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October 6, 2009

File No. FG/02

The Honourable Gail Shea
House of Commons
Minister of Fisheries and Oceans
Parliament Buildings, Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
Canada K1A 0A6

Dear Minister Shea:

Re: De-staffing of light stations

I am writing on behalf of the Islands Trust Council to convey our concern about potential de-staffing of light stations by the Canadian Coast Guard.

The Islands Trust is a federation of independent local governments that represents some 25,000 people living within the Islands Trust Area. The Islands Trust Area covers the islands and waters between the British Columbia mainland and southern Vancouver Island. It includes 13 major and more than 450 smaller islands covering 5200 square kilometres. The Islands Trust has a mandate to preserve and protect the trust area and its unique amenities and environment for the benefit of the residents of the trust area and of the province generally, in cooperation with municipalities, regional districts, improvement districts, other persons and organizations and the Government of British Columbia.

We are very concerned that de-staffing of light stations will have a detrimental effect on public and environmental safety and the heritage values of lighthouse sites. As light keepers provide invaluable services to mariners, aviators and island communities, we strongly believe that staffed Canadian light stations should remain staffed. As you are asking the Canadian Coast Guard to undertake a review of the services provided by light keepers, we respectfully request that meaningful consultation with local communities and service users be an integral part of the review process.

We also ask that during this review the following points be considered:

- Public safety is of the utmost importance.
- Marine communities rely on accurate and timely weather reports available from light keepers for safe navigation and the reliable flow of goods and services
- Marine communities rely on the fail-safe operation of the lights and the fog horn. Delays in repairing failed systems due to a lack of on-site light keepers could have fatal consequences.
- Light stations have important heritage values and the regular maintenance provided by light keepers is important to preserving these sites for future generations.

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Preserving **Island** communities, culture and environment

Bowen Denman Hornby Gabriola Galiano Gambier Lasqueti Mayne North Pender Salt Spring Saturna South Pender Thetis

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- Light keepers are the eyes and ears of our coast and are in strategic locations to observe what is happening in our marine environments.
- Light keepers have a role to play in preventing environmental disasters such as oil spills and mitigating disasters when they occur.
- Light keepers may have an important role to play in helping our communities collect scientific information regarding climate change impacts.
- As extreme weather events occur more frequently due to climate change, the local knowledge of light keepers will be of increased importance to our communities.
- Light keepers perform preventative services which are not normally accounted for in government cost/benefit analysis methods. For example, there are many local anecdotal stories about light keepers sharing boating safety information to ill-prepared tourists thereby preventing the need for search and rescue services.
- Staffed lighthouses have a positive impact on our tourism industry.

I would also like to inform you that in response to the plan to de-staff the Entrance Island Light Station, one of the first four light stations on the West Coast slated for de-staffing this year, the Gabriola Island Local Trust Committee, the local government for the area, passed the following resolution on September 23, 2009:

The Gabriola Island Local Trust Committee encourages the federal government to maintain Entrance Island as a staffed light station, for heritage protection and marine safety.

Thank you for considering this information and we look forward to hearing more information regarding the review process.

Yours truly,



Sheila Malcolmson
Chair, Islands Trust Council

Pc: George DaPont, Commissioner, Canadian Coast Guard
Linda Adams, Chief Administrative Officer, Islands Trust
Islands Trust website