Gaaysiigang proceedings include: we came out of the ocean | feasting at gaaysiigang | the sky has fallen | how do you plan for that?
200 tankers to Kitimat | when the water died | there is an ocean of opportunity | making recommendations | presentation summaries
Gaaysiigang - an ocean forum for haida gwaii

The primary goal of Gaaysiigang – an ocean forum for haida gwaii was to encourage dialogue on the current condition of Haida Gwaii’s marine ecosystems and marine-based economy, and to identify solutions to improve the health of our surrounding ocean and local communities.

Discussions at the forum informed direction for marine use planning, sustainable marine resource management and successful marine-based economic development for Haida Gwaii.

Key objectives of the forum were:

1. To understand critical challenges for marine-based resource sectors and to identify potential opportunities;
2. To understand how outcomes of marine use planning can help sustain coastal communities and their surrounding ocean; and
3. To inform community-supported direction of marine resource management and sustainable marine-based economic development on Haida Gwaii.

Organizing Committee: Russ Jones, Catherine Rigg, Lynn Lee, Simon Davies, Terrie Dionne, Norm Sloan, Jody Bossett, Mike Ambach, Nick Irving, Dale Gueret

Event Coordinator: Nika Collison
Proceedings Writer: Ian London and the Organizing Committee
Facilitator: John Talbot
Graphic Facilitator: Avril Orloff
Haida Gwaii
everything is possible.

We do things differently here.

On Photo: Lynn Lee
On Haida Gwaii anything and everything is possible. We do things differently here. Ocean conditions are deteriorating all over the world but the tides have not yet carried all the doom and gloom to these shores. There is still hope, and this message was loud and clear at Gaaysiigang – an ocean forum for Haida Gwaii. People were invited to the forum to talk about how to make a difference and how to reverse alarming trends in the ocean.

Globally, fisheries are collapsing. Slime is rising. Oceans are acidifying. We are seeing more ocean dead zones. It is happening so slowly that it’s easy to miss—and when we don’t pay attention, we risk losing track of where we came from and where we are headed.

There is this slow incremental change, and there is also catastrophic change. Catastrophic change is obvious to everyone, it occurs without warning, and all of a sudden the things we take for granted are not available anymore. This happened to the communities of Prince William Sound when the Exxon Valdez ran aground. And with the possibility of tanker and other vessel traffic increasing in Dixon Entrance and Hecate Strait, Haida Gwaii also faces the risk of overnight disaster.

While we can plan to reduce threats, we also need to plan to support marine use activities that we see as part of our cultural, social and economic future. Fishing for food and cultural purposes, marine tourism, shellfish aquaculture, marine research and education, local commercial and recreational fisheries are all part of that vision.

How can we make this happen? The communities of Haida Gwaii have a history of working together. Effective oceans management around the islands will require building on those relationships. We need to coordinate. We need to engage. We need to change the status quo.

Gaaysiigang – an ocean forum for Haida Gwaii was a first step. It was an opportunity for us to listen to each other and build on our own experience. Together we sized up the waves—now, it’s time to get going!
**The Haida Way - Our Common Future**

*Rick Steiner, Professor, University of Alaska*

These are wonderful and troubled times for us all. We face simultaneous global crises in food, water, biodiversity, security, economics, and the oceans. Indeed, we have a big mess on our hands, as well as an historic opportunity to fix it. So, it’s clearly time to take a deep breath and think about all of this. In the midst of this gathering storm, the island people of Haida Gwaii, through powerful ancestral connection to their land and sea and a vision founded in tradition, offer a way forward for their exquisite part of planet Earth, and the entire world as well.

The 2009 Gaaysiigang—an ocean forum for Haida Gwaii—was one of the most remarkable gatherings in which I have been privileged to participate. The Haida people, government, industry, NGOs, and many others gathered respectfully in an arena where traditional decisions had been made—a cedar longhouse, surrounded by totem poles, forest, ocean, and eagles. There was dance, art, food from the sea, ancient thought, and new thought. I was convinced that the ancient elders were present. And talk we did—freely, openly, and with a sense of purpose. Voices were heard. Tears were shed. Ideas and solutions were born. Gaaysiigang was a portal to our common, sustainable future.

Through it all, two things became clear—that our ocean is threatened both by acute, overnight catastrophes, such as oil spills; and long-term, gradual degradation, such as over-exploitation, global warming, and pollution. After Gaaysiigang, I am convinced that the Haida may indeed chart a new course for us all, with respect for the Haida may indeed chart a new course for us all, with respect for the Haida. The Haida people, government, industry, NGOs, and many others gathered respectfully in an arena where traditional decisions had been made—a cedar longhouse, surrounded by totem poles, forest, ocean, and eagles. There was dance, art, food from the sea, ancient thought, and new thought. I was convinced that the ancient elders were present. And talk we did—freely, openly, and with a sense of purpose. Voices were heard. Tears were shed. Ideas and solutions were born. Gaaysiigang was a portal to our common, sustainable future.

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Like the Haida, I have always lived by the sea. The sea has been part of my everyday life; sailing, swimming, fishing as a child and later on the object of my passion as a scientist. But almost from the beginning, I have seen the beauty and the bounty of the seas degrading before my eyes.

I taught my young son Stephen how to snorkel on the coral reefs of Jamaica in 1982. Swimming out from the shore we could see the mountains of corals beneath us to depths of 30 metres. But twelve years later when my daughter Rebecca was ready to learn to snorkel the corals were mostly dead, the reefs were covered by seaweed and slime, and the once clear waters were so dirty you could not see the bottom any more. The corals had died from smothering by seaweeds, disease, and global warming—the magic and beauty were gone.

Stories like the decline of Jamaican reefs are more and more frequent, not just for coral reefs but kelp forests, mangroves, seagrasses, and fisheries from coastal waters to the deep sea. But not everywhere is hopeless and there are signs that more and more people have had enough of destruction and hopelessness and are ready to do the hard work and politics to turn things around and reclaim the oceans for all of us now and forever.

such is the case with your inspiring determination to protect and restore the spectacular marine environments of Haida Gwaii. Your aspirations, discussions, and disagreements are a microcosm of the problems and debates throughout the world, but with the fundamental difference of your commitment to make the hard and necessary changes in fishing and protection now and without qualifications instead of some vague and distant time in the future. Haida determination and resolve is a model for us all. I thank you for the opportunity to participate in your discussions and look forward to returning to see the progress you have made and to renew your friendship as an inspiration for my own commitment to make the world’s oceans a better place. •

**Mankind’s Fight**

*Guujaaw, President of the Haida Nation*

Visitors are awestruck by the richness of the land and waters of Haida Gwaii, and indeed we are blessed, we are able to provide for our families the same foods that our ancestors enjoyed. From the sea we enjoy many species of salmon and cod, as well as halibut, shellfish and seaweeds. We marvel in the presence of the seabirds and the great whales and we are taught to respect even the smallest of things. It is our interplay with all this life that is the foundation of our culture.

And yet, here as around the world, we lament the fact that it is not as it once was. At one time countless salmon filled every river and herding was thought to be inexhaustible. But today pollutants are accumulating in marine life at dangerous levels and the oceans continue to be impoverished by the appetite of the global marketplace. Indigenous people live close to the land and sea and we are often the first to notice changes.

For a hundred years, we have warned humanity that we must treat the earth with respect. The time of prophecy is over and we begin to hear the same call from the “experts.”

This unrelenting appetite means that Haida Gwaii faces a constant threat of oil rigs and tankers in Hecate Strait, and off the north coast container ships moving merchandise from Asia bring with them marine life that does not belong here—these are troubled waters indeed.

While we know that change is certain, this does not mean that we accept it and let it continue to damage life systems. This is no longer only the fight of indigenous people, this is the fight of mankind. Humanity has got to stand against the inherent greed that afflicts us, we have a duty to protect and restore life to its full potential.

To our children and descendants, we know that this is your world too. You have the right to enjoy the islands and the earth as we have. Good earth, which has given us life and from which we receive every good, that give us our culture, that continue to provide for us, we will not abandon you. •

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**Haida Gwaii is the beginning of a new story**

*Dr. Jeremy Jackson, University of California’s Scripps Institution of Oceanography*

Like the Haida, I have always lived by the sea. The sea has been part of my everyday life; sailing, swimming, fishing as a child and later on the object of my passion as a scientist. But almost from the beginning, I have seen the beauty and the bounty of the seas degrading before my eyes.

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**Reflecting on Gaaysiigang**

*Photos: Fitch Willain*

Reflecting on Gaaysiigang, an historic opportunity to fix it. So, it’s clearly time to take a deep breath and think about all of this. In the midst of this gathering storm, the island people of Haida Gwaii, through powerful ancestral connection to their land and sea and a vision founded in tradition, offer a way forward for their exquisite part of planet Earth, and the entire world as well.

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The ocean is front and centre in Haida life, culture and history. Every village site is carefully selected based on the abundance of seafood and its marine geography — well-protected harbours are selected for year-round or winter sites, and more exposed locations are used as seasonal summer camps. The canoes that once lined our beaches were sought-after trade goods prized by other coastal First Nations for their unmatched handling and craftsmanship. Sea creatures, from the most common to the supernatural, figure prominently in Haida art, design, and family crests. The sea is also central to Haida oral history, and its bounty is the basis of many Haida foods and medicines. As traditional food gatherer and medicinal practitioner Gwaaganad, Diane Brown explained, the Haida recognize and honour their ocean origins in oral histories.

“...not this lifetime, but the first time we ever came as a people to Haida Gwaii, we came out of the air. This was told to me by Nang KIngaay ’Uwans, James Young. So we became people from the air and then for some reason, we all disappeared. The second time we came out, we came out of the earth and again we disappeared. The third time we came out, we came out of the ocean, as many of our legends, in many different forms. There were those at Naay Kun that came out of the clam shell. There’re those that were on the reef with Sguuluu Jaad and they came out onto the earth from that reef. And there were many, many spots all over Haida Gwaii that we can point to and say this is where our ancestors came out of the ocean.”

Art: Janet Rigg
Photo: Mike Ambach
Yet, over the years the Haida relationship with the sea has been threatened by colonial assimilation efforts, declining maritime abundance, and modern society’s inclination to distance itself from the natural world. Despite this, the relationship has remained strong and healthy but Brown fears it could be jeopardized if ocean health cannot be sustained.

“My hopes and dreams for the future are that my grandchildren, my future grandchildren, and their grandchildren will be able to go out on the low tide and harvest clams, cockles, mussels, abalone, herring roe on kelp, and continue to live as we are, on the bounties of the ocean… there is probably no worse scenario I could imagine than not being able to eat all our traditional foods.”

The Haida relationship to the ocean also has an important economic aspect, both historically and in more contemporary times. The Haida emerged as major players in the north coast commercial fishing fleet – a predictable development for people accustomed to relying on the sea for a living. As Iljuuwaas, Reynold Russ explained, there were once dozens of Haida-built fishing boats plying the waters with Haida skippers at the helm.

“There were 60 trollers in Skidegate at one time – in [New] Masset we had about 60 or 70 trollers and 20 seiners. And these boats, most of them were built in [Old] Massett… both communities were fishing communities and that was the way we made our living,” he said. “Today in Massett, we maybe have one or two boats and there are very few in Skidegate too.”

Declines in traditional fish stocks and markets, along with licence buy-back and retirement programs, thinned the ranks of Haida fishermen and quieted the once bustling harbours. Today, some of those who remain in the industry actually choose not to teach the craft to their children because fishing prospects are so bleak.

These fears for the future were echoed at the feast held in Skidegate at the close of the first day of Gaaysiigang when young Billy Yovanovich Jr. addressed the gathering in the community hall.

“Even since I’ve been around, I’ve noticed things have changed—like you don’t hear about old people going out to get clams as often or people going up to Massett to collect cockles. It’s not as great numbers as it used to be and it is sad for me to see because that’s what I have to look forward to when I grow old. We have to figure out a way to stop this before it’s too late… We have to learn to come together and work together as a Haida Nation, and all the visitors, and all the residents too. This is a good thing—we are coming together and talking about how we are going to solve this problem… I hope this opens everybody’s eyes and we realize we need to start thinking about tomorrow not today.”

Another Skidegate youth, Shoshonnah Greene, reiterated the importance of the ocean to her future and for everyone at the feast. “To me the ocean is the life and health of the Haida people—it has sustained our people since time immemorial,” she said. “If there is one thing I wish for everyone to take from the forum this weekend, it is respect and responsibility for the ocean.”

These words were not lost on Council of the Haida Nation President Guujaaw who reminded forum participants of their remarks the following day when he called for a marine plan that actually restores declining ocean health, and is not just an endless process and distraction.

“Last night, we had a couple of young people come up and speak at the feast and it was really quite a moving thing to hear them speak in front of our people … and you consider, here are some young people under 20 and they are looking at a world that they are about to inherit that’s pretty messed up… After all these years of using the ocean, nobody has ever sat and made a plan about what they are going to do—we are involved in a number of planning processes but we have seen planning processes be a way of putting things aside, plan it for a while and spend another ten years doing that, and in the end it is a non-conclusive thing. And while we are doing this planning that’s so important, we are going to be distracted by battles—we have to make sure we are moving along in the right kind of way.”

Without question that direction is a more sustainable one, one that secures a future where Billy Yovanovich Jr, Shoshonnah Greene, and Diane Brown’s grandchildren can look forward to enjoying the same food, lifestyle, and inspiration from the ocean that their ancestors have for generations before them.
There was once an estuary where the water was sparkling clear. Great meadows of sea grass full of fishes and crabs lined the shores. Vast oyster reefs broke the surface at low tide. Fisheries were so abundant their bounty seemed infinite. Whales, dolphins, and sea turtles were abundant.

Then a strange blight came to the Bay. The water became cloudy and murky. The sea grass and oyster reefs disappeared. Fisheries collapsed, and the whales, dolphins, and sea turtles were gone...

But nutrients, microbes, and jellyfish abound. Outbreaks of new species clog the shore. Toxic plankton kills the fish, the water is polluted, people get sick, and the oxygen is almost gone.”

Dr. Jeremy Jackson, the first keynote speaker at Gaaysigang, chose to launch Haida Gwaii’s Ocean Forum with this unsettling anecdote. The professor from the University of California’s Scripps Institution of Oceanography has enjoyed a long and distinguished career. He boasts a list of honours, awards, and accolades only slightly shorter than the list of books and publications he is credited with authoring. So much the worse then that this man from the forefront of marine science and academia should go on to add that his anecdote describes more than one unfortunate estuary.

“This estuary does actually exist. It is the Chesapeake Bay, Pamlico Sound, and San Francisco Bay. It is almost every large estuary in the U.S.A. It is the Baltic Sea, the Wadden Sea, and the northern Adriatic. It is almost every large estuary in Europe. It is Moreton Bay, Jakarta Harbor, Tokyo Bay, and Hong Kong. It is almost every large estuary in the Western Pacific. It is almost every large estuary around the world. And it is now.”

Dr. Jeremy Jackson, Photo: Barb Wilson
Sky photo: Creative Commons
Jackson was on Haida Gwaii to bring forum participants up to speed on the state of the world’s oceans and the news he shared is grave. Oxygen-starved dead zones are multiplying and expanding, as are toxic algal blooms that endanger the health of coastal inhabitants. Over-fishing has pushed large marine fauna such as sharks to the brink of extinction setting off trophic cascades that end up replacing valuable fish stocks with other species. Trawlers are scraping ocean floors clean and flattening beds of deep sea coral – precious and unique marine habitat. Coral and other calcifying marine organisms such as shellfish and, ominously, plankton are all threatened by the accelerating acidification of the oceans because acidic water impedes calcification and hinders the formation of hard shells.

Researchers blame carbon dioxide emissions for this phenomenon which also has the potential to stratify oceans and starve all but surface waters of oxygen rendering the depths uninhabitable to most species in as little as 20 years.

“The most terrifying thing of all is that the oceans are turning into coca-cola,” Jackson explained. “Think about all those geoducks and things you like—when the ocean is too acidic they can’t make a shell. It’s sort of hard to be a geoduck without a shell and it’s even harder to be a coral without a skeleton. That is really the shop of horrors.”

Jackson said unless sweeping and immediate measures are taken on a global scale these trends will have lasting and tragic consequences far beyond what we have already witnessed. He then identified what he called “the three drivers of degradation” – overexploitation, nutrient and toxic pollution, and climate change – that must be addressed if we are to restore the health of our oceans.

“Let’s do a thought experiment,” he proposed. “Think of your leaders as I describe this – think of those strong, forthright, committed environmentalists in Ottawa and Washington. Scenario one is we cap and reduce nutrient runoff and carbon emissions and stop overfishing within the next 20 to 30 years. We’re all going to take the trolley, we’re going to have electric cars, and we’re going to farm organically in 20 years. But if we do that, the good news is that the oceans will remain well-mixed, there will be oxygen all the way down, dead zones will decrease and disappear. Most of the big stuff will be gone in 20 years but some of it will be left—we’ll have sardines, anchovies, shellfish, and they taste good. We will have massive aquaculture but we’ll have to be responsible, in other words: no farmed salmon. That’s our fantasy, that’s what we could do.”

Or, in other words, that is the best case scenario.
“We’ve got to move beyond the doom and gloom…. What are conservation biologists? 99% of all conservation biologists are morticians refining the obituary of nature.”

According to Jackson the best response to the problems facing our oceans is to address those drivers of degradation. Begin by reducing over-fishing and substituting it with environmentally responsible aquaculture. Reduce nutrient runoff by scrapping fertilizer subsidies and instead taxing their use. Cap and curb greenhouse gas and toxic emissions. Finally, implement a system of protected areas to conserve marine habitat and provide a platform for recovery. “There’s a lot of good news, it’s actually really amazing: if you don’t kill fish there are more fish, and if you don’t pollute there are more fish!” he said. In this way, Jackson’s despair about the state of the oceans was balanced with his message of hope for Haida Gwaii.

“If you take all the area of land which has been cut down for trees in the history of humanity it is not as great as the amount of seafloor that has been turned into a parking lot by trawling.” Dr. Jeremy Jackson

“Just so you know that it is not impossible, Australia re-zoned the Great Barrier Reef under a government more conservative than Bush and your Prime Minister and they actually decided to protect one third of the entire Great Barrier Reef. If they can do it, the northern hemisphere has got to rise to the occasion. You people represent the opportunity…. you live here and your future is in your hands. But if you allow realism, and caution, and conservatism to creep into your language and your thoughts, the dark side of the force will destroy you.”

We have hundreds of studies, inventories, and reports, thousands of stakeholders and their interests, conservation concerns, marine safety issues, development potential, user conflicts, and all of it tied to a vast body of water encircling the entire globe. Anyone want to come up with a plan for that? Oh, and have it done yesterday because the longer this unfolding ecological catastrophe goes unattended, the worse the damage is going to get...
Incredibly, building on piecemeal marine planning efforts in the past, we now have no fewer than five marine planning initiatives underway for Haida Gwaii waters. To be sure, they all differ in scope and objectives, but there are five. Here then is a breakdown of who is doing what and why.

First, the Council of the Haida Nation has begun developing a marine use plan for the waters within the Haida territorial boundary. The purpose of the plan will be to identify acceptable marine uses that support sustainable communities on Haida Gwaii while protecting and, where necessary, restoring marine ecosystems. The Haida Marine Work Group has been charged with the task of developing the plan with help from the Haida Oceans Technical Team and this plan will inform a larger PNCIMA – Pacific North Coast Integrated Management Area – integrated marine use planning process.

Second, linking land and sea planning is undeniably critical for an archipelago such as Haida Gwaii. After several false starts and decades of negotiations the Province of British Columbia and the CHN finally signed the Haida Gwaii Strategic Land Use Agreement in 2007. The agreement brought an end to the climate of uncertainty around questions of land use and development on the islands. It also established new Haida Heritage Sites (a type of conservancy) on land, and committed both parties to collaborate on foreshore and nearshore marine planning to address adjacent marine uses and activities. Although the province is not involved in commercial fisheries management or enforcement of marine recreational fisheries, they do manage tenure and permitted activities in nearshore and foreshore areas such as log handling, docks, aquaculture and kelp harvesting.

Third, for the southern part of Haida Gwaii, the proposed Gwaii Haanas National Marine Conservation Area Reserve (NMCAR) will encompass roughly 3,400 square kilometres of ocean while forming a 10-kilometre buffer surrounding the perimeter of the Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve and Haida Heritage Site. Baseline inventories of marine plants and animals are completed along with preliminary underwater archaeology. The gathering of Haida place names, their meaning, and traditional knowledge associated with places continues through working with elders. An interim zoning plan is being developed, with the goal to have the NMCAR & HHS established in early 2010. Following designation, a more detailed plan will be drafted in consultation with islands’ communities and stakeholders. Similar to its terrestrial counterpart, NMCAR & HHS will be cooperatively managed by the Council of the Haida Nation and the Government of Canada.

Fourth is PNCIMA, a planning process initiated under Canada’s Oceans Act whose size and scope is as impressive as its acronym. PNCIMA encompasses all of BC’s northern coastal waters stretching from the Alaska border to northern Vancouver Island in the south and west to the base of the continental slope. In all, the plan will cover some 88,000 square kilometres and provide direction for commercial and recreational fishing, oil and gas exploration, aquaculture, shipping and tourism interests. Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) researchers, coastal First Nations and others have been busy assembling baseline data needed for the plan and in December 2008 a Memorandum of Understanding on PNCIMA Collaborative Oceans Governance was signed by First Nations and DFO. Following Gaaysiigang, DFO and coastal First Nations hosted a public forum in Richmond, BC focused on stakeholder engagement to launch PNCIMA planning in March 2009. Because of its enormous scope, the previous three planning processes with implications for Haida Gwaii fall within the boundary of PNCIMA. One of the challenges confronting those engaged in each of these planning initiatives will be to ensure consistency where overlap occurs.

Finally, Sgaan Kinghlas, or the Bowie Seamount, was designated Canada’s seventh Marine Protected Area (MPA) on April 19, 2008 in a joint announcement made by the former Fisheries Minister Loyola Hearn and CHN President Guujaaw. An offshore range of three undersea mountains falls within the 6,131 square kilometres slated for protection. Rising from a depth of nearly 3,100 metres to within just 25 of the ocean’s surface, the area has been called “an oceanic oasis in the deep sea, a rare and ecologically rich marine area,” by Natural Resources Minister Gary Lunn. And with good reason—located some 180 kilometres west of Haida Gwaii, Bowie Seamount hosts a remarkably diverse marine ecosystem. The CHN and DFO are beginning work on a co-operative management plan for the area. This plan will define acceptable and unacceptable uses within the MPA boundary, including requirements for research, monitoring and enforcement.

In a perfect world all five of these plans would be complete within no more than three years. New marine protected areas would be established, well-managed, and belong to a network of protected areas along the north coast. Interested stakeholders would be satisfied with the access or allocations they were permitted, and those who were denied what they sought would understand it was to preserve the long term sustainability of marine ecosystems.
and coastal communities. All of these decisions would be made and supported by research, the most complete and recent data, and would prove to be defensible and well-informed in the years to come.

Naturally, the world is anything but perfect and planners will have to get used to angering interest groups, making decisions with insufficient information, and feeling frustrated by agonizingly slow progress. Above all, they will have to incorporate healthy margins for error and the flexibility to amend the decisions made in any of the aforementioned plans. Each plan must also link to the others, such that planning direction, management structure and enforcement is coordinated and consistent.

Fortunately, forewarned is forearmed. At the outset of Gaaysiigang, Jeremy Jackson described where poor planning, or a lack of any planning, has taken us. Rick Steiner reminded us of what can happen if sensible precautionary measures are allowed to fall by the wayside and underlined the importance of citizen involvement in any planning exercise. The many panelists at the forum displayed the conflicts among existing users and the hopes of aspiring ones which must be considered and addressed. The need for direction is clear, but most important is that it comes in a form that promotes the recovery of our marine ecosystems and a healthy and abundant future.

"This is an important issue here and should be a key part of integrated thinking for planning on the north coast," he said. "The inside passage waters of the north coast are already well-traveled waters."

Picard estimates that in 2008 nearly 500 ships called at the north coast’s three seaports – Stewart (30), Kitimat (100), and Prince Rupert (360). The majority carried less hazardous cargo like grain, coal, containers, ore, and cruise ship passengers, but Picard reminded the crowd that container ships and cruise ships also carry large quantities of fuel and dispose of grey water and ballast water in coastal waters. He pointed to Kitimat where a boom in shipping traffic along BC’s north coast, much of it carrying dangerous cargo.

The possibility of a disabled offshore tanker beaching on Haida Gwaii is certainly cause for alarm, but ships plying inshore waters like the Inside Passage and Hecate Strait also pose threats to marine ecosystems on the north coast. Chris Picard from the North Coast – Skeena First Nations Stewardship Society addressed this subject in his presentation at the Gaaysiigang ocean forum. He explained that increasing oil sands development and production in Alberta has the potential to fuel a boom in shipping traffic along BC’s north coast, much of it carrying dangerous cargo.

Alberta-based Enbridge is leading the way – Enbridge has started planning and promoting a $4-billion, 1,160-kilometre pipeline dubbed ‘Gateway’ which would originate near Edmonton and provide the tar sands with access to Asian markets. The pipeline would move up to 400,000 barrels a day and the company has already secured a commitment from PetroChina to purchase half of that total.

Enbridge recruiters have toured northern BC communities along the proposed pipeline route looking to hire the 5,000 workers needed to meet the project’s targeted completion date of 2014. The company has also contracted a Danish marine traffic specialist to chart detailed courses in BC coastal waters for giant ships known as VLCCs, or very large crude carriers – ships over 350 metres long and capable of hauling more than two-million barrels of oil.

Picard said if Gateway goes ahead, 200 oil tankers a year will call at Kitimat, adding to current vessel traffic. All of these tankers will pass north or south of Haida Gwaii on their way to Asia. And if additional proposals from Kinder-Morgan (oil) and Kitimat LNG proceed, the number of tankers loaded with hydrocarbons leaving Kitimat and passing by Haida Gwaii each year could exceed 450. Factor in port development projects in nearby Prince Rupert and Stewart and ‘rush hour’ on the coast could become a permanent reality in the very near future.
The first day of the forum ended with an evening of feasting and performance in Skidegate. Turning from the issues that dominated the day’s discussions and debates, forum participants enjoyed food, dance and speeches that highlighted the close relationship between the sea and Haida culture.

Haida hospitality was true to form, and locals and visitors shared a sumptuous and memorable meal. Smoked salmon, crab cakes, clam fritters, breaded halibut, and k’aaw (herring roe on kelp) whetted the appetite of guests before they were served generous helpings of jam (pronounced jum)—a seafood stew brimming with the bounty of Haida Gwaii’s waters.

Thus fortified, guests were first treated to a program of Haida dance by the HlGaagilda Children’s Dance Group. A procession of traditional Haida dishes entered the hall behind a banner bearing the words ‘our food is our medicine.’ The youngsters performed a number of Haida songs for the audience, including a dance recounting a creation story where some of the littlest performers climbed out of a giant clam shell in the centre of the community hall.

The children were followed by the Massett Xaayda Thuu Dancers and their performance that honoured many of the sea creatures that call Haida Gwaii home—everything from salmon and sharks to supernatural lake spirits. As Christian White explained, each dance reminds us to never forget the importance of the maritime world to the people of Haida Gwaii.

“Here on Haida Gwaii we are wholly dependent on our waters, our oceans, our estuaries, our rivers, creeks, and lakes. That’s what has sustained us for thousands upon thousands of years… It is very important that we take care of our waters and all the creatures that live in these waters. We never want to take too much, and we never want to take more than we need.”

Feasting at Gaayisiigang

Photos: Mike Ambach
Graphic Source: Barb Wilson
In a curious coincidence Alaska’s Rick Steiner was welcomed as the second keynote speaker at the Gaaysiigang ocean forum less than two months shy of the 20th anniversary of the infamous Exxon Valdez oil spill in Prince William Sound on March 24, 1989. At the time of the spill Steiner was the University of Alaska’s marine advisor for the Prince William Sound region, a post he held between 1983 and 1997, and he became intimately acquainted with the disaster, the causes, and the aftermath.

“Prince William Sound was a beautiful place, not too unlike Haida Gwaii. It’s a little further north, a little colder, possibly a little more mountainous, tide water glaciers, lots of ice, very productive ecosystem, seals, sea lions, whales, commercial fishing, and a lot of people just enjoying life there... And all that changed. One lesson here is that everything you hold dear with your marine environment can indeed be lost overnight. It can change overnight in a heartbeat... This was an overnight wake-up call.”

In the early 1970s, Steiner explained, a consortium of oil companies proposed a pipeline between Prudhoe Bay and Valdez, Alaska, and made several promises to the people in exchange for their approval of the project. Among them: that all tankers carrying oil from Valdez would be double-hulled, that the Coast Guard would have a state-of-the-art vessel traffic system to monitor the tankers all the way to the sound’s ocean entrance, and that the companies would have the best oil spill response system in the world. Once the approvals were granted these promises were quickly forgotten and none were in place when the Exxon Valdez ran aground almost two decades later.

It’s impossible to tell if those promised measures would have prevented the spill or to what extent they might have tempered the damage it caused. But according to Steiner, for those who witnessed the ecological disaster that ensued, nothing could be much worse. The Exxon Valdez ran aground four minutes after midnight on March 24, 1989 with the autopilot on, the captain below decks, and two tired junior crewmen on the bridge.

“ Basically there’s no way to respond to this effectively,” he said. “The official estimate is 11-million gallons of oil spilled, but we happen to know that it was at least twice that and it could have been 30-million gallons... but even if they had lost the entire load of oil, I don’t think the damage could have been much worse – once something is dead, it’s dead.”

And there was a lot of dead. The best estimates place the body count at hundreds of thousands of seabirds, thousands of sea otters, hundreds of harbour seals and bald eagles, and billions of salmon and herring eggs. These numbers include only those organisms which died immediately following the spill and likely only a sampling at that. Chief Walter Meganack, a resident of nearby Port Graham, described it this way at the time.

“The excitement of the season had just begun, and then we heard the news: oil in the water, lots of oil killing lots of water. It is too shocking to understand. Never in the millennium of our tradition
Government is known for its stove-piping of issues – we talk about MPAs over here, we talk about fish over here, we talk about climate change over here, all managed by different agencies... the point in the Oceans Strategy is that we need to talk about these issues in an integrated manner.

Averil Lamont

Remember that this is really planet ocean, not planet earth.

Anne Stewart

The initial clean-up and containment effort was feeble and late. It was only once the spill began making headlines and Exxon grasped it was facing a public relations nightmare that one of the world’s wealthiest corporations loosened its purse strings and started spending like, well, a drunken sailor. Some 11,000 people and 2,000 vessels were hired to clean up the mess and over $2-billion were spent. And despite all the effort and money, a meagre five per cent of the spilled oil was recovered.

“Very little of it was for show. It was a public relations gimmick by the company. To their credit they opened their chequebook – it’s all they knew how to do and they said ‘do anything you think will work’ and we did... but not much of it worked,” Steiner said. “This was the country that put a man on the moon and here we are out there wiping rocks down with rags.”

It was only once the destruction was complete that measures were taken to ensure it wouldn’t be repeated. Steiner said single-hulled tankers are being phased out in favour of double-hulled models, hundreds of fishing boats are now trained in spill response, state of the art equipment and crews are stationed in the area on standby, and tankers are required to be accompanied by a two tugboat escort while sailing in and out of Prince William Sound. A citizen’s advisory council with stable funding and a paid staff is also now in place. The council is responsible for sponsoring ongoing scientific research on environmental impacts related to shipping and oil transportation safety, and they make recommendations to government and industry about mitigating potential impacts.

“It works – 95 percent of what the citizen’s council has recommended has been adopted,” he said. “A whole host of things would not have happened had the citizens not had the capability and the expressed authority to be deriving these conclusions and presenting them to the companies.”

It’s a model Steiner said should be imitated on BC’s north coast. Not only to address offshore tanker traffic running from Alaska to the lower 48 states, but also to ensure preventative systems are in place to cope with increasing volumes of tar sands oil leaving north coast pipeline terminals in Prince Rupert and Kitimat and sailing through inshore waters (see page 21).

“[It’s about] changing our behaviour—if we stand behind our colleagues like DFO [...] we open the door for them to do things differently than they’ve ever done them before. We change our own behaviour, and we’ve got to start thinking about how we do things as Haida as well. What does looking after our land and our seas mean to us? These are opportunities for us to set those examples and do things differently.

Cindy Boyko

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incident. In 1994 an Anchorage jury awarded $5-billion – an amount equivalent to Exxon’s profits for one year at the time – in punitive damages to the victims of the spill. In successive appeals the company managed to whittle that amount down to $2.5 billion until finally last year the United States Supreme Court decided $500-million would settle the matter.

Of course, since it took 19 years to resolve the suit, the money was too late to help many people affected by the spill who had already passed on, not to mention the coastal communities in the area which are now shadows of their former selves.

Much like the litigation, the damage to Prince William Sound and its communities dragged on for decades and has yet to be fully repaired. Prior to the spill, the residents of the native villages of Tatitlek and Chenega Bay harvested an average of over 600 pounds of wild foods per person. That number fell to 225 pounds in 1989 and 150 pounds in 1990 before slowly recovering. As food gathering tapered off, rates of suicide, alcohol and drug abuse, domestic violence, and child abuse rose.

Ten years after the spill only two of 24 affected species (the bald eagle and river otter) had been declared ‘recovered.’ Fifteen years later studies were reporting significant amounts of oil trapped beneath the surface of beaches and intertidal zones. Today, herring stocks haven’t recovered at all. And while there may be other factors contributing to the slow rate of recovery for certain species, there is little doubt that the effects of the Exxon spill were disastrous and long-term.

If there is only one lesson to be learned from what happened in Prince William Sound two decades ago it may be best summed up by the expression ‘an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.’ Where oil spills are concerned, it is far better to imagine the worst and adopt measures to prevent accidents, because any alternative is courting disaster beyond imagining.

“There is no simpler way to say this – oil, water, fish, and wildlife don’t mix,” Steiner stated. “The damage from a catastrophic spill will be catastrophic. There’s no way around it.”

Problems are easy to identify, solutions are evasive and usually very difficult to achieve.

Lindsey Doerksen (centre)

People don’t want to listen to the truth because they know it’s going to hit them in their pocket book. There are a lot of people on this island that don’t care—they’re just looking at the dollar. But there are also a lot of people that do care—they’re looking at the future, or what’s left of it.

Paul Pearson
So far, the oceans are turning into slimy Coca-cola, fish stocks are collapsing, dead zones expanding... is there any hope people can earn a living from the sea? Can our oceans feed us as they have in the past and also provide us with sustainable jobs?

People will continue to find work and turn a profit, or they hope to, from any number of marine-based activities over the coming years. Many of these activities, like fishing, have existed for centuries and are now confronting new (and some not-so-new) challenges. Others, such as tourism and aquaculture, are more recently established uses that may prove lucrative, but may not be appropriate or desirable in certain areas. Finally, proposed marine use activities such as the Naikun Wind Energy project are finding themselves competing for space with more traditional sectors.

Sport and commercial fishers continue to harvest local and migrating fish stocks, each year fighting for resource access. It’s a battle that began during the 1980s when sport fishing lodges were first established on Haida Gwaii, and it only intensified as salmon stocks fluctuated and the industry grew. Both sides were represented at the Gaaysigang Ocean Forum on the ‘Fishing’ panel; local troller Lindsey Doerksen spoke on behalf of the commercial fishery and West Coast Resorts’ George Cuthbert provided a perspective on fishing lodges and recreational fisheries. Much of what they had to say about the other’s sector would sound familiar to any observer of Canada’s west coast fishery over the past 20 years, and any new planning effort will have to confront these challenges and emerge with workable solutions. But it won’t be easy – many attempts have already been made to establish sustainable fisheries and restore healthy fish stocks while resolving differences between sectors over the years, a point Doerksen ruefully made while describing the DFO’s (Fisheries and Oceans Canada) management efforts.

“In 1966 we had the first of the big changes or government resolves, and that was the Davis Plan. Since then we’ve had two Pearse reports, we’ve had a roundtable session, we’ve had the Mifflin Plan, we’ve had the...
Toy, we’ve had the May, Kelleher, PFRCC and probably a few more that I’ve missed … [and] they’re all been band-aid solutions to a mortal wound—they’ve done nothing to solve the problems.”

At one time, aquaculture was viewed as a potential saviour—an ostensibly sustainable way to offer consumers fresh fish while easing the strain on wild stocks. Today, that early hope has been replaced by cynicism towards an industry now better known for introducing Atlantic salmon to BC waters, disease to wild stocks, and localized pollution. It’s that perception that people like Brian Kingzett, from Vancouver Island University’s Centre for Shellfish Research, must overcome as they try to convince jaundiced coastal communities that other forms of aquaculture such as shellfish production can be both economically and ecologically sustainable.

“Aquaculture in British Columbia has been very widely discussed and is often a contentious issue. [But let’s] make an assumption that aquaculture can be practiced sustainably… Aquaculture can take pressure off wild stocks, and generally shellfish [farming] is one of the forms of aquaculture that all seafood sustainability groups give a green designation,” Kingzett explained during his presentation for Gaaysiigang’s ‘Putting Fish on the Table’ panel. He added that many of the world’s wild capture fisheries are either fully- or over-exploited.

“In many places in the world, it is not about how or should, it’s that aquaculture is becoming a necessary way to feed a growing world population… [so] how do we move forward and how do we do that in a sustainable way?”

Kingzett calls this shift towards aquaculture a ‘Blue Revolution’ with the potential to completely alter global seafood markets. In his opinion, BC must decide if it wants to be a buyer or a seller. Kingzett noted, however, that the greatest obstacles to developing an aquaculture industry on the west coast were a lack of capacity in terms of investment and trained labour, an uncertain regulatory climate that discourages investment, and weak support from governments who prefer to grant other users priority when considering lease applications. He warned that these issues will have to be addressed if BC is to have a future in shellfish aquaculture production.

Like fishing, tourism is another sector whose success hinges largely on questions of sustainability and limited resources. For instance, local ecotourism operators like Barb Rowsell of Anvil Cove Charters offer clients a guided wilderness experience that won’t amount to much without the finite and threatened wilderness part of the pitch.

“Our raw materials are beautiful scenery, wildlife and an occasional fish for dinner,” she said. “Maintaining these resources will be one of the challenges. Don’t kill the goose that lays the golden egg.”

During her presentation Rowsell indicated that the recently protected Duu Guusd Haida Heritage Site offers interesting new potential for businesses like hers. But the added attraction it represents could also compromise the very qualities that lure visitors to Haida Gwaii in the first place.

“More visitors will bring increased demands on the resources and conflicts between user groups. It is not really great to take your guests paddling along the kelp line and have them pushing their way through bobbing wine bottles and grapefruit peels. Minor, yes in the grander scheme, but for our guests who have paid a lot of money and travelled a great distance and want to think that they are paddling pristine waters, it might not be.”

Some see big potential in drawing cruise ships that regularly call at coastal ports disembarking hundreds or even thousands of well-heeled visitors at a time. It’s a vision that might appeal to the local chamber of commerce, but Memorial University’s Dr. Ross Klein cautions the reality for communities courting cruise ships lacks much of the glamour and extravagance common to the industry’s promotional materials.

The picture painted by Klein was not pretty: cruise ships may relay visitors into coastal towns, but they also dump their grey
water and sewage into the ocean. They burn dirty fuel and incinerate the large amounts of solid waste they generate including plastic. Working conditions for employees are often poor, ship operators typically pay little or no tax to local ports, and cruise companies frequently demand kickbacks from onshore businesses and tours that cater to passengers.

In addition, the ballot also proposed taxing casino revenues generated by ships in Alaskan waters, and the passenger and casino taxes have supported an on-board ‘Ocean Ranger Program’ that monitors environmental systems to make sure regulations are followed. Klein pointed out that although not all communities in Alaska

“I’m very happy that we have the federal government here, the provincial government, all the stakeholders here in the same room hearing what we have to say – you’re welcome here. And we have to stop saying ‘I’m the boss, I’m the authority,’ and start saying, ‘We manage this together’ Blue is not the new green – it’s ‘We.’ We are the new green.”

Roy Collison

“A cruise ship needs a port more than a port needs a cruise ship,” he said. “A $50 head tax has not in any way impacted the number of people going to Alaska. The tax was a ballot initiative from citizens – they did a massive petition campaign and got the required 25,000 or 27,000 signatures. Initially, the industry objected and tried to block what was going on the ballot, saying the petitions were bogus. Even when the citizens were getting signatures on the petitions, industry had people harassing both the people circulating the petitions and the people signing them. When the petitions were filed, industry hired experts to argue that the signatures on the petitions were not real people. They spent huge amounts of money to block the campaign—between 2 and 3 million dollars —whereas the local citizens groups spent somewhere around $100,000. In the end, it went on the ballot and it was resoundingly supported by the citizens of Alaska… the citizens spoke, and they won.”

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confirm that wind is one very abundant local resource, and Naikun’s Matt Burns said his company has identified what it feels is the sweet spot to establish BC’s first money-making wind power facility.

“There is huge potential for wind in the Hecate,” he said. “In British Columbia, we currently do not have a single revenue-producing wind turbine—and we are one of the very few jurisdictions in North America that can say that.”

There are, of course, concerns as well—how will the construction of up to 110, 100-metre tall turbines a short distance from the northeast corner of Graham Island impact fisheries or the visual landscape in an area adjacent to a provincial park? Could a wind farm pose a hazard to birds and other marine fauna? Burns said Naikun is in the process of preparing an environmental assessment to address these questions, and noted these types of impacts have been studied elsewhere and the results were encouraging.

“This will hardly matter if BC Hydro decides to seek additional power generating capacity elsewhere. Burns said the utility is expected to make a decision on bids for provincial energy generation later this year—a decision which will likely determine if Naikun gets mothballed or moves forward. Should it get the go ahead, however, it will certainly need to be accounted for in local marine use planning. There is a clear need for a marine use plan that will guide development, conservation, and restoration of Haida Gwaii’s marine environment. No industry exists without impacts or risks, and it is up to the islands communities to determine if those risks are acceptable and if impacts can be mitigated by good planning.”

“Thomas the Tank Engine”

Whale photo: Debbie Gardiner

Group photo: Mike Ambach

Roy Collison
During two days of dialogue at Gaaysiigang, we learned that major changes are needed in the way we treat the ocean. We heard that present conditions and trends in the ocean are alarming. The health of the ocean is deteriorating worldwide. Human developments are increasing the risk of environmental disaster. We heard that reversing this trend will be a daunting task. It will mean changing our attitude, our collective will be a daunting task. It will mean We heard that reversing this trend will be a daunting task. It will mean changing our attitude, our collective behaviour, as well as our personal actions.

Global to local action is needed to slow or stop some trends such as climate change, ocean acidification, and the growth of ocean “dead zones” caused by pollution. Haida Gwaii has been less affected than many other places but the impacts of these trends will eventually reach our shores as well. The good news is that here on the islands we have an opportunity to buffer against the effects of those changes through local protection and stewardship efforts. Decades of abuse won’t be reversed overnight and we must act now to ensure that our children and grandchildren inherit a healthy ocean.

The forum was attended by over 200 participants including elders, fishermen, business people, environmentalists, government workers, teachers, children and many others. We heard from over 20 speakers about global, regional and local marine issues. Panel speakers sparked debate and dialogue by outlining a vision for their sector as well as challenges and solutions. Their perspectives and some specific recommendations are summarized in the final section of the proceedings. Forum participants also shared their concerns and ideas in response to presentations and during group dialogue sessions. Many of the solutions shared by speakers and participants should be discussed further and then incorporated into plans and put into action.

Four major themes emerged by the closing of the forum. Priority actions related to each theme were compiled by the organizing committee and are outlined in the following:

**Forum Recommendations**

**MOVING FORWARD**

**REFORM FISHERIES MANAGEMENT**

Fisheries have degraded marine ecosystems worldwide and British Columbia is starting to see some disturbing symptoms. For instance formerly abundant species such as abalone, inshore rockfish, herring and Pacific cod are depleted and many key salmon populations throughout BC are depressed. How do we reverse global trends such as overfishing and fishing down food webs? How can fisheries management respond to changes in ocean productivity that may be driving or contributing to some of these conditions? Although we don’t have all the answers, we do have a place to start.

- Take an ecosystem approach. Fishing plans and management decisions must take into account the effect of fisheries on ecosystem dynamics, including habitats, other marine species and human communities. Comprehensive measures are necessary to protect and restore ecosystems and the communities that depend on them, and sustainable fishing requires that decisions are precautionary when specific stocks are at risk.

- Take out an insurance policy. Create protected areas in the ocean – areas where there is little or no fishing – and set acceptable and effective targets for protection. This might mean protecting one-third of ocean space (as recommended by Jeremy Jackson and other scientists), or setting another target that is appropriate for local conditions. Initiatives such as the proposed Gwaii Haanas National Marine Conservation Area Reserve and Haida Heritage Site and Sgáaan K’inghlas (Bowie Seamount) Marine Protected Area are a good start for our region, but they aren’t enough. Protected areas can be used creatively to rebuild depressed stocks, protect endangered species, preserve ecosystem processes, or provide a benchmark for management or research.

- Stop unsustainable fishing practices and support sustainable fisheries that benefit local communities. Hold people to a higher level of accountability when they fish in Haida Gwaii waters and reward those that are socially responsible and have a small ecological footprint. Use local-to-global markets to foster change through branding and fisheries certification.

**TAKE RESPONSIBILITY**

We heard that many of the negative changes in the ocean are occurring globally and we need to change our collective behaviour. Grassroots efforts are needed to stimulate broader regional and global actions.

- Treat the ocean with respect – In Haida this is expressed as Yahguudang. Consider the impacts of your actions. Take only what you need and avoid waste. For example, many forum participants felt strongly about putting an end to catch and release fishing and developing a local code of conduct for the recreational fishery.

- Make the ocean your priority. Participate and speak out about choices in your community and region that affect the ocean. This might mean moderating your energy consumption to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Or talking with your neighbours and speaking to politicians about whether oil tankers should be allowed to travel by our islands. Make demands for better legislation and monitoring to stop pollution of the marine environment. Be informed and if a development compromises the ocean, choose not to support it or ensure that risks are reduced to an acceptable level.

- Support socially responsible development. Ask yourself whether a development meets environmentally responsible standards or what needs to change, and voice your concerns.
WORK TOGETHER AS A COMMUNITY

Our strength lies in our ability to work together. This has been achieved on land – the 2007 Haida Gwaii Strategic Land Use Agreement charts the way forward to a sustainable local forest economy and was the product of local engagement, hard work and difficult decisions. Similar processes are now underway for the ocean and Haida Gwaii is in a position to provide leadership in these marine initiatives.

- Make Haida Gwaii a model for others in ocean management. We can do things differently here. People and organizations from around the world continue to be inspired by and learn from the co-management board that was established for Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve and Haida Heritage Site. The same potential exists for management of the ocean. We can serve as an example of what can be achieved if a community has a vision and takes the initiative to make a difference before it is too late. We can show others how to integrate science and traditional knowledge, how to incorporate local values into decision-making, and how to build a sustainable marine economy. We can be leaders by developing integrated management approaches that are locally appropriate yet globally applicable.

- Pursue sustainable economic opportunities and develop local guidelines. For example new developments such as offshore windfarms, shellfish aquaculture, pocket cruise ships and even ecotourism should be approached carefully and strategically, respecting local values and interests. Find a way forward that engages the local community and other users in such a way that controversy and confrontation do not become barriers to creative economic solutions and new ways of thinking and acting.

INTEGRATE MARINE PLANS

A clear plan is needed to make sure we are heading in the right direction. We heard about five marine and coastal planning processes that are underway in Haida Gwaii, all at varying stages. Communication and integration between planning processes is needed to ensure that resulting plans work for us.

- Coordinate planning efforts. Lead agencies and governments need to talk with one another. Haida Gwaii is a small place and better dialogue and cooperation is needed to coordinate efforts and achieve common goals.

- Get everyone involved. The planning process should be inclusive and encourage participation from interest groups, local communities and the general public. Find adequate resources for community involvement in integrated management both in the short and long term.

- Consider the land and sea together. Explicit linkages between terrestrial and marine plans and protected areas are necessary; for example, plans should account for how activities such as logging in watersheds affects estuaries, water quality and salmon rearing. The land and sea are interconnected and we know that what happens in one realm affects the other.

- Address uncertainties and improve decision making through improved information. Initiate proactive local research and support marine plans with the best science and traditional knowledge. We also need to plan for things on the horizon – climate and ecosystem changes will be a part of our future and we need to be prepared. Our plans cannot be static in time.

We live in interesting times of great local and global change. The ocean forum and resulting recommendations are meant to provoke thought in citizens and leaders. Active engagement of local people in marine issues and planning initiatives is needed to ensure that marine plans reflect our islands’ values and interests. Together we can affect positive change for Haida Gwaii.

Forum Recommendations cont’d
The first keynote speaker, Dr Jeremy Jackson, opened the forum on a sombre, sobering note as he described in detail the rapidly declining health of the world’s oceans.

Disappearing sea ice, overfishing, widespread coral mortality, collapsing populations of large predators like sharks and tuna, destruction of the ocean floor from trawling, food webs poisoned with heavy metals, the ‘rise of slime,’ acidification, and the emergence of enormous oxygen-starved ‘dead zones’ were some but not nearly all of the symptoms Jackson warned are indications that our ocean ecosystems are in peril.

Confronted with this bleak assessment, he argued that assigning blame is hardly a priority. “We are all guilty – it is not one group of people. The only way we can address things all at once is to change the way we live.”

The measures he proposed may strike some as drastic, particularly his suggestion to close fisheries entirely. “There are people in the room who won’t like this, but what the hell. Most fisheries are just grossly irresponsible. The idea of feeding nine billion people with wild caught fish is a joke. We don’t try to feed Europe with deer and elk, we raise cattle.”

Other remedies he favoured included the elimination of fertilizer subsidies, a cap on carbon dioxide emissions, and the establishment of large marine protected areas.

Jackson said if nutrient runoff and greenhouse gas emissions aren’t controlled quickly, the consequences will be the continued decline of molluscs, plankton, and reef corals, the stratification and acidification of oceans, the expansion of global ‘dead zones’ dominated by jellyfish and microbes, and the deterioration of coastal waters to the point where they will become too toxic for aquaculture and unhealthy for human habitation.

Even though we have the right to our fish and our seafood and our abalone, we have to take responsibility too. We need to think about what we are doing. Just because we have a right and a history of gathering food from these lands, doesn’t mean that it is okay for us to deplete them as well.

Nika Collison
HAIDA GWAI MARINE PLANNING INITIATIVES PANEL

Bruce Sieffert, BC Integrated Land Management Bureau
Sieffert's presentation was broken down into three parts: the marine work currently underway as part of implementing the Haida Gwaii Strategic Land Use Agreement, BC’s approach and involvement vis-a-vis coastal marine planning, and a coast-wide provincial perspective on marine planning.

He said the Haida Gwaii Strategic Land Use Agreement references marine boundaries for protected areas and called upon the province and the CHN to collaborate in developing a marine plan for these areas.

Next he explained that the province’s experience with marine planning was based largely upon plans implemented in regions of BC’s south coast, usually in response to aquaculture development and to guide province-issued marine tenures. These plans concentrated on identifying acceptable, non-acceptable, and conditional uses and offer a basis for more detailed and comprehensive planning efforts to come.

Finally, Sieffert said that BC has interests in all of the province’s coastal waters, including jurisdiction over large areas of seabed. As such the province expects to be included as a partner in developing marine planning and conditional uses and offer a basis for more detailed and comprehensive planning efforts to come.

Guujaaw, President of the Haida Nation

Noting that Haida oral tradition goes back to a time when the entire earth was covered in water, Guujaaw said that indigenous stories and knowledge, once viewed as myth, have now been quantified by science and that indigenous people are always the first to sound the alarm when the environment is in peril.

As for science, he said it comes in many forms including corporate science, real science, and science of the sort espoused by DFO. He told the audience that fisheries scientists once inventoried stocks by hauling a length of piano wire behind a boat and counting the number of times it struck fish. “In a few years we’re going to look back at the science here today and it’s going to look like piano wire.”

Guujaaw said when planning for the land on Haida Gwaii began the pundits scoffed at the idea that more than 12 percent could be designated as protected. It took 30 years of strategy battling “trickery and deceit,” but now 50 percent of the land is protected and those areas where development is permitted must be logged in such a way that there is greater attention paid to creeks, wildlife and cultural values.

He said that while visitors to Haida Gwaii remark on the abundance found here, long time residents know it is only a shadow of what it was. The decline in marine life isn’t only due to fishing but distant sources of contamination are also to blame. He thanked Dr. Jackson for giving people the truth about what is happening to the oceans and said these messages must be conveyed to the leaders of the nation so they can understand the urgency of the situation.

FISHING PANEL

Gwaaganaad, Diane Brown, Traditional Food Gatherer & Medicinal Practitioner
Brown began by sharing Haida oral history. She recounted how the first Haida arrived on Haida Gwaii from the air but later disappeared. The second arrivals came from the earth and they also disappeared. Finally, those who remain on Haida Gwaii today came from the ocean.

Because of these ocean origins, Brown explained that many Haida have been brought up to respect the ocean.

Never to take too much, never to turn your nose up at food, that the ocean is sacred. Once there were many eulachon on the islands but they were insulated, left to the mainland, and never returned. To this day the Haida must go to the mainland and trade for eulachon grease. The ocean should be treated like a relative - we all revere our mothers and grandmothers, the ocean deserves the same reverence.

Brown hopes her grandchildren and her grandchildren’s grandchildren will be able to harvest clams, mussels, kelp, abalone, and so on and continue to live on the bounty of the ocean as the Haida always have.

Brown said she feels the greatest threat to this way of life is tanker traffic because an oil spill would mean the end of harvesting traditional Haida food from the ocean – the worst scenario she can imagine. She pointed to overharvesting as another threat and said the fact that abalone cannot be taken is a painful reality for her and many Haida elders who will never taste it again. She said she cannot understand why the sport fishing industry is not more efforts to build clams, mussels, kelp, abalone, and so on and continue to live on the bounty of the ocean as the Haida always have.

Lindsey Doerksen, Commercial Fisherman

Doerksen opened with a historical look at fishing in BC.

He pointed out that DFO oversaw this decline and was unable or unwilling to prevent it. He said time and again the agency commissioned plans and reports, more than eight in all, none of which succeeded in turning around a steadily deteriorating situation.

Doerksen proposed the following solutions: investing in enhancement facilities on a scale similar to Alaska where efforts have contributed to stock improvements, relocating fish farming operations on land where environmental impacts can be contained, bringing an end to logging practices that destroy fish habitat, outlawing the practice of catch and release for recreational anglers, introducing a seal hunt, and if DFO maintains a quota system, requiring that quota holders be active fishermen, not ‘slipper skippers.’

With proper management, Doerksen said fish stocks are a renewable resource that can support a commercial fishery but the system must be rebuilt, otherwise the resource will simply disappear.

We aren't even going to know what some of the opportunities are until we take these first steps. A Marine Protected Area for Gwaii Haanas is an opportunity to do things differently, to do things better. We are going to make our mistakes just like everyone else has along the way but we have learned so much over the last 100 years... we can set examples for the rest of the world to follow.

Cindy Boyko
George Cuthbert, West Coast Resorts

Cuthbert explained how he was drawn to fishing as a boy and how he began working in the recreational sector at the age of sixteen. Today he runs charters for West Coast Resorts and is a director of the Sport Fishing Institute of BC.

He said the recreational fishery is in decline – in 1990 there were 450,000 recreational anglers in the province and that number is expected to fall below 300,000 by 2010. This decline is due to decreased interest and opportunity.

The introduction of a quota system, keeping costs low enough to encourage young people to take up fishing, and environmental degradation were the three key challenges to the sport fishery’s continued viability.

Cuthbert said the sport fishing community is doing its part to improve the situation by investing in university research programs and promoting best standards and practices. He said the mentality among anglers is missing.

Quentin Fong, Alaska Sea Grant Marine Advisory Program

Fong moved to the United States 31 years ago. He holds degrees in marine biology and natural resource economics and was a fisherman for 12 years before he started trading seafoods (trading in shark fins, no less!). During this time, he became aware of conservation issues associated with the seafood industry, and since then has worked with individual businesses helping them find and develop markets for sustainable seafood products.

Fong believes the future of the seafood industry is bright and full of opportunity thanks to emerging markets in India and China. In Alaska prices for specialty products like sea cucumbers and geoducks are very strong, while increasing environmental awareness in Western Europe is creating markets for green and local seafood products.

In 2010, Alaska has introduced a certification program for pollock to assure consumers that fish are harvested sustainably, and similar opportunities exist for other commercial fish species caught in the Pacific Northwest.

Fong said that because most of the new market potential is in value-added seafood it can present challenges for producers since much of the value is added through processing, packaging, and transportation. These areas tend to favour offshore economies – for example, Alaskan seafood is often shipped to China for processing before it returns to be sold in the US market.

This challenge can be met by reducing the cost of labour or branding products that encourage consumer loyalty. He pointed to a study that found ‘soccer moms’ in the US do not want to prepare food for more than 20 minutes so one Alaskan company began successfully producing and marketing oven-ready salmon pinwheels that can be served in 18 minutes. Fong emphasized that small producers had to understand customers’ needs and find creative ways to meet market demands.

“

My vision for the future as an islands’ resident is for food, commercial and recreational fishing to all be important and viable parts of the island economy and culture, and for all these activities to be respectful of and reflective of Haida Gwaii values.

Léandre Vigneault

Léandre Vigneault, Saltsprays Explorers

Vigneault is a lifelong resident of Haida Gwaii, a marine biologist and for the past 15 years an advocate for conservation involved in both land use and marine planning. He watched the expansion of the recreational fishing industry and felt it could be done better. Five years ago he began offering non-catch and release fishing charters that include sightseeing and interpretive hikes as part of a small ecotourism venture.

He said, ideally, that fishing guests should enjoy a remote fishing experience with a reasonable chance of catching a fish secure in the knowledge that the stocks are well managed. During their stay, guests should abide by the islands’ values regarding issues such as catch and release or the targeting of large halibut and sensitive rockfish. Ultimately, visiting fishermen should leave with a better understanding of local ecology, geography, society and culture.

Competition for allocation and confrontation between sectors, rapid expansion of lodge and charter businesses, marketing materials that promote fish size and quantity, the lack of guided boats and catch accountability, and high fish mortality rates were the challenges he identified.

Vigneault proposed the following solutions: a system of marine protected areas around all of Haida Gwaii; the elimination or restriction of catch and release fishing, a well-maintained log of all fish caught and released in Haida Gwaii waters; the introduction of a non-transferable quota system, similar to the ‘rod days’ freshwater allocation, where quota is held in trust and managed by a local entity; the development of a Haida Gwaii code of conduct for recreational anglers; and a requirement that lodge and charter guests be accompanied by guides certified under a locally-based course. Vigneault suggested that the course would teach fishing guides about Islands’ values, history, geography, culture and ecology, the Haida Gwaii recreational fishery code of conduct, fish physiology and biology, and facts about catch and release, including its appropriate uses and techniques.

“Puttin’ fish on the table panel”

PUTTING FISH ON THE TABLE PANEL

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“Puttin’ fish on the table panel”

Brian Kingzett, Shellfish Aquaculture, Blue Revolution

Kingzett introduced himself as a shellfish aquaculture specialist with experience as a grower and biologist working with DFO and First Nations. He is currently involved with the scallop aquaculture projects in the waters near Burnt Island in Skidegate Inlet.

Kingzett described aquaculture as a looming ‘blue revolution’—it has already outstripped captured fisheries in global production and will only continue to grow because wild stocks are for the most part either overexploited or in a state of collapse. Growing world population and demand are expected to create a market for 85 million tonnes of aquaculture-raised seafood by 2030. His vision for the aquaculture industry in BC is one that is accepted by the public, professionally managed, environmentally responsible and financially sound.

In Kingzett’s view some of the obstacles to achieving this vision include: the aquaculture industry’s continuing shift towards a traditional agribusiness model; the high production costs in BC stemming from logistics, regulation, and expensive labour; limited market opportunities because of small capacity; reluctant investors discouraged by uncertain regulatory conditions; and a need for improved professionalism among existing producers.

Kingzett said that because First Nations in BC have a strong voice in what will happen along the coast they should look to collaborate with strategic, long-term developments that place an emphasis on sustainable initiatives, investment and local capacity building.

“Puttin’ fish on the table panel”

We’re in a fish-hungry world.

Lindsey Doerksen
Rick Steiner, Alaska Sea Grant Marine Advisory Program, Fairbanks, Alaska

Steiner’s presentation revolved around the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill in Prince William Sound, Alaska – the cause, the magnitude, the containment, the clean up and rehabilitation efforts, the damage it caused, the immediate and lingering consequences, and the prevention measures now in place.

Before dissecting the Valdez spill, Steiner raised concerns about how power and decision-making has centralized over the past century. He said that 700,000 people really control all the decisions that affect the seven billion people living on the planet – a dysfunctional system that in his opinion can only be rescued with the help of the public and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Together NGOs and public advocacy can correct the often cozy relationship between government and industry. He suggested that this relationship is carefully orchestrated by industry.

As for the spill, Steiner said the tanker ran aground when the autopilot was left on. The official figure states that 11 million gallons of oil spilled, however the actual amount could be more than 30 million. Over 13,000 workers and 2,000 vessels were hired to contain and clean the spill, two billion dollars were spent, and only five percent of the spilled oil was recovered. Some 1,000 sea otters, 100,000 birds, and one million seabirds died as a result of the spill. Today, 20 years later, some fisheries have yet to recover and oil still shows up on beaches and in the ecosystem.

The threat of a similar accident happening on Haida Gwaii exists today. There are Alaskan oil tankers passing to the west and shipping traffic regularly sails from Prince Rupert and Kitimat. Steiner suggested that a number of precautionary measures could be established on the north coast, such as requiring a tug be stationed on the islands or in Prince Rupert in the event that a tanker needs rescuing.

In the wake of the Exxon Valdez disaster a federally-mandated citizen’s council was struck to make regulatory recommendations in Alaska. The council receives four million dollars a year in funding which pays for professional staff and sponsors scientific reports that monitor the environmental impacts of tanker traffic in the region. Based on this research, the council makes regulatory recommendations to mitigate risks associated with oil tanker transportation. Ninety-five percent of the committee’s recommendations have been adopted.
PRESENTATION SUMMARIES: DAY 2

MARINE ENERGY AND TRANSPORATION PANEL

Chris Picard, North Coast – Skeena First Nations Stewardship Society

Picard outlined existing north coast shipping routes and traffic levels, then presented some predictions describing the locations and types of increases to traffic we can expect to see in the near future.

In addition to expansion of the container port in Prince Rupert, Picard noted that tar sands development, and proposals for new pipelines bringing products to Kitimat for shipping to global markets, could fuel a boom in oil tanker traffic in the region. Enbridge Gateway has proposals for parallel pipelines – one that would deliver over 400,000 barrels of oil per day to Kitimat for export, and another to send 150,000 barrels of condensate (a highly flammable, toxic hydrocarbon used to thin oil extracted from the tar sands) from Kitimat to Alberta.

Picard said scenarios based on predicted increases to tar sands production call for volumes of greater than two million barrels per day to be shipped out of Kitimat and Prince Rupert via added capacity. He said First Nations and north coast communities must determine what kind of development they want to see and outline their objectives so that they are prepared when these proposals are presented to them. •

Matt Burns, NaiKun Wind Energy

Burns said that NaiKun Wind Energy, a renewable energy company with offices in Skidegate and Masset, is interested in Haida Gwaii because it possesses all of the elements required for wind generation – high winds, shallow water, and access to the grid.

After years of assessing the potential for wind generation in a 100 square kilometre area of Hecate Strait, NaiKun has identified its preferred project location, along with corridors where it would lay transmission cable to the east and west.

Burns said BC is one of the few jurisdictions that does not employ even one wind generation turbine. The province relies on hydroelectric power for most of its capacity, but also imports about 20 per cent of what it consumes during winter months when river systems are at low flow levels because of little rain and snow melt. That imported power comes in part from coal and nuclear plants.

He said the rest of the world is moving toward wind generation – Britain has set ambitious goals for increasing its capacity, and quoted Greenpeace as claiming wind-generated power comes at almost no environmental cost if it is properly situated. Burns closed by saying there is great potential for wind generation in the Hecate, and he encouraged everyone to use less energy and advocate for green technologies. •

Jacques Morin, Independent Energy Consultant

Morin wants Haida Gwaii to take the lead in sustainable energy production and consumption with the benefits of locally identified and developed solutions remaining in the community. He said over-consumption, inconsistent policy direction, and a leadership vacuum are the barriers to the realization of this vision. Morin gave the example of the Danish Island of Samsoe, which went from wholly dependent upon fossil fuels to being powered entirely by green energy in only six years, as a model Haida Gwaii could emulate.

To become more like Samsoe, Morin suggested Haida Gwaii’s leaders need to collectively commit to energy sustainability and he proposed the establishment of an island trust that would implement and monitor a system of household carbon offsets. Households exceeding their allowance would pay into the trust which would then invest the funds in local green energy projects.

In the meantime conservation efforts need to be stepped up and small scale micro-generation production and ‘Net Zero Energy’ homes should be encouraged wherever possible. He also supports establishing energy standards for buildings, committing to sustainable energy research, developing and integrating potential for solar, tidal and fuel cell technologies, investment in district heating systems for new and existing buildings, and the introduction of rebate campaigns to encourage consumers to buy more efficient home appliances. •

John Davis, University of Victoria, Institute for Coastal and Oceans Research

Davis discussed the impact of climate change on fish and resources. He began by noting that we can look forward to storm events, rainfall and temperature regimes that are more diverse, more intense, and outside our normal range of experience. This will result in more rain when it isn’t needed and periods of drought when it is. With higher temperatures we can expect to see a reduction in snow pack which, in turn, will lead to warmer creeks and rivers with lower water levels. Given that salmon die in the 24 to 25 degree Celsius range, Davis pointed out that climate change could result in major stock mortality.

He said changes such as these are all part of the breaking wave that is coming as a result of climate change. Davis is working with universities and governments across the country bringing together natural and social scientists to try and predict how these changes will unfold and what their impacts will be. He hopes that this information can help contribute to better planning in communities like Haida Gwaii. •

In the beginning of time, there were supernatural beings that lived in the ocean and could come out to be with us and go back into the ocean at will. That is how close we were to the supernatural beings, to all the beings that live in the ocean. So in a sense, we’re all related. And that’s how you should treat the ocean, as your relative. It’s what gave you life. Just as women give birth and give life, the ocean gave us life this time around.

Gwaaganaal, Diane Brown

“”
Anne Stewart, Outreach Coordinator, Bamfield Marine Sciences Centre

Stewart explained the Bamfield Marine Sciences Centre is a non-profit organization operated by the Western Canadian Universities Marine Sciences Society – a body representing five member universities. The centre is in the heart of the Huu-ay-aht First Nation’s territory in Barkley Sound on Vancouver Island and was established to provide research infrastructure for marine and coastal scientists. It offers full credit undergraduate and graduate courses in marine and coastal sciences. She said Bamfield’s main goal is to promote marine conservation and all of its academic and public education programs are oriented towards intensive marine conservation.

Stewart said many of the challenges facing the oceans are larger than the forum, and she pointed to poverty and greed as examples. All of the challenges are also connected and it is important to fully understand the issues so that we can determine how to address them. In this way, Stewart believes that advocacy can be an effective way to bring about and instil change. •

Sustaining the seas and sustaining communities go hand in hand.

Rick Steiner

Barb Rowsell, Anvil Cove Charters

Rowsell, a Haida Gwaii resident for 33 years, has spent nearly that long earning a living on the waters surrounding the islands either by fishing or running charters for government representatives, researchers, or tourists. Today most of her work is adventure tourism—kayak tours offering a blend of forest, ocean, and intertidal interpretation.

Rowsell sees the recent establishment of the Duu Guusd Haida Heritage Site on the west coast of the islands as something with the potential to play a major role in shaping ecotourism here over the next ten years. She said the new status is bound to attract more visitors to the area just as Gwaii Haanas did when it was established, and a plan that accounts for marine use will have to be developed for all of Haida Gwaii, including Duu Guusd and Gwaii Haanas.

Much of what comes out of this plan will depend on what goes into it and Rowsell said it will be important that every stakeholder is involved in planning the future. She lamented the lack of investment in scientific studies by the provincial and federal governments in recent years because that work provides a necessary baseline inventory of what exists today so that impacts and changes can be measured in the future.

Finally she said her guests visit the islands for the chance to see a whale, catch a fish and paddle in clean water. She hopes islands will get together and ensure a future where that can continue to happen. •

Dennis Madsen, Heritage Resource Conservation Manager, Gwaii Haanas

Madsen joined Parks Canada many years ago and has worked at Gwaii Haanas for the past nine years. He said Gwaii Haanas is unique and its cooperative management model attracts visitors from all over the world eager to learn about it. The Haida – Canada Archipelago Management Board is responsible for decision making in Gwaii Haanas and it operates by consensus.

Parks Canada’s mandate is to “protect and present” natural and cultural heritage—a mandate that has remained consistent for the past 100 years and that began on land but is now moving into waters. Part of the vision of the Gwaii Haanas management plan is that a kayaker paddling in the area feels like the first person ever to visit.

Madsen spoke of the changing face of Canada and how it presents some of the challenges facing Gwaii Haanas—the shift towards a more urban, multicultural population, the cost of visiting a place like SGang Gwaay, and how it can be difficult to encourage youth to visit the land when they prefer digital culture.

Parks Canada is trying to address some of these challenges by not charging visiting fees to school groups, offering more web-based opportunities, and implementing a Rediscovery Program every summer in Swan Bay. •

Victoria and Ottawa are a long way away and things seem to be able to get lost between here and there. Keep it local.

Barb Rowsell

Dr Ross Klein, Professor and Author, Memorial University of Newfoundland

Klein highlighted the underside of the cruise industry and warned of empty promises and increased pollution as cruise ship traffic increases. The industry says it runs clean ships but they paid large sums in environmental fines in the US. Their environmental impacts are significant: the fuel the ships use is dirty, they burn a lot of plastic, and they produce 3.5 kilograms of solid waste per person per day that is dumped into the ocean or incinerated. Add to that seven gallons of sewage per person per day and 90 gallons of grey water—all of which ends up in the ocean—and it is difficult for the cruise industry to make the case that it is green.

He said many cruise ships retain 50 to 80 per cent of the cost passengers pay for onshore tours which leads to complaints against the small-business operators who provide $20 tours to customers who paid $50 for the pleasure. Working conditions are also poor—employees work 70-hour weeks, seven days a week for months on end. The industry generated $2.4 billion net profits in 2008 and virtually no tax was paid on it due to cruise vessels being registered in countries that act as tax havens.

There are ways to ensure community benefits though, and Klein gave the example of Alaska where they charge a $50 per passenger fee and tax on-board casino revenues. This has not affected the number of visitors, and the fees have improved cruise ship infrastructure, increased community services, and paid for an ‘Ocean Ranger Program’ that monitors the industry’s environmental compliance.

Klein said the industry needs to be better regulated. Port fees need to be fair and equitable and passengers should be better educated about where they are visiting and what they are supporting. •

PRESENTATION SUMMARIES: DAY 2

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We are the new green! We are the new green!

A special thanks to our sponsors
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- Parks Canada
- World Wildlife Fund Canada
- Land Strategies (Mel Woolley)
- Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Community Involvement Program
- Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Aboriginal Aquatic Resources and Ocean Management Program
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- Alaska Sea Grant Marine Advisory Program
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- West Coast Resorts
- North Coast - Skidegate First Nations Stewardship Society
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- Megen’s Store
- Skidegate Repatriation Committee
- BC Child Care Resource and Referral Program, Queen Charlotte
- Gowgaia Institute
- Haida Heritage Centre at K’ay Llnagaay
- Haida Gwaii Museum at Kay Llnagaay
- Dr Ross A Klein
- Quentin Fong
- Martha Steigman

A special thanks to Kieran Moraes for the use of his name, Gaaysiigang, for this ocean forum.
“To me, the ideal example is the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority’s re-zoning of the Great Barrier Reef which is thousands of miles long. And what they decided was that one-third of the entire area was off-limits, and that that one-third must include 20% of every major habitat type on the Great Barrier Reef. So it included 20% of all seagrasses, 20% of all sponge gardens, 20% of all reef area etc, etc, etc. What is the science for that? The science for that is that it’s impossible to point to any regional fishery that’s not going down, and the limited number of cases where genuine protection on a large scale has occurred, there has been a reversal of that decline. Whether it increases productivity by some sort of magic, there is very, very mixed data for that. The best way to think of it is that it is an insurance policy. Insurance is expensive. And the best scientific opinion at this point, I will say, is that you need to put 33.33% of resource in the bank as insurance so that you can have it in the future.”

Jeremy Jackson

““We aren’t even going to know what some of the opportunities are until we take these first steps. We are going to make our mistakes just like everyone else has along the way but we have learned so much over the last 100 years... we can set examples for the rest of the world to follow.”

Cindy Boyko

“The one clear message... is that the successful Marine Protected Areas in this world are locally-driven. They came from the local area and they mean something to the local people, and that’s what makes them successful. I believe that’s what, in the long run, is going to make Gwaii Haanas successful—that commitment by the Haida and by the communities to make it work.”

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