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Shipping safety concerns Islands Trust

Meeting on Saturna Island on Wednesday June 16, Islands Trust Council spent much of the day on an extensive information session about deep-sea shipping in and around the Islands.

Plumper Sound

Plumper Sound, between the Penders, Mayne, and Saturna Islands, is designated as an auxiliary anchorage for Vancouver Harbour, and there had been recent incidents involving ships dragging their anchors, particularly in southeast gales. Jim Lawson, Regional Director of Transport Canada, indicated that he was aware



EMPTY CAR-CARRIER STALLED BY THE RECESSION WAITS OUT WINTER 2009 IN PLUMPER SOUND.

of the problem, and that it was not intended that Plumper Sound be used as a long term anchorage (a car-carrier is reported to have spent several months there in 2009.) It seemed possible that, with climate change, more severe gales were occurring than previously. A Marine Advisory will be issued about anchoring in Plumper Sound in the winter.

Oil Tankers

Oonagh O'Connor, marine shipping safety advocate, set the stage for a most informative session by explaining that of the 400,000 vessel movements per day on BC's Pacific Coast, tankers accounted for only 1%. Most concern, however, was expressed about the increase in tanker

traffic past the Southern Gulf Islands from the Kinder Morgan Westridge terminal in Burnaby. The terminal is the western end of the former Trans-Mountain pipeline, built in the '50s, which transported Alberta oil to four refineries in the lower mainland and just across the US border.

Only one of those refineries is still in operation, and Kinder Morgan has started to use the pipeline to transport tar-sands oil for export, initially to westcoast US ports, but potentially to China and other Asian markets. With this in mind, the company has recently increased the capacity of the pipeline to 300,000 barrels per day (bpd) and tanker traffic has grown from 34 tankers in 2007 to 65 in 2009, and an anticipated 104 in 2010.

Tanker Restrictions

It is clear from the Second Narrows restrictions (see BOX, below, right) that exceptional precautions are being taken for oil tanker traffic from the Kinder Morgan Westridge terminal, and that similar care is necessary in their passage through the Gulf Islands and out to Juan de Fuca Strait. (Please refer to the article 'Is shipping tar sands oil from Kitimat wise?' in the March 4, 2010 edition of *Island Tides*, available as a reprint through www.islandtides.com, 'Energy' archive.) With Kinder Morgan's future plans to increase tanker traffic to as much as one each day, Islands Trustees' concerns appear to be justified.

What If There Were A Spill?

Marine Consultant Fred Fellerman spoke to trustees about oil spill response in the Strait of Georgia-Puget Sound-Juan de Fuca Strait area. This includes not only Vancouver tanker movements, but also inbound tankers from Alaska to BP's Cherry Point refinery near Bellingham. Fellerman said that the risk of an accident has been reduced by the use of tug escorts, but there is a 'cost factor'.

A large tug is maintained at Neah Bay, at the mouth of

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the Strait of Juan de Fuca, to assist any ship that gets into trouble in the outer strait.

Graham Knox, Manager of Environmental Emergencies with the BC Ministry of the Environment, said that the cleanup of spills was primarily the responsibility of the spiller, supervised by the ministry. In Vancouver Harbour and in the southern Gulf Islands, the Chamber of Shipping ensures that each deep-sea vessel transiting the area has an oil spill reponse contract—a form of insurance. Burrard Clean, the spill clean-up contractor for Vancouver Harbour, carries on a continuous training program, and is expanding to cover growing traffic. A recent incident on Snake Island (off Nanaimo) showed a 85 minute response time from their Vancouver base. But oil spill response beyond the Islands is the responsibility of the Coast Guard.

However, the industry says that recovery of only 15% of a spill is considered a successful clean-up. The BC coast has no real capacity to use dispersants, and cannot do on-site oil burning.

Fellerman remarked that the original estimates of any spill are invariably wrong.

Cutting Back On Advice

The Federal Government has so far not taken up an invitation to join in a co-operative oil spill response team. Additionally, the Pacific Regional Advisory Council on Oil Spill Response—formed to advise the federal Minister of Transport following the *Exxon Valdez* calamity in 1989—has recently had its budget cut and can now hold only two half-day meetings per year. It has apparently been superseded by a new industry-based Canadian Marine Advisory Council.

Pilots

Inbound and outbound takers are required to have pilots, but the number of pilots is decreasing and their average age is increasing. On a simulator in Seattle, the Pacific Pilotage Authority has been carrying out training of pilots to work with skippers of escort tugs in the control of tankers. Larger vessels require two pilots. (See related article on modern tugs, page 10.)

To become a pilot you must have ten years' experience as a master, followed by at least seven years of 'on the job' training. The authority has requested federal funding for a simulator to be installed in North Vancouver.

Island Trust Resolution

Following the highly informative session, Island Trust Council passed the following resolution:

That the Islands Trust Council request the Executive Committee and the Trust Programs Committee to develop, implement and report on an advocacy program to address shipping safety issues in the Trust Area.

That the Islands Trust Council request the Executive Committee to advocate for a shipping advisory to improve the safety of all designated anchorages in the Trust Area.

The Islands Trust meeting was just slightly ahead of the City of Vancouver. Mayor Robertson, citing concerns about increasing tanker traffic through the port, called a special council meeting for July 5. ✍

Tanker Restrictions for Second Narrows

To date, tankers which call at Kinder Morgan's Westridge terminal cannot take on maximum loads, due to depth and clearance restrictions at Second Narrows. The size of tanker presently used is termed 'Aframax', up to 80,000 deadweight tons (dwt), some 245 metres long with a beam of 34m, with a maximum load of 700,000 barrels of oil. The loaded draft of these ships is nominally as much as 20m, but the maximum permitted vessel draft through Second Narrows at high tide is only 12.5m, so they can never be fully loaded.

However, over the last five years, the Port of Metro Vancouver has been planning dredging and regulations to increase the maximum ship capacity of both Second and First Narrows, to match increases in the pipeline capacity.

Dredging will not only affect ship loading, but also tidal currents. Current dredging plans, according to Harbour Master Yoss LeClerc, are to permit 13.5m draft by March 2011, and would eventually permit 15m draft. LeClerc says that his objective is eventually to accommodate Suezmax class tankers, about twice the capacity of Aframax.

However, Second Narrows has a maximum horizontal clearance of some 137m between the piers of the vertical lift section of the railway bridge, and the maximum vertical clearance of the Ironworkers Memorial road bridge is 44m, over a width of 110m. This does not leave a lot of clearance, particularly considering additional room that may be required by escorting tugs for larger tankers.

Passage of tankers is permitted only at slack water in daylight, at a maximum speed of 6 knots. The latest instructions require two tugs for both First and Second Narrows. For large tankers, the double tug escort continues to Race Rocks.

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