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Coast Guard Dive Team Prevented From Diving

OTTAWA— “A senseless decision by the Coast Guard Minister prevented the Coast Guard dive team from entering a capsized fishing boat to save lives,” said John Cummins, M.P. (Delta-South Richmond).

The Coast Guard’s crack dive team arrived at the scene of the accident minutes after the boat capsized but were ordered to wait for nearly two hours until a military dive team arrived from Comox on Vancouver Island even though it was known that there were people trapped below.

“If the Coast Guard were the Fire Department, bureaucrats would prevent them from entering a burning building to save those trapped inside,” Cummins stated.

In a bizarre twist, it was the Coast Guard dive team that had trained their military counterparts. Given the necessary resources the Sea Island based dive team is well placed to save lives. “It is sickening that they should be reduced to a skeleton operation and be forced to watch while people may be drowning below,” said Cummins.

The dive team has been hamstrung by a rule put in place in July of last year by then Coast Guard Minister Dhaliwal. In a statement issued on July 19, 2001 Mr. Dhaliwal restricted the dive team to operating “in open water only.”

The Dhaliwal limitation is such that the usefulness of the dive team for rescue, as opposed to body retrieval, is in serious doubt. The team is effectively neutered, they have the training and equipment but cannot use it.

“The only commonsense course would be to kill the Dhaliwal restriction on diving and to give the Coast Guard dive team the necessary resources to let them do what they are trained for – save lives. The dive team leader must be able to make the determination on the spot as to whether or not it is safe enough to go into an enclosed area when there is a real likelihood of saving a life.”

“Just as the Fire Department is allowed to enter a burning building to save lives, it’s time for the bureaucrats to step aside and let the Coast Guard do its job,” said Cummins.

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