

*Search and Rescue Services*

the point, and I make it here again today, that there should be separate rescue co-ordination centre in St. John's, Newfoundland, to cover the area of the northwest Atlantic to satisfy our obligations under the International Aviation Agreements, whereby we take in a vast area of ocean in terms of international air traffic, and also to protect our mariners, fishermen and offshore workers.

We should have a rescue co-ordination centre in St. John's with decision-making capabilities supported by adequate personnel and fixed-wing aircraft. The Newfoundland question has to be addressed separately. There are no policies, no standards for performance and levels of service, and no objectives for the current search and rescue program. That is a fact; I defy anyone to tell me otherwise. Therefore, there is no method by which to decide or even to measure what is adequate and what is not.

The marine industrial environment has changed over the past decade by the advent of offshore exploration, and this will ultimately increase. It is increasing now. Once the question of jurisdiction has been settled, there will be further increases in activity out there. The massiveness of those offshore structures—and we have the tragic evidence of the *Ocean Ranger* to stand there as testimony—and their exposure to the ravages of the unique environment of the northwest Atlantic correspondingly increase the chances of still further major marine disasters off the coast of Newfoundland.

I emphasize and parenthesize “the coast of Newfoundland”. If you take a look at the offshore activity that is taking place off Nova Scotia, you find there is adequate coverage there provided by the fixed-wing aircraft based in Summerside, P.E.I., in Nova Scotia and by the MoT vessels and fisheries vessels based in Halifax. I do not even have to mention the fishing grounds of the northwest Atlantic, the Hamilton Banks, the northern fishing grounds which are now used by our fishermen on a year round basis and, of course, the area of the Banks of Newfoundland where we have thousands of our fishermen daily exposed, especially from now until June of next year, to the extreme hazards of a very hostile environment.

In order to arrive at a reasonable and realistic conclusion on the adequacy and deployment of search and rescue resources in Newfoundland, certain factors must be considered. We are talking about adequacy because we have an internal report, additional to “An Evaluation of Search and Rescue”, commissioned by a Minister of National Defence and released by the Minister which shows there are adequate resources, that there is adequate deployment. I am making the point that the resources are far from adequate and the deployment is most inadequate.

Standards will have to be developed so that there will be similar rules applicable throughout the region. Those standards must be based on all pertinent factors, such as distances to be covered, miles of coastline, marine activity, environmental factors, capability of SAR vehicles, time factors in response, causes of delays and so on.

Further, independent statistics must be developed that take into account the reason for disparity in incident rate at different levels of SAR service availability, preparedness of mariners and boaters for the missions undertaken, the incidence of self-help and mutual assistance and the recording and reporting thereof, the number of lives lost per incident and in total. I repeat, the number of lives lost per incident and in total.

A value must be placed on the different activities, that is, commercial, petroleum exploration and production activity, fishing, and pleasure and priorities assigned. Obviously, if we have an oil rig in trouble off the coast of Newfoundland, Labrador or Nova Scotia with 80 to 100 men on board, that has to receive much higher priority than a pleasure boat which has probably run afoul of weather and where there is no immediate threat to life.

In my opinion, only a fact-finding body could attempt to find answers to some of the questions I have tried to place on the record. That is why I am pleased and welcome the opportunity to stand and speak in support of the motion put forward by my hon. colleague. The first step for the long term is to establish a basis based on a solid statistical and practical background.

In the short run, the existing service resources should be deployed on the basis of a set of common factors so that all may have equal access and we can eliminate once and for all this often tragic but certainly regrettable time lag.

I have risen in this House time and time again after every accident off our coast to speak to the inadequacy of search and rescue in our country. We are one of the major, if not the major, fishing nations of the world. Our coastline touches three oceans. Apart altogether from our sovereignty, it strikes me as passing strange, and I certainly find it difficult to understand, why our search and rescue on our East and West Coasts is so woefully inadequate. I do not in any way reflect on the capability of our search and rescue personnel, both in the Canadian Coast Guard and in the Armed Forces. They are extremely dedicated people working under very difficult circumstances without adequate equipment. That is what it is all about.

● (1730)

Why is there not adequate equipment? Why must they continue to operate under difficult and almost impossible circumstances? Why can there not be adequate equipment deployed on both coasts? Why should the fishermen off the Queen Charlotte Islands have to depend upon the U.S. Coast Guard for their protection?

As Members of Parliament, the representatives of the taxpayers of this country, we are entitled to an answer to that question. Why can we not have fixed-wing aircraft support in Newfoundland to protect our offshore oil workers and fishermen? It was not until the sinking of the *Ocean Ranger* that the three search and rescue helicopters now stationed in Gander were equipped with all-weather radar, and that was in response to another tragedy. Because they were not so equipped, it affected their ability to respond to the *Ocean*