**Beat: Travel**

# Northumberland Ferries 2023 Season

### New Ship On The Horizon

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**USPA NEWS -** Northumberland Ferries Limited has been providing service for the past 80 years. In Nova Scotia or Prince Edward Island it is not hard to find someone who is unable to share a fond memory of a trip across the Northumberland Strait on the MV Lord Selkirk, MV Prince Edward, MV Prince Nova, MV Confederation or up until recently the MV Holiday Island. These ships have not only served local residents, but also provided countless numbers of tourists and essential workers a vital link to PEI.

The existence of the ferry service from Caribou, Nova Scotia to Wood Islands, Prince Edward Island is not just a vital link between the two provinces, but it is a way of life for many. Since 1941, Northumberland Ferries has provided safe passenger/vehicle service between the two provinces. This service has greatly benefited the region by providing steady employment within the industry, and has supported tourism operators by drawing thousands of visitors to the region each year who are treated to the charms and hospitality of the surrounding area.

Over the last few years, Northumberland Ferries has faced significant challenges and setbacks including service interruptions due to mechanical issues, aging equipment and a major fire on the MV Holiday Island, which forced the ship to be permanently removed from service.

As December 20th was the last day of the 2023 season, this article will explore the current state of Northumberland Ferries assets and what is being planned to maintain the valuable service for future generations.

In July 2022, ferry service was reduced to one vessel, the MV Confederation, after a fire onboard the MV Holiday Island forced the second ferry to be deemed a total loss and scrapped. The MV Saaremaa 1 was provided on loan to NFL for the remainder of the 2022 and the peak of the 2023 season to help the company cope with the loss of their second vessel.

On June 19th, 2023, Northumberland Ferries Limited released the following statement, "On Friday, June 16, 2023, MV Confederation experienced an issue involving the drive connection between the port main engine and the central propulsion gearbox. This has been further identified as a mechanical flexible coupling in the propulsion drivetrain. The NFL team worked over the weekend to try to fix the issue by using a coupling from company spares inventory. Unfortunately, this was not successful and a new part has been ordered. The part must be manufactured as it is not stocked internationally. The estimated time for the new part is three to four weeks."
Although the sourcing of the part and the repair did not take as long as initially thought, the region was still without ferry service throughout the process. The MV Saaremaa 1, was still in dry dock and was not available to be put into service to fill the void until early July.
This latest event is just another major hurdle that Northumberland Ferries Limited has had to face within the last year.

After the MV Confederation broke down in June, 2023 and required a crucial part had to be manufactured in Germany, it left period of several weeks without ferry service between Nova Scotia and PEI. This resulted in much out cry from the public, tourism operators, and local government officials. With pressure mounting for a long term solution, the Federal Government announced that they were in negotiations to purchase a permanent second ferry to run alongside of the MV Confederation. This was a welcome announcement, however, it was met with cautious optimistism from anyone who depends on this vital link between the two provinces.

Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau announced that there would be construction of two new ferries to replace the aging MV Confederation and the MV Holiday Island, which was heavily damaged by a fire and scrapped in 2022. Trudeau, said that we can expect to see the new ferries in service as early as 2028. In the mean time, the Federal Government would be purchasing the MV Fanafjord, a Norwegian car ferry, to operate along with the MV Confederation until the construction of the new ferries is completed.
At a press conference Prime Minister Trudeau said,"The federal government will purchase the MV Fanafjord to replace the MV Holiday Island, which caught fire last summer and was removed from service. He went on to say, "The government will build two new

ferries for that route before 2028."

Prince Edward Island Premier Dennis King released a written statement which included, "This is a welcomed announcement that will provide stability and consistency for our important transportation link between Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia for 2024 and beyond."

The Local MLA for Belfast-Murray River, PEI ,Darlene Compton, in a statement to the media said, "For too long now, the availability and reliability of the ferry service has been impacted by aging vessels...

I wish that it hadn't taken years for good ideas like this to take root but I'm glad that they finally have… A lot of anxiety and economic hardship could have been avoided had the federal government acted with greater urgency sooner."

Central Nova MP Sean Fraser spoke at the news conference in Charlottetown where he said, "I grew up in Pictou County and I can tell you the importance of the ferry link between our provinces cannot be overstated."

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