



May 24, 2002

Government Refuses to Commit to Purchase of New Hovercraft

OTTAWA— “The Commissioner of the Canadian Coast Guard has refused to commit to the purchase of a new search and rescue hovercraft for its Sea Island base at the Vancouver International Airport, its busiest search and rescue base” said John Cummins, M.P. (Delta-South Richmond).

Yesterday Commissioner John Adams appeared before the House of Commons Fisheries and Oceans Committee with the Minister of Fisheries, the Hon. Robert Thibault, to account for the Coast Guard’s spending plans for the coming year.

The Commissioner was forced to admit that a new hovercraft had not been ordered, that he did not know when it would be ordered and he conceded that if a new hovercraft were ordered today it would take more than a year before it could be put into service.

Commissioner Adams chose not to advise the Committee that on May 23rd both hovercraft at Sea Island were out of service. Fortunately their services were not required.

He was obviously not troubled by this lack of coverage in spite of the fact that the Vancouver Airport Emergency Plan requires the presence of fire trucks and hovercraft. Both are essential elements of the Emergency Plan.

Yesterday he hinted that the soon to be retired second hovercraft may be kept in service for another year or two while decisions are made regarding its replacement. The statement by the Commissioner is at odds with the advice that uniformed personnel have provided. They claim that the hovercraft is beyond repair and cannot be re-certified in October as seaworthy.

In July 2000 senior members of the Coast Guard were advised that the old “hovercraft cannot be operated beyond fall 2001 without significant expenditures on spare parts”.

In December 2001 they were advised by the Coast Guard’s Hovercraft Engineering Group that the old hovercraft was **“at the end of serviceable life and can no longer operate safely, mainly due to structural corrosion, limited spares and time expired components.”**

“The government seems to have chosen the Sea King helicopter solution, keep the old structurally corroded hovercraft in use until it sinks. Such an approach will mean there will be many more days in the future when both craft are out of service and weeks and months when only one will be operational. We can only hope and pray that no disasters occur at Vancouver International Airport on such days,” concluded Cummins.

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



John Cummins
Official Opposition Critic
Fisheries and Oceans

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