



25 July 2002

Enron Style Accounting at DFO Major Budget Increase But Key Programs Cut

OTTAWA— “After receiving a massive increase in its Fisheries Management budget the Department of Fisheries and Oceans took an axe to its core fisheries programs while increasing spending on controversial programs such as aboriginal fisheries and aquaculture,” said John Cummins, M.P. (Delta-South Richmond) Vice-chair of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans.

When the department tabled its Estimates in Parliament just prior to the summer break there was no hint of substantial cuts to core programs. In fact the Minister denied there would be funding cuts to key regional programs and instead talked about the need for increased resources to respond to provincial initiatives to expand aquaculture.

The Fisheries Management component of the department’s budget increased by more than 40% this year and now stands at \$356.6 million, up \$105.6 million from last year. Fisheries Management covers much of the core fisheries programming of the department, excluding the Coast Guard, ice-breaking, search and rescue, harbours and the like.

The department’s Estimates give few specifics about how much of the Fisheries Management budget is being siphoned-off to questionable aboriginal programs except to report that \$149 million in Fisheries Management funds will go in “transfer payments” for aboriginal fisheries. When the transfer payments are added to existing aboriginal program spending, the total amount spent on aboriginal fisheries amounts to better than 50% of the total Fisheries Management budget.

The Minister misled Parliament as to his intention to cut core fisheries programs. His report to Parliament on the departmental Estimates covered up the fact that major cuts to core programs were being undertaken, revealing only that Fisheries Management spending was increasing dramatically.

“I have asked the Auditor General to review the Estimates of the Department of Fisheries to ensure that they truthfully and concisely inform Parliament of the department’s spending intentions. Boasting of a 40% spending cut while cutting core fisheries programs and siphoning money to favoured programs such as aboriginal fisheries and aquaculture is contemptuous of Parliament and the public,” concluded Cummins.

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