

# Report recognizes industry deserves answer on Coast Guard: Chamber of Maritime Commerce

By ALEX BINKLEY

**OTTAWA** – A call on the government to have the courtesy to respond to a private sector proposal for improving the Canadian Coast Guard has been welcomed by Ray Johnston, head of the Chamber of Maritime Commerce.

A report from the Commons fisheries and oceans committee, chaired by Liberal MP Tom Wappel, notes that the proposal from the National Marine and Industrial Committee dates back to 2001 but that it has yet to receive a response.

The report's observation is some consolation for the long wait, Mr. Johnston says. "It is recognition finally that the industry deserves an answer to its offer of a long-term contract with the Coast Guard."

The report said the government should have negotiated in good faith with the Coalition over its proposals for phasing out marine service fees. The committee said the government has ignored industry concerns about the impact of the fees on exports.

The overall thrust of the committee report was on the sad state of the

Coast Guard and the need for the government to provide it with independence, funds and a bigger mandate.

"How many more reports will it take to convince the government that it needs to make sure the Coast Guard is properly funded?" Mr. Johnston said.

At the same time, the government has to make a decision on whether the navy or the Coast Guard will be responsible for ensuring the security of Canada's coasts, Mr. Johnston continued. Once the role has been decided, then industry will be able to assist the Coast Guard to build a proper organization. Until now, departments have been unwilling to take up the issue, saying it should be decided at the cabinet level.

The report said that moving the Coast Guard to Fisheries and Oceans from Transport a decade ago has been a disaster. It said the Coast Guard should be an independent agency reporting to Transport Min-



Ray Johnston

ister Tony Valeri, whose department has the lead role for maritime security and safety.

The Coast Guard should have the primary responsibility for search and rescue, emergency environmental response and marine pollution prevention, the report continued. As well, its security responsibility should include the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence Seaway.

"The Coast Guard has been chronically under-funded and has never had the resources to fully meet the goals it was intended to attain," Mr. Wappel said.