

league, the Hon. Member for Skeena, pointed out that it has been demonstrated that after two years in operation:

—the Type 400 vessel has some shortcomings for operations in the worst conditions encountered at certain times of the year in northern British Columbia waters. Therefore, to provide effective SAR coverage in the areas of Hecate Strait, Queen Charlotte Sound and Dixon Entrance, where regional SAR authorities had originally planned Type 400 vessels, the CCG is investigating other options.

The Canadian Coast Guard are investigating other options, but in the meantime, Mr. Speaker, we have a continuing situation where human lives are at risk.

The Hon. Member for Skeena has repeatedly urged that there should be a properly equipped helicopter stationed either on the Queen Charlotte Island of Masset or in Prince Rupert. However, this is not a request which the Minister has seen fit to accept. The Government promised two more search and rescue vessels earlier this year, one for Bella Bella and one for Prince Rupert. The money has been made available by the Treasury Board. But it is not just money which has to be voted for the acquisition of these boats; the boats have to be put in place.

There is a need for multi-tasking of all Government vessels. Certainly, it is required by law that all Government vessels, and indeed all vessels on the coast, should respond to a distress call. However, Government vessels are not all properly equipped or co-ordinated to take part in such services. Studies have repeatedly pinpointed the lengthy delays in alerting search and rescue systems after the initial notification has gone in.

This underlines the continuing need for better co-ordination of the facilities which we already have. It underlines the need for greater use of volunteers. One very simple suggestion which has been made is that volunteers should have paging devices issued to them so that if there were an incident for which they were to be called out, it would be easy to contact them.

The Canadian Marine Rescue Auxiliary, the CMRA, has been formed recently, but it has not been properly utilized. It has been utilized in a way which has, in fact, left many of the smaller lifeboat societies out in the cold. This is really ignoring the very important resource of volunteers. If there is going to be an adequate search and rescue component on the West Coast of Canada, we must use volunteers. The very length of the coast and the sparseness of the population in some areas require that we use adequately trained volunteers, but we have not done that. It is almost as though volunteers are looked upon as somehow getting in the way of the professionals.

● (1805)

The overview presented by the British Columbia Lifeboat Society has a description of the volunteer, and I would like to read it into the record because I think it accurately describes the kind of person these volunteers are and their dedication:

He typically expends a considerable amount of his available resources, be it time, vessel and equipment or money on his avocation—frequently equipping his vessel in a manner improving efficiency in handling Search and Rescue tasks. Small vessel handling skills and knowledge of local marine conditions have been

generally developed over a long period of time, he is most frequently a respected individual in his chosen vocation or profession. These are resources that cannot be purchased much less contracted.

He gives much, asks little—in general—deems to have received less from the authorities.

So I urge there be greater attention paid to the whole question of volunteers.

Another area I think the Commission should be directing more attention to is that of prevention. This is especially important in the southern part of the coast, the part I represent, including the Gulf Islands where there is increasing use of pleasure boats. I believe it should be mandatory to require licensing not only of the vessels but of the operators, especially smaller vessels, because there is nothing to prevent someone from going out and buying a boat, putting a high-powered motor on it and go roaring off into the ocean without any training whatsoever. A test or examination should be required for vessel operators similar to that which we require for people who are going to drive automobiles. We should ensure vessel operators are properly equipped with the knowledge and training which will enable them to provide for their own safety and also be of some use in the event another boat gets into difficulty.

Another preventive measure I strongly advocate is that Coast Guard officials be given the power to terminate voyages which in their opinion are manifestly unsafe. I refer, for example, to situations where the people in the boat have been drinking to the extent they are no longer capable of safely handling a boat. We are able to do that with automobiles but Coast Guard officials do not have that power, only the RCMP has.

I know there are other people who wish to take part in this debate so I will conclude simply by emphasizing that we support the motion. We want to see some positive improvements made in search and rescue. We believe one way to do that would be an independent inquiry which can look into all facets of search and rescue on both Canadian coasts and come up with recommendations that a Government which has the will can implement.

Mr. Stanley Hudecki (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, I must first indicate my concern and displeasure at the approach and direction this debate has taken. The motion expressly indicated the West Coast and the problems facing search and rescue. I, through the Department, have taken time to take that concern to heart and have pointed out exactly what has been accomplished since the issuing of the Cross Report.

I think there has been so much rhetoric as to make it impossible to get that information across in the time allotted. So rather than going over the steps taken, some of which have been brought forward by the previous speaker, I will quickly indicate what has happened and what is being done in this particular field.

First of all, the Cross Report was tabled in the House of Commons in December, 1982. Since then, the Cabinet decision called for a new management system, the goal of which was to