

\$14.4 million will help keep Bluenose II afloat

Ship needs big makeover — Walters

By PATRICIA BROOKS ARENBURG and BEVERLEY WARE Staff Reporters

The ship has come in for Nova Scotia's ocean jewel.

The Bluenose II is expected to see \$14.4 million from a virtual treasure chest — a whopping \$422-million announcement for Nova Scotia gateway projects — opened by federal cabinet minister Peter MacKay and Premier Rodney MacDonald on Thursday.

"We're really pleased that the province is continuing to give their support to look after our ship, which is a great thing," Capt. Wayne Walters, the vessel's director of operations, said Thursday.

"This will assure we can operate for a long time."

The sailing ship is owned by the province but operated by the Lunenburg Marine Museum Society. And it is in need of a real makeover, Capt. Walters said.

"For a couple years now, we've been looking at the possibility of doing a major restoration on the hull," he said.

"With older wooden ships, what happens over the years is they start to . . . droop on the ends. It's called hogging, and we'd like to address that if we could."

The cash will also help bring the "the ship's environmental issues and structural integrity . . . up to today's standards, which is great."

The province will determine where the work will be done and also when the operators will receive the funds to get started.

Capt. Walters didn't know when the cash would start to flow. But he said "we're going to be meeting with the province to discuss details and timelines and all that kind of stuff."

Some Lunenburg-area residents supported the cash for Nova Scotia's signature vessel.

Muriel Webber of Bridgewater said she didn't see this as an attempt to sway her vote in light of an anticipated provincial election.

"I think it's a good idea," she said of the expense, adding that she believed it was an investment in the province and tourism.

Linda Smeltzer of Lunenburg said she agreed.

"Oh yes, I would support that," she said. "It is a lot of money. In this day and age, it is a lot of money the way things are now."

But she said the Bluenose II is important to the Lunenburg area and is instrumental in promoting the province.

Michele Raymond, the NDP's tourism and culture critic, was "very happy to see tourism infrastructure included" in the announcement and "there's no question that the Bluenose II is an important part of Nova Scotia's . . . heritage."

Nova Scotia is welcoming the tall ships in July and "she shouldn't be in terrible shape," Ms. Raymond said of the vessel.

She hopes the Bluenose II sees the promised funds.

But given the high dollar figure, she said "I just want to make sure that, in fact, the government's not putting money in where it already has money, in the form of the monies collected through Sen. (Wilfred) Moore. I hope that they've gotten that all put into the ship first."

That money, which is expected to end up at about \$600,000, is still sitting with the Bluenose II Preservation Trust Society, headed by Mr. Moore.

The trust lost the contract to operate the ship in 2005 but is continuing to navigate through the federal regulations concerning the transfer of funds from one charitable organization to another, trust lawyer Mick Ryan said.

On April 22, Mr. Ryan said the trust sent a letter to provincial Tourism Minister Bill Dooks stating that "we'd be delighted and more than willing to attend a meeting to discuss the situation and determine how we can facilitate the agreed approach."

"We are simply waiting for the province to get back to us," Mr. Ryan said. As far as the trust is concerned, "we're prepared to do whatever we can in order to do it, as long as it meets the requirements and the laws of the country. That's the bottom line."

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