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## Norway and Oil: Part 3 by Sheila Malcolmson, Chair of Islands Trust Council Norway: Governance and Culture of Consensus

Long concerned about how oil spills could damage the Salish Sea's rich waters, sensitive shorelines, and marine-dependent communities, Islands Trust Council opposes oil tanker expansion and has marine safety policy reform at the centre of its 'preserve and protect' work. In that context, I travelled to Norway in June with the Port of Metro Vancouver and Canadian oil industry, federal, First Nations and local governments to examine Norwegian oil shipping.

Norway already has many of the strong oil spill prevention and response regulations Islands Trust proposes for BC (described in Part 2 of this series, August 1 *Island Tides*; read more at [www.islandstrust.bc.ca](http://www.islandstrust.bc.ca), search 'oil spill'). This is partly rooted in Norway's deep investment in oil (the government owns 30% of the oil and gas business, and taxes industry oil profits at 75%, funding much of Norway's spill prevention infrastructure, (described in Part 1 of this series, July 18, *Island Tides*).

But more than the mechanics of legislated response times and oil skimming technology, Norway approaches the governance of oil in a completely different way than Canada. More than anything on the trip, I was inspired by the governance framework and culture of consensus that seems to be protecting Norway's coast.

Norway's federal legislature sits in a circle, with seating arranged based on region, instead of party affiliation. (A Norwegian host said 'We've seen your Canadian parliament and

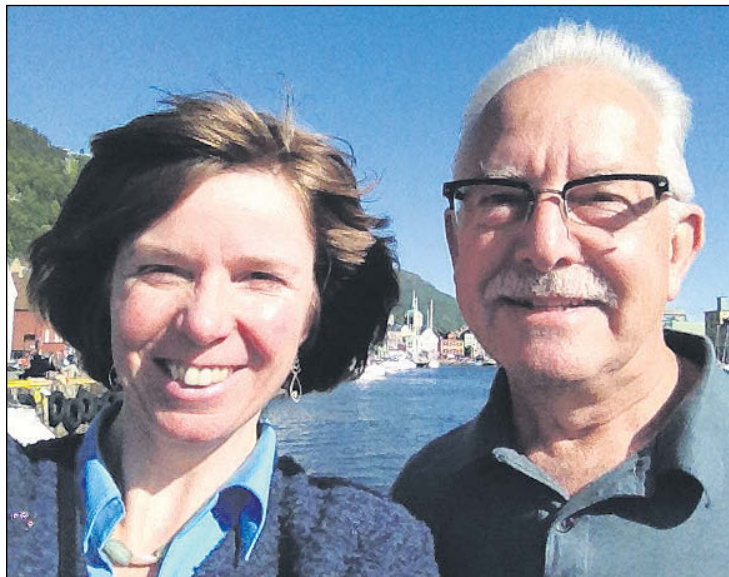
legislatures; it's *nothing* like that...'). I got a strong sense that federal policies truly reflect the consensus view of elected legislators cooperating across party lines. The federal election is by proportional representation (Sadly, even after widely applauding extensive road construction, public transit, and an enviable social safety net in Norway, a member of our tour said

'We couldn't have proportional representation in Canada; nothing would ever get done!')

Norway's National Energy Plan, Transportation Plan, and Maritime Policy (Canada has none of these) are expected to survive Norway's September 9 federal election. Although oil expansion into sensitive fishing grounds is an election issue, we heard that Norway's 1971 accord prevails on state ownership, high taxation of oil profits, and attendant social spending (Norway has no debt and holds a

\$725 billion pension fund for its people). With no split between political parties, this is not a wedge issue that corporate oil can exploit in elections.

When we asked, repeatedly, whether Norwegians trusted their government to represent community interests and uphold environmental regulations, they expressed general bewilderment at the questions we were asking on public process and conflict. For example, asking whether the indigenous Sami People have a veto on resource development, or are 'consulted' in a token way, the Sami Parliament representative replied: 'If the Sami people had concerns, why would anyone want a project



Sheila Malcolmson and World Wildlife Fund's Rob Powell in Norway.

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to proceed? That would be a sign more discussion is needed'. (And yes, the Sami have their own parliament: although Norway once had the same assimilationist First Nations policies as did the Canadian government, it's since established a progressive indigenous parliament that's been copied in Sweden and Finland). 'And we'd want to propose solutions,' the representative added, 'We can't just be critics.'

Another governance difference in Norway is that federal and local governments are closely linked and there's little strength at the provincial level. And, while BC ports are federal, Norwegian municipalities own their ports, thereby controlling what travels through them and how, and keeping port revenues local.

Municipalities are also responsible for spill response in ports, on land and beaches (in BC, local government roles have become increasingly unclear since provincial cutbacks eliminated oil spill training capacity). Norway guarantees municipal oilspill response costs, trains municipal staff and

volunteers, and practices annual integrated on-water spill response sessions with all government levels.

A final note: Norway's lack of a wild salmon fishery might also explain the wide social license for the oil industry. There's virtually no Norwegian commercial salmon fishery, while here wild salmon fishing remains a vital part of coastal culture and economy. To sustain wild populations, we need to protect their fresh water and coastal environments, since salmon are vulnerable to oil pollution at each stage of their life cycle. I love that BC coastal people hold salmon sacred in the resistance to pipeline and tanker expansion.

I'm inspired by Norway and I hope our Canadian government can be too. We're in the heart of some difficult decision-making about natural resources and that conversation needs to unfold with deep local engagement, empowering the people most affected by oil spills' costs. ✍