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Coast Guard Budget Increases Illusionary

OTTAWA– "The money to salvage rusting and worn out vessels and collapsing shore-based infrastructure is little more than smoke and mirrors conjured up by a Government that no longer believes in national security and search and rescue," said John Cummins, M.P. (Delta-South Richmond).

Over the next two years the new federal budget claims to allocate an additional \$94.6 M to the Coast Guard. This money represents an infusion of perhaps \$9.5 M a year to each of the Coast Guard regions. This falls far short of covering the \$11 M shortfall in the Pacific Region's Coast Guard budget this year or the \$11 M plus budget shortfall expected next year.

This supposed new infusion of cash falls short, by a long shot of replacing the resources lost to the Coast Guard as a result of its ill-advised union with the Department of Fisheries. It does nothing to protect the Coast Guard from the ongoing erosions of its resources by the woefully mismanaged Fisheries Department, a Department, which the Auditor General has acknowledged, that is inclined to view the Coast Guard as a cash cow to fund its own internal budget shortfalls.

In a recent report to Parliament, the all-party House of Commons Fisheries Committee recommended an increase of \$2 M alone for the Pacific Region's Marine Communication and Traffic System (MCTS). The Committee faulted the government for its failure to adequately staff and provide ongoing training opportunities and equipment upgrades if it was to fulfil its mandate. Deep cuts to the MCTS, the Report said, had compromised the functioning of the service, Canada's security and placed lives at risk.

Covering even the most basic needs of the MCTS pretty much precludes the purchase of a new hovercraft for the Vancouver Airport Coast Guard Base. This is a key purchase; it is required for the Coast Guard to fulfil its search and rescue obligations to the Vancouver Airport and to allow for the 24/7 reinstatement of the Coast Guard dive team as recently announced by the Minister of Fisheries.

This budget document earmarks the \$9.5 M per region for major repairs to the Coast Guard fleet and shore-based infrastructure.

"All that is wishful thinking for an organisation that, just last fall, could not put uniforms on its crews nor fuel in its ships," said Cummins.

"This budget does nothing to address the additional responsibilities accruing to the Coast Guard as a result of 9/11," Cummins stated. "Canada remains vulnerable on its extensive coastline and must continue to rely on the US Coast Guard and military umbrella for our coastal security."

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