

Reprint **Island Tides**

Visit www.islandtides.com for more interesting articles on other BC, national & international topics

Reprint from Volume 26 Number 14

July 24, 2014

Trust Council On Saturna - Priscilla Ewbank

Salish Sea Islands' governance has a unique-in-Canada component in the Islands Trust which regulates land use, in the broadest sense, for a good deal of the Salish Sea—on 13 larger islands and about 450 smaller islands.

The Islands Trust Area contains the at-risk Coastal Douglas Fir ecosystem. As well as being thrillingly beautiful, our area is drier (rain shadow) and milder than most surrounding lands. This area has always attracted humans, and the Islands Trust's challenging task is to maintain a balance between increasing human use and the longterm survival of endangered ecosystems.

This was all apparent at Islands Trust Council's quarterly meeting, held on Saturna on June 18 and 19. I was impressed by the civil level of governance and the effectiveness of the discussions and decisions.

Saanich-Gulf Islands MP Elizabeth May reported in her Summer 2014 Newsletter that her 'zero tolerance for heckling' when she is speaking in the House of Commons had met with some success. 'However, overall, I have not been able to improve the general conduct and level of respectful discourse in the House,' she says.

Well, those MP's should attend the next meeting of the Island's Trust Council! Under the capable, quick-thinking, and respectful leadership of Sheila Malcolmson, and the active participation of twenty-five other trustees and Islands Trust staff, the discourse is salient, to the point, and civil.

Real decisions are made with full participation. The council's energies and focus is on issues and discourse rather than obfuscation and derision. Points of order are adhered to but are subordinated to the content of the discussion.

Trust Council meets three times a year on a different island hosted by the local trustees, so it takes about five years for Trust Council to meet on your island again. The host island trustees' job is to showcase their island: setting up tours and recruiting presenters that do us proud. Our community presentations included our Saturna Island Marine Research and Education Society with Maureen Welton, which was stellar.

On the first evening, the island hosts a dinner for Trust Council and its past trustees. Overseas trustees are lodged in various accommodations and become familiar with different folks and parts of the host island. Though islands share similar issues, each Island has a different settlement pattern and

timelines, which result in different institutions, governance, cultural features, and traditions.

Everyone works hard at the meetings. Trustees have to be conversant with lots of material, listen well and be ready to present options and points of discussion for the whole body. At breaks, there are little confabs, and globs of trustees and staff get together to continue to thrash out details and to share larger islands-wide concerns.

This process of rotating meetings is fascinating. It reminds me a bit of the Elizabethan court; Queen Elizabeth I is supposed to have taken her entire court on the road to see the countryside, be fed by their hosts, and govern publicly. However the luxury, pomp and imperiousness of a royal court is nowhere in sight. At the meeting, digital aids, microphones, screens and cord spaghetti has replaced thrones and platforms. Two-thirds of the trustees are using computers and about a third refer to written binders.

All this extraordinary organization is the work of Executive Coordinator Marie Smith who is responsible for Trust Council and Trust Executive Committee meetings.

For many, many years, she has organized each Trust Council meeting: space, food, accommodation, local tours, AV systems, ferries, local transportation, and especially, those huge agenda binders with all the details.

I was broadly informed by this meeting. Besides all its committees' work—executive, finance planning, local planning, and programs—Trust Council looks at wider issues—such as ferries, fisheries, and tankers—that come before it and considers new information, direction and initiatives.

A biologist presented a great Coastal Douglas Fir Ecosystem talk illustrating what the Islands Trust is set up to protect. Because of previous and on-going studies, he documented significant changes brought about by increased populations of cowbirds, Canada geese and deer on the ecology.

Delegations and presentations informed attendees about the recent focus for LNG, oil tanker traffic and industrial-scale marine farming in the Trust Area.

Because of the industrial geoduck fishery on Denman Island, the Denman Island Trustees shared their concerns about the regulatory process, enforcement and creation of permits. They explained that the expansion of the Comox Airport allowed for

© Island Tides Publishing Ltd. This article may be reproduced with the following attribution, in its entirety, and notification to Island Tides Publishing Ltd.

'This article was published (July 24, 2014) in 'Island Tides', an independent, regional newspaper distributing on the Canadian Gulf Islands, on Vancouver Island and, via the internet, worldwide.'

Island Tides Publishing Ltd, Box 55, Pender Island, BC V0N 2M0 • 1-250-216-2267 • islandtides@islandtides.com • www.islandtides.com

easy, quick delivery to Asian Markets. Baynes Sound changed from Mom and Pop aquacultural businesses to industrial-scale ones.

To inform this discussion, there was an astounding Skype conversation with a woman from Fisheries and Oceans Canada Aquaculture Resource Management. After greetings and salutations, she read out her powerpoint presentation—all the slides—word for word. A short time into it, people began to get up, get coffee, and do stretching exercises, checking in every screen or two. The ensuing question and answer session was a reminder of the drivel that emanates from federal and provincial talking heads. Trustees asked pointed questions; the ‘answers’ were baffling and soaked up valuable time.

There were no questions from the presenter: such as ‘What is your experience with this process we developed, is this working for you?’ The final question was from a Bowen Island Trustee: Ok, you have issued this many fin-fish permits, this many aquaculture... (reading from their printed fisheries document)... the total adding up to hundreds of permits issued. ‘Have you ever rejected an application?’ All eyes in the room opened wide. Pause ... then the voice said, ‘Yes, one’... long disembodied voice explanation... ‘Why did you reject the one application?’... ‘I can’t remember. We will get back to you.’

San Juan Participants

For many years the two councillors from the American San Juan Islands, just across the border, have attended. They live just a

few miles south of Saturna. At each meeting, they give council an update on their local issues and on mutual concerns.

They stated that they love coming up to the Gulf Islands, they feel at home in our island community and that the discussions and issues that the Islands Trust deals with are just like theirs. In a humourous vein, they disclosed that they hear from Eastern Washington about islanders that dip their toes in Puget Sound and sop up tons of money with useless expensive ferries!

On a more serious note, they are working with the Islands Trust in presenting papers in the Kinder Morgan pipeline expansion hearings. Trust Council was surprised to hear about a proposal for an LNG plant in South Puget Sound and the San Juan councillors were dismayed to hear about the proposal for Howe Sound.

The Public Delegations

Delegations from the public were marvelous. You get a broad view of issues that face islands, from the particular to the wider, and you meet some of the people who are have informed themselves and are working hard to find options and make changes.

The 2014 Community Stewardship Awards were announced, remind us of how powerful and inspired we Islanders are. All the nominees deserved the tribute! As do many other islanders endeavouring for the Salish Sea.

Trust Council’s rotating meetings are an inspiring method of governance. ☞