

Time to Review the Islands Trust Mandate

For many years now there has been dissatisfaction with the Islands Trust and there is now a movement afoot to ask the provincial government to review its mandate.

Back in 1975 when the Trust was formed, there were good reasons to establish a kind of governance that would protect the Gulf Islands from being raped by uncontrolled development. The NDP government of the time structured the Trust to its present form with small adjustments to its original charter as the years went by.

It had its weaknesses and its strengths but, since it only applied to a very small population relative to the provincial population, it was easy to live with its flaws regardless of who was in power.

But things have changed, brought about by a radical social evolution parallel with a population abnormality created by the Second World War. The social evolution has created a larger middle class that is better educated, has more income, is more socially aware, is eco sensitive, is leisure oriented, has political savvy and has a big appetite to travel and explore. And they come all wrapped up in a nice bubble called the "Baby Boomers".

The eco-system covered by the Islands Trust has been the recipient of this new wave but its governance has failed to evolve to keep abreast of the rapid consequential changes.

On Sunday July 4th, there was a rally on Saltspring Island demanding a review of the Islands Trust Mandate to reflect the present realities. These realities were well articulated by many speakers at that rally including Senator Larry Campbell, the ex-major of Vancouver now residing on Galiano Island.

The mandate of the Trust to 'preserve and protect' our eco system has been used to defend the Trust policies and directives but in a very narrow interpretation and has left aside the effect of those policies on our social fabric.

People are raising their voices in response to autocratic governance in the hands of a few individuals with no recourse for appeal. Every democratic system of government has in its make up a check and balance system that protects the individuals under its governance and also has a representation by population so that no minorities could force their views on the majority. The Trust is dictatorial and a case in point is the constant directives and limitations given to the committee reviewing the Gabriola OCP. Even its choice of members was manipulated to serve the wishes of the Trust.

Gambier Island and Saturna Island have populations of just over 300 and have two elected trustees each. Saltspring Island has a population of 12,000 and also two elected trustees. Gabriola has close to 5,000 people and also just two trustees. Is that fair representation?

Taxation is another area that is unbalanced. The budget of the Trust is voted by the Trust Council. Gabriola and Saltspring make up about 17,000 (almost 70%) of the 25,000 living under the Trust and have only 4 (18%) votes between themselves against the other 22. Those 22 can without difficulty vote

any budget increases since the other guys (Gabriola and Saltspring) are paying for most of it. And this is called democratic?

The rally was brought about by people who finally had enough following dictatorial decisions to not allow Saltspring Island Coffee to increase its capacity resulting in the loss of 40 jobs; of Mayne Island Trustees to refuse a farmer to operate a farmer's market; of Galiano Trustees to disallow many generational residents to build on their large track of land; of legal harassment of an established water delivery business on Gabriola and many more undemocratic and socially destructive decisions.

The time has come to work towards preserving and protecting the human side (jobs, viable living, fairness, democracy, respect) of our islands within the new social conscience of reducing our footprint to preserve our planet.

A petition to request the provincial government to review the Islands Trust Act can be signed by going to: http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/review_islands_trust_act/ and some pictures of the rally can be seen at: http://www.gabriola.org/governance/saltspring_pix.html

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