



May 26, 2025

Reference: 185578

The Honourable Ravi Kahlon,
Minister of Housing and Municipal Affairs,
Parliament Buildings,
Victoria, B.C. V8V 1X4
Email: HMA.Minister@gov.bc.ca

Dear Minister Kahlon,

On behalf of three major residents' groups within the Trust area, we write to thank you for your letter of April 28th to the Islands Trust Council. We also thank Ms. Marijke Edmonson for her April 17th reply to our earlier letter.

We are especially grateful for your clarity on the *Islands Trust Act's* core ecological mandate, and your forthright advice to Trust Council that in any revisions to the Trust Policy Statement and Official Community Plans the prime concern must be preservation and protection of the islands' unspoiled natural amenities, and that growth must not exceed any island's carrying capacity.

It is clear from every governance referendum held on these islands since 2000, and from the environmental focus of members elected by this riding to Ottawa and Victoria over many years, that a strong majority of Trust residents support the core purpose of the *Islands Trust Act* and wish it to be firmly upheld.

It has also become clear from recent actions of Trust Council that a vocal faction is striving to undermine this core purpose. Very few trustees openly ran for office on such a platform in 2022. Yet many have used the housing shortage as a justification for proposing policies that could unleash mass private development without guarantees of affordability.

We fully agree with your position that great care must be taken to ensure open, thoughtful and comprehensive engagement with the public and other government agencies — especially the 27 First Nations' governments within the Trust area — when altering land-use bylaws, the

Trust Policy Statement and Official Community Plans. About half of these 27 First Nations have interests on Salt Spring, and one holds a Douglas Treaty reserve there.

This Trust Council often claims that the Trust Policy Statement review is taking too long. But the main reason for this delay is the significant resistance of many current trustees to findings and recommendations in the thorough Trust Governance study released in February 2022 — a key yet unwelcome tool in their kit — which notes that the Trust "is primarily concerned with protecting the amenities and environment of the Trust Area as opposed to providing services to people" (p.10). The Vice-Chair of the Governance Committee, for example, has publicly called for the Islands Trust to be abolished.

In September 2023, Trust Council's in-camera attempt to redefine "unique amenities" as an open-ended list including infrastructure, livelihoods, housing and tourism raised such alarm that 34 distinguished former trustees

signed an open letter of protest in May 2024 (appended below). There has also been a widespread public outcry against this and other such moves in local and provincial media. Online petitions launched this spring by two of our groups have already drawn nearly 2,000 signatures: <https://www.change.org/p/defend-salt-spring-s-growth-limits> and <https://www.change.org/p/protect-the-bc-islands-trust-islands>

We gather that first reading of the new Trust Policy Statement, originally scheduled June 17th, is now put off until July 30th. Neither First Nations nor the public have yet been shown the latest draft. It seems highly unlikely that an extra six weeks will be enough time for it to be re-written in accordance with your indications and with the February 2022 governance study. Extensive further engagement is needed. Once the import of this crucial and contentious document becomes widely known, all 27 Indigenous governments will need extra capacity, legal advice and time to consider the implications fully. So will all residents of the Trust Area who deem the Trust Islands a very special place to preserve and protect.

We applaud your statement that the existing Trust Policy Statement is the touchstone for interpreting the mandate, and we ask that major changes to this and to Official Community Plans not be accepted for approval by your ministry until after the forthcoming Trust elections next year. This will allow time for consultation obligations with each of the 27 First Nations to be fulfilled, and will ensure trustees have a clear electoral mandate to guide what are major policy decisions.

The stand you have taken will of course draw opposition from those who do not support the *Islands Trust Act*. We respectfully urge you to hold fast.

Thank you again for defending the far-sighted legacy of Dave Barrett's government.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Margison, **Friends of the Gulf Islands**, info@friendsofthegulfisland.ca, 250-539-2202

Patricia Lockie, **Positively Forward**, positivelyforwardssi@gmail.com, 250-537-1116

Ronald Wright, **Keep Salt Spring Sustainable**, wvvern@telus.net, 250-537-8351

cc: Marijke Edmonson marijke.edmonson@gov.bc.ca

Rob Botterell Rob.Botterell.MLA@leg.bc.ca

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Rueben Bronee rbronee@islandstrust.bc.ca

34 former trustees and signatories of addendum below

Addendum: Letter from Former Trustees, May 2, 2024

To Executive Committee and Trust Council of the Islands Trust, copied to Municipal Affairs Minister Anne Kang.

As former Islands Trust trustees from various islands in the Trust Area, we are writing to inform you of our concerns regarding Trust Council's intention to broaden the meaning of the words 'unique amenities' in Section 3 of the Islands Trust Act (the Object). The spirit and intent of those words seem unmistakable in light of the 1986 Ministry of Municipal Affairs/Islands Trust "Position Paper; The Object of the Islands Trust: Renewing the Consensus", that specified a combination of many natural factors.

Following an in-camera meeting on September 26, 2023, it was reported that Trust Council had come to a "consensus" on how Section 3 of the Act that created the Islands Trust would (not 'should') be interpreted. What those conclusions were and how they had been agreed upon was not revealed. A silence, lasting almost four

months, followed before the "[Islands Trust Council Highlights](#)" with a link to "[Trust Council's consensus statement](#)" was officially released on January 18, 2024.

It was then that the details of Trust Council's conclusion were revealed to the general public. 'Unique amenities' were to include, "but not be limited to, housing, infrastructure, livelihoods, and tourism". How and by whom these four categories were identified and selected for inclusion is not mentioned.

Apart from consideration of legal opinions, we question the propriety of holding this discussion during an in-camera meeting. We have heard different explanations of how Council's decision was arrived at - from staff, the Executive Committee, and from trustees. These contradictory responses are problematic and confusing. There is no evidence of a motion being passed by Council which would provide a record of Trust Council's approval for the addition of these items under the umbrella of 'unique amenities', or how individual trustees voted. It would have been helpful knowing whether this "consensus" was reached by referring to the 1986 Ministry of Municipal Affairs/Islands Trust "[Position Paper; The Object of the Islands Trust: Renewing the Consensus](#)" and the 2021 "[Discussion Paper: The Islands Trust Object: Past, Present and Future](#)".

These additional categories, now identified as 'unique amenities', are not unique to the Trust Area. Further, housing, infrastructure, livelihoods, and tourism are services provided by regional districts and government agencies. More alarming, this expansion and interpretation of 'unique amenities' has the potential of influencing or compromising environmental policies. The Trust is limited to regulating land use in order to preserve and protect the natural environment and rural character of the Trust Area for all residents of BC, a duty specific to its intended purpose and function as a "trust".

How will this new interpretation of 'unique amenities' influence Trust Council as it embarks upon a review of the Trust Policy Statement? Will this decision result in environmental policies being compromised or excluded to facilitate development?

Pertinent and fundamental questions have been raised by numerous individuals and groups regarding both the process and the conclusions of that process over the course of the past six months and, as of this date, none have been addressed by the Chair of the Islands Trust Council.

We believe the credibility of the Islands Trust's promise of a transparent and open public process has been hurt by the manner in which this decision was reached, the lack of a rationale for this decision, and the lack of information provided.

We ask, therefore, that the Chair make a public statement with full disclosure of why the interpretation was not made in an open meeting, how a "consensus", unanimous or not, was arrived at, the reasoning used to arrive at this interpretation of the words 'unique amenities' and how this interpretation will influence the Trust Policy Statement review.

Sincerely,

Nerys Poole, 2008-2011 (Bowen Island)

John Rich, 1976-1984 (Bowen Island)

Kim Benson 1993-2008 (Gambier Island)

Harlene Holm, 1978-1984 (Denman Island)

Roxanna Mandryk 1992-1996 (Denman Island)

David Critchley 2014-2022 (Denman Island)

Deb Ferens 2011-2014 (Gabriola Island)

Gisele Rudischer 1996 to 2008, 2011-2014 (Gabriola Island)

Kees Langereis 2018-2022 (Gabriola Island)

Debbie Holmes 1996-99, 1999-2002 (Galiano Island)

Tahirah Rockafella 2018-2022 (Galiano Island)

Sheila Anderson 2002-2005 (Galiano Island)

Sandy Pottle 2008-2018 (Galiano Island)

Tony Law 1996-2005, 2007-2018 (Hornby Island)

Barry Kurland 1986-1990 (Lasqueti Island)

Peter Johnston 2011-2015, 2018-2022 (Lasqueti Island)

Tom Weinerth 1999-2002 (Lasqueti Island)

Jen Gobby 2008-2011 (Lasqueti Island)

John Barre 1982-1986 (Lasqueti Island)

George Ravenscroft 1996-1999 (North Pender Island)

Ben McConchie 2018-2022 (North Pender Island)

Christine Torgrimson 2008-2011 (Salt Spring Island)

Peter Lamb 2005-2008 (Salt Spring Island)

David Borrowman 1996-2002 (Salt Spring Island)

Elaine Jacobsen 1986-1996 (South Pender Island)

David Greer 2008-2011 (South Pender Island)

Wendy Scholefield 2014-2018 (South Pender Island)

Wendy Munroe 1984-1988 (South Pender Island)

John Rumble 1996-2000 (South Pender Island)

Cameron Thorn 2018-2022 (South Pender Island)

Bruce McConchie 2014-2018 (South Pender Island)

Liz Montague 2011-2014 (South Pender Island)

Steve Wright 1982-1990, 1996-2000, 2018-2022 (South Pender Island)

Doug Fenton 2018-2022 (Thetis Island)