

THE SENATE OF CANADA



LE SÉNAT DU CANADA

The Honourable Pat Carney, P.C
Senator Retired

Ottawa, Ontario
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NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

After Nearly 10 Years - Heritage Lighthouse Bill Passes

OTTAWA – A private member's bill which empowers communities to help preserve Canada's heritage lighthouses was passed by Parliament Wednesday after nearly ten years in the political process.

Bill S-215, sponsored by former BC Senator Pat Carney, who retired earlier this year, cleared both the House of Commons and the Senate and is expected to receive Royal Assent shortly.

The legislation establishes a process for communities to initiate the selection of heritage lighthouses under criteria established by the Minister of the Environment who is responsible for Parks Canada. It also prevents their unauthorized alteration or disposition and requires that they be reasonably maintained. It applies only to 256 federally -owned lighthouses, most fully operational guardians of maritime safety.

“Until now lighthouses deemed surplus to operational requirements have been burned down, blown up or demolished without consultation with adjacent communities,” said Carney, who resides on Saturna Island, where a historic lighthouse and a light-keeper’s house were destroyed when an automatic light tower was installed.

There are federal lighthouses in every province except Alberta and Saskatchewan. MP Larry Miller, who carried the bill through the Commons and whose Ontario riding (Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound) has several lighthouses said: “We all have a winner here.”

Moving third reading in the Senate, Wednesday, Senator Lowell Murray noted the original version of the bill was introduced in 2000 by the late Senator Mike Forrestall of Nova Scotia, supported by Barry MacDonald of the Nova Scotia Lighthouse Preservation Society. Successive bills have failed to make it through the legislative process.

A supporter of the preservation initiative since 1999, the Heritage Canada Foundation (HCF) welcomed the passage of the bill. “It’s a momentous day for Maritime heritage in Canada,” said Natalie Bull, executive director. “HCF looks forward to working with local community groups to seize this conservation opportunity.”

Department of Fisheries and Oceans has a program to divest surplus lighthouses in Atlantic Canada to communities for social and economic uses, such as tourist destinations. But many operational lights such as BC’s Race Rocks, built in 1860, are crumbling and in a state of disrepair. DFO, which owns most federal lighthouses, has no mandate to preserve them.

The legislation will come into force in two years in order to enable the Minister to establish criteria for heritage designation with the assistance of an advisory council.

Communities will have a further two years to petition the Minister for heritage designation and to propose community uses for any building surplus to operational requirements.

Carney said her Saturna Island community is planning to transform an abandoned Fog Alarm Building at the operational East Point lighthouse into a Discovery Centre featuring the Spanish and British maritime explorers who first charted the surrounding waters. Saturna is named for the Spanish ship “Saturnina”.

The Heritage Canada Foundation is a national, membership-based, non-profit organization with a mandate to promote the preservation of Canada’s historic buildings and places. HCF urges local community groups to contact its headquarters for more information and advice on next steps.

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