



Info@friendsofthegulfislands.ca
www.friendsofthegulfislands.ca

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Delegation to June 2025 Trust Council Meeting

Dear Trustees, Staff, Honoured Guests and Members of the Public

My name is Jennifer Margison, and I'm speaking on behalf of the Board and members of the Friends of the Gulf Islands Society. I come to you from Galiano Island.

Today I want to speak to the recent letter from the Honourable Ravi Kahlon, Minister of Housing and Municipal Affairs, written in response to the Trust Council's second request for a review of the Islands Trust Act, governance, and structure.

His letter contains some clear messages and expectations. He states:

"Land use planning to preserve and protect the Trust area and its unique amenities and environment is the core responsibility of the Islands Trust. This reflects the ecological mandate of the Trust, the toolkit deliberately supplied by government, and that island communities have a role to play in local environmental stewardship."

He goes on:

"It is my expectation that the Trust Council recognizes that this requires careful deliberation and consideration of perspectives to manage expectations of growth, development and local economies without exceeding the carrying capacity of local ecosystems and preserving unspoiled natural amenities."

These are powerful and important phrases. Let me highlight a few:

- *Core responsibility*
- *Ecological mandate*
- *Environmental stewardship*
- *Managing growth and development without exceeding the carrying capacity of local ecosystems*
- *Preserving unspoiled natural amenities*

We strongly support these principles.

We believe the Minister has made it clear: the fundamental purpose of the Trust has always been, and remains, the protection of the natural environment. And that the Trust Policy Statement must contain policies to uphold that purpose.

In support of this message—and in anticipation of the upcoming community engagement on the draft Trust Policy Statement—Friends of the Gulf Islands presents a petition to you today. This petition has already received nearly 900 signatures from people across the Trust Area.

Here is what it says, addressed to Minister Kahlon and to Trust Council:

We request that the new Trust Policy Statement not be approved until it:

- Affirms that the term “*environment*” in the legislated Object of the Islands Trust Act refers specifically to the natural environment—not residential development or infrastructure.
- Affirms that the Trust’s top priority is protection of the islands’ land and marine ecosystems, and their rural character.
- Requires each island to establish clear development limits.
- Limits development to what can be supported by each island’s drinking water supply while also protecting water needed by natural systems.
- Requires each island to produce a build-out report to determine the maximum population if all existing lots were developed or subdivided.
- Ensures that any decisions allowing more intensive land or water use be guided by independent, up-to-date scientific data, local knowledge, and traditional Indigenous knowledge and practices.

Let me close by saying: this is about the future of the Gulf Islands.

The environment didn’t get much attention in the last two elections. We are lucky to have Green Party representation in some Trust areas, but we know that environmental progress is under threat around the world.

This is our opportunity.

The Islands Trust is not an ordinary government body. It is unique—a one-of-a-kind institution with a legislated preservation mandate.

We urge you to ensure that the revised Trust Policy Statement—and all the decisions you make as trustees—truly reflect that mandate. Fully. Faithfully. Effectively.

Only by protecting our environment from further degradation will we be able to support thriving communities, meaningful partnerships with First Nations, responsible housing solutions for workers and seniors—and offer both residents and visitors the chance to breathe deeply, feel renewed, and give thanks for these remarkable islands.

This is a gift we’ve been given. Please—let’s cherish it.

Thank you.