

Boaters demand extended weather forecast back

BY IAN AUSTIN, THE PROVINCE JULY 13, 2009

Boaters say lives are at risk because of a controversial coast guard decision to eliminate the extended forecast from marine weather broadcasts.

The Canadian Coast Guard -- after hearing the broadcasts were too long -- deleted the long-term forecast June 26, and has been hearing pleas ever since to restore it.

"This is life and death to me," said retired journalist Greg Middleton, 62, who sails about 2,000 nautical miles a year, much of it on the "wild side" of Vancouver Island and up the B.C. central coast, where Pacific storms unleash their vengeance. "I need this information to make decisions, and a bad decision or one based on incomplete information could mean disaster for me."

The Council of B.C. Yacht Clubs has protested in writing, calling on the coast guard to reverse its decision.

"The extended forecast, although not always accurate, was found by all delegates to be an excellent planning tool for pleasure boaters," the council wrote June 14, before the decision was implemented.

Max Birch, the coast guard's superintendent of Marine Communications and Traffic Services, said 66 boaters have called to complain of the decision.

"It's a little more than we expected," said Birch. "If we were concerned about safety, we wouldn't have discontinued the forecasts. We'll look at it again."

Birch said he's seeking public input (e-mail ccpgconsult@dfo-mpo.gc.ca) as part of a public review of the decision, and in the meantime mariners who need a long-term forecast should use their marine radio to phone the nearest coast guard station in Vancouver, Victoria, Tofino, Comox, or Prince Rupert and request a forecast.

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