



PRESENTATION BY STEVE BERGH

LOCAL 20232 PRESIDENT  
BRITISH COLUMBIA LIGHTKEEPERS

UNION OF CANADIAN TRANSPORTATION EMPLOYEES

Good evening Senators. My name is Steve Bergh. I am the president of the BC Lightkeepers Local 20232 and have been a Lightkeeper for 27 years. I am also a fisherman of 38 years experience. As a result, I have a good working knowledge of both the capacity of Lightkeepers' services to mariners and the Fisherman's appreciation for the services provided by lightkeepers. I understand the navigational tools used by mariners and the benefits and limitations of such.

I would like to express to you that I feel a great sense of responsibility to be standing before you today. This is the first opportunity that anyone from the coast of BC has had to express to you their needs regarding Lightstation services.

Minister Shea and Commissioner da Pont have had a significant amount of time before you and Director Steele has been seconded to advise this committee without rebuttal in equal time.

With respect, and a sense of responsibility to the public, I would like to say that I am also concerned that Senator Raine, the only senator from BC, has stated less than 2 hours into this process that she is convinced of Director Steele's perspective, before Senator Raine has heard from her citizens regarding their needs.

This is despite the fact that there is widespread opposition in BC to destaffing, which was reiterated last year. After hearing of the Commissioner's intent to destaff Lightstations in September 2009, the Union of BC Municipalities voted unanimously to resolve:

*"..that UBCM and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities call on the Prime Minister to cease all efforts to de-staff lightstations and instead commit to maintaining light station staffing levels indefinitely, in order to ensure the safety of the working and traveling public and the vibrancy of the growing coastal community."*

I submit to you this resolution along with copies of letters sent to Minister Shea and cc'd to me from 19 coastal districts, cities, towns, and villages. May I state that there were likely more letters sent to the Minister, but these are just the ones of which I was sent copies. (Please see attachment # 1)

I would also like to bring to your attention the statements of the Federal and Provincial representatives, including the Conservative Party Policy Declaration of 2008:

*"Lightstations are an important contribution to Canadian Sovereignty, provide for public safety especially for recreational boaters*

*and kayakers, are an essential presence to monitoring sea-planes and marine traffic, and assist in the interdiction of smuggling. “*

The statement of the Green Party, and the statement of the NDP Party also support staffed Lightstations. Note that there are no political boundaries to the support for staffed Lightstations. (Please see attachment # 2)

With respect and a sense of responsibility to the safety of the public, I also feel a need to bring to this committee that in 2007, Mr Jim Abram - who is and was the elected Regional District Director for the Strathcona Regional District - and myself had made ourselves available for a meeting with Bill White, the West Coast representative from the Department of Public Safety, in order to assist this department in an understanding of the capabilities of Lightstations in regards to Public Safety and sovereignty. It seemed logical to me, as it is part of our job description to cooperate with other government departments including the RCMP Coast Watch Program. Bill White, in a polite gesture, requested permission from Coast Guard to visit Chatham Point Light Station, where I was stationed. He required no transportation - he was simply being polite. Please understand that Light stations are not restricted sites. Normally, even members of the public are allowed access under escort by the lightkeeper.

This representative for the Department of Public Safety was refused permission to visit Chatham Point Light Station by Regional Director Susan Steele. When I asked Director Steele why she had refused Mr White access she indicated to me that the Department of Public Safety was looking for new acquisitions to sustain themselves and that Coast Guard was in the business of staffed lightstations.

I also have concerns that on April 10, 3 days before the April 13 meeting of this Committee initiating its review of Lightstations, Lightkeepers received a reminder that they are bound by the conditions of their employment not to speak out. We understand that other government employees that are familiar with light stations have been warned recently. As well, all Coast Guard employees received a notice from Assistant Commissioner Vija Poruks on April 26, that Director Steele's work:

*“is effectively to be the contact person for all matters pertaining to this work and to coordinate all information being produced for the benefit of the Senate SCFO”*

Without disrespect, I would like to point out that Director Steele, being a supervisor to all western region employees and a proponent of destaffing lightstations is not an appropriate intermediary. While the intention of the notice from Assistant Commissioner Poruks might not be to stifle communications, I can assure you that this **will be** the result.

Considering the real possibility that these Senators may receive much useful information regarding the issue of staffed lightstations from Government employees of several departments, may we receive assurance that these employees will be welcomed to contact you directly and that they will be protected from reprisal so that they may speak freely when speaking to this Committee and their government representatives. If such assurance is granted or denied, we request to have this in writing.

Since I have so little time before this Committee, in the interest of public safety, I feel it necessary to address the talking points which Coast Guard hierarchy use at each destaffing attempt and are using again at this time. We find that these same points raised continue to be inaccurate and misleading.

**Re: The 'additional' services that lightkeepers perform are not mandated by Coast Guard.**

We submit to you a copy of our job description (attachment #3) and "THE RESPONSIBILITIES FOR LIGHTSTATION SERVICES" (attachment # 4).

Stated as Coast Guard objectives are:

- Maritime safety (preparation, prevention and response)
- Protection of the marine and freshwater environment
- Facilitating maritime commerce and sustainable development
- Support of marine scientific excellence;, and
- Support of Canada's maritime priorities

Stated as Coast Guard services are:

- Maritime Search and Rescue
- Environmental Response
- Ice Breaking Services
- Marine Communication and Traffic Services
- Aids to Navigation
- Waterways and Management
- Maritime Security
- Support of the Department's fisheries and Oceans Resource Management mandates
- Support to other Government objectives

Lightkeepers are active participants in the successful provision of almost all of these stated services and the resulting attainment of all of these stated objectives. Despite efforts to downplay the role and abilities of Staffed Lightstations, Lightkeepers continue to be effective in public service as mandated by Coast Guard.

**Re: Lightkeeper's role in search and rescue is 'just because they happen to be there'**

I believe that this could be said of any safety service whose location is planned and strategic. Lightstations were placed in strategic locations along the coast...major traffic corrections or landfalls, high traffic areas of specific dangers, confluences of waterways and expanse of view. There are many instances where Lightkeepers have played an integral role in the successful outcome of rescue operations. Please look at the record and the testimony of mariners.

**Re: Repeatedly using a phrase 'vessel of opportunity' to describe lightkeepers as though it excludes lightkeepers from a significant role.**

Rescue Coordination Centre leaves all assistance to mariners (if not a distress or urgent situation) to 'vessels of opportunity....ie fellow mariners. If none are present or willing only then does RCC task CG resources including Lightkeepers if needed. If a distress or urgency is noted, all CCG resources are tasked according to their capacity and individual asset. Among other marine skills, Lightkeepers are trained in Boat handling, first aid and CPR, marine emergency duties and transportation of injured patients.

**Re: Lightkeepers are not part of the Environmental Response Program.**

Lightkeepers played an instrumental role in the Nestucca spill of 1998. Lightkeepers were first to spot and report the spill and West coast stations provided platforms for the response. Lightstations also have the capacity to store equipment needed for response. Weather information from Lightstations will be essential to successful efforts. If these public assets are not part of the spill response plan at this time the question might be raised "why not?".

**Re: Weather forecasts and condition reports are not part of CCG mandate:**

Although Coast Guard is presently stating that the weather information services that Lightkeepers provide is really a responsibility of Environment Canada, the provision of this accurate and dependable information is a key component of the Coast Guard objective of prevention of incidents. Environment Canada is also assisting Coast Guard by providing forecasts (which are often directly informed by the observations of Lightkeepers) to mariners and coastal aviators. This complete service is absolutely a service to Coast Guard who would bear the responsibility of responding to incidents - which would likely be significant in quantity - were the service not available. It is important for these Senators to understand that Environment Canada, through its weather services, likely save

much more money for Coast Guard then they usurp. (Please see attachment # 5 – testimony of mariners and aviators including letters that we have been sent regarding NL mariners needs)

**Re: Automated equipment works.**

Because Lightkeepers change lights (also when in an array), trip mechanisms which have failed to do so automatically, clean snow, ice, condensation, and algae off of lenses, it would appear to the CG hierarchy that there is not much work that is essential to the success of a so called ‘automated’ aid to navigation. I would caution that the failure by the public to report an outage on other fixed aids is an indicator of their reliability can also lead to erroneous conclusions. If the public is getting accustomed to the reduced wattages necessitated by ‘automation’, we caution that on the major aids such as lighthouses, there may be a false assumption of no increased risk.

Remember as well that CCG here is only referring to the light. Automated weather equipment is notoriously unavailable or inaccurate, but CCG s denying any responsibility to provide weather and therefore does not refer to this. (Please see attachment #6)

**Re: Advancements in Technology aboard vessels have decreased needs for services.**

I have attached a letter from the skipper of the Alaska State Ferry Malaspina which runs between Seattle and Alaska twice weekly (attachment # 7) and describes navigation in the real world and speaks to the importance of the brightness of the major aids, many of them Lightstations, which is decreasing now as CCG moves to ‘automated’ mode. (this letter speaks of Green Island BC) . The date of this letter is 1995, from the last attempt at destaffing, describes the difficulties on the coasts which continue no matter how sophisticated the equipment. Often when vessels lose electronics they lose them all. These mariners need all the verifiable information that they can get.

**Re: There has been no increased risk to mariners in places where destaffing has taken place.**

How would a person verify this? Since we have entered the age of ‘risk assessment’ and even governments weigh life against relatively small and imaginary monetary dividends, an understanding of risk becomes ever more elusive. When a lightkeeper spots persons clinging to the hull of an overturned vessel (Cape Beale – 2004), spots a mariner’s last and only working flare on a

stormy night (Cape Scott – 1999), searches for and finds a downed pilot (Dryad Pt – 2001), and no one else has seen these, one would have to presume that if a person were not on duty at these sites these situations could clearly have been mortal. These are just a few instances, for which lightkeepers have received commendations...since the last attempted destaffing. Remember that lightstations are placed in geographic positions of increased risk. It is no coincidence that lightkeepers are able to make a difference by being stationed at these spots.

**Re: Alaska is a good example of successful destaffing.**

When we enquired just how the fishermen felt in Alaska regarding destaffing in that area, we received a letter from the Southeast Alaska Fishermen's Alliance and also a letter from the Executive Director of that Alliance that speaks to their more personal experience in Alaska and their appreciation of the staffed lightstations as they transit the BC coast. Please note that these fishermen stated to me that with recreational fishing on the rise they were even more worried that the lack of reliable weather information in Alaska would result in loss of life. (Please see attachment # 8)

For you Senators that live within the confines of a city and are accustomed to the safety and security that four walls and paved roads provide, I beg of you to appreciate the needs of First Nations people, coastal peoples, mariners, coastal aviators, and other workers and travelers that find it necessary to move in less predictable environments. Please consider their requests for the retention of these Lightstation services. (Please see attachment #9).