

June 8, 2021

To: Islands Trust Council

From: Gulf Islands Alliance/Deborah Ferens, Board Member

Re: Amendments to the Trust Policy Statement

Dear Trustees,

On behalf of the Gulf Islands Alliance, I am providing comments on the Amended Draft Version 1.0 of the Trust Policy Statement.

Reconciliation and Climate Change:

The Gulf Islands Alliance strongly supports the following:

- the new Acknowledgment (1.1) in Part 1 - Introduction
- the goal of the new Part 3: Regional Governance “to foster regional governance approaches that uphold the Islands Trust Object and honour regional commitments to reconciliation and climate change”.
- the new and strongly worded inclusion of “Climate and Biodiversity Crises” and “Restoration and Adaptive Management” in Part 4: Ecosystem Preservation and Protection
- the important and significant policy directives contained in the new Section 3.1 Regional Governance Policies and Directive policies for Local Trust Committees and Island Municipalities such as:
 - the priority “on the integrity of the environment and Indigenous cultural heritage in all decision-making and where necessary limit the rate and scale of growth and development” (3.1.9)

The Islands Trust Object and its Meaning

It is no small feat to reduce a significant historical event into a few short paragraphs (1.2 The Establishment of the Islands Trust and 1.4 The Islands Trust Object and Its Meaning). Thanks to the Trust staff for their attention in capturing the origin of the Islands Trust story gleaned from many recognizable sources. The 1974 concerns of residents, visitors and the government of the day led to the establishment of the Islands Trust Act as a “special-purpose government with a conservation-oriented responsibility to preserve and protect the Islands Trust Area for the benefit of the residents of the Trust Area and of BC more broadly” (1.2 Trust Policy Statement). GIA believes that this is a considerable improvement in the clarity of intent and purpose over the statement in the current Policy Statement.

Examining the statement to “preserve and protect” in Section 1.4 falls short of clarifying the mandate: “The mandate to “preserve” requires policy approaches that place priority on preserving the integrity of the environment and Indigenous cultural heritage in the Trust Area. The mandate to “protect” calls for policy approaches that promote sustainability and resilience.” The “preserve” part of the statement is clear but the mandate to “protect” calling for policy approaches that promote sustainability and resilience seem particularly unclear, unmotivating and lacking directive stewardship. We suggest the following: “The mandate to “protect” calls for policy approaches that promote planning tools and measures that commit to curbing environmental and cultural heritage loss and degradation in the Trust Area”. Thus we have a priority (the Act), a plan (the Mandate) and the expectation of explicit/prescriptive directive policies to enact the Trust Object.

The Gulf Islands Alliance strongly supports:

- Part 3 “Establishing Priorities and Limitation) which states:

“Advancing the Islands Trust Object is the preeminent duty of Trust Council, its committees, and all locally elected trustees in the Trust Area. This unique statutory mandate, unlike any other governance system in the country, specifically names the unique amenities and environment of the Trust Area as being worthy of priority attention....In order to maintain focus on the special purpose mandate of the Islands Trust now and into the future, regional priorities, values, principles and approaches **should** be guided by area-based mapping of significant ecosystems and cultural heritage, along with evidence-based understandings of each islands’ carrying capacity”.

We suggest that the word “should” be replaced by “shall”.

Present Context (1.3)

GIA supports the centrality of reconciliation, climate change and biodiversity loss in the Present Context (1.3)

GIA contends that the Present Context warrants the inclusion of:

- the growing recognition that many of the islands are reaching environmental tipping points and the significance of this alarming situation deserves mention.
- the urgency of the climate emergency with reference to Trust Council’s Climate Emergency Declaration. This cannot be understated and must inform the Policy Statement in articulating Trust Council’s general policy approach. The situation is much more dire and urgent than stated in the amended Present Context.

Pressures on the water supply, demands for intensified land use and residential development remain critically relevant almost 50 years after the 1974 commission’s work but are missing from the new Present Context other than the statement “The Trust Area continues to experience pressure from population growth and tourism” echoing the very same statement in the current Policy Statement. The capacity of the Trust Area’s resources remain limited and fragile. The cumulative development threats and impacts are even greater today than in 1974 or 1986. There should be more attention in the Present Context to the continuing & accelerating development threats to the Trust Area’s environment, sensitive ecosystem and limited resources.

While affordable housing is a major local and global concern, accepting the depth of the social/economic crisis involves acknowledging and addressing the inadequacy of our dominant economic model. This level of analysis is beyond a Trust policy approach and should not be centered in the Islands Trust legislated object as articulated throughout Part I. GIA believes this reference should be removed from the Present Context and is more properly addressed in the section “Housing Policies” (6.2).

Please act decisively and with boldness to craft the TPS with the vision, the directive policies and tools that can preserve and protect the ecological integrity and First Nations cultural heritage of the Trust Area by doing more to manage growth and development. You heard this 50 years ago, 26 years ago and in recent months as people from across the islands responded to the report “What We Heard Islands 2050” – the connection to the islands’ natural environment is of great and abiding value as is the support for the Islands Trust preserve and protect mandate.

The Gulf Islands Alliance is a non-profit grassroots organization actively dedicated to the protection of the natural environment and habitats of BC’s Gulf Islands for now and future generations. GIA supports the Islands Trust federation in achieving its legislated Object.