



CANADA

Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans

**Minister Have You Had an Opportunity to Personally Review
Robert Melvin's Report?**

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🕒 (1105)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

We had an opportunity to be provided by your deputy minister with a document which we have agreed to keep in camera, but I have to refer to it. It's a report by Robert Melvin, Intelligence Officer, and he made certain comments providing a snapshot of things in time as of September 2003. The committee has reviewed this particular document.

Before I make any comments in relation thereto, I want to ask you if you've had an opportunity to review the Pacific Fisheries Resource Conservation Council's annual report to you of 2004. Have you seen that yet? I know that in this department there's a million pieces of paper and there's only so much time in the day, but have you had an opportunity to see that report?

Hon. Geoff Regan: Of course, Mr. Chairman, you know that I see many files every night and I'm going to have to check with the deputy on whether I've seen that. I don't recall seeing it offhand.

The deputy says that we've received it, but he's not sure that I've actually seen it. I don't recall it offhand, but I look forward to hearing details from you and I look forward to seeing it soon.

The Chair: Thank you. This is in no way to sandbag you. That's why I asked you if you'd seen it. I just want to read a couple of things to you.

On page 15, from a report by the Honourable John Fraser who appeared before us at our committee hearings in December, he says:

The persistent failure of the governments of Canada and British Columbia to gain public trust for their management of salmon aquaculture has been a matter of great concern to the council.

He then goes on, under a separate heading entitled, "Diminished Capacity to Conserve Pacific Salmon", to say the following:

The council has become increasingly concerned that the federal government is now failing to meet its obligations to conserve and scientifically manage the fisheries resource.

I further quote:

It is noteworthy that the energies of the Pacific Region of Fisheries and Oceans Canada that should be directed towards managing the resource are being consumed by attempts to deal with budget cuts.

Finally:

Enforcement, habitat protection and restoration, salmon enhancement, research, and stock assessment, are all areas in which the federal government's capacity to do the full job is questionable. It is time for Fisheries and Oceans Canada to explain what it now cannot do that it previously could do, and to open its management to scrutiny about whether or not the choices being made are the appropriate ones.

Minister, I bring that to your attention because in different words that's basically what we said in our report on the Salmon River fishery. We want to highlight to you what we consider to be the major, major failings that are going to cost the resource a tremendous amount if they are not dealt with. You said in

your speech that this has been a year of vision for DFO, it has been a year of changes of how your department operates, and it has been a year of finding better ways to do the job Canadians expect of us. I hope that those are not just words because this is a respected organization. It has major, major problems with the way the department is being operated on the west coast. They're not necessarily finding fault with individuals. They're concerned that lack of money is forcing a focus away from conservation and enforcement, and to number crunching and abacus work. We just want to bring that to your attention.

Finally, we were saddened when we read the Melvin Report because albeit that this is a snapshot in time, it simply served to underscore 100% the evidence that we heard in 2004, and the concerns that we have highlighted in our report. It is our committee's view that appeasement in enforcement is not a proper public policy. The law is there for all Canadians and it is to be enforced by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans for the benefit of all Canadians and for the resource, and for there to be a policy whereby it is enforced for some and a blind eye turned for others is absolutely contrary to what this committee believes is in the best interests of the rule of law, number one, and, number two, in the best interests of the management of the fishery.

So, long preamble, for which I apologize. I ask the question, Minister, have you had an opportunity to personally review Robert Melvin's report?

🕒 (1125)

Hon. Geoff Regan: I am certainly aware of the details of it. I'm aware of the concerns that you've raised, and I'm trying to recall whether I've read the whole report. but I certainly have been made aware clearly of what the issues are that you're referring to, and I am certainly concerned about what I see, but at the same time I think it's very important to recognize a couple of things.

One is that I've directed the department to increase our resources for enforcement on the lower Fraser, and enforcement certainly is an important priority for us. You've talked about budgetary challenges. There's no question that we faced, in the past year, budgetary challenges. There's no question also that we had some good news this year. Now, is there room for more good news? Well, certainly. And I don't think you'd find many ministers who wouldn't like more good news, but you wouldn't find many ministers who are more in need of it perhaps in some respects, and yet we did have some very important achievements in the budget in relation to the coast guard, and other things that I mentioned, and I think that was a very important indication of the

importance this government gives to my department, to the work that you are interested in in Fisheries and Oceans.

Are there other areas that I would like to seek more funding for? Certainly. But I think we can find money this year internally to increase our funding in terms of enforcement on places like the Fraser River, and I think one of the things we're doing is trying to focus more on those kinds of needs and less in areas which you pointed out in the past aren't areas where we feel we should be paying as much attention. We've been following that over the past, and making a number of adjustments in that regard.

The Chair: Minister, excuse me. I'm running out of my own time here.

I just want to bring to your attention the *Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats* report. I'm not going to quote any portion of it. It's called SWOT. It can't take more than ten minutes to read. I would honestly encourage you to read it, because it's a blueprint for how not to run the enforcement section of Fisheries and Oceans on the west coast, and on behalf of the committee it's critical that we ask you to look at this, and ensure that this is not the way of the future for enforcement on the west coast.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Let me say also, though, that part of what we do in enforcement...we've had some complaints about culverts, for example, dealing with culverts that farmers have, and that people on the committee have been unhappy with too much attention given to that sometimes, right?

Well, I think you have to realize that sometimes in achieving compliance that there are other ways to achieve compliance than with a stick, and sometimes there are other ways that are more effective in achieving compliance, and we can't ignore those either.

One of our efforts in relation to the Fraser River salmon is a variety of ways of increasing compliance, whether it be through education or other means, but these issues sometimes are not as simple as they may seem at first. Having said that, I have directed that I want the department to have more enforcement there, and it's my view, as it is yours, that we have to enforce the rules that are in force.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

And thank you, colleagues, for giving me that opportunity.

We'll go back to the regular questioning list.