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## **Oil Spill Response in Norway—Part 2** - Sheila Malcolmson

To learn how Norway handles oil spill risk, I represented Islands Trust Council when, in June, the Port of Metro Vancouver gathered Canadian oil industry, federal government, First Nations and local government delegates to meet Norwegian counterparts in oil spill prevention and shipping safety.

In the last issue of *Island Tides* I described what I learned of Norway's approach to state ownership and taxation of oil and gas. To recap: Norway's government owns 30% of the oil and gas business; industry oil profits are taxed at 75%; and oil taxes make up 30% of state revenues, resulting in extensive public infrastructure and an enviable social safety net.

Canada and Norway are both major oil and gas exporters, and with BC's population and coastline being equal to Norway's, Norway's experience is relevant here.

Having expressed concerns about oil spill risk for three decades, in 2009 Islands Trust Council ramped up shipping safety advocacy when container ships dragged anchor in Plumper Sound, risking fuel tank ruptures that could have oiled sensitive Salish Sea shorelines.

Trust Council has since been asking questions about the federal and provincial capacity for oil spill prevention and response, and how Canadian regulations compare to other countries. Trust Council is opposed to the Kinder Morgan pipeline expansion and its tenfold oil tanker increase in our waters, but we also want better spill prevention and response for the vessel traffic which BC already has.

So on the trip, it was heartening to hear Norway has already adopted the strong regulations we hope for in BC, such as:

- Acting on derelict vessels. Norway doesn't delay to find out who 'owns' the pollution, but in Canada no agency is responsible;
- Ports of refuge are designated for vessels in trouble which might create an oil spill if they remain at sea;
- Dedicated standby tugs, to prevent a vessel-in-trouble situation from escalating into an oil spill, (Norway has five standby tugs; Washington State has one; BC none);
- Geographic response plans to identify sensitive areas that need extra protection and special conditions like strong currents that might affect how spill response is approached. Although Washington State has 19 geographic response plans, our

government hasn't required or adopted any for the BC coast. Industry voluntarily developed eight geographic response plans for BC's coast, one of which covers just 8 of 470 Islands Trust islands;

- Regulated oil spill response times that are faster than in Canada (it's three days for a 10,000 tonne oil spill in BC's Salish Sea; we were told it's ten minutes in Norway. That can't be quite right, but it's clearly a tighter regulation);
- Responding to oiled wildlife (Canadian regulations don't require any response).

The Norwegian Coastal Authority [www.kystverket.no/en](http://www.kystverket.no/en) coordinates all oil spill prevention and response. Although the Canadian industry representatives on the tour felt Norway's shipping safety infrastructure was replicated here in BC (though spread over many departments and agencies), I felt more reassured by Norway's approach, where this vital function is housed under one roof.

A few cautions on what's above: some of this information may have been lost in translation (Norwegians spoke very good English, but there are things I may have misunderstood). Also, there are measures the BC shipping industry and ports adopted voluntarily that they feel are equivalent to Norway's operating standards; I'm focussing on where I heard that Norway's federal requirements exceed the Canadian government's regulations.

The Port of Metro Vancouver will soon issue a trip report that confirms some of these regulatory details. Also, three studies will soon be released on comparative oil spill responses (by the Pacific States/BC Oil Spill Task Force, the BC Ministry of the Environment, and a federal panel on Canadian oil tanker safety), so we'll soon be able to see Canada's oil spill regulations compared to other regimes.

I'm grateful for the chance to learn from Norwegians and so hope our Canadian government does; we don't yet have 'world class' regulations, which we badly need for the Salish Sea. The cost of an oil spill, to ecology and community, is too much to bear.

In the next issue of *Island Tides*, part three of this series will look at the governance framework and culture of consensus that spawned this regulatory approach and seems to be protecting Norway's coast.

*Sheila Malcolmson is Chair of Islands Trust Council.* ☞

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