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## ***The Islands Trust Story—IV***

*Peter Lamb*

### **The Story So Far**

The first three Acts in our drama described the formation of the Islands Trust in 1974 and subsequent events over the next decade as the Islands Trust evolved and adapted to meet its 'preserve and protect' mandate. In the intermission, the story of the Islands Trust Fund and its land conservation successes was told. It is now 1985 and the curtain rises with the trust once again under provincial scrutiny.

### **ACT 4, Scene 1: Housekeeping?**

While the Islands Trust has the authority to appoint its own staff, it is the Ministry of Municipal Affairs which has the authority and budget to pay their wages and benefits. As a result, Trust staff are considered part of the government and its bargaining unit. Not surprisingly, this creates conflicts from time to time in the management of Islands Trust operations. In April 1985, Socred Minister Bill Ritchie introduces Bill 30—the Islands Trust Amendment Act to address this matter with two short 'housekeeping' amendments to bring Islands Trust staff directly under ministry jurisdiction.

Trust Council Chair, Mike Humphries, writes a long letter to the Premier claiming 'the elected officials and the various island communities they serve see it as an unjustified interference in the management of island affairs.' Editorials criticize the government for its proposal and trustees express anger and frustration over the lack of consultation by the Minister.

The Opposition is suspicious, alleging a 'hidden agenda' to exert more provincial control over the Islands Trust. NDP critic Robin Blencoe leads a prolonged attack on the legislation and proposes a compromise, recommended by the Islands Trust, of allowing it to fund its own operations without provincial support.

Despite the extensive and contentious debate, *Bill 30* passes into law without amendment.

### **Scene 2: Support for the Trust**

In response to continuing concerns expressed by the Islands Trust, in May 1987, the Select Standing Committee on Economic Development, Transportation and Municipal Affairs is directed to undertake a comprehensive public review of the Islands Trust. Socred Minister Rita Johnston makes it clear that they are not considering abolishing the trust. The Committee report is tabled six months later, recommending that the Islands Trust become a regional district, an idea opposed by trustees, other agencies and island residents.

Coincidentally, an analysis of the trust is undertaken by graduate students at Simon Fraser University headed by Professor Michael M'Gonigle and completed in September, 1987. It includes a survey of 150 residents, a questionnaire of 36 former and present trustees and interviews with 51 key individuals. The study finds strong support for the Islands Trust and its performance to date but expresses concern over its lack of authority to fulfill its mandate as well as underfunding and understaffing.

The study recommends that 'the Islands Trust be retained and strengthened' by granting it more authority and clarifying its jurisdiction. Changes to the *Act* would 'reflect a commitment by the provincial government to local management by the trust and individual islands.'

### **Scene 3: A Major Reworking Of The Islands Trust**

In July 1989, Minister Johnston finally introduces Bill 78—The Islands Trust Act with significant changes more in line with the SFU study recommendations than those contained in the Special Committee report. The proposed new Act is intended to 'improve the operation of the Islands Trust, enhancing its autonomy and increasing its flexibility. It confirms the trust's mandate to preserve and protect the islands and strengthens its ability to do so.'

Highlights of the legislation are:

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- an approved Trust Policy Statement to guide planning and development approvals;
- establishment of the Trust Fund Board;
- provision for island municipalities on Trust Council;
- Official Community Plans to be consistent with the Trust Policy Statement;
- Trust Council to become the principal body for trust administration and land-use policy decisions;
- establishment of an Executive Committee to carry out the daily business of the Trust and review local trust committee activities (the term General Trustees to be eliminated); and
- local trust committees to comprise the two locally-elected trustees plus one member of the Executive Committee.

Trustees are pleased with the proposals and Islands Trust Chair Nick Gilbert, declares 'the new *Act* returns all previous powers and gives us some additional ones. Salt Spring's *Driftwood* newspaper declares that the Islands Trust, 'is now an autonomous governmental body.'

The NDP Opposition expresses 100% support for the Islands Trust and calls Bill 78 'the first real major reworking of the organization of the Trust.' While generally supportive, it criticises 3 of the proposals:

- the provision of municipalities within the Trust Area: 'What you risk is...you start to balkanize, break down by incorporation into little municipalities.' A less risky alternative, the concept of a local community commission is suggested.
- ministerial approval of OCPs, island municipality bylaws that the trust refuses, the Islands Trust annual budget and the Trust Fund Plan—all considered inconsistent with greater Trust autonomy.
- establishment of a Trust Fund 'without seeding with sufficient money or land.'

With very little debate, *Bill 78* is passed. The inaugural meeting of the new Islands Trust is held on April 1, 1990. In his opening remarks, Chair Nick Gilbert notes that the occasion 'marks the end of an era of much frustration and hopefully the agency has reached a new beginning.'

The Islands Trust enters the 1990s with a much improved legislative framework and organization structure that essentially continues today. ☞

*The Islands Trust story is published in booklet form, ask for it at yor local bookstore.*

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