

December 13, 2002

Handling Airport Emergencies Coast Guard Bought a Rowboat Rather Than A Lifeboat

OTTAWA– "Twice on Wednesday morning the Coast Guard hovercraft stood by while two flights were cleared for emergency landings at Vancouver Airport - one with smoke in the cabin and the other a flight originating in Ottawa," said John Cummins, M.P. (Delta-South Richmond).

"Fortunately a hovercraft was available. But that won't always be the case because the Minister of Fisheries has bought a rowboat when the Coast Guard needed a lifeboat."

The British company with the twelve year-old passenger ferry for sale, the *Freedom 90*, has published a notice to indicate that an option to purchase has been taken on its aging hovercraft. The *Freedom 90* is a 100 series hovercraft and substantially smaller than the 400 series hovercraft currently in use at the Coast Guard's Airport base. The engines on the *Freedom 90* have between 30 and 50 percent less horsepower than the existing 400 series hovercraft and has about 28,000 hours on it.

The Coast Guard's Statement of Operational Requirements for the new hovercraft indicate that it will not be merely a spare but will be the primary Search and Rescue hovercraft available for about 30% of the time. The document indicates that the existing hovercraft requires approximately 60 days annual downtime for scheduled maintenance and averages 30 days downtime for unplanned repairs. In addition, it is down for a period each day for inspection which can last as much as 4 hours per day. It is therefore likely that on many occasions the used British hovercraft will be the only Search and Rescue hovercraft available should there be an emergency at the Airport or elsewhere.

According to these same documents it appears that the Minister of Fisheries has bought, in this purchase of an aged hovercraft, a replacement that will be unable to sail 30% of the time in the Fall and Winter, due to the weather. Simply put, it is a smaller and substantially less powerful hovercraft that may be unable to navigate in seas with significant waves over 1.5 metres.

"The Minister of Fisheries does not have a plan to provide rescue capability when the refurbished passenger ferry is unavailable due to weather conditions in the Fall and Winter. What is the Airport to do when an airport emergencies arises and the refurbished passenger ferry cannot venture out of its hanger due to the weather, reschedule emergencies to warm sunny days in the summer?" Cummins concluded.

Contact: John Cummins, M.P.
(613) 992-2957 or cell (604) 970-0937