



## **SOUTHERN GULF ISLANDS FORUM**

### **Meeting Notes from Friday, December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2024 – 1:00pm – 2:30pm**

#### **Attendees**

##### Members:

1. Elizabeth May, MP (Saanich-Gulf Islands)
2. Rob Botterell, MLA (Saanich North and the Islands)
3. Timothy Peterson, Islands Trust Vice-Chair, Islands Trustee (Lasqueti Island)
4. David Maude, Islands Trust Vice-Chair, Islands Trustee (Mayne Island)
5. Laura Patrick, Islands Trustee (Salt Spring Island)

##### Staff:

6. Helena Murray-Hill (Office of Elizabeth May, MP)
7. Patricia Pearson (Office of MLA Rob Botterell)
8. Theresa Coles (Office of MLA Rob Botterell)

#### **Welcome**

MP May welcomed the attendees and gave a land acknowledgement. Members and staff were invited to introduce themselves.

#### *Brief introduction regarding the purpose of the SGI forum:*

- Started in 2021 in response to the needs of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Former MLA Adam Olsen's passion project. MP May would like to keep it running through the transition from Adam Olsen to MLA Rob Botterell.
- A way for elected representatives to break out of their "jurisdictional silos".
- Potentially the only forum of its kind in Canada.

- The forum meets once a month, with 10 fully virtual meetings and 2 hybrid (in-person with an online option) half-day meetings per year.

#### *Discussion of next meeting*

- To be hosted by MP May's office.
- Half-day hybrid meeting with provided lunch for in-person attendees.
- January 17<sup>th</sup> was proposed as a date, but this date did not work for MLA Botterell, and MP May felt it was important that he be present.
- Discussion of other possible dates, but nothing was decided.

#### *Other administrative business*

- Anything the forum has advocated for in the form of a letter should be uploaded to the Forum website.
- Responses to letters sent jointly by members of the group should be upload to the website as well.

**Action item** – *Helena Murray-Hill (MP May's Office) and Patricia Pearson (MLA Botterell's Office) will coordinate to make sure meeting minutes and the Joint Letter to Federal Ministers on Marine Matters are uploaded to the SGI Forum Website.*

**Action item** – *By middle of next week (December 11-12<sup>th</sup>), MP May's office will ensure meeting notes from December 6th are completed and sent to all members, and will ask all forum members for their January availability.*

#### **Discussion**

Discussion focused on providing the new MLA with updates on pending federal legislation and ongoing situations on the Gulf Islands, with particular attention paid to the Sidney Island Ecological Restoration Project.

Some key points include:

#### *Update on the Joint Letter to Federal Ministers on Marine Matters*

- Still no response, but MP May continues to push for one.

*FYI: Letter from Chief Dom Tom to Minister Anita Anand*

- Chief Don Tom of Tsartlip First Nation has written to Anita Anand, Minister of Transport, to make clear Transport Canada and the Port of Vancouver have never consulted with treaty nations regarding their use of anchorages and buoys.
- Significant failure of the Government of Canada to fulfill UNDRIP.
- Ongoing abuse of people living in the area. Pristine areas now feel like industrial zones.

*Update on Bill C-33: Strengthening the Port System and Railway Safety in Canada Act*

- Significant progress has been made in committee.
- Still has not reached 3<sup>rd</sup> reading.

*Background on the Sidney Island Ecological Restoration Project (SIERP)*

- Parks Canada project that had been going on for some years before MP May became aware. Parks Canada is not required to consult MPs.
- Coastal Conservation is the firm that won the contract (open bidding process) to eradicate an invasive species.
- Sidney Island is primarily a Strata, with most of the property owners not living on the island, so it took several attempts to get a referendum through, which passed by a very narrow margin.
- The SIERP is not a cull, but a (total) eradication of an invasive species (fallow deer).
- The goal is to allow the natural flora of the forest, including medicinal plants used by Indigenous residents of the island, to recover from over browsing.
- W̱SÁNEĆ leadership council was involved in the planning process, is in favour of the project.
- The project has attracted a lot of attention, including being brought up by MP Pierre Poilievre twice in Question Period, because of the cost, the use of helicopters to shoot deer from the air, dogs to sniff out deer, and foreign hunters from New Zealand.
- MP May has concerns the project is not being represented properly in the media as an ecosystem restoration project in a national park with full Indigenous engagement.

*SIERP: What is Currently Happening*

- During phase 1 in September/October, Coastal Conservation failed to eradicate all of the fallow deer and killed a number of native blacktail deer as well.
- Roughly two weeks ago, Parks Canada decided to pause phase 2 of the project without warning. Bad press from a video posted online of a deer caught in a net and pressure from the Minister's office were likely reasons. The Minister has not been in contact with MP May.

- Parks Canada stated it was pausing phase 2 due to concerns with animal welfare, but the SPCA has been advising, consulting, and not objected to the project.
- MP May passed a letter from Chief Don Tom of Tsartlip First Nation to the Minister which states that Parks Canada's failure to consult First Nations prior to pausing phase 2 constitutes a violation of UNDRIP.
- MP May is concerned the decision to postpone the project has made things worse. If the project is cancelled, millions of dollars will have been wasted, and it will be more difficult for other Gulf Islands to request similar eradications in the future.
- Going forward, the project will have to work to keep the Strata on board and stop offending the sovereignty of First Nations in the area.

#### *Background on Baker Beach on Salt Spring*

- Four properties not adjacent to each other have applied for crown lease referrals for beach erosion.
- Islands Trust staff received the crown referrals in August and responded without bring them to the attention of Islands Trustees. After learning about it through alternative channels, a public statement was made that Trustees were not aware nor given the opportunity to react.
- Public comments on the pending decision closed November 13<sup>th</sup>.
- The authority to approve the referrals has been delegated to staff, but if they do not approve the Trustees could be the appeal board.
- Some of the property owners requesting referrals had filed complaints years ago about a shellfish farm operated by Penelakut First Nation. Penelakut is aware of this but has yet to make a comment on the current applications.
- A petition was signed by 600 people in relation to the decision, and a meeting was held on November 14<sup>th</sup> where a presentation on the contents of the petition was given.
- Islands Trust Executive Committee has requested some involvement in the process, and are wanting to update their letter of understanding on the situation. Otherwise, for now, the Islands Trustees are at arms-length.

#### *Dissolution of BC Ferry Advisory Committees*

- A week ago, Monday, BC Ferries hosted a gathering of all FAC members (at least 100 people were in attendance) billed as a discussion of engagement surveys for work they had been doing together. Instead, BC Ferries chose to arbitrarily fire all the FAC members.
- BC Ferries gave notice the advisory committees would be shut down in May of 2025, but they have no plans to hold any meetings between now and May, and the committee chairs were not informed.

- BC Ferries has halted all community consultations and has no plan to replace them, other than looking to create something that is more representative and a better process going forward.
- The Times Colonist, Driftwood, and Vancouver Sun have all run articles on this situation.

*Discussion of a potential future meeting with the Counsellors of San Juan Island.*

- As of January 1<sup>st</sup>, there will a number of new Council members, so perhaps a meeting could be planned for a few months after to discuss trans-boarder issues.
- Parks Canada has a long-term plan to expand the Marine Conservation Area adjacent to Gulf Islands National Park. Since the San Juan Islands are designated as National Monuments in the United States, there is potential to create an international biosphere reserve.
- Canada may also learn from the Washington State legislation on Shellfish.

*Dilbit Spill Emergency Preparedness*

- MP May sent a 23-page Order Paper to several Federal Ministers asking about emergency preparedness measures, including evacuation plans, in the event of a dilbit spill.
- A response was received, but the answers to the questions were insufficient.
- MP May is working with experts at West Coast Environmental Law and Simon Fraser University to draft a second letter.

*Update on Bill C-433, the Environmental Justice Act*

- MP May's office is consulting with stakeholder groups interested in what kind of regulations may come with Bill C-443, which is now law.
- Environment Canada claims they are consulting with stakeholder groups, but several have hold MP May they have not been contacted in a while.
- Stakeholder issues include toxic dumping and waste sites near Indigenous communities, and the closing of shellfish fisheries for decades at a time without testing or reviewing whether closures were justified by science or evidence.