



Islands Trust

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Via Email: [marc.garneau@parl.gc.ca](mailto:marc.garneau@parl.gc.ca)

The Honourable Marc Garneau  
Minister of Transport  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

Dear Minister Garneau:

**Re: Concerns about anchorages in the Salish Sea**

Congratulations on your recent election and appointment as the federal Minister of Transport. I am very pleased that you have been appointed to work with the Government of Canada in this capacity.

I am writing to you today as Chair of the Islands Trust Council. Please allow me a brief introduction in case you are not familiar with the Islands Trust; we are a small, special-purpose local government created through legislation by the Government of British Columbia in 1974. We are charged with the mandate to preserve and protect the islands of the Salish Sea. This is a unique and special place composed of 13 major islands and more than 450 smaller islands covering approximately 5,200 square kilometers of land and water - an area almost the size of Prince Edward Island. We represent 25,000 citizens.

It is with this responsibility that I'm writing to express serious concerns with commercial vessel anchorages in the Salish Sea between the British Columbia mainland and Vancouver Island and to request that you investigate what measures could be taken by Transport Canada and industry to minimize anchorage use in the Southern Gulf Islands. Further, we would like you to consider implementing measures that decrease the risks from any vessels that continue to use anchorages in the Islands Trust Area.

The Islands Trust Council has had an ongoing interest in marine health and oil spill issues since 1979. For the last five years the Islands Trust Council has dedicated significant resources to working collaboratively with residents, industry and federal agencies to encourage actions to minimize noise and light pollution in anchorages. We have also advocated for improvements to spill prevention, preparedness, and response, including safer marine shipping practices in our region.

It has been immensely frustrating to watch billions of dollars spent on Canada's Pacific Gateway infrastructure with no consideration of the impacts and risks of the resulting vessel traffic on the Salish Sea and its communities. Our region is a scenic archipelago that provides habitats for an exceptional variety of species: more than 200 types of migratory and resident birds, numerous species of fish, the iconic Orca whale, migrating Gray whales and diverse intertidal life, terrestrial wildlife and vegetation. The significance and sensitivity of our region, and the need for protective measures was internationally recognized in 1973, when an International Joint Commission proposed that the islands and waters adjacent to the British Columbia-Washington State border be protected as an international park in order to maintain water quality and to preserve and protect marine and land-based wildlife habitats and archaeological and historical sites.

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Extra vigilance and special measures are warranted as this region is among the most productive marine ecosystems in the world. The federal government is assessing the feasibility of establishing a national marine conservation area reserve in the Southern Strait of Georgia. Trust Council has also included in its 2014-2018 Strategic Plan the goals of exploring whether this area could be nominated as a UN Biosphere Reserve. As I recently explained in the Islands Trust Council's letter of comment to the National Energy Board, the federal government's Tanker Safety Expert Panel's 2013 report stated that the waters around the southern tip of Vancouver Island were one of four areas in Canada with the highest probability of a large spill. The report also stated that the southern coast of British Columbia, including Vancouver Island, was one of two areas in Canada with the highest potential impact from a spill. Vessels in our waters are often close to shore, making oil spill prevention all the more critical because there is so little time available before swift tidal currents bring the oil onto shorelines. These potential spills are not only from oil products but also from fuels, lubrication oils and other contaminants.

On November 4<sup>th</sup> 2015, the Islands Trust hosted a meeting of 23 stakeholders from the Pacific Pilotage Authority, the Chamber of Shipping of British Columbia, CSL Americas, the Port of Nanaimo, the Cowichan Valley Regional District, the Cowichan Bay Ship Watch Society and Islands Trust Area residents to discuss concerns about anchorages. Transport Canada representatives were unable to attend, due to the establishment of a new government. The meeting was intended to facilitate greater knowledge of:

- 1) Shipping pressures (e.g. growth in vessel sizes, growth in number of vessels) and supply chain issues that are driving the need for vessels to go to anchor in the Salish Sea.
- 2) The process undertaken and the results of the 2011 review of Southern Gulf Island anchorages.
- 3) Anchorage options in the southern Georgia Strait and Gulf Islands.
- 4) Residents' concerns and industry and port authority concerns.

Following that meeting, we've concluded that we need your leadership on this topic. Our primary concerns with the Southern Gulf Island anchorage situation are as follows:

### **1. Oil spill risks**

The Islands Trust Council's concerns with vessel anchorages began in 2008 when the Hebei Lion bulk carrier grounded in Plumper Sound, located between Saturna, Mayne, North Pender and South Pender Islands. After the incident, Dale Jensen, Manager of the Washington State Department of Ecology's Spill Prevention, Preparedness and Response, stated in a press release that "damage to fuel tanks on a cargo ship that size could have oiled the islands on both sides of the border". Our initial concern was compounded when in January 2010, the bulk carrier Pacific Ace dragged anchor in Plumper Sound and had to be repositioned twice by tug. In March 2011 the bulk carrier Cape Vanguard dragged anchor in Plumper Sound during a forecasted windstorm and came within 200 meters of hitting the shore. Despite Transport Canada having issued advisories to ship masters and agents, our island residents still observe vessels dragging their anchors on a disturbingly routine basis.

The underlying conditions that led to these previous incidences remain unaddressed. Vessels in Southern Gulf Island anchorages are not monitored by any federal agencies due to a lack of radar coverage and vessel tracking system coverage. The Port of Nanaimo has developed a vessel tracking system that could monitor vessels in this region but legislative change is required before it could be used.

## **2. Noise and light impacts**

The serious noise and light pollution from vessels at anchor disrupts the tranquility and character of our island communities and disturbs water fowl. Some island residents can read in their bedrooms in the middle of the night because the vessels' lights are so bright. Generators drone on through the night, anchor chains clang and bang, fog horns sound at all hours of the day and night, and occasionally alarms sound indicating some unknown urgent matter onboard the vessel. Neighbouring communities have had enough. In 2009 there were 23 ships staying in the Southern Gulf Island for an average of 6.7 days. By 2014, there were 170 ships staying for an average 9.3 days. The growing industrialization of our region through increased anchorage use is contributing to loss of residents' quality of life and the region's character. Concerns that the Salish Sea is being exploited as a parking lot are growing and the use is contrary to our expectations for this special place.

## **3. Ships use Gulf Island anchorages free-of-charge**

Our region should be considered a last-resort option rather than first choice, but vessels currently have a financial incentive to use Southern Gulf Island anchorages because they are available at no cost. Vessels have to pay to anchor within the borders of Port Metro Vancouver or Port of Nanaimo. This financial incentive is completely inappropriate because Southern Gulf Island anchorages are:

- surrounded by quiet neighbourhoods and ecologically-rich shorelines with other commercial and recreation fisheries uses,
- not continuously monitored by federal agencies, and
- are inconvenient locations for pilot access in the event of emergencies.

This absurd situation is a glaring example of the lack of attention paid to marine shipping impacts despite all the Asia-Pacific Gateway investments.

This financial incentive for Southern Gulf Island anchorage use is further exacerbated by the fact that ship charter costs have fallen dramatically in recent years, meaning that companies face only small monetary penalties for leaving a ship at anchor.

## **4. Lack of grain shipment co-ordination resulting in greater use of Gulf Island anchorages and greater carbon emissions**

Since the dissolution of the Wheat Board in 2012, we have heard of a lack of co-ordination in the grain delivery system to the West Coast, resulting in vessels having to accept their cargo in batches. We have also heard the grain has not been arriving at Port Metro Vancouver in a sequence that matches vessel arrivals. This supply chain disorganization results in vessels spending more time at anchor and numerous transits between anchorages and terminals. Some vessels have moved in and out of Vancouver grain berths over 10 times. Each additional day at anchor and each transit, regardless of duration, creates unnecessary oil spill risk and unnecessary light, noise and air pollution. It also results in unnecessary burning of bunker fuel and release of greenhouse gases.

We respectfully request that you investigate what measures could be taken by Transport Canada and industry to minimize anchorage use in the Southern Gulf Islands. Potential avenues for Transport Canada research could include:

- anchorage pricing options,
- better co-ordination of grain transportation, and
- the possible use of fixed deep-sea buoys as an alternative to vessels anchoring close to shorelines and neighbourhoods.

Please also consider implementing measures that decrease the risks from any vessels that continue to use anchorages in the Islands Trust Area. Potential avenues for Transport Canada research could include:

- options for better oversight of Southern Gulf Island anchorages,
- feasibility of a stand-by rescue tug for the region, and
- enhanced oil spill response standards that reflect the values at risk in this region.

Thank you for considering our requests. We would be very appreciative of a response from you by March 1, 2016 so your response can be considered by the Islands Trust Council at its next quarterly meeting. We would also appreciate an answer by then as the Islands Trust has accepted an invitation from the Pacific Pilotage Authority to assist in consultation with residents of Gabriola Island about a federal proposal for five new anchorage locations for deep-sea coal vessels off the Georgia Strait side of Gabriola Island. We expect this consultation to occur in April-May of 2016. We have heard significant frustration from island residents and expect that there will be significant local attention to this topic throughout the spring.

If your work brings you to our coast I invite you to visit our islands where I would be more than happy to show you first-hand the concerns expressed by our residents.

Yours sincerely,



Peter Luckham  
Chair, Islands Trust Council  
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Attach: Map of Islands Trust Area anchorages

cc: The Honourable Amarjeet Sohi, Minister of Infrastructure and Communities  
Trust Area MPs  
Participants of the November 4, 2015 anchorage meeting  
Robin Silvester, President and CEO, Port Metro Vancouver  
Bernie Dumas, President and CEO, Port of Nanaimo  
Islands Trust Area First Nations  
San Juan County Council  
Bowen Island Municipal Council  
Islands Trust Council  
Islands Trust website

Courtenay

# Existing and Proposed Commercial Vessel Anchorages in the Salish Sea / Strait of Georgia

December 2015

VANCOUVER

NANAIMO

Tsawwassen

U.S.A

Canada

VANCOUVER ISLAND

Duncan

Sidney

San Juan  
Islands

- Islands Trust Area Boundary
- ▲ Nanaimo Port Authority Anchorages
- ▲ Proposed Gabriola Anchorages
- ▲ Southern Gulf Island Anchorages
- ▲ Vancouver Fraser Port Authority Anchorages

