

Mainstream media ignoring facts, focusing on fear

Public opinion on the merits or otherwise of the Northern Gateway project is being formed from information disseminated by the local and national press in all its forms. Sadly, a large part of the coverage has been based on emotion and presumption but very little fact. To some extent, your publication has attempted to address some of the issues with knowledgeable comment and balanced opinion — I offer my two cents worth.

Much has been made of the product which will be carried on the outward voyages from Kitimat which, with some disdain, is reported as bitumen or, even worse, tar. In my past, I served on three tankers which were designed to carry bitumen exclusively loading at ports in the Caribbean for discharge at ports in Europe, West Africa, the United States and within the Caribbean.

In order to remain fluid and pumpable, the bitumen we carried on those ships was heated (I seem to recall it was loaded at a temperature of 300°F and maintained at a minimum 270°). Whilst I am not aware of any spillage of bitumen from those ships, and certainly not during my voyages, it is easy to imagine how, in the event of spillage, the bitumen, on contact with colder water would rise rapidly to the surface (it is much lighter than salt and even fresh water), would cool rapidly and coagulate. I have no doubt that small amounts could have been rolled up into oil barrels.

I have no idea how that bitumen product would compare with that coming from the oilsands.

Much has been made also of the size of the ships to be employed in carrying the product from Kitimat to market — 320,000 deadweight tonnes has been quoted which is many times bigger than the ships on which I sailed. From a safety point of view, and ignoring the economics, one can imagine the potential for congestion and increased risk of

collision if say 10 32,000-deadweight tonne ships were used in place of each of the proposed supertankers.

In speculating on the inevitability of a collision or grounding it has been assumed that the whole cargo will be spilled. This is not correct. In addition to increased safety resulting from double-hulled tanker construction one should understand that the space in which the cargo is carried is divided into smaller, separate tanks. There is absolutely no reason why, in the unlikely event of an accident, spillage would not be confined to a small percentage of the total cargo.

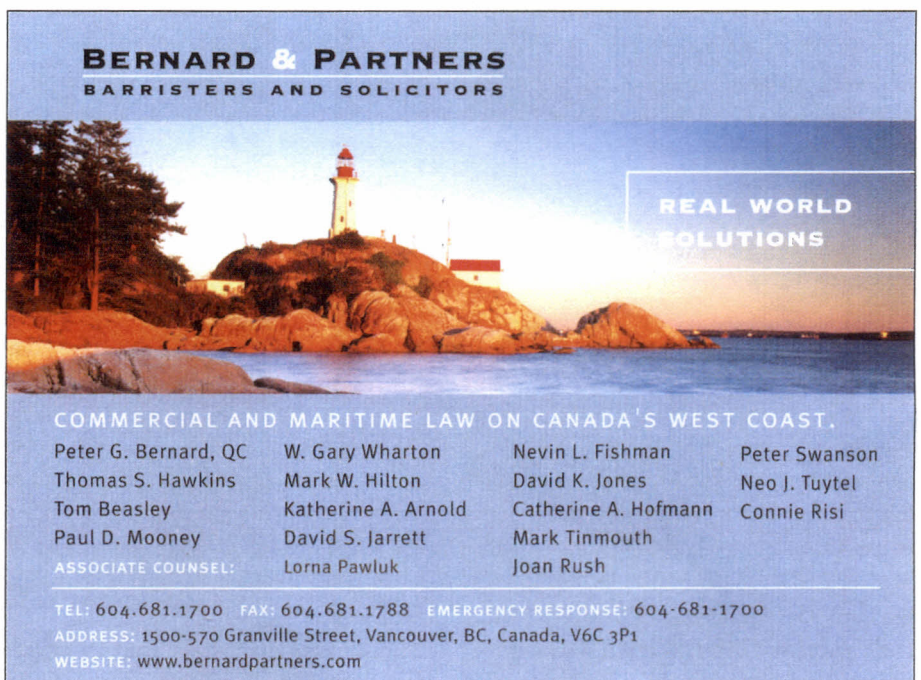
In most of the maritime accidents resulting in significant oil spillage — including the *Exxon Valdez* and the *Torrey Canyon* — opportunities to minimize damage by removal of the majority of the oil onboard existed for several days. Unfortunately, delays in responding to the initial accident, often through indecision, succeeded in aggravating the situations beyond the point of mitigation.

In the case of the Northern Gateway, I would be interested to know if any consideration has been given to how

quickly and from where relief tankers could be brought in as it might become necessary to remove remaining oil from a ship in the event of an accident penetrating one or more cargo compartments.

The views and advice of the marine industry have not been sought by the national press or, if they have been sought, they have not prominently appeared. One does not have to stray far for valuable input — to mention a few: we have a pilotage authority which has an outstanding safety record providing knowledgeable and experienced pilots to guide all ships within B.C. waters; we have a towboat industry with wide experience in their particular field; we have at least one marine architect recognized globally as a foremost authority on escort tugs utilized in situations similar to what will be experienced here; there is much valuable knowledge available within the Chamber of Shipping of British Columbia and the members of the Company of Master Mariners. I believe none of these are conflicted in this matter.

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