

Hughes: MPs silent about dangers of Amphitrite closure

[Jackie Carmichael](#) / Westerly News

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Silence from local MPs on the impending March 2014 closure of Tofino Marine Communications and Traffic Services Regional Office at Amphitrite Point in Ucluelet is weighing on Allan Hughes.

Hughes is a Marine Communications Officer with the Coast Guard out of Comox, as well as official regional director of Canadian Auto Workers 2182. He spent six years at Amphitrite Point.

"This is the last summer that mariners/boaters and the public on the west coast of Vancouver Island will have a Coast Guard MCTS centre. This time next year, the centre will be operated from Prince Rupert. What are the consequences, no more weather report from Amphitrite Point lightstation, even though the Senate told the government to stop lightstation de-staffing," Hughes said.

Loaded tankers that transit the West Coast of Vancouver Island from Alaska and outbound from Vancouver are going to bring the possibility of dangerous interactions along the infamous "Graveyard of the Pacific," and at the gateway to Victoria, Seattle and Vancouver's port facilities without the benefit of having someone of significant experience at "Tofino Traffic" to help prevent them, Hughes said. "The government decision to close Tofino MCTS centre is short-sighted, ill-advised and will have negative safety consequences for those that rely on Coast Guard services. The centre in Prince Rupert will monitor over 30 radio sites for distress calls, with only two officers. The government intends to review its proposed 2 officers on watch after the closure and it is quite likely ONE officer will be responsible for the largest geographic area of Canada. Distress calls will be missed and members of the public will die as a result," Hughes said.

He sees only silence coming from local federal MPs.

"Dr. James Lunney was very outspoken a year ago, early on in the announcement of the closures and was, I presume, quickly silenced by the Prime Minister's Office," Hughes said, citing early commentary on Lunney's website where he stands up for Coast Guard services.

With the Comox closure as well and new electoral boundary lines coming into place, local MPs may not see the issue go away come election time.

"John Duncan - a former Ucluelet resident, I might add - has been deathly silent on the issue, other than touting the speaking lines he's been given by the Prime Minister's Office's communications department," Hughes said.

"I understand the government's desire to reduce the deficit," he said, recalling a flight to Ottawa to meet with the deputy minister of Fisheries in charge of the Coast Guard.

"At the end of the day, they're going to be \$2 million behind their projected savings," Hughes said.

Additionally, the West Coast will feel the economic impact of losing good-paying jobs and the families they support - and the government will have to hire 30 people to staff for the 17 positions earmarked for elimination, Hughes said.

It's not too late for Prime Minister Stephen Harper to keep Amphitrite Point's operations going, and Hughes said that would be a smart move on the government's part.

"The government would then be holding true to its commitment of stopping de-staffing of light stations as the Senate committee said to do. They would be able to see dangerous situations as they unfold, and in the end they would protect their savings as they wouldn't have a recruitment and retention issue, which they're going to have in the coming years with the two centres in Victoria and Prince Rupert," Hughes said.