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Buried on budget day: Government closes third coast guard base

OTTAWA, April 21, 2015 /CNW/ - Federal budget day coincides with the closure of a coast guard monitoring station in Ucluelet, the third such base to be closed by the Conservative government in 2015. Coast guard officers say that reducing the number of staff that oversees marine communications and traffic is a threat to the safety of Canadians and wildlife on the coast.

"The fuel spill in Vancouver's harbour this month was within sight of a closed coast guard station," said Chad Stroud, President of Unifor Local 2182, the union representing coast guard communication officers. "Fewer officers means reduced capacity to monitor traffic, distress communication, and coastal communities are more vulnerable."

The Harper government's cuts to the marine safety network have impacted services on both coasts. Three bases have been closed so far this year in Saint John, St. John's, and now Ucluelet. Five more monitoring stations are scheduled to close in 2015 in Thunder Bay, Rivière au Renard, St. Anthony, Vancouver, and Comox.

Commercial fishers are concerned that reduced oversight will put them at a higher risk.

"Thousands of Canadians make their living on our coast. The coast guard is essential to our safety," said Keith Sullivan, President of Unifor's Fish, Food, and Allied Workers (FFAW).

Restoring funding to the coast guard would cost \$5.5 million per year, or 0.25% of the cost to the government of the income-splitting program introduced in 2015.

Unifor is Canada's largest union in the private sector, representing more than 305,000 workers. It was formed Labour Day weekend 2013 when the Canadian Auto Workers and the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers unions merged.

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