

# Undemocratic Process of Islands Trust Draft Policy Update

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This letter is to express my dismay at the lack of public involvement allowed

in the process of Islands Trust developing a new Draft Policy Statement which in its final format will affect the lives of all residents in the region in their charge.

They have created a document with some very dramatic statements and largely sprung it on the communities with negligible input, and indeed even knowledge, on the part of the public.

Most residents of the subject Islands have stayed, or relocated to, not out of necessity but by preference for what we have here and likewise they appreciate the 'Preserve and Protect' mandate of Islands Trust but they also realize the world cannot freeze in time and people must make a living and pay for the privilege.

Salt Spring, where I reside, is a vibrant community of accomplished and capable people with a cooperative community fabric and, although there are independent thinkers, they consensually love their island and do not appreciate having bylaw bomb proposals dropped on them by what appears to be a committee with unclear motives and rationale and certainly extremely poor community communication skills to those they theoretically represent.

At a recent public gathering here in the Park, hosted by ASK SALTSPRING, trustee Laura Patrick fielded questions from the community who were strongly concerned over proposals they had recently read in the Draft Policy of June 15 and the apparent lack of public consultation in constructing such objectives. Ms Patrick tried to deflect the criticism by stating the draft had already been amended and the public would get ample opportunity to comment officially. She stressed that Salt Spring had 'a large roar at the table' and the public concerns would be heard and yet when asked if she had the most recent amendment, with which to enlighten the audience, she responded that she had not been sent a copy. Not what one might expect for an island with a lot of clout or 'big roar' as she had stated.

Also, when asked about the form of the public input which would be sought on first reading on July 8<sup>th</sup> of this draft containing the dramatic updates, she advised that on the day prior there would be a two-hour meeting by zoom to hear from all concerned parties. It then became evident that this meeting was for all the islands under the Trust's mandate and for all concerned parties. By doing simple math one sees meaningful input is unlikely. Therefore, it

would be unlikely that the Trust would receive any viewpoints/arguments substantial enough to change their dramatic draft and the first reading would pass and proceed to second reading.

From listening to my extensive personal network on Salt Spring, which ranges from old to mid timers, they appreciate the origins of the Islands Trust and its mandate but feel the Trust over the past years has been gradually losing touch with their constituents, the residents, and is exhibiting a bureaucratic arrogance due to the apparent lack of oversight of its organization and therefore nurturing the negative consequences of empowerment.

The Trust has taken a broad brush affecting the lives of a great cross section of residents.

The abolition of new docks, a capital project that already goes through such a comprehensive approval process, affects contractors as well as coastal land holders..... will the latter receive a significant reduction in property taxes? The rationale provided by trustee Peter Grove at the ASK SALTSPRING hosted meeting was they wanted to prevent Salt Spring from becoming another Piers Island near Swartz Bay. This was a ludicrous response because Salt Spring would never develop like Piers, a very small island in totally protected waters divided into small waterfront lots with no access other than by small boat. This is not Salt Spring.

The prohibition of desalination initiatives. In the case of Salt Spring, we have an island that is struggling for water because of porous geology and a lack of sufficient reservoirs to capture winter rains. Desalination is a technological advance that could theoretically relieve some pressure and is used worldwide. The global population is expanding, and climate change is causing excessive heat and drought in some areas. Record setting heat waves like we are presently experiencing in the Salish Sea may reduce the islands storage in aquifers limiting the present, lest future, populations access to water. Why turn your back on technology that could help reconstitute aquifers to support the island ecology as well as man?

Short Term Vacation Rentals (STVR) seem to be also a preoccupation for Islands Trust with the indication that they believe STVR's should be converted to Long Term Rentals (LTR) to help solve the rental shortage for employees on Salt Spring. The Trust therefore seems to see the Affordable

and Available Housing Issue as one that private landowners should be a large part of the solution. Therefore, bylaw officers have become very active in attempting to shut down STVR's. The Trust does not seem to understand that most STVR's are not suitable facilities for an LTR through the dark rainy months or that owners wish to have flexible occupancy so friends and family can stay when visiting the island. Closing of STVR's would provide few new LTR's. Also, many off island visitors would prefer staying in a local residence or detached cottage in order to meet the people. This preference is not particular to Salt Spring but the world. The additional summer income of STVR's is welcome to many homeowners to help defray rising costs including property taxes.

One gets the distinct impression that Islands Trust is opposed to tourism on Salt Spring and do not seem to understand that this industry contributes to the viability of many service businesses, local artisans, and home-based services. Tourism is a summer injection that helps give the island its strength through the long winter months. Yes, they create a little more congestion for a couple of months and have a few more showers but they appreciate the fabric and specialness of Salt Spring as it is and having an elite economic demographic who do not need to augment their incomes in various ways is not what they are looking for. Gentle seasonal tourism is healthy for the islands economically and culturally, and private landowners should not be harassed by Islands Trust bylaw officers for petty infractions in the nature of their unique offering unless it can be demonstrated that there is significant counter-productiveness to the Preserve and Protect mandate. ELIMINATING STVR'S WILL NOT BE THE LTR SOLUTION.

On the Forestry front I believe there is strong concern when it comes to clear-cut logging on private land but the answer to controlling this surely cannot be that one needs a permit to cut each and every tree on the island..... this would seem impractical.... and there must be a better way to manage and protect the Coastal Douglas Fir Ecosystem.

Without going into all the substantial incursions of the Draft Policy into the lives of the islands people, the above will serve as an example of the impacts and questioning of rationale, but there are similar effects in areas like agriculture etc which need bona fide discussion with potentially affected groups.

In summary, the reasonable property rights of many will be affected and legitimate opportunities for many existing businesses minimized if the existing draft is not seriously altered. There was little to no public consultation and there is limited opportunity for proper consultation and democratic feedback going forward unless the process is substantially delayed and preferably restarted with proper consultation prior to a draft document being presented.

I acknowledge that there is a process to follow, and that first reading is only the first of several. But the extremity of these proposed changes is alarming. Please postpone the first reading of the draft Policy Statement until the fall of 2021 to allow proper and democratic public consultation, not on the tail end of Covid restrictions mandating zoom, as opposed to 'live public', and during the heat of the summer when many people can be away or busy with their business etc.

In the interim and in the spirit of Preserve and Protect, in a manner that does not impact peoples lives in negative ways and would garner full support from islanders, the Trust should be redeploing its' By Law officers to combat the highly invasive Scottish Broom that is not only forcing out endemic species but is a huge fire hazard for the islands forests and while they are at it come up with a way to control deer populations that in the absence of natural predators are also altering the natural landscape.

Jim Allan  
Resident of Salt Spring Island