

## PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS

[English]

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Corbin):** Shall all items listed under Private Members' Notices of Motions preceding Item No. 26 be allowed to stand by unanimous consent?

**Some Hon. Members:** Agreed.

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### SEARCH AND RESCUE

#### ADVISABILITY OF INITIATING INDEPENDENT COMMISSION OF INQUIRY

The House resumed from Friday, January 16, 1981, consideration of the motion of Mr. Siddon:

That, in the opinion of this House, the Government should consider the advisability of initiating an independent commission of inquiry to investigate the serious deficiencies within the administration of Search and Rescue services on Canada's West Coast.

**Hon. James A. McGrath (St. John's East):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity to address this most serious question. It is now approximately one year and seven months since the sinking of the *Ocean Ranger* with the loss of 84 lives off the south coast of Newfoundland. That sparked an evaluation of our search and rescue capability on the East Coast.

Of course, this motion deals specifically with the West Coast and I congratulate the Hon. Member for Richmond-South Delta (Mr. Siddon) for introducing it. I want to serve notice now that it would be my intention to amend the motion so that the inquiry which is called for under the resolution would include the East Coast as well as the West Coast.

Following the sinking of the *Ocean Ranger*, we had the release of the report on the evaluation of search and rescue. This was the interdepartmental study that was released approximately a year ago in September of 1982.

It is nothing short of a national disgrace, a blot on the record of this Parliament, that this report has not been the subject of committee study and that the sinking of the *Ocean Ranger* has yet to be examined by a committee of the House. This is notwithstanding the fact that shortly after that tragedy it was the subject matter of a study by a congressional committee in the U.S. House of Representatives. It was also the subject of a study by the U.S. Coast Guard and I believe there was one other U.S. study into the sinking of the *Ocean Ranger* that was completed.

● (1720)

That rig was operating under a Canadian licence, it was operating in Canada's economic zone, under Canadian jurisdiction and primarily with a Canadian crew. Yet we have yet to address ourselves to an inquiry into the cause of that disaster and the impact or adequacy of our search and rescue capability in dealing with this kind of a disaster, and this is difficult, if not impossible, to understand.

### Search and Rescue Services

The purpose of this motion is to point out that Canada's search and rescue on both coasts is in a mess, an incredible mess. The fact the Government has been able to circumvent Parliament by not having this subject before a parliamentary committee speaks to the ingenuity of the management of the business of this House, but it does not get away from the fact that search and rescue is nevertheless in a mess. We will probably be just on the verge of another disaster before we have another evaluation of the capability of our search and rescue.

I know from my own experience as Minister of Fisheries and Oceans that many of our fishermen on the West Coast of Canada have to depend upon the U.S. Coast Guard for protection. That is a disgrace and it should not be allowed to continue. On the East Coast dispersal is such that only a small area is adequately covered. That speaks to the tragedies surrounding the sinking of the *Ocean Ranger*.

I want to speak for a moment about the report on "Evaluation of Search and Rescue" from the perspective of my own Province and the inadequacy of search and rescue in Newfoundland. First, the report does not concern itself with the loss of life. The statistics in the report relate to incidents. The DND internal report, which objectively ignores the lives lost, explains that such figures would distort their basic statistics and set the fluctuation in activity statistics "wild" by one or two incidents, such as the *Ocean Ranger*.

In other words, although 83 people were lost in the *Ocean Ranger*, if you were to use that figure in the statistical compilation it would set the whole thing awry. That is the kind of convoluted logic that we get. It is more than that: the *Ocean Ranger* was a warning to us all. The sobering conclusion to be drawn from this is that since all major incidents are to be found in and around Newfoundland, they are not to be used statistically to reinforce the argument.

The greater the distance the rescue co-ordinating centre is from the scene of an incident, the longer the decision time and thus the longer the response time. I am making these points as briefly as I can to allow other Hon. Members to address this motion. I make these observations on the evaluation of search and rescue.

Newfoundland, it has to be said, by virtue of the configuration of the Atlantic region which takes in millions of square kilometres, is permanently locked into what has to be an inherent time delay because of the location of the rescue co-ordination centre in Halifax. This lag in response time has been a major factor, or has been referred to in just about every inquiry into every incident on the East Coast, certainly every incident off the coast of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The fixed-wing aircraft based in the Halifax area, which includes P.E.I., are such that they are not suitable to respond to offshore incidents off the coast of Newfoundland and Labrador. This speaks to the desperate need for the location of fixed-wing aircraft in the East Coast area off Newfoundland.

The report also makes reference to the fact that there should be a separate marine rescue co-ordination centre. I have made