

Creative, Headstrong and Driven

by Lynn Lee

Here I sit in my office, Ani deFranco sings about a goldfish and his castle that is a surprise every time, and I wonder at the irony of how trying to conserve nature requires so much time inside. Beyond my small window, the spruce trees sway to the rhythm of a southeaster and the alders surrender their leaves to its tempestuous breath. Further afield, the ocean surface beats to the rhythm of the storm. All appears to be well on this autumn day.

Yet below the surface, a crisis screams into the southeast wind. In my native Chinese language, the character for “crisis” stems from the characters for “danger” and “opportunity” – recognition of a turning point.

In a May 2002 workshop in Tlell, people of the Haida Gwaii marine community gathered with marine conservationist Elliott Norse to talk about this crisis. Discourse brewed around some heady marine issues facing us as Islanders who want to restore and maintain a vibrant and diverse marine culture. Amidst discussions from herring to sport fishing lodges to marine protected areas, the message was clear: A community-driven Marine Strategy for the waters around the Islands was needed and needed now.

A Haida Gwaii/QCI Marine Strategy. What does that mean and how does it fit into the web of marine planning? To start, we need to look at who’s in charge of what. On the local front, there’s the Council of the Haida Nation (CHN) who has laid title over the land, sea and air around Haida Gwaii/QCI – That would include the waters and seabed around us. Then there’s the Province of British Columbia claiming mineral title and the seabed of inshore waters whose boundaries are defined by joining headland to headland along the coast. Although this seems like a straightforward description, the lines defining inshore and offshore waters are not very clear. Finally, there are numerous federal government departments with jurisdiction over the water itself (inshore and offshore), fisheries resources and fish habitat, ocean ecosystem health, migratory bird habitat, species at risk, the seabed of offshore waters and marine transportation.

Next, let’s have a look at what marine planning processes are currently in place or on the horizon? The CHN and the Province have initiated a co-managed Land Use Planning Process (LUPP). Although the LUPP only considers values and issues above the high tide line, a similarly co-managed marine planning process is anticipated within the next year and a half. This marine process would likely include those values below the high tide line currently under provincial jurisdiction, including foreshore leases for developments such as shellfish farming, log dump and booming sites and fishing lodge sites. Perhaps the federal government will also be involved, considering values under their authority. Already, marine mapping is taking place as part of the Coast Information Team work through the Province, in anticipation of marine planning for Haida Gwaii/QCI, the North Coast and the Central Coast.

Through Turning Point, the Haida Nation along with other coastal First Nations from the Central and North Coasts are poised to embark on a marine planning process with Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) through the Oceans Act. And also through the Oceans Act, the Haida are working with DFO, industry and conservation groups to establish the proposed Bowie Seamount Marine Protected Area.

With the recently passed National Marine Conservation Areas (NMCA) Act, a planning process to establish the proposed Gwaii Haanas NMCA reserve in South Moresby is imminent. A co-management agreement mirroring the Gwaii Haanas National Park and Haida Heritage Site Archipelago Management Board is expected. Cooperation between federal agencies Parks Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada and Transport Canada would also be required, in addition to meaningful consultation with local communities and interest groups to define an effective ecosystem-based management plan for the area.

Recent articles in the local paper seem to indicate movement forward for the proposed Gwaii Haanas NMCA reserve. The boundaries of the Gwaii Haanas Marine Area were drawn and a promise towards its establishment made 15 years ago with the signing of the Gwaii Haanas Agreement. The oil companies relinquished their mineral rights within the boundaries in 1997. The Province agreed to relinquish any rights that it might have on the seabed within the boundaries for the establishment of the NMCA reserve. The NMCA Act was passed through parliament in June 2002. And most recently, on October 2, 2003, a joint federal-provincial announcement in Vancouver named the Gwaii Haanas NMCA reserve as one of three sites (2 NMCAs and 1 National Park) of high priority for establishment in BC. Amongst all three sites, \$65 million was promised to be spent.

All this sounds very positive but the reality of the situation is that progress over the past 15 years has been glacially slow and much work remains to be done. The CHN and federal government have not agreed on a co-management arrangement. Different federal departments, particularly DFO and Parks Canada, have not internally defined a working relationship around NMCAs. And despite government promises of money and imminent public consultation about Gwaii Haanas, committed dollars remain elusive. Add to this a general public distrust of government and strong vested business interests in fisheries resources, and the soup gets pretty thick.

Then add the eclectic local community directly linked in social, economic and research activities dependent on the enduring ecological health of the Haida Gwaii/QCI marine area. The too-numerous-to-list conservation and stewardship groups based on the Islands conduct and support research and outreach activities that broaden our collective understanding of the natural world around us. Other groups focus their work on salmon, salmon enhancement and habitat, and salmon fisheries. A Heritage Tourism Strategy defines our perspective on how we as Islanders relate to our environment, marine and terrestrial. There are subsistence, recreational and commercial fisher people; fishery license holders; tourism operators; shellfish aquaculturists; fish processors; sportsfishing guides; sportsfishing lodges; local governments and people who appreciate the ocean simply because it is. All these perspectives and more are the patchwork quilt that is our Islands marine community.

So in a convoluted way, we wind up back at a Haida Gwaii/QCI Marine Strategy – community and conservation driven. There are many outside powers that have and continue to define how and what will be done with the marine area around us. Even so the winds of change are blowing. More and more, the CHN is a governance partner in decision-making around the Islands. The public voice in marine management is slowly but surely gaining sway in government decisions most notably with regard to local areas. Although it will take a lot of hard work and great patience to see through one another's eyes, the people of these Islands have the ability and the will. Because we live here, because we rely upon the health of this place for our well-being, the time has come for us to talk about what we want for our future and decide on courses of action that will take us there.

So you have it – the *raison d'être* for an Islands Marine Strategy. It is a living discussion about where we want to get to and how we can get there from here. Think of it as a blueprint guiding the construction of our marine future. Some of the tools we need to build from include existing legislation such as the NMCA Act, the Fisheries Act and the Oceans Act. Others will be innovative tools of our own design – after all, Islanders are nothing if not creative and headstrong.

To continue discussions initiated in May, a workshop was held in December 2002. Many issues were discussed. Abalone. Salmon farming. Shellfish mariculture. Dungeness crab. General fishery management. Geoduck. Halibut. Herring. Krill. Lingcod. Local economy. Marine protected areas. Offshore oil and gas. Razor clam. Red sea urchin. Rockfishes. Sea otter. Sportsfishery. Trawlers/Druggers. Wild salmon. All were identified as important to Islanders at that meeting in Tlell which closed with a commitment to get together again to share information and ideas, debate issues and solutions.

Many people and agencies are actively involved in field research and compilation of existing marine information. Part of our work is to gather these together and map additional information to spur discussions around our values as a marine community. What and where are some of the tangible marine values surrounding us? What kinds of activities are occurring and where? What are the impacts of those activities on our environment? What activities do we support as a community and what might be their limits for development? What activities do we believe too great a risk? What are our immediate marine concerns and potential solutions to them?

To maintain momentum, we are aiming to host another Haida Gwaii/QCI Marine Strategy planning workshop in late November or early December 2003 to further our discussions and show and tell the information we have to date. ETA for a draft Haida Gwaii/QCI Marine Strategy? December 2004. The time is ripe for the Islands community to take marine matters into their own hands and on these Islands, having a deadline to shoot for is half the battle.

Invitations and agendas will be forwarded shortly to those who have received information about past workshops. If you are not currently receiving information but wish to in the future, please contact me at *Marine Matters*.

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