

## COMMUNITY INPUT FOR BC FERRIES' NEW SERVICE TERM

VICTORIA, March 22, 2007 – Transportation Minister Kevin Falcon has agreed to give ferry-dependent communities a voice in the setting of the upcoming term of service, in the contract between BC Ferries and the Province.

The request was made by the Ferry Advisory Committee Chairs (FACC), based on concerns about fare increases of 30% to 65% already implemented since the new ferry system took effect. The FACC met with Minister Falcon on March 19.

“We’re very pleased the Minister recognizes the value of community suggestions for mitigating the impacts of further increases expected in the next four-year term,” says Tony Law of Hornby Island.

The first five-year term of the Coastal Ferry Services Contract is nearing an end. The fare structure for the next four-year term is currently being determined. Fares are expected to increase further. Preliminary figures will be issued on March 31.

This renegotiation is being conducted for the first time, as described in the Coastal Ferry Act. Currently it involves three parties. The BC Ferry Commissioner sets fare caps based on financial and operational information from BC Ferries, and on the size of the contribution decided by the BC Government.

The communities are represented by Ferry Advisory Committees, which are set up for the routes serving Haida Gwaii to the Southern Gulf Islands that require support from the Province.

Users of these routes were hit hard during the first term of the contract, with the double-digit increases in annual tariff hikes plus fuel surcharges. In the new contract term, the routes face the added requirement of moving toward a user-pay basis.

The FACC will bring to the Minister suggestions for how the Province can contribute to keeping ferry service affordable while maintaining BC Ferries’ sustainability.

“Ferries are an essential transportation link,” says John Sprungman of Cortes Island. “They are an integral part of British Columbia’s highway system. Coastal community viability and provincial tourism depend on ferries being affordable.”

Ferry-dependent communities add to the economic well-being of British Columbia through tourism, resources and small business activity. They offer all British Columbians the means to enjoy the recreational, cultural and environmental features of the coast.

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