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Haida Gwaii's Marine Future: A Conservation and Local Economy Path

This description was prepared by the Haida Oceans Technical Team and BC technical staff to describe the elements of a marine future on Haida Gwaii. It is drawn from results of the Haida Gwaii Marine Future Scenarios Workshop (July 17-18, 2012), as well as direction expressed by the Haida Marine Work Group and Haida Gwaii Marine Advisory Committee. Progress towards planning targets (to be identified) will be regularly assessed through indicators for each of the realms below.

Twenty Years From Now

Haida Gwaii has followed a path that prioritizes culture, healthy intact ecosystems, and sustainable communities. Marine use and development is balanced with high environmental protection standards and a comprehensive network of marine protected areas. Marine industries that are supported around Haida Gwaii generally have low environmental impacts and are consistent with the distinct islands lifestyle. Community growth is based on a diversity of activities that tap into a growing global demand for sustainable seafood and a unique visitor experience. Substantial progress in this direction has been made in the realms of environment, economy, community and governance as follows:

Environment – Haida Gwaii has embraced new conservation efforts through establishment of a network of marine protected areas. High environmental standards are required for all developments and activities. New fisheries policies and approaches are explored, and fisheries within Haida Gwaii waters are managed sustainably with significant levels of local involvement. These actions protect key habitats, marine communities and biodiversity as well as culturally significant places, and buffer against climate change and environmental uncertainties. The result is a resilient and productive marine environment that supports sustainable marine industries.

Economy - Economic development in the marine sector is focused on managed growth of tourism and shellfish aquaculture, slow but steady development of new community fisheries initiatives, and support for new sustainable technology initiatives and research. Haida Gwaii has become known as a premier tourism destination and source of sustainable wild fish and aquaculture products through concerted efforts in marketing and branding. Economic growth required sustained investment in human resources and key improvements in infrastructure. These improvements included amenities to support tourism, service industries or facilities to support fishing and upgrades in transportation and telecommunication systems to support business development. Focused training efforts prepare island residents and youth for new local opportunities. New partnerships and incentives serve to improve local benefits from recreational and commercial fishing in Haida Gwaii waters. New businesses are successful in part due to strong local leadership, ability to attract external investment and sustained government support. Overall the marine sector provides a greater proportion of local benefits and the number of jobs grows at a modest rate which keeps the islands population relatively stable.

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Community – The Haida’s strong cultural attachment to the ocean flourishes while supporting economic opportunities that are a good match to their growing, youthful population. Island residents maintain a high quality of life resulting from access to healthy food, fresh air, and the expansive and generally uncrowded inlets and shores. Community cohesion is strong and there is pride in living on Haida Gwaii, particularly in the innovative and progressive management of waters around Haida Gwaii. Infrastructure – particularly facilities to support tourism and clean sources of electricity —improves, although it is a struggle to maintain community infrastructure without a large tax base and reliance on seasonal jobs.

Governance - Marine and ocean governance systems continue to be refined and improved. The CHN, provincial and federal governments are working together along with industry sectors to meet the marine plan objectives, resulting in stronger co-management relationships over time. This includes collaborative efforts to manage marine protected areas throughout Haida Gwaii. Stronger relationships between managers, communities and users generate increased confidence in management decisions. The Haida Nation continues to work with local government to support island initiatives. Governance processes and decisions are sometimes slow but provide a stable base for development of businesses, delivery of services, or advocacy on behalf of island communities and other resource users.