

**From:** Michael Hey [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Monday, August 9, 2021 10:21 AM  
**To:** Islands2050  
**Subject:** regarding July message from Islands Trust Council Chair

Having just read your July Message regarding the new policy statement, I feel compelled to share my observations. You seem a little taken aback by the animosity that your draft has generated. Rightly or wrongly, at least some people are upset. I'd like to share my feelings, perhaps to shed some light on the matter. Only from a place of mutual understanding can we move forward, guided by wisdom.

Wisdom counts. Good intentions do not. You may intend to preserve the natural beauty, livability and long term viability of this land, but without wisdom, there is nothing to guarantee that your every action does not bring about the opposite of what you are hoping to achieve.

There is very little wisdom in the world at this precise moment in time. There is much anxiety about the future and a sense of great change, but very little insight into what is actually happening on the planet.

If you are going to update an important document that has not been updated in twenty-five years, do it from a place of wisdom, not from the place of utter confusion that is being reflected to us through the media on every topic of any significance whatsoever. From the "experts", all we get is panic. From climate panic to Covid panic – an endless mountain of fear to feed our insatiable appetite for crisis. Perceived crisis is most always used by legislators to circumvent due process and to make bad decisions quickly. Do not let everybody's favourite crisis of the hour dictate your long-term vision (or, to the extent that you do, recognize the need to remain flexible and to adjust).

Crisis is really just another word for lack of clarity. When something appears as a crisis, this highlights an inability to see the array of solutions before us. The moment you perceive with clarity solutions become apparent, appropriate action becomes obvious, and the word "crisis" no longer describes the way you feel about a situation.

One aspect of wisdom then is to recognize a lack of clarity where it exists.

Islanders, for the most part, share all the same concerns about the future of this land that you do. To the extent that there is resistance to the changes you are proposing, understand that it comes from a concern that the very things you are intending to protect are actually under attack. Clearly there are strong differences in perception. To move beyond this, it is my wish for you to be able to see all views with absolute clarity.

Without delving into specifics about any of the changes you propose, I'd like to share a Salt Spring perspective – not the Salt Spring perspective, but simply a Salt Spring perspective.

We are a community of over ten thousand people without any form of democratic direct local governance. For a community this large not to be incorporated is rare. I know that you are aware of this. What you must appreciate, is that the feeling of being disenfranchised is pervasive on Salt Spring. The current model of governance is not ideal – no model can be. Nor can any form of government rise above the level of wisdom of those who are behind it.

In the case of Salt Spring, we have had several opportunities to change the model – changes that were rejected for economic reasons. This is very important to appreciate. Salt Spring Islanders do not like the structure behind the way we are governed, but we have repeatedly chosen the model that is in place because of a perceived economic benefit. In that sense, while you may choose to update your policy statement, understand that the structure of the Islands Trust itself represents the status quo in a fundamental way.

Of course democratic deficit is not the same as bad governance. These are two separate concerns that arise in tandem whenever a sweeping change is proposed. Functioning democracy is limited by the very same challenges that make your administrative obligations difficult as well: You know what you know and you don't know what you don't know. Hindsight will one day show whether the decisions you made had the consequences you desired. In the case of democracy, the

limiting factor is mass consciousness. In a functioning democracy, an elected government is no wiser and no more virtuous than the average citizen.

In your case, you are charged with making decisions that affect the future of people who have had no direct opportunity to choose you. Your limitation is the same as that of any mayor or elected councillor (you know what you know and you don't know what you don't know) but your responsibility is greater. It is a matter of fact that the Islands Trust is a small group of people making decisions that affect a large number of people. This is not about calling into question the legitimacy of the Islands Trust. It is simply about recognizing the inherent limitations of the current model of governance as well as the tremendous responsibility that has been shifted in your direction, as the word "trust" implies.

When you change not just policy, but the guiding principle, the inherent democratic deficit is amplified, because the actions of a select few will reach that much further into the future. A new policy statement for the Islands Trust will affect livability of the land and potentially the quality of life for millions of people.

If all this is clear to you, then you must understand the monumental difference between simply implementing a new policy or implementing a new policy statement. By analogy, imagine if the Government of Canada (which the majority of Canadians disapprove of for any given government at any given time) had decided to draft a new Constitution. Imagine further, that the majority of Canadians knew absolutely nothing about the proposed changes until the new draft is presented for a first reading!

Seems reasonable. After all, the Constitution has not been updated in forty years. Besides, it's only a draft.

For myself, personally, I tend not to get involved in politics. I perceive the world differently from most people which places most of my priorities outside mainstream politics. However, sometimes I am inspired to comment.

In the case of what is happening here, without referring to specifics of the new draft policy, I would like make two observations:

1.) Changing the policy statement is a big deal. The manner in which you communicate your intentions and the amount of public engagement ought to reflect your inherent understanding of how significant such a proposition is. A policy statement reaches into the future, well beyond your current mandate or the personal involvement of any current trustee. As such, your responsibility in the matter and the extent to which you are influencing present and future lives cannot possibly be overstated. It doesn't matter that you sincerely believe the changes you propose are for the better. That's your perspective and time may well prove you correct in some regards and wrong in others.

2.) Good stewardship happens when good people are empowered to make responsible and principled decisions. Do not make the mistake of equating environmental stewardship with rules and regulations or with micro-management by government. I'm not saying that we're ready to abandon all rules - only that the most enlightened society needs the fewest rules. Therefore, if we wish to one day become an enlightened society, we must accept that this implies reducing, not expanding, the rules that restrict us. Your concerns may be sincere and your aims may be noble, but these aims will be undermined the more heavy handed and top-down the rules become. Good stewardship is only possible when responsibility shifts directly into the hands of the people who live on and work the land, be they landowners, tenants, farmers, sustainable foresters and so on.

Governments, democratic or otherwise, tend to behave like parents. The fundamental presumption among those in position of leadership is that government knows best when in reality, wisdom resides in the trees and in the land itself. The very first step towards responsible governance of any kind is a profound spiritual recognition of the limits of human understanding at this particular moment in time in terms of the problems as they are perceived and the solutions as they are envisioned.

Sincerely,

Michael Hey, Salt Spring

