



House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on National Defence

NDDN • NUMBER 041 • 3rd SESSION • 40th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Monday, January 31, 2011

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Chair

The Honourable Maxime Bernier

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• (1425)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Maxime Bernier (Beauce, CPC)): I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to our committee today. I want to thank you for being with us. This is meeting 41 of the Standing Committee on National Defence.

We have with us today, from the Gander International Airport Authority, Mr. Reg Wright and Mr. Fred Moffitt. Thank you for being with us.

We also have, from the town council of Gander, Mr. Tucker and Mr. Turner. Thank you for being with us.

Finally, as an individual, we have Mr. Johnson. Thank you.

We'll start with our witnesses from the Gander International Airport Authority. After that we'll hear from the town council of Gander, and then from Mr. Johnson. Each group will have five to seven minutes.

If you want to start, I'll give you the floor. Thank you.

Mr. Fred Moffitt (Chairperson, Gander International Airport Authority Inc.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I met quite a few of you this morning, in my capacity as honorary colonel of 103 Squadron, but I've changed my suit this afternoon. I now have on the hat of the chairperson of the Gander International Airport Authority.

I have to apologize for Gary Vey, our CEO. He's stricken down with the flu and is unable to be with us. Mr. Reg Wright is our director of marketing at the airport. I'm going to hand it over to him to make our presentation.

Mr. Reg Wright (Director of Marketing, Gander International Airport Authority Inc.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the esteemed members of the standing committee for the opportunity to speak today regarding search and rescue response times.

Again, my name is Reg Wright, and I'm the director of communications for the Gander International Airport Authority. We are a not-for-profit organization created in 1996 to manage organizations at Gander International Airport, and we play a key role in the economic and community development of the Town of Gander and the central Newfoundland region.

The airport is a source of stable, year-round employment for the region and a significant economic engine. An independent study undertaken in 2006 found that the airport directly sustains 1,200 jobs in the province, with \$107 million in gross domestic product, \$312 million in economic output, and \$70 million in wages. Ongoing economic activity at the airport contributes \$32 million annually in tax revenue, including \$20.6 million to the federal government and \$10.7 million to the provincial government.

I provide this background because it should be recognized that the Gander International Airport Authority—and indeed the entire central Newfoundland region—has a vested commercial and operational interest in the matters we discuss today. As a joint civilian-military airfield, the importance of CFB 9 Wing Gander and 103 Search and Rescue Squadron cannot be overstated. The military presence in Gander has long made an important and invaluable contribution to the community, historically, economically, and socially.

Gander International Airport has served military aviation since its inception. In 1938, with the threat of war rumbling in Europe, Gander fast became a strategic allied air base. Gander became the main staging point for the movement of more than 20,000 North American-built bombers to Europe during the Battle of Britain. At the height of wartime operations, as many as 15,000 British, Canadian, and American servicemen lived and worked in crowded barracks at the airport.

Even today, military aviation remains a cornerstone of our operation. While the lion's share of military traffic at Gander is from the United States and Canada, the airport also accommodates military aircraft from Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, the United Kingdom, Saudi Arabia, Israel, India, Mexico, Poland, and others. If a nation has an air force, we've seen it at Gander at one point or another, be it on a training mission, en route to an area of conflict, or providing humanitarian support.

The airport authority is fully supportive of its partners at CFB 9 Wing Gander. In particular, we share our community's pride in the work of 103 Search and Rescue Squadron. These men and women have one of the most difficult jobs on the planet, in one of the world's most difficult marine operating environments.

It is a job that demands an extraordinarily high level of courage, training, skill, and commitment. It is a job where a successful rescue mission is expected. Where a rescue mission fails, the squadron is immediately subjected to a very public discussion of what went wrong and who might be accountable. These men and women provide an essential service to people who ply a trade in a very dangerous place.

If I might convey just one thing here today, it is this: search and rescue professionals require the best possible resources and support to ensure they can continue to succeed in every mission, every day.

I guess a focal point of your work here today will involve a discussion around response times, positioning, and resources. Coming from an airport management perspective, I do not think I have the background or capacity to give great insight into this. Thankfully, a number of independent experts have already examined the greater question of SAR resources and positioning over the last decade.

Back in 2003, Dr. Norman Corbett undertook a study called “The Impact of Offshore Oil Operations on the Delivery of East Coast Search and Rescue Services”, for the Canadian Air Division Centre for Operational Research and Analysis, which may also win a record for the world's longest study report. Among other things, the study assessed whether dedicated SAR assets should be moved from Gander to St. John's and whether doing so would provide an improved response to a distress call related to the offshore oil industry.

As you know, the oil and gas industry is the crucial economic engine for the provincial economy and has witnessed great and heightened activity over the last decade. Without belabouring what is a comprehensive and complex analysis of this question, Dr. Corbett concluded—and I quote—that “coverage offered by Gander is... better than that offered by St. John's” at all distances.

While all eastern Canadian airports operate in often trying conditions, it has to be recognized that Gander does provide an inherent advantage over St. John's in terms of weather. To refer back to Dr. Corbett's report—and I quote—he indicated that: “When historical conditions are considered, Gander is the preferred location. Indeed, critical weather conditions occur more frequently in St. John's, with the most notable differences occurring in the spring and summer months”.

In terms of operating environment, weather reliability, and total critical weather conditions, Gander does provide an advantageous operating environment for search and rescue operations.

The other component of Dr. Corbett's study involved total transit and on-station times with regard to response. Again he concluded—and I quote—that a deployment from Gander generally results in faster transit times.

More recently, the National Research Council released its review of the statement of operational requirements for the fixed-wing search and rescue aircraft. This review found that basing fixed-wing assets in Gander rather than Greenwood would result in the greatest improvement in response times.

● (1430)

To summarize, both studies recognize that Gander, both as an airport and as a community, represents the best location for SAR resources. Beyond the weather reliability and transit times, the community and the airport have a number of other advantages: Gander International Airport is a 24/7 full-service airport with no curfews or restrictions; everything at our airport is offered 24/7, 365 days a year; the Royal Canadian Mounted Police is co-located on airport property; we are a congestion-free airport with a rate of nearly 100% direct clearances from our tower; CFB Gander is expanding its infrastructure and already has well established military supports throughout the community; and, locally, the College of the North Atlantic produces world-class aircraft maintenance engineers eager to find a career locally and contribute to the SAR endeavour.

Despite Canada's healthy fiscal condition, we acknowledge that the Department of National Defence is under pressure to exercise financial stewardship while addressing important matters of a national and international scope.

I will say that the Gander International Airport Authority is a willing and progressive partner with DND. If an expansion or enhancement of SAR services is to take place in Gander, or new aircraft is to be added to the fleet, we can work jointly to invest in the infrastructure and operating supports to ensure this is done in the most cost-effective and efficient manner. We have made this commitment to our partner at the CFB, and I reiterate that here today. As an airport authority, we are prepared to provide whatever resources or investment is required to assist 103 in meeting its mandate.

If I can say one thing with conviction, it is that the move or dilution of current assets from Gander to any other site would serve only a niche commercial interest that stands to benefit from the same. I think exhaustive study and assessment by experts clearly demonstrate that Gander is the best choice and location for any enhancement of SAR staffing, resources, or fleetings.

So the task at hand is to determine what might be done to improve response times and mission success given changes in technology, fleetings, and marine activity. I would suggest the impossible by saying that these decisions need to be made purely on the basis of operational exemplars, that is, what is best to achieve the SAR mandate. I do recognize that it is very difficult to extract politics, lobbying, the interests of special interest groups, and capitalism from the process, but, at day's end, I think all stakeholders and residents will be comfortable with any decision so long as it is premised on the best possible support for SAR providers and the greater community they serve.

To conclude, SAR professionals gladly undertake the challenge of one of the world's most difficult jobs, in a dangerous North Atlantic operating environment. Our shared goal should be to support a decision that provides the enhancements and support to ensure they effectively meet their mission.

I thank you for the opportunity to present our views today and wish you every success with your hearings.

● (1435)

The Chair: That you very much, Mr. Wright.

I'll give the floor to the Town Council of Gander, Mr. Tucker.

Mr. Zane Tucker (Deputy Mayor, Town Council of Gander):
Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and committee members.

Search and rescue has helped define the people of Gander since the Newfoundland Airport officially opened in January of 1938, long before the Town of Gander even existed. The challenge of locating and retrieving downed flyers was a very necessary and all too frequent part of airport operations throughout the Second World War, continued through the subsequent development of commercial aviation, and today remains a key part of daily life of our community as long-time host to 103 Search and Rescue.

It's a field in which we are perhaps uniquely experienced, having learned first-hand the trade through both necessity and invention and, more recently, advocating seemingly year after year on behalf of the SAR professionals we have the privilege of hosting in our community.

Before we discuss the critical and often emotional issue of SAR response times and level of service, allow me to reiterate the position consistently held by current and previous town councils of Gander: that we fully and unequivocally support the staff, both military and civilian, at 103 Search and Rescue Squadron and their counterparts across our country. We share their dedication to providing the best possible services to Canadians within the constraints of infrastructure and resource allocation, and we appreciate the opportunity to address the committee towards that end.

In particular, the issues of response times and SAR resource allocation have been raised repeatedly in recent years, mainly in direct response to marine or aeronautical incidents resulting in the loss of life. These incidents include the involvement of the *Ryan's Commander*, the *Melina and Keith II*, the *Check-Mate III*, and, most recently, the Cougar crash involving offshore oil workers in 2009. Most often, the ensuing discussion involves the proposed transfer of SAR assets currently located in Gander to a base in St. John's or the establishment of duplicate SAR services in St. John's.

Numerous studies commissioned by the federal government have examined this question and have consistently found that Gander is the optimal location not only for a Halifax SAR base but also for a fixed-wing SAR aircraft base, which is currently located in Greenwood, Nova Scotia.

In terms of additional protection for offshore oil workers or the perceived neglect of offshore oil workers in SAR resource allocation, the Town of Gander takes the position that this sector not only has equal access to our military SAR services, but has an additional advantage of industry-supplied SAR services offered under contract by Cougar itself. Improvements specific to this sector could best be achieved by legislating minimum industry SAR standards to include at least one dedicated SAR helicopter and such SAR-trained crew as required to provide 24/7 operational readiness.

Search and rescue operations throughout eastern Canada, whether they be aeronautical, marine, or land based, are coordinated by the joint rescue centre in Halifax. The 103 Rescue Squadron is charged with providing search and rescue capability to the Halifax Joint Rescue Coordination Centre 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. They

are responsible for covering approximately 4.7 million square kilometres, of which 80% is covered by water.

The number of SAR cases in Newfoundland and Labrador is twice the national average, making the squadron one of the busiest in the country. On average, 103 Squadron responds to more than 100 calls on a yearly basis. The majority of its missions are marine based. SAR crews routinely find vessels in distress or overdue and evacuate sick or injured seamen.

The squadron's 92 military personnel and civilian employees operate three CH-149 Cormorant helicopters. The Cormorant can carry 12 stretchers, or a load of 5,000 kilograms, and its ice protection system allows it to operate in continuous icing conditions. Meanwhile, Gander is the only SAR base in Canada operating without fixed-wing aircraft. Cormorant missions from Gander are instead supported by the Hercules aircraft, which is currently based in Greenwood, Nova Scotia.

In terms of operational readiness, 103 Squadron maintains its 30-minute standby posture 40 hours per week, and a two-hour standby for the remaining 128 hours, typically nights and weekends. The optimal allocation of SAR resources should provide for the fastest possible response to the greatest number of incidents. This is achieved through the analysis and periodic review of the geographic locations of historical incidents and also the number of people at risk as a result of those incidents. Within the Halifax SRR, maritime incidents comprised the vast majority of missions—approximately 75% in the period from 2002 to 2008—with aeronautical incidents accounting for less than 7% over that same period.

People potentially at risk in the SRR include: aircraft passengers, both domestic and international, and passengers carried by Marine Atlantic between North Sydney and Port aux Basques, North Sydney and Argenta, and the Island of Newfoundland and ports along the Labrador coast, as well as local ferry systems, resource harvesters, including hunters, fisher persons, loggers, and miners, and oil industry workers.

● (1440)

A comprehensive study on the impact of offshore oil operations on the east coast SAR by the Centre for Operational Research and Analysis, released in December of 2000, provides perhaps the best data set to date on the issue of response times. Its various conclusions have since been referenced and supported by other federal studies, and it concludes that Gander remains the best possible location from which to save the most lives in terms of incident coverage, transit times, on-station times, accounting for the number of persons at risk in various scenarios, weather limitations, and even the impact of extending the range of the Cormorant helicopters.

As recently as March 12, 2010, the National Research Council observed that basing fixed-wing search and rescue aircraft in Gander would immediately improve coverage for the region. In discussing the statement of operational requirements for fixed-wing search and rescue aircraft, the NRC was critical of constraints imposed within the SOR that severely limited options for replacing Canada's fixed-wing SAR fleet.

Specifically, the NRC's final report noted the constraint that the current four main operating bases remain unchanged. I quote:

...it is clear that the existing bases of Greenwood, Trenton, Winnipeg and Comox do not represent the best option for SAR response. In particular, basing aircraft in Gander rather than Greenwood would have had a significant positive impact on the response time to a vast majority of the incidents examined as the range required to respond to 90% of historical incidents reduced from 653 nautical miles (nm) to 533 nm. The analysis shows that "the greatest reduction in cruise speed that can be achieved by moving a single base arises when the Main Operating Base (MOB) in Greenwood is relocated to Gander."

The mandatory requirement for aircraft range was derived based on an incident in the mid-Atlantic...with response from Greenwood and a refuelling stop in St. John's. However, a Gander base in lieu of Greenwood, had it been considered in the SOR, would have impacted the range requirements of a single aircraft solution slightly by requiring an increase in the range requirements for a new aircraft by 45 nm...while the response would be greatly improved as a transit leg from Greenwood to St. John's plus a 1-hour refuelling stop would be unnecessary.

Given the existing SAR role of the Cormorant in Gander, and the improvement in response time of a platform based there, it is unfortunate that such a basing option is excluded due to this constraint.

While many of the issues related to the positioning of military SAR resources have been studied and debated for years, any discussion of increasing allocations today must also address the attrition of trained and experienced SAR personnel from the ranks of the military, which cannot currently compete with the wages and benefits offered in private sector SAR operations. This attrition already threatens to degrade the existing level of SAR services and must be addressed immediately to prevent serious impacts on our overall capacity.

In a presentation to SAR professionals in October 2003, Brian F. Stone, superintendent of Maritime Search and Rescue, Canadian Coast Guard, Newfoundland and Labrador division, said:

In many industries safety has become a game of money, numbers, and statistics. A company can now decide an appropriate expenditure per life saved, calculating safety decisions mathematically. While it is vital that a corporation consider the statistics of risks to workers along with the costs to protect them, the goal is to protect the lives [of] each individual worker. Just because a company can financially handle the loss of a worker does not mean that it should not do everything possible to protect workers from injuries. **Safety is not simply about numbers; it is about lives.**

As a nation, we have the knowledge, skills, experience, and technology to provide the highest standards of search and rescue services available anywhere in the world. The level of service we ultimately offer is limited only by the priority we assign to this service and the investment we are willing to make in its provision.

The Town of Gander recognizes that SAR response times can be improved through any or all the following changes to current resource allocation and/or policies, and we urge this committee to give full and fair consideration to each of our five recommendations: one, upgrade 103 Squadron to a 30-minute operational readiness posture 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, or extend the current 30-minute posture to such days and hours in which the highest number of missions has historically been recorded; two, assign one or more

dedicated fixed-wing aircraft to Gander to extend the range and on-station times in the critical stages of search operations; three, assign an additional Cormorant aircraft to Gander to help eliminate periods when maintenance, repairs, or training missions mean that no aircraft is immediately available in the event of an emergency; four, ensure that routine maintenance and training be scheduled such that at least one aircraft and crew are always available to respond from Gander in a timely manner; and lastly, address the growing issues of the recruitment and retention of military search and rescue personnel.

Thank you very much for your attention this afternoon.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Tucker.

I'll give the floor to Mr. Johnson.

● (1445)

Mr. Albert Johnson (Fisherman, As an Individual): My name is Albert Johnson. I'm a fisherman.

I think Scott was going to ask me some questions.

The Chair: Do you want to—

Mr. Albert Johnson: I won't make a presentation. Mr. Simms was going to ask me some questions.

The Chair: All right, perfect.

The first member we'll hear from is Mr. Simms.

You have the floor for seven minutes.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Thank you.

I want to thank all the guests for coming.

First of all, to the committee, welcome to Gander. Although with Mr. Tucker in the room as deputy mayor, I'm probably not as qualified... Welcome to Gander, and I hope you enjoy your stay. I wish you could be here longer to spend oodles of money, but I guess we'll take what we can get.

I want to thank the guests for coming here. As I discussed earlier, I'm glad you came here as both the authority and the town to give the committee a sense...and to read into the record just how linked this base is with this community and the entire region. To hear this from the deputy mayor, who certainly has a handle on how this works—I've often joked that Mr. Turner, who's the chief administrative officer, probably knows enough about this base to get a second job in operations over at the base itself.

Several years ago there was a campaign here called SOS—Save Our Squadron. I think it was a learning experience for everybody within this community. Everybody in this community and this region knew about search and rescue, about response times. Fixed-wing search and rescue, although it's puzzling to some, basically means search and rescue airplanes. You mention the words “fixed-wing search and rescue” to anybody in this community and we know what you're talking about. We've argued for quite some time about the presence of that.

I just want to get a quick comment, before I go to Mr. Johnson, about the traffic activity you've seen at the airport, as immense as it is with medevac and that sort of thing, and also from the town itself, and about what a great contribution search and rescue has made, from a citizen's point of view, and from the point of view of airmen and airwomen who come here.

Mr. Zane Tucker: Did you want to speak to the airport first, Reg?

Mr. Scott Simms: You can talk about the airport first.

Mr. Reg Wright: It's fairly evident that search and rescue is the primary contributor to the whole dynamic of why our airport is there. Gander is purpose-built as an emergency alternate. We play a support role not just for the CFB and for the Canadian Forces, but of course for those from around the world.

Mr. Zane Tucker: Obviously, from the town's point of view, as Reg alluded to, there are historical ties with our airport. Gander is often known as the lifeboat of the Atlantic, so I guess we're used to that rescue role. In terms of the impact on the town, just in dollars, we have over 90 people who work at our search and rescue squadron. In a municipality of our size, obviously, that's very significant, and they're a great integral part of our community.

Mr. Scott Simms: And the integral part that this town played with 9/11 obviously gives you an idea of just how strategic this place is geographically, which is why it's nice to hear you're a strong advocate for fixed-wing search and rescue.

Mr. Johnson, some time ago you told me the story of an offshore incident. First of all, as a bit of background, you're an offshore fisherman. Is that correct?

Mr. Albert Johnson: That's right.

Mr. Scott Simms: That's for crab and turbot?

Mr. Albert Johnson: Yes.

Mr. Scott Simms: How far offshore do you go?

Mr. Albert Johnson: I go as far as 130 miles from Cape Bonavista.

Mr. Scott Simms: How long would that take?

Mr. Albert Johnson: When we're fishing turbot, we're out there for probably five or six days.

Mr. Scott Simms: You're also a member of the coast guard auxiliary. Is that right?

Mr. Albert Johnson: Yes, I have been for the last 25 years.

Mr. Scott Simms: You mentioned you had an incident recently?

Mr. Albert Johnson: Yes, we had an incident last year. One of my deckhands collapsed on deck. I got on the single sideband and contacted the coast guard, and he put me on to a doctor. The doctor

determined that the guy had to be airlifted off. It took two and a half hours for the chopper.

Mr. Scott Simms: How would you say your relationship is with the coast guard auxiliary?

Mr. Albert Johnson: It's a good relationship.

Mr. Scott Simms: The communication you have with the coast guard auxiliary or even search and rescue has been a strong one?

Mr. Albert Johnson: Yes.

Mr. Scott Simms: I want to talk about your confidence level. When you're out there—and just among the fishermen you speak to—how do you feel about the service being provided and the response times?

Mr. Albert Johnson: Well, a lot of fishermen talk about it. You all know about the incidents we've had over the last three or four years, and there's an uneasy feeling that if you're out there in bad weather and then something happens, you're going to have to wait that long to get help.

Regarding the auxiliary, we're there all the time to lend a hand to help whenever we can, but sometimes we're not out when it happens or it happens too far away, or....

• (1450)

Mr. Scott Simms: You have what's called an EPIRB. Can you explain what the EPIRB is as a beacon of distress?

Mr. Albert Johnson: It pinpoints your position, I think, when it's activated. You're in distress when the EPIRB is activated.

Mr. Scott Simms: This is something that is mandatory for you to carry?

Mr. Albert Johnson: Yes, it's mandatory for vessels going offshore.

Mr. Scott Simms: What about other vessels? What vessels is it mandatory for your EPIRB distress signal?

Mr. Albert Johnson: I'm not quite sure about this. I think when your vessel is over 40 feet or over a certain tonnage, then it is mandatory. You have to have this EPIRB. Also, DFO got VMS on our vessels. That's mandatory.

Mr. Scott Simms: That's part of the same system for...? How is it activated? Describe how this works.

Mr. Albert Johnson: The VMS is a tracking device DFO uses to monitor our fishing activities while we're out there.

Mr. Scott Simms: Okay. How much does it cost?

Mr. Albert Johnson: You can get them for \$1,800 to \$2,000.

Mr. Scott Simms: That's quite a bit for—

Mr. Albert Johnson: Then of course you have to pay \$80 to \$90 a month while it's activated during the fishing season.

Mr. Scott Simms: You've talked to a lot of fishermen, fish harvesters. Are they happy with the service they're getting when it comes to the EPIRB? Are they confident that if they were in a distressed situation out there they would be rescued in an adequate amount of time?

Mr. Albert Johnson: I think the EPIRB is a model tool. They use it out there to.... When it's activated, you know there's distress. We've got other means. We have our VHF radio, which is not long range, but we have the sideband radio, which is long range. We monitor the 2182, which is the distress signal, all the time.

The Chair: Thank you, Scott.

You'll have more time in the second round.

I'll have to give the floor to Mr. Bachand.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): I have seven minutes.

[English]

You will need your translation device, because I'll be speaking French—which is great, I think, in this part of the country.

[Translation]

This morning, I discovered your search and rescue military base, and I was most impressed with what I saw. I understand that you are quite attached to this base and that the citizens of Gander are, as well. We were given an historic overview of the base. These people are doing an absolutely exceptional job with the resources available. And I promised them that, at the end of the morning, when I had the opportunity, I would tell everyone that the base is a very important asset. As for whether it's enough, that's the question everyone's asking. This is why we're here today to listen to what you have to say.

I was also really impressed by your presentation. It's clear that you know the history of Gander and the east coast. The situation is this: given recent events and various issues, we want to focus on the problem and determine whether there is too much equipment in some places and too little in others. It's always a fine balance. There's an expression about robbing Peter to pay Paul. What needs to happen, though, is for Peter to keep his money, and for Paul's parents—in other words, the federal government—to give him more money. This is what we're thinking about.

[English]

Ray, I'm sorry, I'm making you laugh too much.

Voices: Oh, oh!

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand: As you know, there are three important places: Halifax on the east coast, Trenton in central Canada, and Victoria on the west coast. The statistics we saw this morning seem to agree with you. There seem to be more problems on the east coast. All the red spots represent incidents. Naturally, there are more on Vancouver Island, but it seems that there's a problem in the east. Perhaps the Atlantic Ocean is stormier than the Pacific Ocean.

Military personnel often tell us that they do their job and that the situation is operational. In other words, they want to decide. I don't

share that opinion. As a member of Parliament, I think that it is up to the elected representatives to decide. Furthermore, we are up against limited resources. So, I'm not able to tell you if Saint John has too many resources compared to Gander, or if the west coast has too much compared to the east coast. We are trying to consider this issue as a whole. So far, what I can see is that there isn't enough equipment.

You're aware that the acquisition of fixed wing search and rescue aircraft is currently a fundamental issue in Ottawa and involves the purchase of some 20 fixed-wing aircraft at a cost of \$3 billion. I think that this could be useful to you. This could allow us not to take from Peter to pay Paul.

I would very much like your opinion on the possibility that Canada will acquire 25 new fixed-wing search and rescue aircraft and that a good number of them will go to the east coast, to Gander, maybe Saint John and Halifax. Do you think that will improve the situation? You said that Gander is the best place geographically for doing search and rescue. I think that I'm starting to see that. If the fixed-wing aircraft were added to the fleet and your constituency received a number of vehicles, would that help?

• (1455)

[English]

Mr. Zane Tucker: Thank you very much for your comments and questions.

Going back to the map and the stuff you alluded to, of course it shows with the dots where these folks are going. We have over 29,000 kilometres of coastline, so that gives you an idea of why it's concentrated very much on the east coast.

As I referenced in my report, we have the only base that I call “splintered”, with no fixed-wing support. So you have to wonder why we're doing it in other parts of the country but not here. I was just advocating for the addition of fixed-wing to our helicopters. It would make a great difference in the response times, and I think in the efficiencies as well. That's not only our opinion; it has been studied. The report I referenced came out in March last year. It says quite clearly that a fixed-wing allocation in Gander would enhance the services. That's why we're here.

We understand there are constraints on resources. What these folks are doing is dangerous, there are limits, and those sorts of things. But when you have a strong recommendation that says it obviously makes sense to go ahead and do it, how can we not be advocating for it? It's good when it's not just us as politicians talking about it but there's some concrete evidence for it.

So bringing fixed-wing to Gander, whether it's in one, two, or three years when we buy these new planes, would certainly be a wise decision, in our opinion.

Mr. Reg Wright: We certainly concur with the fixed-wing assets. As Zane said, I defer to the report by the experts who really understand the industry. The procurement of aircraft comes with a lot of requisite support in manpower, engineers, and mechanical support, so it needs to be considered holistically to get at the root of.... If the times are insufficient, let's address it from a fleet perspective and a manpower perspective.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand: How much time do I have left?

The Chair: You still have one minute.

Mr. Claude Bachand: I will give up my turn.

[English]

The Chair: I'll give the floor to Mr. Harris.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

I'm delighted that the committee has been able to come to Gander and hear what you've had to say today. It's extremely important to our work. I do know, without having you tell me—but obviously you told us in a very comprehensive report—the importance of this operation to the town of Gander.

It's also, of course, extremely important to people like Mr. Johnson, whose occupation, and those of many more like him, is dependent upon having a good-quality search and rescue service. That's what the service is for. I think the location in Gander has demonstrated that it's a superb one, and the pre-eminent one for that purpose in Newfoundland and Labrador.

I am also very concerned, and I guess you are too...when we started the study, it was sort of intuitively my concern that we had a “standby posture”. That was the term they used—an odd term. It was a standby system where there was a 30-minute window to get in the air between 8 and 4, for 40 hours a week, and a two-hour window after that, although it's obvious they're often in the air before that.

This study occasioned a whole lot of inquiry by members of the committee, and some research, some of which you've referred to. But I'm particularly concerned about the fact that one study, which is dated 2004, by Sean Bourdon and Mark Rempel for DND, using the same chart that Mr. Bachand just told you about, determined that if you look at the 30-minute standby, for eight hours a day, five days a week, which is what we have, in fact only 17% of the incidents that occur, occur within that period. That seems to be consistent with what we heard this morning as well.

I know Mr. Johnson might have a particular view on that as well. If you're going fishing 24 hours a day and you're out 100 miles from Bonavista for four or five days, you're obviously outside that 8 to 4 window, especially if it's on the weekend. It seems to me, as you mentioned, Mr. Tucker, the response to improve that requires probably more assets and perhaps more manpower. I'm delighted to hear the five recommendations that you have. I think that's a good basis for us to say, okay, let's look at these.

How does it strike you, first of all, as part of a council, to say, okay, we've got a search and rescue service that's fully operational 30 minutes in the air for 40 hours a week, when we only get 17% of your calls? How does that strike you as a town representative?

• (1500)

Mr. Zane Tucker: I guess you look at what you can work with, with the resources that you're given. One of the comments I made—and I don't know if the committee has been looking at it very much—is that we are losing these professionals who are right now employed by the Department of National Defence. We're losing a lot of these people. It's not just here in Gander; it's right across the country. We're losing these folks to private companies.

So I think it's fair to say that they're operating with a skeleton crew. We've heard some instances over the years where they're doing a lot of things to juggle their personnel. As we're advocating for, there should be an enhancement of service if there are going to be any additional resources. I guess the issue is twofold. One, is money. So if the committee makes recommendations and in its wisdom says, “We need to put more money into this”, that's a great start. Two, we're going to need more personnel, so we're going to have to find those folks, train them, and, more importantly, keep them once we get them here.

With regard to your question regarding the percentage of time during the regular 8 to 4 business hours, so to speak, I guess they're doing the best they can with the resources the politicians are giving them. I think that's what they're taxed to do right now, and it is a challenge.

Mr. Jack Harris: I was on the parliamentary program last summer and saw how the SAR techs operate, rappelling down and taking people out of the water and whatnot. I think everybody admires their skill, their ability, their courage, and their willingness to risk their lives to save those in peril. I think we all agree that these are remarkable people doing a terrific job. Our question, as politicians, is what kind of recommendation should we make to ensure that this coverage is better? From Gander's point of view, additional assets and additional crew are an enhancement to the other values that you talked about.

I'm also interested in the fixed-wing aircraft. We looked at those studies. The National Research Council did a study on the operating requirements for fixed-wing aircraft. Initially, in the procurement process, they were told not to worry about search and rescue response times—they're already fixed, leave them alone. But it's pretty clear that the addition of a fixed-wing aircraft in Gander would enhance the ability to get somewhere quickly. Having a 30-minute response time 24 hours a day would also allow you to get a different type of plane, one that didn't have the same speed requirements. So I think that has risen to the surface as an important enhancement of the operations in Gander as well as the ability to respond to someone in distress. You may want to comment on that.

Mr. Johnson, would you elaborate a little more? People have been talking within the fishing community about this issue. How much of an issue is it for people in your profession who are generally out at sea 24 hours a day?

Mr. Albert Johnson: Well, it's a big issue. We're out there and we know that the response time after four o'clock in the evening is two hours or so. It's on my mind quite a bit when I'm out there, in bad weather especially, and a lot of the fishermen have a concern about it.

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Bachand was wondering why there were so many incidents in this part of the country as opposed to the west. Perhaps the reason is that there are a lot more fishermen in the five provinces that are covered here than out in British Columbia. Would you agree with that?

• (1505)

Mr. Albert Johnson: Yes, I certainly would agree with that.

Mr. Jack Harris: Okay. That'll do it.

The Chair: Thank you.

I will give the floor to Mr. Hawn.

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

And thank you all for being here. We've had some worthwhile input and there are some worthwhile points of discussion.

Mr. Johnson, I want to clarify in my own mind the incident we're talking about. What time of day did you make the distress call?

Mr. Albert Johnson: I'm not sure exactly what time. I think it was between a quarter after four and 5:45, say, somewhere around that time.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: How far were you from Gander?

Mr. Albert Johnson: We were 128 miles from Cape Freels at the time.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Could someone help me with Newfoundland geography? How far is that from Gander?

A voice: Three hundred kilometres.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Three hundred kilometres, so 150 to 160 miles.

Mr. Albert Johnson: We were heading to St. John's with a sick man and the operator told me to go ahead to Cape Freels because that was the closest place to Gander.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: I'm just trying to get a handle on the response time you talked about. So it's about 150 to 160 miles. More than that? So it's going to take the helicopter, once it's airborne, almost an hour and a half to get there.

Mr. Albert Johnson: We were steaming in. We were in closer than that. When he got to us, we were a little over a hundred miles—

Hon. Laurie Hawn: From Gander.

Mr. Albert Johnson: We were somewhere around a hundred miles away.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: So he would have gotten airborne in about half of the two-hour response time?

Mr. Albert Johnson: Yes.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: I want to clarify a couple of things. There were 94 incidents in 2009 and 88 in 2010. In 2009, 29% happened within the 30-minute response time; in 2010, 20% happened within the 30-minute response time. Those are the squadron's statistics.

Mr. Albert Johnson: I'd also like to point out that the weather was excellent at the time. We had a northerly wind of 10 to 15 knots, with clear skies and about one-metre seas. So the conditions were really good.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Yes. That doesn't make the airplane go faster, though.

Mr. Albert Johnson: No, no.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: It just makes it easier once you get there.

We talked about additional resources. We had a discussion about that today at 103. I think, Mr. Tucker, you mentioned it. Do you have any idea of what additional resources would be needed to increase their standby posture to 30 minutes 24/7?

Mr. Zane Tucker: I don't know the actual number of personnel required. Obviously, they would need teams. I don't know how many additional teams they would need.

Airport authority, would you folks know that?

Hon. Laurie Hawn: It was essentially a doubling of people.

Mr. Zane Tucker: Double, okay.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: And we talked about personnel attrition. That's a significant problem with not just the military but anybody who employs high-tech people who are attracted to other organizations. Believe me, it's something that CF is wrestling with all the time. Do you have any suggestions about how to improve that situation of personnel attrition?

Mr. Zane Tucker: You alluded to it yourself. I think a lot of it is money, of course. There's no secret about that—the salary and wages you're paid. But in addition to that, I think there's a lot to be said for quality of life, and I think a lot of professionals are really valuing that now. If you're working with a skeleton crew and you're punching a lot more overtime than would be reasonable, you and your family are only going to take so much of that. I think that's where the issue of putting more resources into it and having more people share the load may help keep some people.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Yes, I have no doubt. I'm sure you appreciate the recruiting and training bill that goes with that. And of course the CF trains some pretty qualified people who are very attracted to the oil patch and so on, which makes it a challenge.

We talked about Gander being the most suitable location—Gander versus St. John's—and I guess from the airport guys.... Reg, would you have an assessment about the weather in Gander versus the weather in St. John's vis-à-vis the number of flying days you would lose to weather in St. John's versus Gander?

Mr. Reg Wright: I'd have to go back and dig out a comparison. We operate basically on 98.3% weather reliability. The critical incident days are encapsulated in that report I referenced, which I don't have here with me right now.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: I seem to recall somebody saying there were about 30% more weather days in St. John's than Gander.

Going to the fixed-wing SAR piece, I think everybody would love to have things everywhere. It isn't just a matter of cost, but it is a matter of not unlimited resources. Have you done any studies from the airfield side as to what your assessment would be for the additional resources required to add a couple or three fixed-wing SAR airplanes to 403? Fred, you may have some input on that from your 403 hat.

• (1510)

Mr. Fred Moffitt: Yes, just changing my hat slightly, I'll refer to what Zane was talking about with personnel matters. In my conversations with the boys at 103, one of the biggest attrition items is movement of their personnel and their inability to stay in one place for very long. That is a problem. I'd just add that.

However, to get back to your main point, as a board and as an airport authority, on several occasions we have—Reg, I'm sure, will back me up on this. We're willing to enter into joint ventures with the military, the province, the federal government, to provide facilities. We have the room, we have the space, and we are quite willing to enter into any sort of joint arrangement at any time to accommodate additional assets.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: We're talking hangars and taxiways and ramps. It's not cheap infrastructure.

Mr. Fred Moffitt: No, it isn't.

I don't know if Reg wants to add to that.

Mr. Reg Wright: Of course, the big thing is the built infrastructure, the hangar support for maintenance and other things, but the good news is there's ample room for expansion. The airfield doesn't require any great investment for the 103 needs, though.

Mr. Fred Moffitt: It would be essential, the hangarage. In my experience—I flew Hercules for 15 years before I retired—you cannot leave search and rescue airplanes out in this weather. We're talking response times. In this weather you've got to de-ice, and that's totally unacceptable with search and rescue. So you've got to provide the hangarage for the big airplanes as well as the helicopters.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Yes, of course. And yet we talked about fixed-wing SAR being able to get to somebody faster than a helicopter, obviously. But have you got your heads around a little bit that...we can get a fixed-wing airplane out there, we can get a SAR tech in the water, and presumably picked up by a boat or to help somebody, but now we've got to get him out of the water. So it's not just fixed-wing SAR. Obviously it's got to be a combination of the two, and on the rescue side you're still going to be limited to the helicopter's capabilities.

The Chair: Thank you, Laurie.

I'll give the floor to Mr. Simms.

Mr. Scott Simms: Thank you.

I want to just pick up on that one more time, because I know there was an announcement some time ago about the work that is to be done on the base itself, on 9 Wing as an entire base, not just 103. But I think one of the ramifications of that is...I believe their footprint is going to be reduced somewhat, to the point where that gives them the opportunity to build on the current assets they have. The studies point out obviously that a fixed-wing presence would—in my opinion—reduce the amount of response time, so it certainly seems like all the elements could be lining up. The only thing we're missing, of course, would be the cash element.

One of the other situations that's unique with this particular base is the amount of civilian involvement within the base. From a town perspective—and the authority can probably pipe in on this as well—there are quite a few employees who are not of military rank and who certainly get involved in the base here. It's certainly a unique situation. Would you say that's one of the reasons why this town is so familiar with the issues regarding search and rescue as an industry?

Mr. Zane Tucker: Yes. That's a good point, Mr. Simms. As you're alluding to, and as Fred said earlier, of course, part of it, I guess, is working with the Department of National Defence. You're a transient

community and you are moving around. You heard us reference in our report that it's not just military; it's civilian as well. So I guess where you have both of those groups working side by side, it probably eases integration into the community.

With that, I suppose, it educates us folks in the town about the importance of the role they're doing. I guess we understand day to day what they're doing up there and also the people like the mechanics and others who are working on these helicopters and how important they are. It's a team effort. We often talk about the people who are jumping out of the helicopters to save people, but what's also important is the people who are keeping the helicopters ready to go.

Mr. Scott Simms: The other issue, too, that was pointed out—and I'd like to read it into the record this morning—was that 103 Search and Rescue does far more medevac situations than any other base across the country or any other province, for that matter. Sometimes it goes unheralded as to just what a great impact search and rescue has when it comes to the basic health of Newfoundlanders across the province.

In my riding alone there are 193 towns, and the largest town has only 13,000 people, so it gives you an idea of just how difficult things can be in the types of distress there are. I think there was a recent incident when they flew a young girl from Twillingate to St. John's, and that was straight medevac, whereas other provinces don't have that service available.

I'd like to go back to Mr. Johnson for just a moment.

In your situation, in the industry that you're in, and on the northeast coast, where do most of the harvesters, the fishermen, travel in a boat your size offshore?

•(1515)

Mr. Albert Johnson: All up and down the east coast, right on down below Cape Freels. It depends on what you're fishing. If you're fishing crab, most of the boats are up southerly. If you're fishing turbot, you're off...and then the shrimping.... Some of the boats are off 150 miles or 160 miles.

Mr. Scott Simms: Would you say—and I'm asking you to make a blanket statement here—that the awareness of safety for harvesters is a lot better today than it was, say, 25 to 30 years ago? I mean the awareness of what to do and that sort of thing.

Mr. Albert Johnson: Oh yes, definitely.

Mr. Scott Simms: Do you think the coast guard, along with search and rescue, played a big role in that, in promoting safety to harvesters?

Mr. Albert Johnson: Well, yes. Transport Canada and the coast guard, yes.

Mr. Scott Simms: Okay. Do you think there's room for improvement, though? Do you think maybe they could be doing more to help out harvesters? Because it's not like you're dealing with one particular industry like offshore oil. You're dealing with a whole bunch of industries, with smaller vessels and whatnot. It has improved, I agree, but where do you see the coast guard getting more involved, or even search and rescue, to help benefit fisher people?

Mr. Albert Johnson: Well, the search and rescue is there now, but the response time is the problem. We're out there and we're relying on them if anything happens. I've been fortunate. I've been fishing now 50 years and I haven't had an incident yet where I've had to... except for the one I told you about. I mean, there are so many things can go wrong out there. At Transport Canada now, they have a lot of safety issues put in place, and there's room for more. There are a couple of things they should be having that they don't. I don't know if you want me to elaborate on it here today or not, but....

Mr. Scott Simms: So your issue is more the regulations?

Mr. Albert Johnson: Yes, the regulations have really gotten strict in the last few years. Every four years we have to get our boats inspected, and they're really strict since those couple of incidents a few years ago.

Mr. Scott Simms: Okay.

That's it.

The Chair: I will give the floor to Mrs. Gallant.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman

Thank you all for coming here today.

I'd like to start off with Mr. Johnson and continue were we just left off.

You said there were a couple of recommendations you would make that Transport Canada should implement. Would you please elaborate on that?

Mr. Albert Johnson: Yes, I have a couple of things in mind. One is to put the alarm system in the bill. It's not mandatory. A lot of the vessels have one, but it's not mandatory. Another one is the camera in the engine room. I think those two things should be mandatory regarding the safety.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Are there ever times when you're out at sea that you're not able to be in communication with anyone on land?

Mr. Albert Johnson: Yes, there are.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Is it routine practice for the fishermen to have somebody on shore know what their float plan is, such as it may be, just in general speaking terms?

Mr. Albert Johnson: Well, most of the vessels that go offshore now have satellite telephones, and they all have sideband radios. The communication is there, but there are times when, of course, there's interruption of that, with weather conditions and whatever. You're 150 miles out there, and there are times when you can't communicate.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: If you can't communicate and you're outside the distance at which a helicopter could make its way there without having to stop somewhere else to refuel, is there any way that somebody else would know where you are? Do you let your people on shore know what path you're planning on taking? And how long would you be out of communications?

• (1520)

Mr. Albert Johnson: Well, we wouldn't be out of communications very long. Sometimes with weather conditions, you get a thunderstorm or heavy rain and you just can't.... But yes, I think

everybody who goes offshore now has to have all these plans. You tell people where you're going and when you're going to be back and all this. You let your buyer know; you let your wife know and your friends and whoever.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Right.

Is there a length of time after which they definitely should get hold of the authorities to let them know? Do you have a maximum time you would want to be out of communications?

Mr. Albert Johnson: Well, if you were out there and were in trouble and couldn't communicate, I guess you'd activate your EPIRB, because everybody has an EPIRB. That sends out a distress signal to let the coast guard know you're in trouble.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: All right. Thank you.

My next question is for the airport authority and the city. On the west coast, as the oil and gas industry is ramping up to ship its product out to shore, the companies there are offering to augment what the SAR forces currently have in place. Now here it sounds as though there's a bit of a competition, that they're almost poaching your SAR technicians. That's the impression I'm getting from the testimony here.

You said you were willing to work with government, with the military, to ensure the infrastructure was in place. Have there been any conversations with the oil and gas companies as to whether or not they would be partners in these ventures, so that rather than taking your human resources away, you would all be working together?

Mr. Reg Wright: That discussion hasn't happened with anyone from the oil and gas industry. From our perspective, our discussions have focused on our partners at CFB and what they need.

Mr. Fred Moffitt: I think our overall criterion is to provide the best search and rescue possible, and to that end we have had conversations mainly with the military.

Mr. Simms, of course, is our local representative. As a board, we have never had any conversations with the industry itself.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: I understand that the number of missions the SAR technicians have to undertake is increasing in part as a consequence of the rigs offshore. So does it not stand to reason that you would reach out to see whether or not they'd be willing partners in this as well?

Mr. Fred Moffitt: It would make sense, but it hasn't been done yet.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: All right.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I will give the floor to Monsieur Paillé.

[*Translation*]

I understand that you will share your time with Mr. Bachand.

Mr. Pascal-Pierre Paillé (Louis-Hébert, BQ): Good afternoon, everyone. I don't quite know who to address my question to, but here it is.

We have talked a lot about fishing boats, but I guess that, for the past few years, there have been more cruise ships along the coasts. If there was an accident involving a number of people, what would be the capacity for saving them? Do we have the capacity to save three, five or seven people? If a ship with a thousand people on board was in trouble, how complicated would it be to help them?

[English]

Mr. Zane Tucker: Thank you for the question.

I guess the only portion of that I can answer, as I referenced in the bit of homework we have done on it so far, is that the Cormorant, as it stands right now, can take up to 12 stretchers. I don't know what its capacity would be beyond that, in terms of the number of people you could put in it in an emergency.

I understand that you folks were up this morning and saw the helicopters first-hand. You know there's not a lot of room in them. So if you were to have a big catastrophe with a cruise ship.... We also referenced Marine Atlantic and their crossings across the gulf and how important they are—that's our trans-Canada highway, our link to Canada, and it's very well used. So if one of those major vessels were to go down, I think our province would be in trouble.

• (1525)

Mr. Fred Moffitt: If I could add to that, this morning Major Reid alluded to the maximum number of people you could get on the Cormorant. I think with people standing he said it was about 20 to 24. Of course, that would depend on where the cruise ship was. You could take 24 people, but if there were stretcher cases, people would have to be standing. Then he would have to get back to shore.

So the time element for a huge cruise ship would be very testing. Then you would have to bring in other resources—ships that were nearby, and helicopters. With just the one stand-by we have, we would not be able to cope with the task.

Mr. Albert Johnson: There is the search and rescue auxiliary. I don't know the exact number, because I wasn't prepared for this to come up today, but there are hundreds of vessels around the island that are capable at practically any time—not in the winter; there's not so many. In the summer, if there were an accident out there with one of those big cruise ships, I'm sure there would be lots of vessels around that could get there. So there's the coast guard, the search and rescue auxiliary. I'm a member, and there's a lot of members.

Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand: I have here the report that the National Research Council was asked to prepare. The council was given constraints at the outset and was asked only how to consider the maximum speed of a new platform, of a new aircraft. The National Research Council indicated that there were other issues. I think that they are the same ones you indicated. Where are the bases? What is the standby posture? Where will they be kept in the meantime? How will they be crewed?

It's easy for me to understand that your situation is similar to the one in the high Arctic, where not a lot of incidents occur. But they are far away from actual bases. Unfortunately, National Defence kept the bases where they are because of its operational needs.

I think that I've clearly understood what you are saying. We need to see whether the deployment capacities are located where they could best respond to a greater number of incidents.

The speed of the aircraft is not the issue. If an aircraft in Winnipeg needs to go and rescue someone in the high Arctic and needs to travel thousands of kilometres, clearly it will take more time. So, it's not a matter of speed. I find that the department limited the mandate of the National Research Council.

The way you see it, we should instead consider the location and method of operation. The aircraft need to be situated in the best location so that they can get to the incident site as quickly as possible.

I think we agree.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Monsieur Bachand.

I will give the floor to Mr. Boughen. I know you'll share your time with Mr. Hawn.

Mr. Ray Boughen (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Chair, let me add my voice to that of my colleagues in welcoming the panel here this afternoon. We certainly appreciate the time it takes to meet with us, and we appreciate your input.

We've heard that training personnel, fixed-wing aircraft, and shorter response times are all issues that you would like to see addressed, as well as others. I'd like to hear from the panel. If you had to settle on one issue to enhance the operation as it now exists, what would that one be?

Mr. Zane Tucker: Thank you for the question. I guess I can start.

It's been referenced in some of the previous studies. I know we as a municipality, and more importantly provinces, have been talking about it for years. I think it would be the addition of fixed-wing. As I referenced, we're the only unit in the country that doesn't have a fixed-wing stationed with helicopters. It doesn't make sense.

Mr. Reg Wright: And the independent assessments have basically said that is the best investment in terms of improving response times. It's tied to a fixed-wing fleet.

Mr. Fred Moffitt: Just going on what Major Reid said this morning, he would love more assets in order to reduce the response times. Personnel is a big thing.

In regard to the fixed-wing aspect of it, in my conversations with the boys of 103, when they're working at night.... You referred to the flare situation. There have been occasions—and this is anecdotal; I don't have any evidence. There have been occasions where the Hercules is behind, depending on where the incident occurs, because it has to come from Greenwood and it's at night.

The boys of 103 could be there in a very short space of time. To generate the Herc and get him to catch up and drop its flares, on occasion that has delayed the exercise. Major Reid said this morning that they turn up coincidentally. Yes, they do. But there have been occasions because they're not co-located. Again, in Gander, if it's north of Gander, you have the problem of the Herc arriving later than the Cormorant. Having them co-located would be rather nice.

•(1530)

The Chair: Mr. Hawn, go ahead.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: I have a couple of quick things. Referring to the 103, just to get it on the record, their average response time in 2010, when they were on 30 minutes, was 19.5 minutes, and their average response time when they were on two hours was 50.7 minutes. Those are the "you shall not be longer than" times. Obviously, they strive to get airborne as quickly as possible, and they do a pretty good job.

To Mr. Paillé's point, is there any way that anybody could ever cater to the sinking of a 5,000-person cruise ship and have adequate resources to deal with it? Mr. Moffitt.

Mr. Fred Moffitt: Highly unlikely. Really, you're going back to *Titanic* days.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Yes. You would need a couple of aircraft carriers in the vicinity.

Mr. Fred Moffitt: That's right. You would just have to be totally reliant on what's in the vicinity in terms of ships.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Hopefully, you would have enough life boats, unlike the *Titanic*.

Mr. Fred Moffitt: Exactly.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: That's all I have, Mr. Chair.

I personally want to thank everyone, and I'm sure the other committee members feel the same way.

Thank you very much for your input. It was worthwhile; there's lots to chew on there. And I know we all appreciate it.

The Chair: I want to thank you for being with us this afternoon. It will be useful to our committee. If you need to refer to any of the documents or anything like that, don't hesitate to contact the clerk. If you want to add precision to your testimony, you're welcome to do that.

We'll suspend our work for five minutes and then come back.

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