

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, January 14, 2026 8:28 PM
To: Islands2050
Subject: Draft Policy Statement - Support for draft principles on reconciliation and collaborative governance

Good afternoon, Trustees,

I understand that you are in the process of considering a draft Islands Trust (area-wide) Policy Statement which is under development. I would like to offer commentary on aspects of the statement (which applies to the whole of the Trust area, not just Gabriola, of course).

First, I wish to applaud your extensive engagement efforts on the draft statement. This is the first comprehensive, contemporary expression of intent that the Islands Trust has developed in years and your fulsome engagement with all residents of the Islands Trust's area of jurisdiction, and all First Nations governments with constitutionally protected rights and title within the area is essential, for so many reasons.

I have provided my feedback on the whole draft statement as an individual resident through the online mechanism provided to do so. In this instance, my comments are focussed on the principles and approaches contained in the draft statement regarding reconciliation and collaborative governance with First Nations in the Trust area.

Prior to doing so, I reviewed the feedback provided by some of the First Nations on the draft statement and published on the Trust website. It is unsurprising that themes arising from that feedback include the importance of:

- Acknowledging the history of exclusion of the First Nations from their traditional stewardship and use of the Islands Trust area, through colonization and the reserve creation process and systemic racism prioritising opportunities for settlers over the rights of First Nations;
- Acknowledging Indigenous rights and title;
- Acknowledging treaty rights;
- Recognizing that First Nations continue to be active stewards of and rightsholders on their lands and waters, culturally, environmentally, and economically;

- Acknowledging the continued exclusion of First Nations from Islands Trust decision-making on those parts of their lands and waters that are within the Trust area; and
- Endeavouring to restore balance, justice, and fairness to the framework and decision-making mechanisms of the Island Trust.

With regard to the last two points above, I note that as far as I can ascertain, individual citizens of those Nations who do not own fee simple properties in the Trust area are excluded from voting for Islands Trustees, even though those elected Trustees make decisions over their Nation's lands and waters: leaving them with no Islands Trust representation in the Trust area other than through any ability of their own governments to represent their collective interests in government-to-government discussions with the Trust. In terms of fairness and balance, this is a glaring gap that effective co-governance could address.

The final version of the draft statement should be considered through the lens of all these important facts to ensure that it accurately reflects these realities and commits, in particular, to the last point made regarding restoration of justice, fairness, and balance.

As currently drafted, I fully support the intent of the draft statement to recognize First Nations' rights and title, to work with First Nations to protect cultural and environmental sites, and as noted above in particular to engage in co-governance—the latter an essential measure to restore balance in decision-making on lands and waters that have been in the stewardship of the First Nations for millennia prior to colonization of British Columbia, and fairness to First Nations' citizens who currently have no say in electing Islands trustees but who are entitled to representation in decision-making on their lands and waters.

Experience shows that there is nothing to fear in this approach, and everything to gain for all residents in the Trust area in terms of the mandate of the Islands Trust “to preserve and protect the Trust Area and its unique amenities and environment for the benefit of the residents of the Trust Area and of British Columbia generally, in cooperation with municipalities, regional districts, improvement districts, First Nations, other persons and organizations and the government of British Columbia.”

That mandate, like any government mandate, requires clear policies, rules, and procedures so that all citizens and residents know what applies to them and what is required of them. We already must comply with environmental standards and protection measures for cultural sites. We already have constraints on what we can do on our properties, to ensure that the Islands Trust mandate is respected and upheld (and under provincial legislation such as the *Heritage Conservation Act*). We already must adjust as those rules change from time to time (for example, when steep slopes regulation came into effect, and when the HCA is amended as anticipated later this year to increase protection for Indigenous cultural sites). Those rules will always change over time, as society, the environment, and laws evolve, and we will always have to comply with them. This proposed framework for updating the rules in the Trust area is clear, positive, and helpful in setting out the landscape in which we can expect the rules to evolve in the future. Bravo.

However, I wish to emphasize two more important points. First, reconciliation measures can and should occur whether or not and in what form a new Policy Statement is made; the Policy statement itself is not and should not be the impetus for the Trust's work on reconciliation, but rather the simple and indisputable fact that reconciliation is essential.

Secondly, certainty is the best weapon against fear of the unknown. There is a great deal of anxiety being generated at the moment around First Nations' rights and title thanks to deliberate misinformation being circulated in the media, and unnecessary fearmongering by opponents of reconciliation efforts. Understanding of the history and interests of First Nations in the Trust area and the immense knowledge and resources they bring to the table in land and water stewardship and providing clear, timely, and accurate information as the process unfolds, will assist in reducing anxiety and fear. I urge the Trust to actively continue this conversation with all residents and use opportunities to correct misinformation whenever you can.

The draft statement commits the Islands Trust to actions to support reconciliation. How those actions translate into concrete measures will be the next step, including ongoing community consultation. I look forward to those consultations as opportunities for relationship-building and bringing the Indigenous and non-Indigenous people of the Islands Trust area closer together in

greater understanding of each other.

Respectfully,

Katherine Gordon, LLB (Hons)

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