

## Extra money coming, MP tells Coastguard

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By Alice Neville

Relief is on the horizon for volunteer emergency service organisations feeling the pinch from rising fuel costs.

Accompanying Coastguard New Zealand on the water yesterday, MP Mark Gosche said the Auckland Regional Amenities Funding Bill would give cash to 11 organisations, including Coastguard Northern Region.

The bill is before the transport and industrial relations select committee, which Mr Gosche chairs.

The Land Transport Management Amendment Bill, which had its second reading last week, would also help the Coastguard through a regional fuel tax to pay for priority projects, said Mr Gosche.

The Coastguard is short of money and is also being affected by other boaties skimping on petrol spending.

Ian Gibson, of the Howick Coastguard unit, says some boaties are taking less fuel out with them as a money-saving measure.

"So we have to come and get them, and use more fuel than they would have had to use to get home."

On the water with the Howick unit yesterday, Mr Gosche said the work of Coastguard volunteers was invaluable.

"New Zealanders, and particularly Aucklanders, are so keen on getting out on the water, and I couldn't imagine what it would be like without these guys.

"I think the work they do might be taken for granted sometimes."

Coastguard New Zealand costs about \$8.5 million a year to run, and relies on donations, trusts, lotteries and member fees, and the 2500 professional volunteers who crew rescue vessels and air patrol and monitor calls in radio operations rooms.

"Our unit alone cost \$40,000 to run last year," said Mr Gibson. "Fuel is usually \$10,000 a year, so with that going up 20 per cent, it's a big increase.

"Any money we get from the Auckland Amenities Bill will be a big help.

"We need funds from other sources. It's not fair for volunteers to have to raise it all."

The Coastguard helps anyone in trouble, but only about 10 per cent of the Auckland region's 100,000 or more boaties are members, paying the \$89 annual fee.

A \$280 an hour fee is requested from non-member boaties who get into trouble, but only about half pay it.

As well as the funding issues, it is getting more difficult to attract volunteers to the Coastguard.

Mr Gibson says that when he joined five years ago, the average time volunteers stayed was about



Todd Forsyth (left) and Ian Gibson tell Mark Gosche (centre) what the Coastguard deals with. Photo / Greg Bowker

five years, but now it's three to four years.

"People's lives get busy, they have kids. It's tough missing my kids' soccer games at the weekend."

But the volunteers love their work. "I enjoy helping people, and the camaraderie of it," says Mr Gibson.

"And it's the adrenalin - those incidents in the middle of the night, flying along in pitch black at 30 knots."

*This story was found at:*

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