

Dec. 12, 2002

Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management

NORTH ISLAND STRAITS COASTAL PLAN**INTRODUCTION**

The North Island Straits Coastal Plan (NIS Plan) was initiated in October 2001 to address potential uses of provincial foreshore and nearshore in the area from the Johnstone Strait entrance to the northern extent of the Queen Charlotte Strait. The plan area includes the Broughton Archipelago as well as foreshore fronting Port Hardy, Port McNeill, Alert Bay and Sointula. It covers the traditional territory of ten First Nations and is within the Regional District of Mount Waddington (MWRD).

The area was selected for planning because of the level of competing interests and issues such as salmon farming, tourism uses and recreational activities and the need to diversify the economies of the local community and First Nations. It was also identified as a priority for detailed planning by the Central Coast Land and Coastal Resource Management Plan Table in their March 2001 report to government.

Provincial jurisdiction in the area addressed by the plan relates to the issuing and managing foreshore and seabed tenures. The Plan does not address federal responsibilities such as fishery or marine mammal management, navigation or marine transportation. The Plan provides greater clarity for provincial agencies involved in the review of Crown land applications for tenure, particularly Land & Water BC Inc. (LWBC). The Plan also benefits potential applicants in their search for appropriate sites.

PLANNING PROCESS

The NIS planning process was developed in accordance with the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management's new requirements - planning processes have a clear business case and are completed in a timely manner using a government-led consultative process, and provide balanced outcomes that reflect government's sustainability principles. The NIS Plan is intended as a prototype for all multiple use coastal plans to be completed by the ministry.

It has taken 12 months to complete the NIS Plan. The process included meetings with all key industry and interest groups, including salmon farm companies, forest companies, commercial recreation operators, and local and provincial conservation and recreation groups. Public open houses were advertised and held at the beginning and end of the process, and an early draft of the plan was available on the ministry Web site for public review. The Mt Waddington Regional District helped organize and conduct public open houses. They also assembled an advisory body that provided comments on the draft plan. In addition, a local resource information group, the Inner Coast Natural Resource Centre, was contracted to obtain additional local knowledge and advice.

First Nations were invited to participate in the process (with funding support). The Tlowitsis First Nation and Gwawaenuk First Nation provided comments on earlier drafts of the plan. Other

First Nations were contacted but declined to participate or did not respond. A final draft NIS Plan was sent to all First Nations in October with a formal request to provide comments for inclusion in the NIS Plan. Three have responded to date, and their responses have either been placed on the Ministry Web site or incorporated into the text of the Plan.

PLAN COMPONENTS

The Plan Area has been divided into 66 smaller planning units based on marine ecosystems. Information was drawn from provincial agencies and federal organizations with responsibility for marine management. Federal agencies included Fisheries and Oceans Canada, the Coast Guard and the Canadian Wildlife Service. Information assembled for each unit includes upland ownership, current tenures and ongoing activities; biological resources, environmental values and recreational uses; capability for shellfish and salmon aquaculture. This data allowed planning staff to better understand and to focus more closely on the unique combination of biological features and human activities in the area. For each planning unit, recommendations have been made on the degree of acceptability of various foreshore and nearshore uses in order to guide LWBC in processing tenure applications. Management provisions are included, as necessary, to address identified issues or siting concerns specific to all or part of each planning unit.

The Plan provides for a “plan variation” mechanism in units where it recommends no new applications be accepted for a particular use. Variations will only be accepted if the proposed use was not outlined in the Plan, if new technology may influence the compatibility or impact ratings, or if the proposed use is based on new information that was not available at the time of plan development. Letters of support from local government and/or First Nations are encouraged in support of the variation proposal. Successful variation requests will result in LWBC agreeing to accept and process an application for the specified use. The ultimate decision on issuing a tenure is dependent on a subsequent review and referral process.

The Plan identifies and recommends a number of follow-up studies to further enhance the likelihood of Crown land applications being made, and to stimulate sustainable economic development. These are:

- Shellfish aquaculture barriers & constraints study;
- Finfish aquaculture siting assessment for salmon bearing streams;
- Campsite allocation strategy for the Johnstone Strait area;
- Enhanced responsibilities for community harbour authorities;
- Marketing of the Plan’s recommendations and outcomes.

PLAN ASSESSMENT

The Plan takes a multiple use approach, accommodating a variety of uses in each planning unit (as opposed to zoning which restricts each zone to specific types of uses). It maintains and supports jobs and economic value from current uses (over 435 commercial, industrial and recreational tenures), while identifying the potential for a range of new uses. The greatest potential for economic development and diversification appear to be for shellfish deepwater aquaculture and commercial recreation uses.

The Plan has identified a number of areas noted for their conservation and recreational values. The Plan recommends that Land Act “notations of interest” be placed over these 11 areas to reserve them from development until further marine conservation assessments can be undertaken

in concert with Fisheries & Oceans Canada. Recognizing their importance to both commercial fisherman and recreation boaters, the Plan further recommends notations over 16 important boat havens.

Identifying acceptable uses in the NIS Plan is expected to reduce the economic and social costs of resource conflicts, and increase certainty for prospective applicants. The Plan's economic benefits will likely occur over time and are dependent on other factors and constraints besides site availability. As a consequence, quantitative assessments of future economic benefits are highly speculative and have not been included in the Plan. However, the Plan does provide economic coefficients or "multipliers" for key coastal uses, in order to track and report on the effect of the Plan in the future.

The environmental impact of the Plan was assessed by studying impacts associated with certain types of development on the biological values known to be present in each Planning Unit. While existing tenures are assumed to result in the same level of impact in the future, additional impacts will depend on the increase in number and type of new tenures. Assessment of the impact of extensive future development indicates 45 planning units with low risk to environmental values, 15 with moderate risk, 4 at high risk and 2 with a decreased risk as a result of Plan recommendations.

USE AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLAN

The approved Plan will be implemented by LWBC as a guide in assessing specific Crown land applications that are made within the Plan Area.

The Plan's recommendations for use should not imply that such uses will automatically receive approval and tenures. All applications, if accepted, are required to follow LWBC processing and referral procedures, which include consultation with affected First Nations and referrals to local government.

The approval of the Plan does not infringe or diminish court established Aboriginal rights and is not intended to limit or restrain any treaty discussions with First Nations affected by the Plan.

For more information on the North Island Straits Coastal Plan, please visit our Web site at www.gov.bc.ca/srm.

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