

WHEN EVERY MINUTE COUNTS

MARITIME SEARCH AND RESCUE

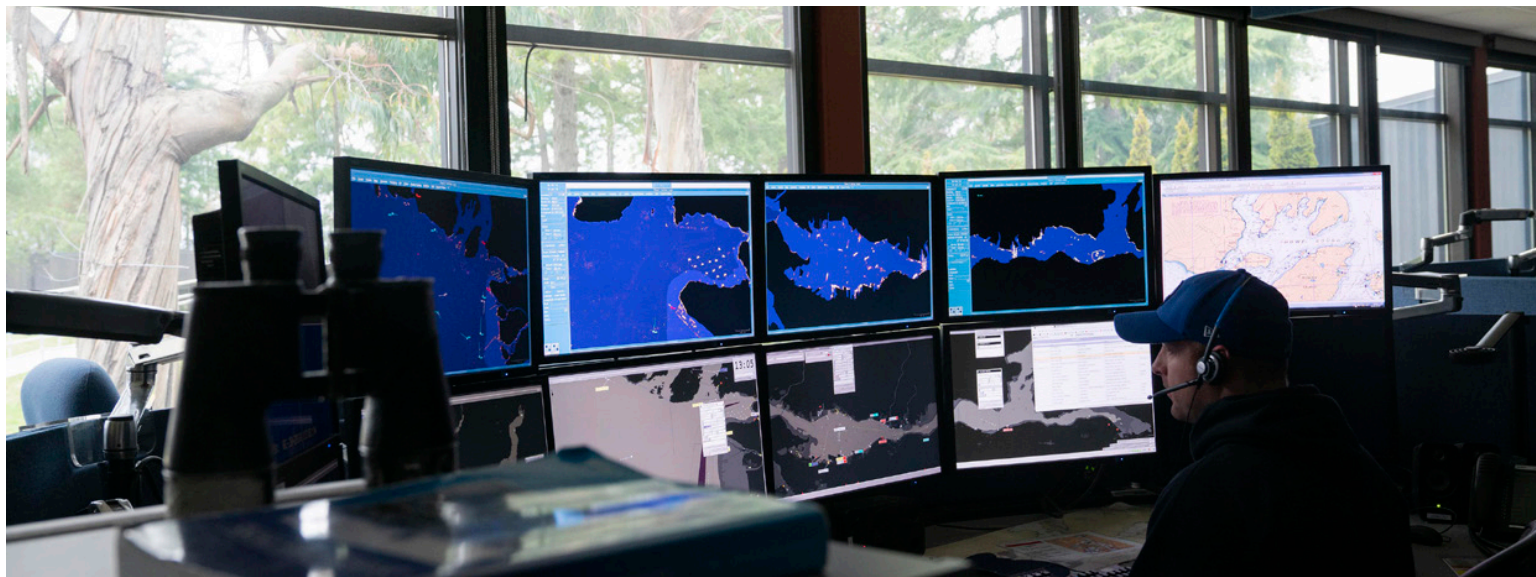


EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Standing Senate Committee on Fisheries and Oceans (the committee) undertook its study on maritime search and rescue (SAR) because gaps had been identified over the past decade regarding coverage, capacity, prevention, and governance. However, it is important to first and foremost acknowledge the great work of Canada's SAR personnel, both paid and volunteer. The committee heard that these individuals and teams are "the best of the best" and agrees with that assessment. Committee members would like to thank SAR personnel for their courage and dedication to the cause of search and rescue in Canada.

Through a literature review, public hearings, briefs, and national and international site visits, the committee learned many things about maritime SAR in Canada and how it compares to maritime SAR abroad. Although the report discusses several themes, a few stood out to members of the Committee.

The first theme is reflected in the title of the report, When Every Minute Counts. The committee learned that many factors contribute to reaction and response times as well as to the success or failure of a SAR mission. Examples include (but are not limited to): the location of assets, the deployment time of assets and personnel, the amount of information available to coordinators and rescuers, the equipment used by those in distress, and radio coverage. Although gaps in coverage and capacity were identified in the report, the committee acknowledges that the delivery of maritime SAR in Canada has, to date, been effective. However, as discussed in greater detail in the report, improvements can be made to the maritime SAR program to: help increase the likelihood of mission success, reduce the risk to SAR personnel, and better equip remote communities to respond to such events.



The second theme is the realization that although Canadian Coast Guard (CCG) and Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) personnel are crucial to the deployment of CCG and CAF assets in the face of a maritime SAR operation, Canadian Coast Guard Auxiliary (CCGA) members and other volunteer organizations are often the first responders on SAR missions. In the committee's view, this highlights the need to not only recruit and retain CCG and CAF personnel for maritime SAR activities, but also to ensure that CCGA and other volunteer organizations are supported – through funding for equipment and vessels and through training – to solidify and expand Canada's maritime SAR capacity.

The third theme is the need for increased prevention. The committee heard that the best SAR incident is the one that is avoided altogether. The committee agrees that investing time and funds into outreach for commercial fish harvesters, recreational boaters and others who navigate Canada's waterways is time and money well spent if it helps avoid maritime SAR incidents.

The fourth and final theme is that Canada's maritime SAR program would benefit from enhanced visibility. The committee heard that maritime SAR incidents in Canada were on the rise in certain areas (e.g., the Canadian Arctic) and that maritime traffic was changing (e.g., the Halifax search and rescue region has experienced an increase in pleasure craft incidents over the years). Raising the visibility of Canada's maritime SAR program and of the CCG could increase awareness, boost recruitment, and ensure that maritime SAR capacity is maintained, if not increased.

In the end, the committee believes that the ultimate goal should be that no matter their purpose on the water, boaters should feel safe navigating Canadian waterways because a robust maritime SAR program is ready to help them, if needed.



READ THE REPORT

When Every Minute Counts: Maritime Search and Rescue

<http://info.sencanada.ca/maritime-SAR>

