

PRIVILEGE

AVAILABILITY TO ALL MEMBERS OF STUDY ON FISHING VESSEL SAFETY

Mr. Blaine A. Thacker (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, with respect to the alleged question of privilege raised yesterday by the Hon. Member for Cowichan—Malahat—The Islands (Mr. Manly), I wish to advise you and all Hon. Members as follows:

First, every Member of this House, on November 3 at about 1 p.m., received a press release outlining the key elements of the fishing vessel safety report prepared by the Canadian Coast Guard. This package included the release and executive summary plus the 41 recommendations.

Second, the report itself was of course available to all Hon. Members in the mail room and also in the distribution centre.

Third, the Official Opposition transport critics plus certain government and opposition Members, received the above package plus three additional pages with information concerning the purpose of the study, background information and the implementation strategy.

Therefore, it is clear that the Minister gave a release to all Hon. Members and a bit more information in detail to certain Hon. Members in all three Parties. No favouritism was shown at all to government Members, and I submit that the privileges of the Hon. Member Cowichan—Malahat—The Islands were not violated. I therefore trust that he will rise and withdraw his statement that the Minister of Transport (Mr. Crosbie) is playing cheap partisan politics with the safety of fishermen.

Mr. Jim Manly (Cowichan—Malahat—The Islands): Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Parliamentary Secretary pointed out that these materials were circulated on November 3. I have a letter here dated November 2 and it is addressed to Progressive Conservative Members of Parliament with ridings affected by marine transportation policy. Included with the letter was a briefing book from the Canadian Coast Guard.

To the best of my knowledge, I have not yet received a copy of this package, which is from the Coast Guard and which is presumably designed to help Members who live in ridings affected by this new policy have a better understanding of what is involved. I submit that the situation remains as I laid it before you yesterday. The Minister of Transport (Mr. Crosbie) has been playing favouritism on an issue of vital importance to all Members with fishing communities or people involved in the industry in their constituency.

● (1120)

Mr. Thacker: Mr. Speaker, I would be happy to arrange for my friend, or any other Member, to receive the bit of additional information that was provided to the NDP critic, the Liberal critic, as well as another NDP Member. If they simply let us know, we will provide them with the extra 11 pages, I think it is, of information.

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Nonetheless, the Hon. Member seems to be shifting his ground to alleging the Minister of Transport is showing favouritism. I reject that as well, and the Hon. Member should rise and withdraw his original statement about cheap partisan politics. No Minister of Transport is ever going to play cheap partisan politics with the safety and lives of fishermen.

Mr. Speaker: I am not at all sure that anything is advanced by hearing more argument as to the facts. I have the point of the Hon. Member and will consider it. He has been invited to rise. Whether he wishes to respond to what the Hon. Parliamentary Secretary has said, I am not sure, but I will certainly hear him.

Mr. Manly: Just for your information, Mr. Speaker, the additional material is not two or three pages. It is 18 pages in the Coast Guard study information kit on fishing vessel safety for Members of Parliament. This is the material that was included with the letter.

Mr. Speaker: Perhaps the Hon. Parliamentary Secretary can help me. As I understand it, the information attached to the letter dated November 2 which went to some Progressive Conservative Members of Parliament was at the same time sent to critics of the other two Parties. Am I correct in that?

Mr. Thacker: Yes, Mr. Speaker. While the letter was dated November 2, it was not sent until November 3, after the date on which it was available to all other Members of Parliament.

Mr. Speaker: It think the Chair can settle this. There is apparent concern on the part of the Hon. Member for Cowichan—Malahat—The Islands (Mr. Manly) that perhaps the Minister had been favouring one side of the House over the other by sending out some material that did not go to every other Member. It would seem to me that it may not have gone to every other Member, and it does seem to have been delivered not on November 2 but on November 3. The word of the Parliamentary Secretary must be accepted and it seems that the information was given to all Parties although perhaps not to every Member at the same time.

In any event, the Hon. Member for Cowichan—Malahat—The Islands indicated, if I heard him correctly, that perhaps the Hon. Minister of Transport was somehow in this particular exercise doing something that was not in the interests of fishermen and other people travelling across the waters of the West Coast. I do not think it is appropriate for the Chair to comment on that one way or the other. That may be the Hon. Member's opinion. However, most certainly, under the circumstances, what we have here is an argument over distribution of some information.

With the greatest respect, the Chair cannot see how the Hon. Member's privileges, in the sense of his capacity to carry on as a Member of Parliament, have been in any way impaired. Therefore, I have to say with respect to the Hon. Member that I find it is not a question of privilege.