



**John Cummins**  
Official Opposition Critic  
Fisheries and Oceans

## News Release

October 2, 2002

### **EMERGENCY DEBATE REQUESTED LAPSE IN HOVERCRAFT SEARCH AND RESCUE COVERAGE**

**OTTAWA**— John Cummins, M.P. (Delta-South Richmond) asked the Speaker to authorize an Emergency Debate on the lapse in hovercraft search and rescue coverage that will occur at midnight on October 4, 2002 at the Vancouver International Airport as an important matter requiring the urgent consideration of the House of Commons.

The following statement was made in the House in support of his motion for an Emergency Debate as provided for under for under House of Commons Standing Order 52:

The safety of passengers on flights in and out of Vancouver International Airport is in jeopardy. The airport depends on the Coast Guard to provide round-the-clock hovercraft search and rescue services on the tidal flats adjacent to the airport. Such service can no longer be provided as one of the two hovercraft is permanently going out of service on midnight October 4, 2002 when its safety and seaworthiness certification expires.

Internal Coast Guard documents advise the Regional Director for the Coast Guard that: “In October 2002, the situation will reach a point where the federal Search and Rescue program will not be able to meet its mandated responsibilities in the shallow waters surrounding metropolitan Vancouver. The department will be ... blamed for the loss of lives ... resulting from a failure to meet our legal ‘duty of care’.”

The hovercraft are staffed with rescue divers capable of rescuing those trapped in an aircraft that has been forced to ditch in the tidal waters near the airport. The airport’s Emergency Plan is predicated on the availability of a minimum of two hovercraft on a round-the-clock basis to pick up passengers, ferry out members of the Richmond Fire Department and in the words of the Emergency Plan “to continue to provide transportation for casualties, rescue personnel and equipment until the need no longer exists.”

The Superintendent of Marine Search and Rescue has already advised local fire departments that hovercraft search and rescue will be “unavailable for certain periods” such that they will be “unable to provide a rapid response.” The Superintendent further advised: “until the situation is rectified, it is suggested that any contingency plans that include the use of the hovercraft be modified in the interim.”

Without hovercraft search and rescue service, the airports emergency plan is compromised, as is the safety of passengers at the Vancouver Airport.

On August 13th, the day of the Cap Rouge tragedy, only the retiring hovercraft was in service and it suffered severe mechanical problems while attempting the rescue. The Search and Rescue Operations Report, on the tragic loss of a mother, her two children and two crew aboard the Cap Rouge, recommends “a replacement craft ..., capable of operating on the large Fraser River mud flats should be acquired as soon as possible.” We can not afford another Cap Rouge where the Coast Guard lacks the authority and resources to effect a rescue, leaving body recovery as the only option.

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