

NEWS RELEASE – from the Ferry Advisory Committee Chairs (FACC)
(Contact information below)

BC Ferries: Let's get back to basics

26 October 2011 - The Ferry Advisory Committee Chairs (FACC) are telling the BC Ferry Commissioner that it is time for the ferry system to get back to basics. They want to see the Coastal Ferry Act amended to replace the existing six principles with one simple, customer-oriented principle: *to provide a safe, reliable, affordable ferry service.*

“Affordability means that fares should increase in line with the Consumer Price Index (CPI). Instead, fare increases have been several times higher,” says Bill Cripps who Chairs the North Sunshine Coast Ferry Advisory Committee. The FACC is recommending that government contributions be sufficiently increased in April 2012, to support a major roll-back in fares on the non-major routes.

The FACC have submitted their comments to BC Ferry Commissioner Gord Macatee in a paper entitled *“Ferry Governance: A Matter of Ideology”*. The Commissioner has been directed by provincial legislation to conduct a review of the Coastal Ferry Act – which lays out the governance model for the ferry system. He will deliver a final report to the BC Government in early 2012.

Since the Coastal Ferry Act was adopted in 2003, communities have suffered economically and socially as substantial declines in minor route traffic have led to businesses shrinking or closing, families being isolated, schools losing enrollment, young people leaving and tourism plummeting, according to the FACC submission.

“The Act signaled a disastrous ideological shift in approach to ferry service that needs correcting if ferry-dependent communities, and BC Ferries itself, are to survive in a sustainable way,” says Brian Hollingshead, chair of the Southern Gulf Islands FAC. “WAC Bennett created BC Ferries to provide reliable, safe, affordable transportation to coastal communities that depended on ferry service as a lifeline. The principles included in the Coastal Ferry Act do not address these objectives. Instead they focus on the sustainability of the ferry operator and a requirement to reduce government contributions in favour of user-pay.”

The FACC believes that this ideology has allowed ferry fares to increase by up to 100% since 2003. Escalating fares have been followed by steadily declining traffic. In addition to impacting communities, this drop in traffic means that BC Ferries is nowhere near meeting its target for return on equity. This is eroding its ability to operate sustainably.

“The Province needs to get away from the concept that BC Ferries should operate as if it is a commercial enterprise when in reality it is a regulated natural monopoly providing an essential transportation service,” says Tony Law, Chair of the Denman-Hornby Ferry Advisory Committee. “The bottom line is that ferries provide the same basic function for coastal communities as highways do for other communities. This is what we mean by getting back to basics.”

The FACC is comprised of the chairs of twelve local and regional Ferry Advisory Committees appointed by BC Ferries.

Ferry Governance: A Matter of Ideology attached

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