

33. National Marine Conservation Area Reserve – Strait of Georgia

Issue

The Chamber is supportive of developing and implementing the proposed National Marine Conservation Area (NCMA) Reserve in the Strait of Georgia, provided its unique environment and its importance to the health and prosperity of the regional economy is clearly recognized. To that end, The Chamber expects a specific piece of legislation be enacted to address unique nature of the Strait of Georgia NMCA Reserve, such as was done with Saguenay-St. Lawrence Marine Park. Such legislation would mitigate confusion or uncertainty, allowing businesses, residents and visitors a stable and transparent decision-making platform.

Background

The beauty of British Columbia is intrinsically tied to tourism, external investment, and the health of our communities.

The Chamber believes the proposed establishment of a NMCA Reserve in the Southern Strait of Georgia can contribute to the economy, attract investment, create household-sustaining jobs, and support local business.

The Chamber believes the biggest risk to commercial and recreational activities is stakeholder confusion or uncertainty leading up to and after the Strait of Georgia NMCA Reserve is established.

A “Reserve” is established when there are First Nations land claims in an area. Given the number of unresolved First Nations claims in the Southern Strait of Georgia area, an NMCA Reserve would be established pending resolution of the claims. Once all claims are resolved, the area would become a NMCA.

Impact

Once the Southern Strait of Georgia NMCA Reserve is established¹, ownership of provincial lands - including the seabed - would be transferred to the federal government. For waterfront residential and commercial properties, that means the submerged lands below the high-tide watermark would be transferred from the Province of B.C. to the Government of Canada.

Beyond the transfer of submerged lands ownership, there is a complex jurisdictional maze that includes First Nations, regional districts, municipalities, transportation authorities, and island trusts. This area also has more than 100,000 residents and countless visitors who have relied on easy and free access to waters for decades. Such a delicate operating environment has a direct impact on residents’ quality of life as well as on local businesses.

One of the frequently discussed business impacts surrounding the navigable waters within the 2011 proposed boundaries is marine transportation; it is BC Ferries “backyard” and a transit route for thousands of cargo shipments per year.

There are many practical questions that still need to be answered, such as how will the NMCA Reserve operations - including enforcement - be funded? Who makes the decision to halt or alter commercial vessel traffic patterns if zones need to be established or amended? How will the success of the NMCA Reserve be measured? Who will manage affected land use, e.g. issue permits for private infrastructure

¹ See Annex for 2011 Proposed Boundaries

that extends below the high-tide watermark? These are questions that need to be answered before the NMCA Reserve is implemented to ensure a welcoming business environment and public support.

Decision-Making Environment

The Government of Canada will have numerous challenges facing the proposed Strait of Georgia NMCA Reserve, including:

- continuing to allow high concentration of commercial and recreational marine traffic in the area,
- the potential for a variety of inter-departmental jurisdictional issues, e.g. fishing and marine transportation falling under both Fisheries and Oceans and Transport Canada and in collaboration with Parks Canada, and
- the proposed NMCA Reserve is expected to fall under the *Canada National Marine Conservation Areas Act*, and as such, would not address specific conditions relating to the Southern Strait of Georgia's unique environment.

Progress to date

Parks Canada has reportedly hired a full-time employee to manage the specific file, and is working on a number of studies to develop a comprehensive understanding of the region and to reach a determination of the feasibility of the proposed NMCA Reserve. The Chamber expects this research to include a thorough analysis of current and forecasted commercial and recreational activity, as well as how such activity may be affected by the establishment of an NMCA Reserve - before the reserve is created.

The proposed Southern Strait of Georgia NMCA Reserve should balance the needs of the economy with the environment. Issues should be anticipated and questions answered prior to implementation. Critical points need to be incorporated into separate legislation to ensure a stable and transparent decision-making environment for all stakeholders.

Recommendations

In recognition of the Strait of Georgia as one of North America's busiest shipping corridors, moving billions of dollars in trade goods, the Chamber recommends that the federal government:

1. Establish a stable and transparent decision-making process for the proposed Strait of Georgia National Marine Conservation Area Reserve, and
2. Ensure continued access to the existing and future marine trade corridors in the Strait of Georgia.

**Southern Strait of Georgia
National Marine Conservation Area Reserve
Boundary Concept**

**Concept de limites de la réserve
d'aire marine nationale de conservation
dans la région sud du détroit de Georgia**

Proposed National Marine Conservation Area Reserve

Gulf Islands National Park Reserve

Terrestrial
Marine Component

Boundaries for the proposed national marine conservation area reserve remain subject to refinement and are not to be considered final or legal boundaries.

Réserve d'Aires marines nationales de conservation proposée

Réserve de parc national du Canada des Îles-Gulf

terrestre
volet marin

Les limites du projet de réserve d'aire marine nationale de conservation peuvent encore être définies et ne sont donc pas des limites définitives ni légales.

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January 2011

Vancouver
Richmond
Tsawwassen
Point Roberts (U.S.A.) (E-U)

SALISH SEA
MER DES SALISH

STRAIT OF GEORGIA
DÉTROIT DE GEORGIA

Nanaimo

Ile Gabriola Island
Ile Valdes Island
Ile Thetis Island
Ile Kuper Island
Ile Galiano Island
Ile Mayne Island
Ile Prevost Island
Ile North Pender Island
Ile South Pender Island
Ile Saturna Island
Ile Tumbo Island
Ile Moresby Island
Ile Sidney Island
Ile D'Arcy Island
Ile Portland Island
Ile Fulford Island
Ile Salt Spring Island
Ile Ganges Island
Ile Crofton Island
Ile Duncan Island
Ile Cowichan Bay
Ile Mill Bay
Ile Brentwood Bay
Ile Sidney Bay

Ladysmith
Chemainus
Maple Bay
Duncan
Cowichan Bay
Mill Bay
Brentwood Bay
Sidney

Canada - U.S.A. border
Frontière canado-américaine

PASSAGE BOUNDARY PASS

JUAN DE FUCA STRAIT
DÉTROIT DE JUAN DE FUCA

VICTORIA

SALISH SEA
MER DES SALISH