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COAST GUARD CUTS HARMFUL TO CANADIANS

OTTAWA – Today, New Democrats joined with the Canadian Coast Guard's Marine Communicators Union to slam budget cuts that could jeopardize the lives of fishers and other mariners.

"We demand the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans stop gambling with people's lives," said Fin Donnelly, New Democrat critic for Fisheries and Oceans. "The government should immediately reverse its decision to cut Coast Guard staff and close Search and Rescue Centres. These cuts put fishers and other mariners at risk while also threatening the ocean environment," added Donnelly.

Martin Grégoire, Canadian Auto Workers union Local 2182 president, represents Coast Guard staff at the 22 Marine Communications and Traffic Services (MCTS) Centres across Canada. The Centres are undergoing cuts to staff and the Inuvik MCTS Centre is slated for closure in 2012.

"In terms of savings to the government, these cuts amount to nickels and dimes," said Grégoire. "The government is putting the lives of Canadians at risk to squeeze a few extra dollars out of the Coast Guard. That's not right."

Last year, the Conservatives announced it would close key Marine Search and Rescue Centres located in Quebec City and St. John's.

"These cuts will make it even harder for the Coast Guard to prevent oil spills at sea," added Philip Toone, New Democrat Deputy critic for Fisheries and Oceans. "A single oil tanker accident would more than wipe out all the savings the government hopes to gain with these cuts."

New Democrats also announced the launch of a national petition calling on the Conservative government to reverse the Coast Guard budget cuts and stop the closure of the Inuvik MCTS Centre, as well as the two Marine Search and Rescue Centres.

The petition will be presented in the House of Commons in the months to come.

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