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## **Islands Trust population grows ten percent in five years**

**T**he population of the Islands Trust Area grew by 10%, while the number of private dwellings on the Islands grew by 6.5% between 2001 and 2006, according to data released March 13 by Statistics Canada.

The rate of change ranged from a 2.2% decrease in the Lasqueti Island Local Trust Area to a 48% increase in the South Pender Island Local Trust Area. The greatest numerical increases in population were experienced in the Gabriola and Salt Spring Island Local Trust Areas and on Bowen Island. These three Island communities also showed the greatest increases in the number of dwelling units.

'Overall, the Trust Area's rate of population growth was double the Canadian rate of 5.4% and the similar provincial growth rate of 5.3%,' said Kim Benson, chair of Islands Trust Council.

Statistics indicate that the Gulf Islands are bucking the national trend towards urbanization; Stats Can reported that on average, Canada's rural areas and small towns had grown by only 1%. (Fewer than 20% of Canadians lived in small towns and rural areas in 2006.)

### **Owner-Occupiers**

'This year the Census has included a new category—private

dwellings occupied by residents—which will be of interest in many of our communities,' said Benson. 'Because this is the first time the Census has included this category, we can't compare it with previous years, but it is a trend we will watch with interest. There has been a concern on some Islands about a decline in resident ownership of dwellings. In 2006, the rate of dwelling unit occupancy by residents ranged from 83% on Salt Spring Island, to less than 15% on Gambier Island.

'We will understand more about the reasons for these changes once the demographic data are released in July, showing the distribution of age groups on the Islands. We are also looking forward to additional future releases of Census information about housing affordability, mobility, and employment.'

The Islands Trust contracts with Statistics Canada to provide it with customized data for each of the Local Trust Areas and Island municipalities in the Islands Trust Area. The data are useful for a wide range of community planning purposes. Trends can be compared to those in British Columbia and Canada as a whole by viewing the Statistics Canada report 'Portrait of the Canadian Population in 2006'.

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