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## *The Islands Trust Story: V* Peter Lamb

### Acts I–IV

The last five parts of this drama have described the period from the formation of the Islands Trust in 1974 up to the major reworking of the Trust in the late 1980s. In the 'Intermission', the story of the Islands Trust Fund and its land conservation successes was told. (Find them all online, in *Island Tides*' 'Trust Matters' archive.)

### Act 5, Scene 1: A Sense Of Commonality

It is now 1994, population in the Trust area in 1991 is around 18,000, an increase of 46% since 1981 and development pressures continue to challenge the Islands Trust. The curtain rises with a new NDP government in power.

The first official Trust Policy Statement is finally completed by Trust Council and approved by the Minister of Municipal Affairs, Darlene Marzari, giving the islands in the Trust 'a sense of commonality'. Any future amendments to each island's Official Community Plans will now have to be consistent with this Statement.

Inevitably, concerns have been expressed in the Legislature about the appropriate balance between local island autonomy and the new, overriding common trust-wide policies contained in the Policy Statement.

The Trust opens its first regional office on Salt Spring Island, to be followed later with a northern office on Gabriola Island.

The Minister promises a closer look at of the Trust governance structure and 'how this fragile creature called the Islands Trust can deal with the development demands that are being made on it on a day-to-day basis.' She states that 'if it is to sustain itself, it needs strengthening, broader scope, and greater interest on the part of the provincial government in its longevity and sustainability.'

In July, 1994, Bill 25 is introduced into the legislature,

including amendments to the *Islands Trust Act* requested by Trust Council which enables it to enter into coordination agreements with federal and provincial ministries and other public agencies. (First Nations are added to the list later). Any such agreements will require ministerial approval. This is intended 'to make life easier' for the Trust by giving them 'additional scope and an additional maturity.' Once again, concerns are expressed over the requirement for provincial approval of these Islands Trust agreements.

To relieve the workload on Executive Committee members who chair local trust committee meetings as well as overseeing Islands Trust operations, Bill 25 also authorizes an increase in the number of executive members.

### Scene 2: Managing Growth

It is a time of growing involvement of the Ministry into the affairs of the Trust. The 'complicated and contentious' issue of private land logging is under constant review, sparking the Galiano situation over Macmillan Bloedel lands. Resolution of the Gabriola OCP concerning Weldwood forestry lands is reached. Groups on Bowen, North Pender and Salt Spring Islands are looking at municipal status constrained by the Minister's expressed desire 'to preserve the protection function of the Islands Trust.'

In 1995, with the aim of better managing growth in the province, *Bill 11* restores regional planning, dismantled in 1983 by the previous government. For the Islands Trust, this means 'new, compatible and rather flexible arrangements that the Islands Trust will now have with their adjacent regional districts for services and planning.'

In 1999, a referendum on Bowen Island supports incorporation and arrangements are made to establish an 'Island Municipality' within the Islands Trust that would

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have two of its elected councillors sitting at Trust Council. The 'preserve and protect' objective will continue to apply through reference to the Trust Policy Statement and the Islands Trust will continue to approve the Bowen OCP but, if rejected, an appeal can be made to the Minister (an option not available to local trust committees).

### **Scene 3: Strategic Perspectives**

It's the new millennium. In March 2000, a 'Strategic Perspectives Study' is prepared by consultant Diane Butler for the Islands Trust and the Ministry, based on interviews with 46 individuals and 5 groups with an understanding of the Islands Trust. As such, the Study relies heavily on 'what was heard' during the interviews.

The Final Report notes that, 'Over the past quarter century, the Islands Trust has evolved and adapted to meet changing circumstances' and the study is seen as another step in 'the continuous process of planning for the future of the Trust Area.' It is intended to provide a greater understanding of the Trust's strengths and weaknesses, an appreciation for future trends facing the Trust and identify potential future options.

The Study recommends a three-stage approach: carry out those actions that are within the trust's existing authority; carry out actions requiring cooperation from other jurisdictions, including legislative amendments; and conduct a governance study.

Trustees see this as an opportunity to renew requests for legislative changes to strengthen the Trust's authority to achieve its mandate and to better articulate the provincial interest in the Trust area. Trust and Ministry staff get together in June, 2000 to initiate a Trust Area Governance Review.

Perhaps prompted by this strategic review of the Islands Trust but more likely by the continuing extensive logging occurring on the islands (most recently on Salt Spring and Denman), over two hundred Islanders attend a

protest rally on the steps of the BC Legislature. They press the provincial government to 'Unchain the Trust' by extending its authority to stop industrial logging in the Gulf Islands—but they are without success.

And so the curtain falls with the Trust once again under scrutiny while a Liberal government is about to take over.

*The print version of 'The Islands Trust Story' is available at: Salt Spring Books, Volume Two Book Store, Black Sheep Books, and Watermark Books on Salt Spring Island; Saturna General Store; Galiano Island Books; Talisman Books & Gallery on Pender Island; Miners Bay Books on Mayne Island; Abraxas Books & Gifts on Denman Island; The Island Book Shoppe on Gabriola.*