations.

I have to say that, when the boat is sunk, we can then do something about it, because the local people will identify where it is. They'll start all the paperwork. At that point, we do pick it up and crunch it up. The problem is solved as long as the boat is small enough that we can handle it.

Our greatest fear right now is if our *Pacific Challenger* goes down. It's a 160-foot steel boat. The Coast Guard has removed most of the pollutants, but when something like that goes down to the bottom of the ocean, it causes a lot of damage when it hits. You can't find a spot deep enough in a little harbour where it doesn't become a natural reef, let's call it. In fact, it becomes a hazard to navigation. We need to find a way of looking after those bigger boats as well, because the community and our existing program just can't handle that part of it. It has to be a multijurisdictional effort to get together and figure out solutions.

• (1700)

Mr. Patrick Weiler: Thank you very much for that, Mr. Lee.

I want to ask my next question of Mr. Winn.

Building off of what Mr. Lee mentioned, one of the big challenges that we have, even when boats are removed from the water, is what to do with those boats. I was hoping you might be able to share your thinking on how the federal government might be able to help with the proper disposal of boats and their component parts after they are removed.

Mr. Ian Winn: Thank you, Mr. Weiler, for the question.

The issue is, whether it's a small boat.... As Mr. Lee stated, they were able to take them out of the water, crunch them up and dispose of them. That's okay if it's a smaller size of vessel, but the challenge comes more when it is larger, such as the larger one he mentioned or in Átl'ka7tsem or Howe Sound.

There's a lot of industry that happens with logging activities—log booms, barges and vessels of more significant size than recreational. As I mentioned in my statement too, there are barges, scows and other larger vessels that may be going up to the Squamish terminal. It's a little bit different. We're not that far away from Pender Harbour, but we are in a different part of the sea.

What happens to those larger vessels? This committee has heard of ship-breaking facilities on Vancouver Island and Union Bay that are a bit problematic because of contaminations and pollution.

There's a ship-breaking facility in the Howe Sound area that is trying to get under way, but it's being met with a lot of requirements. Sometimes those requirements are onerous. They need to have environmental assessments done. They need to have an archaeological assessment done, typically by a first nations interest. Then DFO, Transport Canada and others may get involved. It becomes a bit of a long, onerous process.

The federal government could help in this by, first of all, identifying that.... Certainly we want to prevent it from happening, and we don't want them down at the bottom of the ocean. When situations occur and it's a larger vessel, we need ship-breaking facilities.

I would ask the federal government to recognize this and perhaps empower agencies like DFO and Transport Canada to be part of the solution and to really collaborate with all levels of government. As many on this committee have heard, in British Columbia, it is this quagmire of provincial, federal and different authorities that—

• (1705)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Winn. We've gone over time on Mr. Weiler's questioning.

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

[Translation]

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

Thank you to the witnesses. I've been enjoying hearing from them.

I was charmed by Mr. Lee's description of where he lives when he suddenly started talking about an island and ferries.

As you know, I represent the Bloc Québécois, so my main concern is the St. Lawrence River. I, too, live on an island where there's a ferry. That really resonated with me.

I thought we could talk about vessels staying at anchor—we use that expression, too—off certain coastlines. In the St. Lawrence, we have more of a problem with wrecks on the riverbed. There's a lot of marine transportation in the St. Lawrence. There are a few bays, a few marinas, a few ports of refuge.

[English]

The Chair: Madame Desbiens, could I interrupt, please? I think Mr. Arnold and I are getting some feedback from another mic that may be on.

Go ahead again, Madame Desbiens. We'll see if there's any feedback. Mr. Arnold will let us know.

[Translation]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: That was a long introduction, but I do have a question.

Mr. Chair, I think I'm getting feedback. It's as if there were two—

[English]

The Chair: We're getting both English and French in the earpiece, so I have your time stopped. We'll see if we can resolve what's going on here. We'll suspend for a moment.

• (1705)

(Pause)

• (1710)

The Chair: We're back. We'll start the clock right from the top for Madame Desbiens because the sound was horrible.

Please start off with your six minutes or less.

[Translation]

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

Thank you to the technicians, thank you to the interpreters for their patience, and thank you to the witnesses for being here.

Mr. Lee, I was charmed by your description of your environment, which sounds a lot like mine. You talked about an island, a ferry, lots of tourists and, of course, the abandoned vessels problem.

Things work a little differently in the St. Lawrence. Yes, there are marinas, and boats can be anchored offshore. That said, we deal with abandoned vessels fairly well. As far as I know, they don't stay in the St. Lawrence River for long.

Why do boats remain anchored for years where you live, abandoned by owners who can't be traced? Is there a municipal, provincial or federal plan for that? What is the Canadian Coast Guard's role when it comes to abandoned vessels?

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Lee, that question was for you.

Mr. Leonard Lee: I'm sorry. All I hear is the French version, and I only have high school French, so I couldn't follow it. I apologize.

The Chair: You can select French on your iPad or computer, whatever you're using. You can select the language of your choice. If you want to hear English when somebody else is speaking, hit English, and you'll hear English as Madame Desbiens is speaking French. You won't hear her French; you'll just hear somebody speaking in English in your earpiece.

Mr. Leonard Lee: Yes, I was looking at it. It says English and French, so if I click French—

The Chair: No, click English. You want to hear it in English.

I'm going to ask Madame Desbiens to repeat her question to you, and you let us know if you don't hear it in English.

[Translation]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: No problem, Mr. Lee.

Can you hear me well? Can you understand me in your language?

[English]

Mr. Leonard Lee: Yes, I can. Thank you.

[Translation]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: I was very interested in your description of your region, which sounds a lot like mine. I'm an islander, too. I'm from Isle-aux-Coudres, in the middle of the St. Lawrence, and people get there by ferry.

It occurred to me that tourism is an important economic driver in both our regions.

As I understand it, abandoned vessels along the shoreline in your area are a bit of a blight on the seascape. It sounds like your community doesn't know how to manage these kinds of vessels that serve no purpose, that are anchored at sea and that deteriorate over time.

Here's my question.

Abandoned vessels in the St. Lawrence don't stay abandoned for very long. For one thing, if a vessel is anchored somewhere, sooner or later a powerful northern storm comes along, and the vessel is

gone. It's a very unpredictable and violent river, and the winds in the St. Lawrence estuary are very violent, too.

From what I understand, you also have storms where you are, but vessels weather them and sometimes even cause collisions. There are a lot of abandoned boats at anchor.

What can the municipal, provincial and federal governments do? Does the Canadian Coast Guard help you in some way?

• (1715)

[English]

Mr. Leonard Lee: Yes, thank you.

I should speak French. On my mother's side, I was all French, but living in B.C., we didn't have that option. You have my apologies. My brother sent his kids to French immersion to correct that, which I thought was very nice of him. It's too bad we didn't have it when I was younger.

Yes, we need stronger winds. It would take better care of our problem. We do get some pretty good winds, but our harbours are very well protected. Some boats do break loose, usually when they tie up two boats to one anchor. They'll wander around, and they'll hit other anchored boats, but then they'll hit boats that are properly moored to a dock. At that point, the owners will get kind of excited with these things bouncing off of them, and they will generally phone the local search and rescue, who will tow them back out and anchor them.

However, there's very little we can do about those boats before they sink. We do try to get an owner to give up ownership and let us crunch them, but owners are very reluctant. They're treasures to them, and until they sink.... That's really about the only viable option right now. We just wait until they sink, and then we crunch them. That's not good. It's not a very viable option. It should be taken care of before it gets to that point.

[Translation]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Can the Canadian Coast Guard intervene when that happens? Does it have jurisdiction? The Coast Guard isn't getting involved, is it?

[English]

Mr. Leonard Lee: No, they don't become involved. Yes, it's a pretty tough situation.

[Translation]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: What would help you deal with this issue? What do you need?

[English]

Mr. Leonard Lee: It would be very helpful if the boats weren't there, anchored, in the first place. If they simply weren't allowed to anchor over two or three days and had to move on, that would be the most helpful thing.

We have had instances where a local not-for-profit has gotten involved and managed to obtain ownership, and then through grants, we've been able to get money to dispose of them. That does work, if we get excited enough, but the local not-for-profits are—

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Sorry, I have to interrupt you.

Do you know if those are federal grants? Or is it provincial support?

[*English*]

Mr. Leonard Lee: It's been provincial grants that we've had. I'll have to go back and check with the not-for-profits. I could be wrong.

• (1720)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: My understanding is that the federal government doesn't help you very much.

[*English*]

Mr. Leonard Lee: They have been very helpful in a lot of ways through the boats that have been tied up at the harbour association facilities and are derelict. The federal government has a program that assists the harbour authorities to actually get rid of those boats, and that has been a very good program. I can't think of any derelict boats that we have now at our actual small craft harbour facilities. Those have all been taken care of.

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Desbiens.

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

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

Thank you to the witnesses who are here today. It's always great to be able to hear different perspectives on what's happening on the west coast and on the east coast. It's good to have all of you here.

My first question is for you, Mr. Winn. You talked about the vessels that are being launched and set adrift. I know that I've said this in every meeting so far, I think, but this comes up over and over again. It's the fact that, right now, for many who own vessels and boats, it is easier for them to abandon a vessel than it is for them to dispose of it properly, which is not at all where we should be at this point in time.

I'm wondering if you could let me know if you know of any turn-in programs or recycling initiatives for wrecked and abandoned vessels in your area. Do vessel owners know what they can do with their vessel when it has reached the end of its life?

Mr. Ian Winn: Thank you for the question.

Yes, I think there are programs available, but the communication to the vessel owner isn't there. Especially if it's a small boat, they look at it more like an automobile or a vehicle that they can just push off into the woods and will disappear.

The programs are there, to some extent, and there is some funding available, mostly at the provincial level or through organizations where funds are raised, like at our biosphere region, where it's

a marine debris fund and people give money to it. The programs do exist, but the communication to the public and the small craft owners might not be there. That could definitely be improved.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you very much.

Just to clarify, then, would it be your feeling that what's currently in place is not adequate? Is that the sense you're getting?

Mr. Ian Winn: That's true, yes. There's a lot more opportunity, and it would require a lot more money. It does cost a lot of money to recover a vessel if it's on the bottom, or even to take it off the beach and dispose of it properly.

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

Mr. Lee, welcome and happy belated birthday. I would sing happy birthday to you, but I'll leave that to Madame Desbiens if she'd like to.

I wanted to ask you a question, Mr. Lee. You talked about vessels—I'm trying to remember your exact words now—floating and just being abandoned and left. I'm wondering about one thing that has been brought to my attention. It's that the bar is set too high for the vessels to be cleaned up. What happens is that they'll come and review it and say, “Okay, you know what? It's not polluting to the level that we need it to be polluting in order to clean it up.” Then it sits there and continues to pollute and becomes a big compounding problem.

I'm wondering if you have seen anything like this, where vessels that are already polluting are left because they don't reach that threshold to be cleaned up.

Mr. Leonard Lee: The pollution that is probably the most harmful is a boat that sinks and has some diesel left in it when it sinks.

Yes, that happens. We don't deal with them until they sink. You can have a look at them and you can say, yep, it's going to go down—that it was close last week and this week it's probably its turn—but typically we don't deal with it until it has gone down.

• (1725)

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

I apologize. I don't mean to interrupt you. Perhaps, you could finish your response along with clarifying the.... I've had a very full day today. My brain is very full. Around the.... Maybe I'll just let you finish and then I'll remember the next part. I'm sorry about that. You can continue.

Mr. Leonard Lee: The biggest pollution problem is when the boat sinks. Some boats have batteries in them with pumps. They leak heavily, and they regularly pump the bilge water out into the ocean. As long as the owner has some way of keeping the battery charged, it just continues to do that. It's a source of pollution, but it's not as bad as when the boat sinks.

The biggest source of pollution in our harbours are the live-aboards that don't have holding tanks. They just plain dump the sewage overboard. They live there for years and years, sitting on an anchor and polluting the water. That's the thing that actually causes the seafood and the shellfish that our first nations would like to harvest to not be harvestable, because these boats are typically in closed harbours, where they can actually sit at anchor without blowing away. Also, the bays don't flush. For instance, it takes about five days for the water to flush in our harbour.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lee.

Thank you, Ms. Barron. Your time is up.

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

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

My time is short, but I'm going to split it with Mr. Perkins after I get through a couple of questions.

Mr. Lee, I'll just ask you, if you could, to submit in writing to the committee what you feel need to be the changes in regulations and enforcement, so we won't tie up a lot of committee time. Can you make that fairly clear in a written submission to the committee, as soon as possible, so that we can consider that in any recommendations we might have on this?

You also just mentioned live-aboards with no waste disposal and so on. Can you indicate why there are people living aboard vessels that are basically almost derelict or possibly derelict?

Mr. Leonard Lee: We have a housing shortage and affordable housing is quite a problem here. People can get these boats essentially for free because the owner doesn't want to pay to dispose of them, so they'll give them to someone.

In a couple of instances that we have in Porpoise Bay, which is near Sechart—Chief Joe was talking about at the last hearing—that bay essentially does not flush.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Basically, the cost of living and the housing crisis have contributed to the extent of some of the pollution issues that you're experiencing. Is that correct?

Mr. Leonard Lee: The answer to that is yes. There are some mental health issues as well associated with it, but the primary reason is the housing crisis.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you very much.

I want to move on now to Mr. Welsford, if I could.

Mr. Welsford, I hope that we have no nefarious characters listening or watching this FOPO meeting today, because what I'm going to say could be used possibly to the detriment of our harbours and so on. However, it appears to me, from what I'm hearing, that the ownership and the responsibility of that ownership are being sloughed off.

From what it looks like to me, someone could set up a limited company, could buy a vessel, could dissolve that company.... If someone were to do that, what would happen to the title of that vessel if it were registered to the company?

Mr. Richard Welsford: That's a very interesting question, because you're talking to a biologist and not a lawyer, but I'm learning a lot, quickly...or over 20 years perhaps.

There's a process called escheatment, and it's usually provincial legislation. It's almost equivalent in British Columbia to as it is in Nova Scotia. If a company has an asset, whether it's property or otherwise, and if that company fails somehow, then that asset escheats to the provincial Crown.

In the case of British Columbia, the ship-source oil pollution fund, with the Coast Guard as a partner, pursued the Province of British Columbia to enforce this law of escheatment and to have it assume ownership of vessels in that situation. The province lost. It was appealed, and the province lost.

I'm sure if you look into the province's budgets these days, it has a budget for the disposal of abandoned vessels. In Nova Scotia, it didn't pursue that route.

• (1730)

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

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

Mr. Rick Perkins: What happened when the Coast Guard stole the vessel off the wharf? I think Bernadette Jordan, the fisheries minister, was standing there waving at it at the time, in a little photo op.

Were there assets on there that were yours and that, because of this ownership process, they didn't pay you for?

Mr. Richard Welsford: Remember that part of our agreement was to provide \$400,000—guaranteed—to them. We used our asset of the property to guarantee that a payment would be made. That \$400,000 wasn't picked out of the sky. We had customers who we were sure would provide approximately that amount. Plus, there were assets on the vessel: generators and a submersible with, actually, historical value. That had all disappeared.

We've never had any accounting for it, except that there is now a document that we have in our possession where the minister of the day, Bernadette Jordan, offered to donate that submarine or submersible.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Can you table that?

Mr. Richard Welsford: Of course. I will provide that.

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

Mr. Rick Perkins: You should ask me if there shouldn't be criminal charges on these things.

The Chair: We'll now go to Mr. Hardie for five minutes or less, please, to finish up this first hour.

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

I appreciate the testimony we've had so far.

I don't know where to start, but we'll start with you, Mr. Winn.

Are there changes that can be made to accelerate, basically, the deeming of a vessel to be abandoned and to not leave anybody with any obligations to try to track down owners, etc.?

I know you've said that you're a biologist and not a lawyer, but I guess you're learning both pieces of this in an awful hurry here. Would you like to see something like that?

Mr. Ian Winn: Thank you.

That wasn't me who is the biologist and not a lawyer, but anyway, yes, I think there need to be ways to assess.

I think that's your question: How do we assess it quickly as to the risk? It shouldn't be left up to communities to do their own assessment of a vessel when it's on a beach. If it's a clear and present danger to the community infrastructure or the community property owners, it shouldn't be left to them.

We need to have a better and streamlined way to assess and figure out who is responsible for making the assessment and at which level of government—it can vary tremendously here—and then be able to act. It's not only to observe, record and report. We need action—

Mr. Ken Hardie: Okay. If I may, I am rather short of time here.

The Dead Boats Disposal Society was mentioning that those inland waters between Vancouver Island and the mainland are basically all in the provincial domain. The provinces ceded some authorities to the Coast Guard. The Coast Guard is worried about navigation hazards and, I suppose, to some extent, pollution, but the nuisance factor seems to fall off the board. As well, municipalities do have the authority to put in place bylaws, etc., that would allow them to take action. When we're cooking up our recommendations, we wouldn't mind hearing something from you, perhaps in a written form, to say, "This is what would make life easier for us in addressing this problem."

I'd like now to go to Mr. Lee. Happy birthday again, sir.

Let's look at the future. What can we start to do now that will eliminate this problem when the next cycle of boats coming to the end of their life happens? What would you recommend?

• (1735)

Mr. Leonard Lee: There are two things that could occur.

One is more public moorage, but that doesn't seem to be in the cards. The federal government is divesting itself of public moorage as fast as it can, so it's left up to the private sector to provide moorage, and they do it at market value plus profit. You have to have a lot of means to be able to leave a boat in the water tied up and useful, so that's a big problem. I wish one of the levels of government would subsidize more moorage. Our harbour authority does have relatively inexpensive moorage, but it's full. There's something like a five-year waiting list to try to get a spot.

The most important thing we could do.... You mentioned the municipal ability to manage a harbour. Regional districts don't have that authority, and that's where the problem is. It's with the province, unless it's an issue with navigation, and that's finger

pointing in both directions. Somehow we have to regulate the cause of the derelict boats, which are basically being abandoned at anchor and left there for years until they become derelict and abandoned.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Basically, what you're saying is that there has to be a faster intervention when it's very clear that a boat is unloved and unwanted and has just been abandoned. Is that right?

Mr. Leonard Lee: Yes, that's absolutely what we need. We have a very similar problem with abandoned vehicles around the roads as well.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Vehicles have vehicle identification numbers and you have ICBC, of course, that would at least know who the last official owner was. Perhaps something like that for boats could also be brought in. What do you think?

Mr. Leonard Lee: That's a suggestion I hear quite often, and that is an additional licensing cost to just look after the boats that are abandoned and need to be taken care of right away.

Mr. Ken Hardie: All right. Thank you. That's all I need.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hardie.

We'll now suspend for a moment to let our witnesses sign off or leave the room. If there's anyone online for the next session, we'll do a sound check to make sure everything is okay.

Thank you, everyone.

The meeting is suspended.

• (1740)

(Pause)

• (1740)

The Chair: Welcome to the witnesses on our second panel.

We have, in the room, Joshua Charleson, executive director, Coastal Restoration Society; and from Québec Subaquatique, we have Marie-Christine Lessard, executive director, and Clément Drolet, diving instructor.

Thank you for taking time to appear today. You will each have five minutes or less for your opening statements.

I believe, Mr. Charleson, you're speaking on behalf of your group. You have five minutes or less, please.

Mr. Joshua Charleson (Executive Director, Coastal Restoration Society): Good evening.

[Witness spoke in Hesquiaht]

[English]

My name is Joshua Charleson. I'm the executive director for the Coastal Restoration Society, and I live in Port Alberni, B.C.

I have four points on the current state of derelict vessels in Canada, as my team at Coastal Restoration see it, as well as a lot of the coastal first nations that we work with. Just let me know if I'm rambling on too long.

The first one is that it's very costly. A huge barrier to dealing with derelict vessels is the cost. It costs up to \$60,000 per vessel to get rid of them. The costs include training a crew and include insurance, accommodations, logistics, vessels, crew, equipment, waste transport, heavy equipment, barge, staff and landfill fees. There are just so many costs to actually getting rid of a derelict vessel.

There's a lack of infrastructure, so there's a massive gap in infrastructure needs on Canadian coasts to deal with derelict vessels, which are causing environmental harm. Current infrastructure is not equipped to responsibly deal with end-of-life vessels, particularly the small vessels. Then there is the example of Union Bay. I'm not going to get into it because I only have so much time.

The return on investment isn't high enough for larger shipyards to dispose of pleasure crafts. There's a lack of incentives for vessel disposal, and that's contributing to the abandonment of vessels.

As for numbers, we have around 1,400 abandoned vessels or derelict vessels that have been recorded on the B.C. coast, and 700 of them are under 12 metres long, so they are considered a small vessel. An estimated 43,000 vessels require disposal annually across Canada, according to the Vard report in 2016. That's a lot of vessels that we have to deal with every single year. The longer we don't have the infrastructure to take care of it, the more they're just going to pile up and then just become somebody else's problem.

Around authority, there's always confusion over who is going to take ownership of it, going to authorize a vessel of concern or going to actually give the green light for a vessel to be removed. That needs to be settled because there are CCG, DFO, Transport Canada and provincial requirements, as well as first nations communities. You have to do the runaround to figure out who is actually going to do this.

This is the way we want to see Canada's derelict vessels dealt with in the future. The first one is that it's so costly. Building responsible infrastructure to deal with derelict vessels in Canadian waters will reduce harm to the environment and will reduce the cost of dismantling, landfilling and recycling derelict vessels substantially. Having dedicated facilities that reduce the need for field-based breakdown and extensive transportation can reduce disposal costs, if we actually had the infrastructure put into place.

As for responsible infrastructure, we're proposing to create a derelict vessel depot—there could probably be a better name for that—on the west coast of Vancouver Island that will be economically viable. It will provide full-time employment and training. It will reduce the cost to vessel owners and will provide a pathway for insurance agencies to fund the deconstruction of derelict vessels. It will provide closed-contained and environmentally safe shipwrecking, and it will provide space for innovation and technology in the recycling of derelict vessels in the future.

In terms of numbers, here is a little history. Since the 1950s, fibreglass boats have become very popular for commercial vessels as well as for recreational vessels. The problem with fibreglass is that the life expectancy is about 50 years, so now we're stuck with tens of thousands of these vessels that are near the end of their life expectancies. A vessel built in 1950 had an end of life in 2000, and it's just subsequent to that every single year.

The process we do to break down fibreglass vessels on the coast is to break them apart the best we can while trying not to release the fibres back into the environment. It's impossible to do if you're just doing it on the shore. Obviously, wind, water or any kind of little gust will bring up those particles and put them right back into the ocean. That's why we're talking about having an actual place to bring your vessel so that it's closed-contained, has the filters that are needed and nothing can escape. You have oil sumps, runoff catchment and everything like that in this.

I realized I'm missing a page somewhere, but we'll just continue.

● (1745)

As to how we're dealing with it on Vancouver Island—our waste management—I found this out only when we were doing derelict vessels out of Ladysmith. People know it as the “dogpatch”.

We were removing a bunch, and I called waste management, asking them why we have to break everything down to a metre. That's to fit it into their landfill bins. From Ladysmith, it goes to Nanaimo. From Nanaimo, it gets put on a barge and goes over to Delta. It gets put on a truck, then onto a tram, goes down to the States, gets put on another truck and then ends up in a landfill. For us to remove one footprint—one boat in Ladysmith—it goes through all of those stages.

We're leaving footprints all the way across the map just to get rid of one footprint on that beach. We need more responsibility.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Charleson. We've gone a bit over time.

I want to go now to Ms. Lessard for five minutes or less, please.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Christine Lessard (Executive Director, Québec Subaquatique): Good evening. My name is Marie-Christine Lessard, and I'm the executive director of Québec Subaquatique.

Québec Subaquatique is a non-profit organization that helps divers dive safely in Quebec waters. Most of our work has to do with scuba diving regulations within Quebec, but we also have a diving base in Les Escoumins, where some 800 divers a year come to dive in the St. Lawrence. The Les Escoumins diving base is in a Parks Canada site, the Saguenay-St. Lawrence Marine Park. As such, we have lots of data about the health of that part of the St. Lawrence. We also have a large database that covers all possible dive sites in Quebec.

That said, we have about 199 sites in Quebec waters, 31 of which have shipwrecks or artificial reefs and some of which are in lakes. One of our largest wrecks is still the *Empress of Ireland*, which is in the St. Lawrence.

I'll turn things over to Mr. Drolet now.

• (1750)

Mr. Clément Drolet (Diving Instructor, Québec Subaquatique): My name is Clément Drolet, and I'm a diving instructor.

I've been diving for quite a while. I've visited lots of wrecks all over Quebec, Ontario and the south, of course.

I do technical diving training. I love marine life. Every now and then, we discover things, but we also observe things.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now go with our rounds of questioning.

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

Mr. Rick Perkins: That's great. Those were the most efficient statements yet, so far. Thank you.

Mr. Charleson, it's nice to see you again. It feels like we're old friends since we met in the cafeteria this morning, thanks to MP Johns.

I want to give you an opportunity to talk about some of the things that you didn't get a chance to talk about. You mentioned something about Union Bay. Being an east coaster, I don't know what that's about. Could you tell us?

Mr. Joshua Charleson: They're doing massive ship-breaking out of Union Bay. It's been all over the news on the west coast of Canada for causing environmental damage. There are different standards in how B.C. regulates copper effluent or zinc effluent. It's different from the standards that ECCC has. When ECCC goes in and does the testing, they don't see a problem with it, but the province has stricter guidelines on what you can actually release into the environment.

That's where there is that confusion between agencies. If it's provincial or federal, what actually are the regulations that are to be abided by when you're doing ship-breaking?

Mr. Rick Perkins: Is that one of the few places that can actually do this work?

Mr. Joshua Charleson: I'm not too sure, to be honest, on the actual designated areas of doing ship-breaking. It's kind of just done as funding is available—

Mr. Rick Perkins: We're talking only about mainly smaller recreational things.

On the east coast, our abandoned vessel issue is primarily but not exclusively old navy ships and old scallop draggers and that kind of thing, although we do have the odd sailboat that sinks and is a hazard. Is it generally in the volume of recreational boats where this is happening out in B.C.?

Mr. Joshua Charleson: Yes. It's just the sheer volume and not having anywhere to really bring them. For the bigger shipyards, it's not worth it for them to take on a 21-foot vessel.

Oftentimes, as I think Lee was talking about earlier, you find them on logging routes. People buy the trailer because it's still a good trailer. They tie the boat to a tree and then just take off with the trailer. We see it all the time, because there's nowhere to take them. You can't just bring a boat to a landfill. You need to break it down to the metre chunks to be able to actually get rid of it. Even just throwing it away, you need to have heavy equipment.

Mr. Rick Perkins: That costs money.

In my part of the world, as we heard from witnesses last week, we have a couple of famous vessels. Mr. Welsford talked about the ones in Bridgewater earlier, and there was the *Farley Mowat*. Part of the challenge has become where to scrap these vessels. We had a facility for that in my riding—it no longer exists—down in Shelburne County, where the *Farley Mowat* went. There was a facility in Cape Breton too. I don't know if it exists anymore.

Where to take these vessels seems to be a problem on all coasts, because if you don't deal with removing the vessels, there's no business case to scrap them. Is that the chicken-and-egg scenario we're in?

• (1755)

Mr. Joshua Charleson: Yes, pretty well. It's because of fibreglass. Europe is working on solutions for how to recycle fibreglass, from conversations I've had with different organizations in B.C., but the problem with their process, from what I've heard, is that it's costly. For a kilogram of fibreglass, it costs one euro, and once you do the recycling, it could cost five to 10 times that.

That's what I've read and read into. They are developing the technology to start recycling so we can have a circular economy, but the science and innovation aren't quite there yet to make it economically feasible.

Mr. Rick Perkins: One thing you talked about—I think it was number three—was incentives for people to dispose of vessels rather than dropping them off in the woods or doing other things. What are you thinking there, tax credits or...?

Mr. Joshua Charleson: It's hard to jump right to incentives because there's no infrastructure to take a boat somewhere. How would we even create incentives for a boat owner to get rid of their boat when there's nowhere to bring it in the first place? I think we have to start off with that.

One thing we're starting to look into as a society is creating a derelict vessel depot in Port Alberni, because it has a deepwater harbour and we have an area where we can build a lift and create the infrastructure. We can make it economically viable by adding a shipyard that will subsidize our depot, and people can bring vessels in, bringing costs way down. Instead of dealing with a 45-foot fishing vessel that will cost us \$50,000 or \$60,000, we're hoping that having this infrastructure and building this depot will bring the cost down to \$10,000 or \$12,000.

Mr. Rick Perkins: That presumes you can figure out who the owners are and whether a vessel was abandoned in the water, causing a hazard at a wharf, or was abandoned and towed away somewhere. Do you have any thoughts on that issue?

In the work that many of the witnesses have done, dealing with establishing ownership seems to be a barrier to doing anything, as Mr. Welsford was mentioning earlier.

Mr. Joshua Charleson: That's probably one of the first steps that need to happen. You need to make sure that people are registering boats, but there's nobody checking. Nobody checks on the B.C. coast. I haven't seen anybody check anybody's boats—Transport Canada, the Coast Guard, DFO. There's nobody out there, so you can do whatever you want.

I have a boat. I don't have to register it, but I do. That's my decision. I'm not forced to. There are no laws or penalties—there's nothing. If I wanted to buy 10 boats, I could just leave them unregistered and put them on the beach. You'd never know they were mine. I'm not going to do that, but it's possible.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Perkins.

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

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

Just quickly, I'll go back to Mr. Charleson. My colleague Mr. Perkins already asked some questions on this, but just to make sure, did you say the derelict vessel depot already exists in your area, or is it something you want to build or create?

Mr. Joshua Charleson: This is something we want to create. We're reaching out to partners and looking at funding agencies to support our vision of creating this depot so that it can be used as a framework in the coming years for putting it in major ports, like over on the east side of Vancouver Island, in Prince Rupert and in Nova Scotia. It's about creating a model of responsible infrastructure to take care of derelict vessels into the future and bringing the cost down for owners so that vessels don't get derelict in the first place.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Then no such infrastructure exists in your area in B.C. I'm not sure if you're from B.C.—sorry—but I think you're from B.C. You're saying no infrastructure of that type exists.

Mr. Joshua Charleson: No, not on the scale that we're thinking. I don't know of any. There are lots of smaller organizations that do salvage, but we're talking about the 43,000 vessels annually—that has been reported—that Canada has to deal with. We 100% do not have the infrastructure to take care of that number of vessels.

I think that's why we're doing the study now. We all have to put our heads together and figure out where to start, where we're going and what the future is going to look like to make sure that owners will be responsible with their boats going forward.

Mr. Serge Cormier: I'm not an accountant, but I'll be like an accountant right now with my next question.

What makes you think you can go from, you said, \$60,000 per vessel down to \$10,000? Where are the savings? How are we going to save \$50,000 by having those ships taken to this new derelict vessel depot?

• (1800)

Mr. Joshua Charleson: I listed off some of the stuff at the beginning of my talk—

Mr. Serge Cormier: Yes, but I just want to make sure that we're getting....

Mr. Joshua Charleson: You save costs on training, insurance, accommodation, logistics, vessels, crew, equipment, waste transportation, heavy equipment, barge, staff and landfill fees, because part of the derelict vessel depot we're aiming to build will have that science and innovation to recycle things so that it's a circular economy. It's obviously going to be a—

Mr. Serge Cormier: I don't want to cut you off—I'm sorry—but to go and get these vessels, for example, you will still need a barge and things like that. You'll probably still need some insurance on your business or whatever. Don't you think those costs are...? They're not fixed costs. A barge to go and get those vessels and then take them out of the water....

I just want to make sure I understand your business idea, if I can put it that way.

Mr. Joshua Charleson: Usually, the way we run projects is with clusters of boats, so we save on costs by going to get, say, 10 or 20 boats. The barge cost to pick up one boat is the same as it is to pick up 20 or 30.

A barge costs \$350 an hour. You can use it for 10 hours a day and get it to a place in the depot—that's \$3,500—rather than send an entire crew down, who will stay in a hotel, rent boats and get a barge to bring in an excavator to break it down. There are all of those different steps. The more remote you are when you have to do this, the more expensive it gets, so by having somewhere central, you can actually cut costs significantly.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Thank you.

[Translation]

Ms. Lessard and Mr. Drolet, I want to make sure I understand. What exactly does your company do? Do you look after abandoned vessels, for example?

Ms. Marie-Christine Lessard: Our organization, Québec Sub-aquatique, is a non-profit organization made up of recreational divers. Our divers visit wrecks and abandoned vessels. As my colleague was saying, in Quebec, abandoned vessels are not a problem; there are very few of them. Abandoned vessels actually become tourist attractions for divers, who can explore them, observe biodiversity and practise certain techniques.

It's really the recreational and tourism aspect of scuba diving.

Mr. Serge Cormier: We also have a few wrecks intended for scuba diving.

Let's consider a vessel that has been abandoned or has sunk. You've probably dived around some vessels that weren't sunk for the purpose of encouraging dive tourism.

Is there a difference between vessels that were sunk appropriately and those that were simply abandoned? For example, maybe the fuel tank wasn't emptied before the vessel sank.

Is marine biodiversity the same around such wrecks?

Ms. Marie-Christine Lessard: That's a great question.

We don't have data on that, but Mr. Drolet might be able to answer your question based on his extensive experience.

Mr. Clément Drolet: Wrecks definitely need to be cleaned up. Any fuel or cargo aboard a vessel could be detrimental to biodiversity. The difference is how quickly life will take hold on the wreck.

Let's consider a wreck of some kind—or any object, really. I'll give you an example: In the Saguenay fjord, a communications tower fell on a sandy bottom. There's hardly anything on the sandy bottom, but, when you look at the tower, it's hard to see the steel parts because there are things living on it. There are lots of living things, including anemones, crabs and squid.

As a recreational diver, I've never come across an accidental wreck or one that was only recently sunk.

In Ontario, near Brockville, Prescott or Kingston, there are wrecks that have been under water for over 100 years. The fuel at the time was coal, so there's a little more coal than diesel or fuel oil under water. These wrecks have been there for a long time, so life has returned.

One thing we know for sure is that the more fuel or pollution there is in the water, the longer it takes for life to take hold.

• (1805)

Ms. Marie-Christine Lessard: The organization—

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Your time has run out, Mr. Cormier.

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

[Translation]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: I'll let you finish your sentence, Ms. Lessard.

Ms. Marie-Christine Lessard: Actually, I just wanted to talk about the Artificial Reef Society of BC, which has large teams that specialize in using sunken wrecks to create artificial reefs. They also do a lot of studies on how long it takes for life to take hold on an artificial wreck. It takes about four years for enough biodiversity to return and attract divers. I think there are some interesting solutions for small vessels that can be implemented.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: That was kind of my question, actually.

Thank you for being with us. I'm so happy to hear people from Quebec talking about the St. Lawrence River and related topics.

My goodness, Mr. Chair, it's so nice.

I also want to make sure my colleagues understand that some wrecks have a recreational aspect. Certainly, some wrecks are detrimental to marine ecology and biological health, but there are some wrecks that can be used by diving enthusiasts for tourism purposes. My partner dives at Les Escoumins. I'm sure you've met.

I wanted to make that clear to my colleagues. You also mentioned that there's a team in British Columbia that does this kind of thing.

That said, there's one thing I'd like to know. Why must people sink vessels when there are so many at the bottom of the river that we'd like to remove? Would it be possible to develop an assessment protocol, perhaps even with the help of divers like you? Is there a way to assess whether a wreck on the bottom of the St. Lawrence is good or bad and to give that assessment to authorities who could take action or know what to do about it?

The Canadian Coast Guard folks told us they didn't know how to identify them or what to do. I think it might be a good idea to have better communication between your organizations. What do you think?

Ms. Marie-Christine Lessard: There are a lot of wrecks in the St. Lawrence River, but accessibility is the problem. The St. Lawrence is a hostile environment for divers, after all. There are currents, and the water is cold and deep. I think Mr. Drolet could tell you more about exploring these wrecks from a technical perspective.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: It's an extreme sport.

Ms. Marie-Christine Lessard: Yes, it's an extreme sport because the river is deep. For example, the *Empress of Ireland* is about 110 feet down. Very few divers can access it. Cold, deep water and other factors can make it tricky to survey abandoned vessels that could be wrecks.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: They can be surveyed only if they're at the right depth.

Ms. Marie-Christine Lessard: That would be very interesting. If you want us to do a study on that, I'm sure I can find a lot of divers who would be very happy to go out and look for ships. Mr. Drolet would be the first to get involved.

Mr. Clément Drolet: I would definitely be the first because I love scuba diving. In fact, divers are all explorers in a way. Obviously, the wreck of the *Empress of Ireland* is a wonderful treasure for Quebec, and for the entire world. The fact that it sank was a terrible disaster. However, the boat is well preserved and has a historical component, which is really interesting.

In the case of a wreck that is set up though, there might be more to explore, such as the resumption of marine life. Of course, I love history and I love diving, but biodiversity is important. The Escoumins de Québec Subaquatique dive base is located in Parks Canada's Saguenay-St. Lawrence Marine Park. There is a beautiful beach site that could be used to set up a wreck and support marine life.

As we know, the river temperature is rising and it's more difficult. There is less marine life.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: How do wrecks promote biodiversity? Do they provide a biodiverse environment?

Mr. Clément Drolet: A wreck becomes an artificial reef. It's a protective environment for small organisms. The small ones, when there are a lot of them, attract the medium-sized ones, and then gradually it becomes a complex ecosystem.

• (1810)

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: It protects them from predators, too.

Mr. Clément Drolet: That's correct. It's their new home. It's like a reef.

Ms. Marie-Christine Lessard: It also protects them from the current, the tides and climate issues.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: So there are positive aspects. We have been hearing a lot about the negative effects since the start of the study, but there are also positive effects in the case of some wrecks that, for example, have no dangerous fuel or that have been there for a long time.

I am pleased that this is part of our study because it is important to understand that there can be benefits to preserving wrecks on the ground rather than disturbing them and disrupting the biodiversity that has been established on them. The skills you have are needed to assess which wrecks can be preserved and maintained, without necessarily exhausting resources to remove them because they are positive, while others are negative.

That's what I wanted to highlight.

Ms. Marie-Christine Lessard: It's also important to understand that the wrecks in Quebec's cold waters attract a lot of people from elsewhere. It's not just local tourists who want to come and dive here.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: It's a challenge.

Ms. Marie-Christine Lessard: Yes. Also, because of the French language, I don't have to tell you that our European neighbours in France—

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: The positive side of the French language in Quebec is its economic strength, which is wonderful.

Ms. Marie-Christine Lessard: French people come and dive here because they find wrecks in cold water—

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: There are challenges.

Ms. Marie-Christine Lessard: There are challenges. So it's interesting. If we are able to develop this further, that would be positive action to attract foreign tourists to come and dive in Quebec to see those wrecks.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Desbiens. You've gone over a little bit, but you deserve that.

Now we'll go to Ms. Barron for six minutes or less, please.

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

Well, I'm sold. I definitely want to go diving in Quebec, so thank you so much.

[Translation]

Welcome to the witnesses.

[English]

Welcome, of course, Mr. Charleson. I'm going to be asking you my questions today.

The first question I have is around this vessel depot that you were talking about, the one you were speaking of that would be a wonderful asset for the west coast of Canada.

Can you explain in a little bit more detail what is needed from the federal government in order to make this vessel depot come to fruition?

Mr. Joshua Charleson: Yes.

It's still very much in the idea phase. We have already reached out to a lot of our partners, like Tseshah First Nation and Hupacasath First Nation. The city is on board, and the port authority in Port Alberni is as well. We've reached out to organizations like COAST, ABCMI, B.C. Ferries and several other partners in developing this idea from the ground up.

We're going to be looking to find people who will actually fund the build of this derelict vessel depot. What can help significantly is funding from the federal government and the provincial government—that they consider this as a solution and put money forth.

What I've been noticing is that there are a lot of these funding opportunities that keep coming out through the clean coast, clean waters initiative fund and the abandoned boats program, but it's just so expensive.

I feel that we can put those future dollars to better use in creating an infrastructure that can be used into the future and that will bring costs down. Initial costs are obviously going to be high. You can't just build a massive industrial depot out of thin air. It's going to cost millions of dollars, but once we actually have that, it's going to save throughout the future. It's like investing in solar. It's expensive to get solar started, but it pays itself off.

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

Colleagues, I'm having a hard time focusing on my.... Thank you so much.

Mr. Charleson, you spoke about some of the partners involved in this project. You were talking about how important it is that we're not in silos, that we see intergovernmental work, that we see first nations, municipalities, the provinces and the federal government all working together for a national strategy.

Can you speak a little bit about how important it is to have first nations working, just having people working together from all levels of government, to make sure that we have a national strategy put into place and not a patchwork approach?

Mr. Joshua Charleson: Yes, 100%. That was the point that I didn't quite get to when I was talking: the authority. Right now, the authority comes from federal agencies or provincial agencies. There are many first nations in western Canada that have guardian programs. They watch their territories daily. They see vessels that are tilting, that are clearly abandoned, but they have no authority whatsoever to call them vessels of concern and deem them ready to be removed.

That's where I think that, federally, we can do a better job of creating MOUs and an actual frame to give first nations the green light to deem vessels in their own territories as abandoned or vessels of concern. It's obviously not going to be a blanket approach. You can't create just one framework. You have to do it with each individual nation.

Not all the nations have the capacity to deal with abandoned boats, derelict boats or vessels of concern. It would be a framework that's open for first nations people to actually buy into and then also help with the actual eyes on the ground, because they're in the territory daily.

• (1815)

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you so much.

Could you clarify, in a few more details, why first nations are best equipped to take the lead on these projects in their territories, just so we have it clear for everybody here today?

Mr. Joshua Charleson: First nations are the best for coastal communities because of the connection to their lands and waters. We have a saying over in Nuu-chah-nulth, *hishuk ish tsawalk*, which means everything is one and everything is connected. First nations people have values like that and a love for their home.

As much as the Canadian history books like to talk about first nations people being very nomadic, we're very set on where our territories are, and we've been that way for millennia. We have a vested interest in taking care of the territory, and we're not going anywhere. I was born in Hesquiaht. Hesquiaht is going to be my home

territory forever. That's never going to change boundaries. It's not going to go somewhere else.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you so much.

You talked about the importance of the vessel depot having enclosed, safe shipwrecking. I know this was brought up briefly with Union Bay.

Can you speak a bit about how important it is to have the appropriate facilities in place so that we're not inadvertently polluting the same waters we're trying to clean up?

Mr. Joshua Charleson: It's really important to have it contained because there's so much that can go wrong. It's a very technical profession, breaking down a vessel. If you're talking about a 45-foot boat, we're reaching the wall there. Then you have it with a 12- or 18-foot beam, and you're talking about a couple of storeys of boat that you have to break apart. Any number of things can go wrong.

There could be hydraulic fluid still in the hoses. If hydraulic fluid hits you in the hand, you're amputating your hand. Those kinds of things can go wrong quickly. I've seen it with fishermen when things like that have gone wrong. It's the same with oil, gas and combustibles. If they have a sewage system in them, there are all these different contaminants that can get out and damage the environment where you're breaking breaking it down.

Having it controlled and contained in a place that can handle all of those different environmental contaminants would save us from having any kind of disaster. That's the importance of having that infrastructure dedicated to doing the job.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Barron.

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

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

Thank you, all, for being here today.

I wasn't surprised when you talked about someone taking a boat up into the bush, tying it to a tree and driving away, because I saw exactly that on a hunting chat group just a couple of weeks ago in the Okanagan. It's not uncommon. The smaller, recreational vessels have come to the point that they're not repairable within a reasonable cost, so this has become quite common. I used to be in the boat repair business, so I understand how they deteriorate to a certain point where it costs more to fix them than they're ever going to be worth.

However, I want to relate a case I had when I had a vehicle stolen, and the insurance on that vehicle was about to run out in a week's time. When I contacted the insurance company and said, "I guess I don't need to renew my insurance," they told me, "No, you do need to renew that insurance, because you are the registered owner. It doesn't matter who is in control of that vehicle; you are the one who covers the liability." I actually had to renew the insurance on a vehicle that I never saw again. That ownership attaches to the last registered owner and stays that way.

Can you explain why that isn't happening with vessels, both recreational and commercial? It appears that someone can just sell a vessel for cash and absolve themselves of any responsibility.

• (1820)

Mr. Joshua Charleson: I think it's different with vehicles, because it's compulsory to get insurance on a motor vehicle on the road.

Mr. Mel Arnold: It is actually compulsory under the Transportation Act.

Mr. Joshua Charleson: Is it compulsory for vessels? Okay. I didn't know that. It's not enforced.

I broke the law sometimes when I didn't reinsure my boat before I put it back in the water. That's news to me, so a bit more education on insuring your boat would be needed.

Mr. Mel Arnold: The requirement to transfer vessel ownership is actually on Transport Canada's website.

Mr. Joshua Charleson: It's not enforceable, I guess. Nobody's out there, actually enforcing it.

The other thing with vessel insurance is that it's extremely costly. Even just for a crappy little tin boat, you have to pay up front for the whole year. It's definitely a huge barrier with vessel insurance, as well, that you can't pay a monthly fee for any vessel of any size. It's up front and you have to pay it that day. Otherwise, you don't have insurance.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Thank you.

You said that no one is checking on the ownership of vessels. That's interesting. It sounds like the regulations are there, but they're not being enforced. We've heard that from other testimony as well.

You also mentioned that there needs to be a better ability to designate a vessel as being a vessel of concern. Can you elaborate a little further on that?

Mr. Joshua Charleson: Yes. Because it's on the ocean, it's considered federal jurisdiction, but once it's on shore, it's considered provincial jurisdiction. Then there's always that in between, where it's still floating outside of our shore, so you have to talk to Coast Guard or you have to talk to Transport Canada until it's actually on shore, where it's provincial. It's hard to get the right answers on who to actually call when you have a vessel of concern.

The Coast Guard probably does the best job out of all the different agencies that have jurisdiction for vessels, but they focus on the big ones. They don't focus on anything small. They focus on large vessels that have high potential for environmental damage.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Are you aware of any standards for identifying a vessel of concern, or should there be standards for declaring a vessel of concern?

Mr. Joshua Charleson: We have in-house standards that we use when we're filling out "S-38s", I believe they're called, for when we're looking for funding through the abandoned boats program. We use Survey123 with a whole different set of standards in terms of what to look for on the vessels and any identification. There are about 40 or 50 different pieces of information that we fill out for that, that we've actually—

Mr. Mel Arnold: Are they adequate?

Mr. Joshua Charleson: They're adequate for our uses, but none of them are anything formal that we need to do. Do you know what I mean? I don't know what kind of process the federal government uses in identifying VOCs, but I know from working with our first nations partners, such as Snuneymuxw First Nation, that they go out there regularly to do a check on boats after big rains. They know all the vessels that need to be removed or the ones that are going to sink. They become way more costly to remove as soon as they sink. You just put the bill up twofold or threefold, because now you're looking at divers, a barge, a crane and all this stuff.

Building out that framework, giving the ability for first nations to govern their territories and steward them properly and having that MOU and training and framework and everything else that goes along with creating this plan is the necessary first step, I think, to really bolstering the VOC. We don't see enforcement out in B.C., or not on the west coast or the Salish Sea where I've worked, anyway. I think we need it.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arnold.

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

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

While everybody was chatting about this, I had a chance to look online for some information on the *Empress of Ireland*. That looks like a very fascinating story. It must be a wonderful dive for those who can make it.

I will go to you, Mr. Charleson, for my questions. Would there be any value in having a system whereby collection spots could be created where people could basically volunteer their vessel? It would make barging a lot more efficient, obviously, if you had everybody collected in one spot. You could load them up and take them to this facility that you have in mind.

Is anything like that going on right now, or could it be set up?

• (1825)

Mr. Joshua Charleson: There's nothing formal, but when you're working with coastal communities, usually there's a spot where people put their boats. You'll just see a cluster of abandoned boats, about 40 or 50, where the dead boats go. If there were actually designated spots that were funded to be cleaned up, with standards and somebody actually checking in your boat—this boat came from so-and-so and it's in this condition—that would be extremely helpful. The problem is that people just drop them wherever. Then you have to go retrieve them from wherever.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Right. If it could be done at, say, a nominal cost, I'm sure it would at least cut down on the number of people doing the "dock and dash", if you want to call it that.

In our previous session, we heard from a chap by the name of Gordon Edwards. I don't know if you're familiar with that name. I asked him about business opportunities for the breaking up of boats and the reclaiming of materials. He said that there are opportunities and there's funding available, but nobody seems to want to go down that road. It sounds like you do.

Mr. Joshua Charleson: There are a few salvage places around the island, but they're full.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Yes. However, Mr. Edwards said there is money available, but there are no takers, simply because nobody seems to be interested in doing this. Anyway, I'm sure the clerk or somebody can get you some contact info. Maybe you could follow up with them.

What about the manufacturers? We talked about the difficulties in dealing with fibreglass, especially. Are there things for the people who make these boats in the first place, such as new techniques and new materials? Could those be a little kinder to the environment and, obviously, end-of-life disposal?

Mr. Joshua Charleson: I don't know. I've never built a boat, so I'm not too sure.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Okay.

Mr. Joshua Charleson: My operations manager has built boats and stuff like that. I'm sure he would be able to answer that, but I don't know.

Mr. Ken Hardie: As we look toward trying to solve the immediate problem, we also have to look at changes we can make to prevent the next wave of problems coming in. We've heard a lot about registration fees and perhaps setting something up that will look after boats at the end of their lives, so the liability, if you like, of owning a boat at the end of its service is diminished, because there's a fund to look after it, like an insurance fund, or an ICBC-type fund.

Do you think that would work?

Mr. Joshua Charleson: Yes. Any kind of structure would work right now—anything that will fund the removal of vessels—because the onus is just on vessel owners.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Then, of course—

Mr. Joshua Charleson: If you've paid insurance on a vessel for the last 50 years, the vessel insurance companies will not give you a cent for dismantling it, unless it sinks at the dock. Then they come in.

Mr. Ken Hardie: It would appear that, as we look at trying to solve the current problem, we want to think about having abandonment as the trigger. Nobody is showing a vessel any love. It's been sitting there for a certain period of time. It's been noticed. Maybe a notice goes up: "If this is yours, you'd better claim it. Otherwise, by such and such a date, it's ours."

Wouldn't something like that work?

You're right. Waiting until something sinks and becomes a navigation hazard or pollutes all over the place is a little too late. We need to be a little more proactive. Wouldn't you say?

Mr. Joshua Charleson: I agree 100%.

However, we need the personnel to do that. We need people checking in who have the authority to do that. I was talking about Snuneymuxw. They have guardians who go out and check on these boats, but they don't have the authority to declare a vessel a "vessel of concern", "hazardous to navigation" or anything like that. They can report it and hope the Canadian Coast Guard comes out, with its capacity, to take a look and declare it a VOC.

However, as I was saying, they generally focus on the big environmental hazards—boats over 12 metres long. I'm talking about the dailies, like the six-metre-long boat and the 10-metre-long boat. They add up very quickly. One of those sinking in a pristine estuary is enough to destroy massive amounts of eelgrass, salmon and everything else.

• (1830)

Mr. Ken Hardie: We've heard that.

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

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

[*Translation*]

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

I am eager to get back to the witnesses, to whom I am very grateful.

If I told you that it was possible, perhaps under a joint federal-provincial program, to create a project to assess whether shipwrecks are positive or negative, something that could be included in your normal diving activities, do you think that would be of interest to the divers you know? I'm not talking about a project that would put you in danger, but rather that would enable you to identify them using funded tools that would be provided to you.

Ms. Marie-Christine Lessard: Oh, yes.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: So I think that's agreed.

I hope that such a project could also be put in place in British Columbia and in the west, so that we can coordinate the valuable knowledge and skills you have. They seem to be one way of getting more information about the boats at the bottom, at least those that are accessible.

Thank you for being here. I hope everyone will agree and that we can provide the necessary funding so that your recreational activity can be used to protect biodiversity and bring more marine tourism and divers to our respective sectors.

Ms. Marie-Christine Lessard: Let's hope so.

We are there, and we will be there to help you if needed.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: That's what I wanted to hear. I'm very pleased that you said it and that my colleagues heard it.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

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

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

I have just two quick points.

First of all, Mr. Hardie—and all my colleagues, actually—I just want to remind you that there was also testimony provided by John White from Snuneymuxw, who did identify that Snuneymuxw is also willing and keen to do this work. I just want to clarify that this is also testimony that was provided.

Another thing I want to highlight is just how different they are. With regard to all the coasts and the waterways that we're talking about, the situations are so different. I think it's important for us to consider that in this study.

I want to go to Mr. Charleson.

First of all, I don't think I thanked you for all the important work that you do through the Coastal Restoration Society. It does such important work along the west coast, and I know, Mr. Charleson, that you're out on the water quite often. I'm wondering if you can share with us some of the implications that you're seeing of these vessels being left abandoned along our coasts.

What is the impact on our surrounding marine ecosystems, on food security, on our coastal communities and so on?

Mr. Joshua Charleson: A lot of the places that we've cleaned up, where we've gotten rid of derelict vessels from the beach, are still not healthy, and this was years ago. There are loads of heavy metals. People love to use the paint that has lead in it and stuff like that, and it all leaches into the beaches and poisons the clam-beds. Then everything that eats clams going forward has all those toxins in them as well.

I was talking about *hishuk ish tsawalk*, and then it's the same with fibreglass. It's releasing microplastics. Everything this small eats it, and then something bigger eats it and so on up the chain. Then we eventually eat it.

We're living with microplastics and toxins because of what we're putting into our food chain. Coastal first nations and coastal people rely heavily on food sovereignty, especially when something happens. There was a fire a couple of years ago in Port Alberni that cut us off from the rest of the island. There was no way around it. During those times, like a lot of people, we needed to rely on the foods that we had in our freezers that we had harvested from our own territories and everything like that. We want more abundance.

I always hear from all the old-timers, “Oh, my God, it was a heyday; we had so much. There were way more fish; there was way more forest.” I want those heydays to come back, and that's why the work that I'm doing is restoring it or remediating it to those levels. It's so that my kids and my kids' kids can have that same abundance, which I don't have in this generation because it skipped mine because of the generation before that had their heyday. I want to bring the levels back up so that future generations have that heyday again.

● (1835)

The Chair: That closes up this round. I want to thank our witnesses for sharing their knowledge and information with the committee on this particular study.

Mr. Charleson, Mr. Drolet and Ms. Lessard, thank you again for coming to the committee and sharing your knowledge.

I want to say thank you to the clerk, the analysts, the translation team and everybody for making this a successful meeting today.

On Monday, November 18, our next meeting when we come back after the constituency week, we will finish our study on derelict and abandoned vessels.

The meeting is adjourned.

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