



CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
OTTAWA, CANADA
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Fin Donnelly, MP
New Westminster—Coquitlam

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Hon. Keith Ashfield
Minister of Fisheries and Oceans Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON
K1A 0A6

December 19, 2011

Dear Minister Ashfield,

As the Official Opposition Critic and Deputy Critic for Fisheries and Oceans, we are writing to you to express our deep concern over the recently announced cuts to your department, which will result in the loss of close to 300 jobs nationwide.

We understand that many of these job cuts will be in rural regions like the lower St. Lawrence and the Gaspé, where unemployment is highest.

The fishing industry is vital to the long-term survival of coastal communities in Canada. The cuts to science, fisheries management and conservation at your department threaten the survival of these communities.

We are particularly distressed to learn that Fisheries and Oceans plans to cut Coast Guard jobs, as well as reduce overtime hours in 11 Coast Guard Marine Communications and Traffic Services (MCTS) Centres across Canada.

Coast Guard staff are some of the bravest and hardest working people in our country. They save lives and prevent marine disasters, like the Irving Whale catastrophe near the Magdalen Islands, and the sinking of the Queen of the North ferry in Wright sound, British Columbia.

Our constituents, as well as Canadians living in coastal communities nationwide, have expressed concern about whether your department will be able to prevent marine accidents and loss of life, given that it is cutting front-line rescue response staff in some of Canada's busiest coastal areas.



We are also concerned about the health and safety of the Coast Guard workers in MCTS centres whose job stress will be significantly increased as a result of reduced overtime hours.

Besides these job losses and cuts, Fisheries and Oceans is also planning to close Maritime Rescue Centres in Quebec and Newfoundland.

Quebeckers have expressed grave concern that the planned closure of the only bilingual Maritime Rescue Centre in Canada will endanger the lives of francophone fishers and other mariners.

These closures will put even more pressure on MCTS Centre staff, since these local staff will now be required to assist the rescue centres in Halifax and Trenton in identifying local resources for rescues, despite cuts to overtime hours.

The most distressing aspect of these cutbacks is that they are part of a plan that requires every branch within your department to cut 5-10% of its budget, regardless of the consequences.

The closure of two rescue centres and the cutbacks in overtime hours will only result in small savings for Fisheries and Oceans, but could lead to major marine accidents that will cost Canadians billions of dollars, not to mention loss of life.

Many of the programs and services offered by your department are crucial to coastal communities and mariners. In light of this, we ask that you reverse these cuts, and that your department recommit itself to the essential work of search and rescue, fisheries management and conservation.

Sincerely,



Fin Donnelly, MP
New Westminster—Coquitlam
Official Opposition Critic
Fisheries and Oceans



Phil Toone, MP
Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine
Official Opposition Deputy Critic
Fisheries and Oceans

CC: Megan Leslie, Official Opposition Critic for the Environment
Claude Gravelle, Official Opposition Critic for Natural Resources
Martin Grégoire, President, Coast Guard Marine Communications Officers, Local 2182
Jean-Pierre Gauthier, Directeur general, Municipalité de Saint-Siméon