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News Release

June 2, 2003

Scrap Yard Hovercraft Risks Lives and Wastes \$10-Million

OTTAWA - "The Coast Guard is about to sign the contract to purchase a 19-year old passenger ferry for conversion to a search and rescue hovercraft for the Vancouver airport," said Canadian Alliance Critic for Fisheries and Oceans, John Cummins, M.P. (Delta-South Richmond). "This scrap yard hovercraft will risk lives and waste \$10M."

The former passenger ferry, the *Liv Viking*, was constructed in 1984 and is said to be worth about \$200,000. The Coast Guard is prepared to pay over \$10-million to purchase, refit and deliver it to Vancouver.

Unfortunately, even with a near total reconstruction, it cannot handle the sea conditions of the Georgia Strait at the mouth of the Fraser River. The converted ferry will not be able to do medical evacuations as it does not have a bow ramp and cannot be re-configured to allow for one. Rescue divers will be forced to go over the side.

If the Coast Guard desired to get value for money it would go through the normal tendering process and call for public tenders to get a search and rescue hovercraft that could successfully undertake search and rescue operations in the heavy seas when most such rescues are required. Instead it has chosen to use a sole source contract to purchase a worn out craft that cannot do the job.

This is happening despite the fact that Canadian boat builders in both British Columbia and Ontario are prepared to build a new state-of-the-art hovercraft for \$10-million, a price equivalent to what it will cost to refurbish the 20 year old *Liv Viking*, a craft that can't do the job no matter how much money is spent. A new craft could be constructed in about 12 months.

The new craft will replace the Coast Guard hovercraft 045 that went out of service in early October 2002. The Minister has said that the *Liv Viking* is a stopgap measure and he will see to it that a new craft is purchased when enough money is available. "For the \$10-million the Minister is prepared to spend on a temporary fix, Vancouver could have a new state-of-the-art hovercraft. We can save lives and save scarce tax dollars," Cummins said.

The Coast Guard has already set aside \$24-million to purchase a new hovercraft to operate seasonally on the St. Lawrence. That means that enough money is already available to purchase two new hovercrafts.

"The Minister has wasted seven months since the 045 went out of service. Nothing has been accomplished. Plans to buy a piece of junk from a hovercraft graveyard in England must be stopped and a tender issued for the immediate purchase and delivery of new search and rescue hovercraft that can handle local sea conditions, allow for medical evacuations, and act as a diving platform," concluded Cummins.

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