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File No. GM-6410-03

Aleria Ladwig
Ecosystems Approach Officer
Resource Management
Fisheries and Oceans Canada
200-401 Burrard Street
Vancouver, BC, V6C 3S4

Via Email: Aleria.ladwig@dfo-mpo.gc.ca

Subject: Protecting the Howe Sound Sponge Reefs

Dear Ms Ladwig,

I am writing on behalf of the Gambier Island Local Trust Committee in support of permanently closing all Glass Sponge reef/garden sites in the Atl'Kitsem/Howe Sound area to commercial and recreational fishing activity.

The Gambier Local Trust Committee is part of the Islands Trust, a federation of island communities that was decreed by the provincial government to preserve and protect the sensitive ecosystems and rural communities of the Southern Gulf and Howe Sound islands.

The Islands Trust has prioritized the protection of marine areas in this term's strategic plan through advocacy and education. The Local Trust Committee prioritizes the protection of ocean ecological systems throughout the Official Community Plans of Keats, Gambier, Anvil and other Associated Islands. The Atl'Kitsem/Howe Sound glass sponge reefs are of particular interest given the growing evidence of the important role they play in promoting bio-diversity in the marine environment. As this area continues to recover from a history of intense industrial activity, the discovery and protection of the glass sponge biotherms is an important goal for all islanders.

The Gambier Island Local Trust Committee also considers that increased enforcement capabilities of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) in the Howe Sound area are a vital part of the overall initiative to protect the glass sponges. There is disturbing anecdotal evidence of increased fishing pressure on Rockfish protection areas once they are identified as restricted. Many residents on the islands in Atl'Kitsem/Howe Sound are willing to engage in citizen monitoring, but they find it frustrating when their calls are not followed up on. Please continue to maintain a local office in the Howe Sound region and consider increasing the presence of DFO officers as part of the overall protection for glass sponges in Atl'Kitsem/Howe Sound.

Best Regards

Susan Morrison
Chair, Gambier Island Local Trust Committee - smorrison@islandstrust.bc.ca

Copy: Gambier Island Local Trust Committee – GambierIslandLocalTrustCommittee@islandstrust.bc.ca
Clare Frater, Director, Trust Area Services, Islands Trust – cfrater@islandstrust.bc.ca

*Preserving **Island** communities, culture and environment*

Bowen Denman Hornby Gabriola Galiano Gambier Lasqueti Mayne North Pender Salt Spring Saturna South Pender Thetis