



**Opening Comments to the
Senate Committee on Fisheries and Oceans
By Christine Collins, National President
Union of Canadian Transportation Employees (UCTE)
Tuesday, June 21, 2016**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about the Canadian Coast Guard and our vision for it. Maritime search and rescue is a key function of the Coast Guard and it will comprise an important part of my presentation today. At the same time, our vision is broader than just search and rescue and a realization of this vision could have a material impact on how and why search and rescue (SAR) is done.

By way of background, UCTE is the national union for the non-officer component of the Canadian Coast Guard. We represent ships' crews, search and rescue specialists, staff at the Joint Rescue Coordination Centres, environmental specialists, administrative support workers and light keepers among others. We have 2,366 members at the CCG of which 713 are deckhand positions which include the search and rescue specialists. It should be noted that all our members are subject to large rescue SAR call-ins, even when they are off-cycle. A SAR specialist would be called for a smaller incident or medical emergency.

I know a question raised by this committee was whether wages for search and rescue specialists were competitive. For Coast Guard as a whole, we do not believe that they are. It is difficult to attract skilled employees when the pay offered is up to 25% less than what is available from industry; specifically, offshore oil and gas work or shipbuilding and other manufacturing or service jobs.

Also, comparative pay studies have failed to take into account the types of roles that our members must assume. Search and rescue or recovery, firefighting, carpentry, welding, etc. are the kinds of functions that must be done at sea and therefore pay for these types of functions should be compared to pay for private sector employees performing similar roles. The Treasury Board compensation survey results for the SV/operational services group states "*The individual job tables for the Deckhand, Boatswain, Engine Room Assistant, and Steward are not included in this appendix as insufficient data was collected to report on any of the compensation elements.*" The reality is that all other groups within the SV group will receive compensation as a result of the comparison to similar jobs within the private sector. Once again, the ships' crew which includes SAR specialists, will not benefit from this pay survey result. It is a good thing that our members do not join or stay with the Canadian Coast Guard for the salary. They do it because of the importance of the work. I do say to you that this needs to be addressed and fixed.

For many years now, UCTE has been advocating for a significant change in the way the CCG is structured and operated. Some of you may have seen our updated position paper entitled "*The Canadian Coast Guard: A case for change*" (Appendix A) that we distributed prior to this meeting.

We think it is wrong to structure and operate the CCG as a division of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. The CCG needs its own statute and should be structured as a Separate Statutory Service Agency similar to the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA), Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) and other organizations. The Commissioner should be a Deputy Minister level appointee reporting directly to the Minister of

Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard. Furthermore, there should be scope for stakeholder involvement in the governance of the organization, something akin to a Board of Directors modelled after the CRA structure. As a service agency to multiple organizations within the federal government, provincial and municipal governments, shipping companies, fishers and fishing companies, and many others, a separate statutory agency would help create the framework to remove redundancies, save money, and provide a firmer foundation for cost recovery and fee for service.

This new structure would benefit search and rescue directly. An important element of the work of the SAR program is management and monitoring. For search and rescue, a separate statutory agency would provide the flexibility that Coast Guard needs to manage its own affairs as well as make it easier to identify and obtain resources required to respond to incidents or establish protocols for response. With the opening of northern or arctic marine commercial activities, this flexibility becomes even more imperative.

It is important to note that today, there are instances where the CCG is not in a position to take action on the seas, where interdiction is required, or where derelict vessels need to be dealt with. This is partly because the CCG does not have any police or interdiction authorities to enable it to take action. It is necessary to have a third party police force presence on the CCG vessel in order to address many maritime problems. It is not always the case that these individuals and the police resources are present on the vessel when these powers are necessary to act. It is for this reason that UCTE believes it would be appropriate to provide the legal authorities and the training for arming of the Coast Guard. We suggest that the CBSA model may be one to consult. A statute enabling these powers could help achieve this objective.

While UCTE is pleased that the government has committed significant resources to new and updated vessels, we are not convinced they are sufficient. We need more icebreakers and the commitment to one new vessel is not enough.

The CCG needs 20-year capital plans and capital budgets similar to the Department of National Defence. 7-year capital plans and budgets are just not long enough, nor do they permit effective capital planning for an important and strategic national institution.

If CCG were to adopt a service agency structure and organization, it could have larger service revenues that could hold the organization in better stead where other federal budgets are squeezed. Some search and rescue activities, as well as other services provided by the Coast Guard, could be billed directly to users. If the rationalization model that goes to the heart of the service agency idea works properly, partner and stakeholder organizations will see fit to support the CCG even if times are tough.

Another critical element to search and rescue is operations. We are so pleased that this government has re-opened the Kitsilano Coast Guard base in British Columbia and are waiting to see how the government implements its commitment to re-open the St. John's, Newfoundland Marine Rescue Sub-Centre. The important question is "why were

these decisions to close made in the first place?” The CCG search and rescue program’s mission is to save and protect lives in the maritime environment. If the government of the day had reflected on this mission statement, we believe they would have concluded that the Coast Guard is an organization that needs to be supported at all times.

When we speak about rationalization and the importance for an efficient Coast Guard, we are also thinking of the relationship between the Canadian Coast Guard and the Auxiliary. Too often, there are Coast Guard SAR stations and vessels in close proximity to Auxiliary stations and vessels, seemingly competing with one another for SAR duties. This does not make any sense at all. The CCG is the primary maritime search and rescue response element. The Auxiliary, a maritime volunteer organization, must remain as a complement to the CCG SAR who should assist and never replace professionally trained SAR specialists.

In closing, I would like to quote from a speech I made to the 2011 DFO/CCG Labour Relations Symposium:

We are an essential service to all maritime safety and security - a vital component in Canada’s transportation system - and a service agency to countless industries, including the fisheries sector. By adopting this vision of ourselves and finding the ways and means to link this vision with government priorities and public needs, we can easily meet the test of priority status, the test of essential service and the test which should result in CCG receiving more government support and not less.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our vision of the Canadian Coast Guard and the important work that they do.

Appendix A