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December 7, 2010

File Number: PG/05

The Honourable Murray Coell
Minister of Environment
PO Box 9047 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria BC V8W 9E2

Dear Minister Coell:

Re: Follow up on topics raised at UBCM 2010 Convention

Congratulations on your recent appointment as the Minister of Environment. We appreciate the support you have consistently shown for the Islands Trust mandate to preserve and protect the delicate environment in and around the Gulf Islands. We look forward to working with you and your staff on the issues we raised with your predecessor at the recent Union of British Columbia Municipalities 2010 Convention in Whistler and on other issues important to the Islands Trust.

Priority issues that we look forward to working with you on include:

1. The National Marine Conservation Area in the Southern Strait of Georgia;
2. Derelict and abandoned vessels, barges and docks;
3. British Columbia's oil spill preparedness, planning, response and recovery; and
4. Water Act Modernization – Gulf Islands as a priority area for regulation.

1. National Marine Conservation Area in the Southern Strait of Georgia

I so appreciate your support for creating a National Marine Conservation Area in the Southern Strait of Georgia. To protect the rich ecosystems in the Southern Strait of Georgia, we need a large, ecologically-zoned National Marine Conservation Area Reserve that reaches from the southern end of Haro Strait up to and including Gabriola Passage. We encourage you to approve this project; and take advantage of the International Marine Congress in Victoria in May 2011 so that you and the Premier can announce major progress towards that goal. When it is convenient, the Islands Trust Executive Committee would like to meet with you to discuss adoption of the Southern Strait of Georgia/Salish Sea National Marine Conservation Area.

2. Derelict and Abandoned Vessels, Barges and Docks

As you know, the issue of abandoned and derelict vessels, barges and docks has been a high priority for the Islands Trust for many years. The serious safety and environmental contamination risks and the visual pollution posed by the growing number of these vessels spurred the Islands Trust and other coastal communities to propose solutions at the 2010 Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM) convention this fall. Thank for you attending our meeting at UBCM with the Honourable Pat Bell. We are now working with Minister Thomson's staff and the Association of Vancouver Island Coastal Communities. We appreciate that the Province of British Columbia is showing leadership on this issue and hope we can count on your support for efforts to develop sustainable, workable solutions.

3. Oil spill preparedness, planning, response and recovery

We hope you will give priority to oil spill preparedness, planning, response and recovery in British Columbia. The Islands Trust is gravely concerned about the oil spill risks posed by shipping traffic. Last November, the Salish Sea avoided a catastrophic spill when the large fuel tanks of the bulk carrier Hebei Lion did not break open after it grounded on the rocks in Plumper Sound, between Saturna and North Pender Islands. Had the

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worst occurred, and millions of litres of bunker fuel spilled from its tanks, British Columbia would not have been ready to respond. The harm to the ecology, livability and economy of the Salish Sea region could have been devastating. We understand that the province is still not ready to respond to a major oil spill, despite the province's desire to increase marine shipping. We believe that the safety net should rise with the risk and this has not been occurring.

British Columbia's underinvestment in this area was recently highlighted in the media, comparing BC's environmental emergency staff of 13 and budget of \$2.5 million with Washington State's 78 staff and budget of \$29.1 million. Please make us proud to be British Columbians by taking responsibility for our fair share of the risk management for this globally important issue.

We see a pressing need for an expanded spill response program and believe that the shipping industry should help pay for the costs of oil and hazardous material spill preparedness, planning, response and recovery in British Columbia. We were encouraged to hear Minister Barry Penner say at the 2010 UBCM Convention that he supports additional measures to deal with increased traffic, based on user-pay.

We strongly encourage you to seek and invest additional resources for oil spill planning and response during your next cycle of budget preparations. The Hebei Lion incident offered us all an opportunity to re-consider the terrible consequences of an oil spill in this beautiful and ecologically important region. We must all learn from this lucky escape from disaster.

4. Water Act Modernization – Gulf Islands as a Priority Area for regulation

The recent report from the Office of the Auditor General of British Columbia, "An Audit of the Management of Groundwater Resources in British Columbia," states that groundwater "is a precious resource that can be all too easily depleted or contaminated, and needs to be protected for both current and future generations" and that the "government is not yet a good steward of this treasure." We were pleased to read that the Ministry of Environment has accepted the report's recommendations and we look forward to seeing improvements in groundwater protection and management.

We also look forward to seeing the results of the Water Act Modernization consultation process. In 2008, we were encouraged by the identification of the Gulf Islands as a priority area for the regulation of groundwater use in the ministry's Living Water Smart Plan. However, we continue to wait for a regulatory response to the urgent surface and groundwater shortages facing the Islands Trust Area. We hope our staff's submission to the Water Act Modernization consultation process will help in developing such regulations. We suggested that the Ministry of Environment's first priority be the definition of groundwater allocation and groundwater extraction "thresholds" based on the special characteristics of our islands. We also provided recommendations on: the interrelationship of surface water and groundwater; bulk water extraction; saltwater intrusion; hydrofracturing; and water conservation.

Should your staff wish to follow-up with Islands Trust on any of the above topics, our staff contact is Lisa Dunn, Director, Trust Area Services. She can be reached at ldunn@islandstrust.bc.ca.

We're so pleased you are in this new role, and look forward to on-going cooperation with you and your ministry on these important and vital ecological issues.

Sincerely,



Sheila Malcolmson
Chair, Islands Trust Council

pc: Islands Trust Executive Committee
Islands Trust website