

Media Advisory – for immediate release

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### **CAW President Calls on Feds to Stop Cuts to Coast Guard Communication Centres**

(Toronto) CAW President Ken Lewenza is calling on the federal government and the Coast Guard to stop a shortsighted plan to cut servicing hours for Marine Communications and Traffic Services personnel who provide critical distress and safety services on Canadian coastal waters.

The Canadian Coast Guard's proposal is to gut servicing hours at 11 of its 22 active stations located in Vancouver, Victoria, Tofino, Comox and Prince Rupert, British Columbia; Sarnia, Ontario; Quebec City and Les Escoumins, Quebec; Saint John, New Brunswick; Halifax, Nova Scotia; and St. John's, Newfoundland.

Lewenza called this a reckless cost-cutting measure that puts lives at risk.

"This situation offers a glimpse into how blindly the Harper government is approaching austerity measures," Lewenza said. "Harper's own security and energy policies are putting greater pressures on the Coast Guard to monitor our waters, yet the government is trying to reduce services in this exact area. It doesn't make sense."

Marine Communications and Traffic Services officers are often the first point of contact for distressed mariners, fishers, recreational boaters, kayakers, and others in coastal waters. MCTS also manages marine vessel traffic flows, which covers everything from detecting unmarked foreign vessels to preventing possible environmental damage through tanker collisions and spills. MCTS centres handle over 7,000 marine search and rescue cases each year.

The full roll-out of the Coast Guard's cost-cutting plan is set to begin on February 1, although a partial program was rolled out at the beginning of the year. This month-long "dry run" has already resulted in one urgent call from a distressed vessel being missed at one MCTS centre that has reduced servicing hours. Fortunately, the location of the vessel was such that a neighbouring MCTS centre was able to pick up the call.

CAW Local 2182 President Martin Grégoire, who represents over 350 MCTS officers, said he was disappointed in the public remarks made recently by Keith Ashfield, Federal Minister of Fisheries and Oceans (published in the *Comox Valley Echo*), who considered this an effort to put "the proper resources in place when and where they need to be available."

"To suggest that the Coast Guard can adequately schedule service hours well in advance of a crisis is simply absurd," Grégoire said. "The whole point is to ensure that we're fully prepared to deal with any situation, no matter how big or small, at all times."

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