



October 2, 2002

## **Cummins Demands Minister Produce Missing Diving Policy**

**OTTAWA**— John Cummins, M.P. (Delta-South Richmond) today in Question Period demanded that the Hon. Robert Thibault, Minister Responsible for the Coast Guard produce the Coast Guard Dive Policy that governed rescue dives on August 13, 2002 at the time of the tragic loss of life on the fishing vessel, the *Cap Rouge II*.

According to the Coast Guard Commissioner and the Minister, this phantom policy would have allowed the divers to enter the *Cap Rouge II* in search of those known to be trapped inside, if the divers had been aware of it. The question and the response from the Minister were as follows:

**John Cummins (Delta—South Richmond):** Mr. Speaker, on August 13th five lives were lost, including a mother and two small children, when the fishing vessel *Cap Rouge II* capsized. Coast guard divers were directed not to attempt to rescue the persons trapped inside.

Yesterday the coast guard commissioner stated that policy which would have permitted the divers to enter an overturned vessel had not been communicated to the divers. What policy is he talking about?

The *Fleet Safety Manual* prohibited divers from entering capsized vessels. Senior bureaucrats ordered them to stay out. I ask the Minister to table the policy which would have permitted a rescue attempt in this instance.

**Hon. Robert Thibault (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans):** Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Coast Guard's diving policy is consistent with the *Canadian Labour Code* and as such, divers do not enter restricted areas. Under the *Canada Shipping Act* there is a provision for the joint coordinator of search and rescue to permit any actions necessary to save human life under reasonable circumstances.

**John Cummins:** Mr. Speaker, the *Canadian Labour Code* does not prohibit rescue dives. The Fleet Safety Manual does. This Minister's policy does.

The real issue here is that the Minister and his senior bureaucrats have created a straw man. They would rather be held accountable for failing to communicate policy rather than putting in place a policy which may have cost five people their lives, including a mother and her two small children.

If that is not true, I challenge the Minister to table the appropriate policy documents.

**Hon. Robert Thibault:** Mr. Speaker, the government offers its condolences to the families and friends of all the people whose lives were lost, but it regrets the actions by the members opposite and others who would have it seem to be the responsibility of the coast guard and due to actions of the coast guard. The coast guard, the divers, the search and rescue, the fire departments and all responders did a beautiful job. They save 1,500 people annually in B.C. and will continue to do so. To indicate any less is irresponsible.

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