

Conference to address West Coast marine opportunities

VICTORIA – Marine engineers and industry representatives from the Pacific Northwest, across Canada, and around the world will meet in June in Victoria, B.C., to review opportunities for the marine industry in British Columbia.

Among those opportunities are the development of offshore oil and gas and the replacement of the aging ferry fleet in the province.

Sponsored by the Canadian Institute of Marine Engineering (CIMarE), the national conference Mari-Tech 2004, themed Pacific Northwest Marine Opportunities – Buyers & Suppliers, will take place June 9-11 at the Inner Harbour's Laurel Point Inn. It will be held in conjunction with CIMarE's annual general meeting.

B.C. Premier Gordon Campbell

has indicated his government's determination to bolster the province's economy using the oil and gas reserves off the coast of the Queen Charlotte Islands by forming a \$5.8 million, 11-member team to pursue the goal of pumping petroleum before the 2010 Olympic Games.

The process of removing federal and provincial drilling restrictions is now under way. After pressure from British Columbia, the first in a series of scientific reviews on the impact of drilling in the area was undertaken in November. Earth sciences professor Jeremy Hall of Newfoundland is leading the four-member team..

CIMarE said that British Columbia Ferry Services (BCFS) is also planning major investments that should be a boost for the industry,

adding that plans to upgrade the ferry service are under way and will result in \$2 billion invested in new ferries, terminals and improvements over the next 15 years.

BCFS' intention to invite tenders from international companies has created some concern among unionized workers, CIMarE said, adding that although there is a 25 per cent import duty on ships built outside Canada and travel costs must be included, local shipyards will need to maintain tight controls on costs to compete with the lower labour rates overseas. Ultimately, the level of the Canadian dollar may make the difference for regional shipyards, CIMarE said.

Further information on the conference is available on-line at www.maritech2004.org