



Arctic Research Foundation

Thursday, April 30th, 2015

Hon. Leon Aglukkaq
Minister of the Environment
458 Confederation Building
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

Dear Minister Aglukkaq,

I had the privilege of visiting the *HMS Erebus* dive site two weeks ago and spending time with elders in Nunavut who engaged me and my companions in local traditions. It was both a humbling and inspirational experience. Our organization, Arctic Research Foundation, is committed to helping build capacity in Nunavut and making sure that Canadians across the country keep advancing their knowledge and appreciation of Canada's North. We hope to continue supporting the Government-led Victoria Strait project for many years to come.

I am writing to you today to express my concern about the documentary "Franklin's Lost Ships" which aired on CBC on April 9, 2015. I think it's important that the contribution to the search is recognized accurately, that the history of the project is documented correctly and that it reflects the partnership agreements of each organization involved.

I am concerned that the documentary contains information that runs contrary to the planning meeting we held in your office on June 9th, 2014 and filmed for the Prime Minister's on-line news channel. The narrative, as currently presented, attempts to minimize the role of the Government and its respective agencies and private partners. It also creates new and exaggerated narratives for the exclusive benefit of the Royal Canadian Geographic Society and its own partners.

Some examples include:

- The Akademik Sergey Vavilov, is shown throughout the film as the main platform for the search. Yet it was CCGS Laurier that led the search and carried the crew, experts and equipment used to find *HMS Erebus*.
- This misleading characterization is further enforced by the footage of One Ocean Expedition's principal showing the chief of underwater archeology at Parks Canada on the map where to search for the lost Franklin vessel. This narrative underplays the significant support you have provided to have the search strongly follow the southern

area, supported by the Environment Canada Ice flow studies that also matched the oral history which came from your home town.

- The CEO of RCGS makes a claim that his organization has been doing the search “for years, catching a break this year” when in fact they joined the Victoria Strait partnership in April of 2014 as a support partner to help with communication and outreach activities. This narrative put forward by the RCGS undermines the leadership shown by you and the Prime Minister and the careful logistical planning that the Government supported well before the communications support role was taken by the RCGS.
- The DRDC Autonomous Underwater Vehicle, carried on the Akademik Sergey Vavilov, is presented as the key technical help for the archeology team in finding *HMS Erebus* yet it was only used for open water testing far from the search area. This runs contrary to public records that show it was Canadian Hydrographic Service’s use of the Gannet and Kinglett, launched from CCGS Laurier, which surveyed the seabed which ultimately resulted in the discovery.
- Government partners, in particular the Government of Nunavut, Canadian Hydrographic Service and the Canadian Coast Guard are shown as supporting players to RCGS and Akademik Sergey Vavilov when the opposite is true. Having been involved with the project since 2008 I can attest to the fact that these and many other government agencies and departments have been providing key leadership, expertise and support in the search for Franklin’s ship for years.

These are just some examples of the errors made in the documentary. While I don’t want to speculate about the motivation of RCGS and its partners in creating an alternative narrative for themselves and their role in the Victoria Strait partnership I am concerned that official communication outputs, such as this documentary, contain versions of the search that are misleading the to the Canadian public. Because this documentary is currently being adopted for US and international audiences I have requested meetings with the film director and the producing company to discuss how best to fix these factual errors.

I have personally advocated RCGS’ participation in this multi-faceted partnership and made a significant financial contribution the Society last year so that they can achieve their stated objectives, mainly a documentary and a book on the Franklin search. I am troubled that Canadian history is not being presented accurately and I have expressed my concerns to the Society’s CEO in the past. I am raising my concerns with you now because I understand that the Government of Canada has final approval of the content of this documentary and subsequent communications outputs such as “the official book” currently in production by RCGS.

This public-private partnership is widely being recognized as one of the most successful ones in Canada. The discovery of *HMS Erebus* is a culmination of a large group of Canadians working together to make history. It was only possible by the strong leadership of Prime Minister Harper, many talented civil servants across the country and private partners. This project offers an unprecedented opportunity to engage our fellow Canadians in our history, Inuit culture, and the North which together raises awareness of the importance of the Arctic to our security, sovereignty and prosperity.

I look forward to hearing from you on how best to address the inaccuracies in the “Franklin’s Lost Ships” documentary and how we can ensure that they are not repeated in the subsequent international versions or the upcoming book.

Sincerely,

Jim Balsillie
Arctic Research Foundation

Cc: Shaun Webb, Regional Affairs, Prime Minister’s Office