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Premier ducks question of ferry safety

Following the firing of a ferry captain for a recent close call in Active Pass, North Coast MLA Gary Coons stepped up the pressure on the government to force BC Ferries to enact all the recommendations found in the Morfitt Report. In the absence of the Transportation Minister, Coons fired off questions (in question period) to Premier Campbell, demanding accountability on behalf of ferry dependent communities.

'I visited 30 ferry-dependent communities on the coast of BC, and everywhere I heard major concerns about fares and operational safety,' said Coons. 'Since the Minister of Transportation has washed his hands of the marine highway, what is the Premier doing to ensure that BC Ferries on-time bonuses do not compromise safety and put passengers and crew at risk?'

The Premier declined to comment. His silence on the topic is indicative of his lack of interest in the safety and well being of people in ferry dependent communities, according to Coons.

'Morfitt's safety audit had 41 recommendations that would reassure public confidence in our ferry system. This government and this Premier have stated that BC Ferries has committed to implementing every single one of the Morfitt recommendations,' noted Coons. 'The public needs more than a

commitment from BC Ferries. They want a commitment from this government, from this Premier and from the Minister responsible.'

The Morfitt recommendations included basic safety controls to ensure that staff are qualified for the positions they are assigned to, and ensuring crew have access to safety training.

'The recent near-collision in Active Pass with a contracted-out captain at the helm highlights Morfitt's concerns with on-time management performance bonuses compromising operational safety. On-time payouts are a key goal in performance measure for this government's quasi-privatized corporation,' noted Coons. 'The Morfitt report addresses the danger of prioritizing schedules over lives.'

Although the Morfitt report was delivered more than a year ago, little action has been taken on many of the recommendations, says Coons.

'These are common sense regulations that can save lives,' Coons adds, 'I don't understand why the Premier won't stand up for ferry dependent communities, and demand that every last one of the Morfitt recommendations is enacted immediately.' ☞

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Island Tides, Box 55, Pender Island, BC, Canada. Phone: 250-629-3660. Fax: 250-629-3838.
Email: islandtides@islandtides.com. Website: <http://www.islandtides.com>
