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January 26, 2022

The Honourable Joyce Murray
Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard
Fisheries and Oceans Canada
200 Kent St Station 15N100
Ottawa ON K1A 0A6

The Honourable Omar Alghabra
Minister of Transport
Transport Canada
330 Sparks Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N5

Re: San Juan County and Islands Trust Joint Request for an Emergency Towing Vessel in Sidney

Dear Minister Murray and Minister Alghabra,

Thank you for your leadership in enhancing marine safety through the Ocean Protection Plan. Commissioning the Atlantic Raven and Atlantic Eagle emergency towing vessels (ETVs) to respond to emergencies off Canada's west coast reduces the risk of a disabled vessel drifting aground and spilling oil. The threat of such an incident along the inland shipping routes to and from the Port of Vancouver poses an equal risk to the communities and ecosystems of the Salish Sea. San Juan County Council, Washington and the Islands Trust Council request that you facilitate the repositioning of one of Canada's multi-mission ETVs to Sidney, British Columbia to extend the protections afforded by these vessels to the inland shipping corridor to Vancouver. This is not a new request. Islands Trust Council and San Juan County Council jointly wrote Minister Garneau on this topic in May 2018¹. We are pleased that you are now developing a National Strategy on Emergency Towing and hope this letter and supporting studies can inform your work.

Recent studies by Canadian interests, San Juan County, and the Washington Department of Ecology demonstrate the need for and feasibility of an ETV for oil spill prevention in the Southern Strait of Georgia, Boundary Pass, Turn Point off of Stuart Island, Haro Strait, and the Strait of Juan de Fuca. These studies demonstrate:

- Tugs of opportunity cannot be relied upon for emergency response in the central Salish Sea.
- A dedicated ETV stationed in Sidney could be effective in responding to disabled vessels in inland waters.
- Positioning both of Canada's ETVs on the coast does not provide the margin of safety needed for timely response to inland waters, such as the threats recently posed by M/V Zim Kingston.
- Canada's two ETVs have been present in the inland waters, mooring in Victoria or Sidney a total of 54 days and could be reliably present for oil spill prevention if one were repositioned.
- Washington's Neah Bay ETV and one Canadian ETV potentially could maintain protection of Canada's west coast, responding in time to prevent 90-95 percent of vessels from drifting aground.

Tugs of opportunity cannot provide the rescue capability necessary in these waters today, let alone in anticipation of increasing vessel sizes and transit frequency. Many lack the bollard pull capability, necessary equipment, and properly trained crews for a rapid response to high-windage ships.

Furthermore, the *Availability of Tugs of Opportunity for Canada's Pacific Coast*² study determined that tugs with a bollard greater than 70 metric tonnes were only present in the Strait of Juan de Fuca, Haro Strait and Boundary Pass about 30 percent of the time in 2016 (deemed representative of their presence in 2019). The Washington Department of Ecology similarly concluded in their *Report on Vessel Traffic and Vessel Traffic Safety, Strait of Juan de Fuca and Puget Sound Area*³, that 'a tug-of-opportunity system should best be considered a contingency strategy, rather than a primary oil spill prevention tool.'

Some have questioned whether or not an ETV could be effective in the Salish Sea's narrow inland waterways. San Juan County has addressed this long-standing question using the best available wind and current data to model vessel drift trajectories and the time available for an ETV to respond before a disabled vessel drifts aground. The *Vessel Drift and Response Analysis for the Strait of Juan de Fuca to the Southern Strait of Georgia*⁴ demonstrates that an ETV stationed in Sidney could be effective in preventing a disabled vessel transiting the central Salish Sea's Boundary Pass, Turn Point, or Haro Strait from grounding more than 80 percent of the time.

The M/V Zim Kingston incident suggests that positioning both of Canada's ETVs on the west coast provides insufficient emergency response capability to mitigate the spill risk posed by the current level of vessel traffic calling on the Port of Vancouver. The Atlantic Raven did not arrive on-scene until the day following the reported outbreak of a fire onboard. This incident represents a near-miss of an oil spill potentially catastrophic to Vancouver Island, Olympic Peninsula, San Juan Islands, and Gulf Islands. Climate change must be considered as we are more frequently experiencing high winds in the Salish Sea and are extremely concerned about the associated risks to vessels at anchor and in transit. A multi-mission ETV in Sidney would improve safety not only for vessels in transit, but also for the increasing congestion in anchorages.

The Atlantic Raven and Atlantic Eagle have been present in the inland waters and could be reliably positioned to monitor the central Salish Sea shipping routes. In 2020, they spent approximately 12% of their time near Victoria and, of the 90 total days in port, 54 days were at the ports of Victoria or Sidney⁵. Their presence provides an effective emergency response capacity that otherwise is lacking for the inland shipping lanes and anchorages, including a Class 2 firefighting capability.

It is appropriate to consider whether dedicating one of the Atlantic ETVs to protect inland waters is feasible while also maintaining protections along Canada's west coast. Studies⁶ have shown that together the Neah Bay ETV and one Canadian ETV positioned in Prince Rupert could provide:

- 95 - 99 percent probability of rescue of vessels transiting over 35 nautical miles (nm) offshore Haida Gwaii⁷
- 95 - 99 percent probability of rescue of vessels transiting over 55 nm offshore, and 90-95 percent probability of rescue of vessels transiting over 40 nm offshore, of northern Vancouver Island

There is need for an equivalent in Canada to Washington's Neah Bay emergency response towing vessel to protect the central Salish Sea. As a matter of increasing urgency, we request that you optimize the operation of available ETV assets and consider additional measures for oil spill prevention in this ecologically significant region, while continuing long range analysis and planning for Canada's commercial marine safety.

Respectfully,

San Juan County Council

Islands Trust Council

District 1, Christine Minney

District 2, Cindy Wolf

District 3, Jamie Stephens

Peter Luckham, Chair

¹ [Letter to the Honorable Marc Garneau, MP re: Islands Trust and San Juan County joint request for standby rescue tug](#), May 31, 2018.

² [Availability of Tugs of Opportunity in Canada's Pacific Region](#), Nuka Research & Planning Group, LLC for the Clear Seas Centre for Responsible Marine Shipping, July 2019.

³ [Report of Vessel Traffic and Vessel Traffic Safety: Strait of Juan de Fuca and Puget Sound Area](#), Washington Department of Ecology, January 2019, revised February 2021.

⁴ [Vessel Drift and Response Analysis for the Strait of Juan de Fuca to the Southern Strait of Georgia](#), Nuka Research & Planning Group, LLC for San Juan County, April 2021.

⁵ [2020 Emergency Towing Vessel Monitoring Report](#), Nuka Research & Planning Group, LLC for the Proactive Vessel Management Pilot Project on Haida Gwaii Project Committee, November 2021.

⁶ [Vessel Drift and Response Analysis for Canada's West Coast](#), Clear Seas Centre for Responsible Marine Shipping [Scenario 4, Figure 12, ETVs traveling at 8 kts], March 2018.

⁷ This 35-nm distance compares to the 12-, 25- and 50-nm voluntary protection zones that have been trialed off the west coast of Haida Gwaii, as reported in the [2020 Emergency Towing Vessel Monitoring Report](#).

<p>cc: Canada Honourable George Heyman, BC Minister of Environment and Climate Change Islands Trust Area Members of Parliament Islands Trust Area Members of the Legislative Assembly Cowichan Tribes SXIMELEŁ (Esquimalt) First Nation Halalt First Nation Homalco (Xwemalhkwu) First Nation Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group K'ómoks First Nation Klahoose First Nation Laich-kwil-tach Treaty Society Lake Cowichan First Nation Lyackson First Nation MÁLEXEŁ (Malahat) Nation xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) First Nation Nanwakolas Council BOKÉCEN (Pauquachin) First Nation SPUNE'LUXUTTH'(Penelakut) Tribe Qualicum First Nation Scia'new/Chenuh (Beecher Bay) First Nation SEMYOME (Semiahmoo) First Nation Shíshá7lh (Sechelt) First Nation</p>	<p>Snaw-naw-as (Nanoose) First Nation Snuneymuxw (Nanaimo) First Nation Lekwungen (Songhees) First Nation Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh (Squamish) First Nation Stz'uminus (Chemainus) First Nation Te'mexw Treaty Association Tla'amin (Sliammon) First Nation T'Sou-ke (Sooke) First Nation WJOŁEŁP (Tsartlip) First Nation S̓ÁUTW (Tsawout) First Nation Tsawwassen First Nation Tsleil-Waututh (Burrard Inlet) First Nation W̓SIKEM (Tseycum) First Nation We Wai Kai (Cape Mudge First Nation) Wei Wai Kum (Campbell River First Nation) Clear Seas Centre for Responsible Marine Shipping Port of Vancouver Pacific Pilotage Authority Chamber of Shipping of British Columbia Western Canada Marine Response Corporation Town of Sidney Council Bowen Island Municipal Council Islands Trust Council Islands Trust website</p>
<p>cc: United States The Honorable Maria Cantwell, US Senator The Honorable Patty Murray, US Senator The Honorable Rick Larsen, US Representative The Honorable Jay Inslee, Governor of the State of Washington The Honorable Liz Lovelett, Washington State Senator The Honorable Debra Lekanoff, Washington State Representative The Honorable Alex Ramel, Washington State Representative The Honorable Timothy J. Greene, Sr., Chair, Makah Tribe The Honorable William "Ron" Allen, Chair, Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe The Honorable Frances Charles, Chair, Lower Elwha S'Klallam Tribe The Honorable Lawrence Solomon, Chair, Lummi Nation The Honorable Ron Cline Sr., Chair, Nooksack Tribe The Honorable Jeromy Sullivan, Chair, Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe The Honorable Leonard Forsman, Chair, Suquamish Tribe The Honorable Teri Gobin, Chair, Tulalip Tribes The Honorable Steve Edwards, Chair, Swinomish Indian Tribal Community Justin Parker, Executive Director, Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission Capt. Patrick M. Hilbert, Commander, U.S. Coast Guard Sector Puget Sound Col. Alexander Bullock, Commander, Seattle District, US Army Corps of Engineers Laura Watson, Director, Washington State Department of Ecology John Veentjer, Chairman, Puget Sound Harbor Safety Committee Catherine Reheis-Boyd, President, Western States Petroleum Association Michael Moore, Vice-President, Pacific Merchant Shipping Association Charles Costanzo, Executive Director, Puget Sound Pilots Lucas Hart, Director, Northwest Straits Commission Jay Manning, Chair, Leadership Council, Puget Sound Partnership Carlos Clements, Program Manager, Dept. of Ecology Spill Prevention, Preparedness & Response Program</p>	