Gulf Islands — in the slipstream of an industrial port - Patrick Brown

Kinder Morgan’s Trans Mountain Expansion Project proposal—which would increase the number of crude oil tankers passing the southern Gulf Islands from 5 per month to 34 per month—has alerted islanders to the hazards of living in the slipstream of a major resource shipping port. An increase in tanker traffic to one inbound and one outbound Aframax tanker every day—combined with coal, lumber, and container traffic—increases the possibility of an accident.

Given the shipboard precautions proposed by Kinder Morgan, the probability of an oil spill is small, but it is not zero. Providing that the federal government, along with the industry, is prepared to establish KM’s much enhanced oil spill response regime, the Islands should be well protected, but again, the impact of any spill response regime, the Islands should be prepared to establish KM’s much enhanced oil spill response regime, the Islands should be well protected, but again, the impact of any spill accident would not be zero.

Restrictions at Second Narrows

Tankers carrying oil from the Trans Mountain Expansion Project (TMEP) will load at Westridge, east of Second Narrows in Burrard Inlet. The maximum size of tanker that can transit Second Narrows is known as an Aframax; it is 245m long. It is somewhat smaller than a supertanker, and because of the limited depth of Second Narrows, can only be loaded to between 70-80% of capacity, depending on the tide. The average loaded capacity is estimated at 350,000 barrels.

In fact, it is at Second Narrows that the tankers face their most severe restrictions: they must clear the bottom by 10% of their loaded draft, must fit under the Ironworkers Memorial Bridge, and through the opening of the CN railway bridge. The tugs remain with the outbound tanker until it leaves Second Narrows is known as an Aframax; it is 245m long. It is somewhat smaller than a supertanker, and because of the limited depth of Second Narrows, can only be loaded to between 70-80% of capacity, depending on the tide. The average loaded capacity is estimated at 350,000 barrels.

An Internet search turns up an astounding number of pages about radiation from Japan’s Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant meltdown that followed an earthquake and tsunami in March 2011. But it’s difficult to find credible information.

One reason is that government monitoring of radiation and its effects on fish stocks appears to be limited. According to the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, No US government or international agency is monitoring the spread of low levels of radiation from Fukushima along the West Coast of North America and around the Hawaiian Islands.

The US Food and Drug Administration’s most recent food testing, which includes seafood, appears to be from June 2012. Its website states, ‘FDA has no evidence that radionuclides from the Fukushima incident are present in the US food supply at levels that would pose a public health concern.’ This is true for both FDA-regulated food products imported from Japan and US domestic food products, including seafood caught off the coast of the United States.’

The non-profit Canadian Highly Migratory Species Foundation has been monitoring Pacific troll-caught albacore tuna off the BC coast. Its 2013 sampling found ‘no residues detected at the lowest detection limits achievable.’ The BC Centre for Disease Control website assures us we have little cause for concern about radiation from Japan in our food and environment. Websites for Health Canada and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency yield scant information.

But the disaster isn’t over. Despite the Japanese government’s claim that everything is under control, concerns have been raised about the delicate process of removing more than 1,100 nuclear fuel rod sets from Reactor 4, each containing 60 to 80 fuel rods with a total of about 400 tonnes of uranium. The process is expected to take a year.

Some, including me, have speculated another major earthquake could spark a new disaster. And Reactors 1, 2 and 3 still have tonnes of molten radioactive fuel that must be cooled with a constant flow of water.

A radioactive plume is expected to reach the West Coast sometime this year, but experts say it will be diluted by currents off Japan’s east coast and, according to the Live Science website, ‘the majority of the cesium-137 will not reach BC’s coast.’

Looking for Gulf Islands and East Vancouver Island customers? You’re looking at the newspaper that will do it all. Call 1.250.216.2267 today!
Class composition in BC worse than ever, says BC Teachers Federation

Data on BC's education system released by the government shows one teacher's class composition is worse than ever before. The report shows there are over 6,000 classes with four or more children with special needs.

"BC teachers fully support including all students, like those with special education needs, in our classrooms, but 21 years of cutbacks has meant that kids are not getting the support they need," said Iker. "Ever since the BC Liberal government stripped our collective agreement in 2002, learning conditions for all students have deteriorated. We see the results today because more teachers than ever before are dealing with complex illnesses, often with underlying issues that need to be addressed," says Maria, now age 29. "As a teenager I was constantly interventied, and I was able to get treatment.'

People don’t choose to have an eating disorder; these are illnesses. Many people are not coping with eating disorders as adults, although their illnesses began as children.

February 8–28 is provincial Eating Disorder Awareness Week. In 2013, 28% of women and 15% of men in BC were diagnosed with eating disorders as adults. Many are not coping with eating disorders as adults, although their illnesses began as children.

Friday 28–29 is provincial Eating Disorder Awareness Week. In 2013, 28% of women and 15% of men in BC were diagnosed with eating disorders as adults. Many are not coping with eating disorders as adults, although their illnesses began as children.

Eating disorders are mental illnesses having little to do with looks, eating or beauty—in fact, most people will never even be diagnosed with an eating disorder. "I grew up in a chaotic household, and obsessing over my weight helped me escape," says Sally. "I didn’t really believe I was sick until I started having memories and felt cognition impairment," says Maria. "My family intervened, and I was able to get treatment.

In fact, the number of women diagnosed with an eating disorder in mid-life is growing. I started having issues with my weight in my mid-20s; notably, I developed a fear of adulthood, and I was Coping with controlling my food intake; however, I wasn’t diagnosed with an eating disorder until I was in my twenties.

"After my treatment, I feel like now I can live like a normal person," says Maria. "I don’t think about food all the time, and my weight has reached a healthy BMI (body mass index)." The first step was giving myself permission to eat and EATING DISORDERS, please turn to page 6

Some Tides content regarding eating disorders (including Madam, the local newspaper, and Eating Disorders, please turn to page 6)

Galiano LTC approves land transfer to expand park

Sixty-five hectares of forest land, as well as water and forestfront, will be protected on Galiano Island, thanks to a campaign led by the Galiano Island Local Trust Committee, BC Parks and a private landowner. The land will be transferred to BC Parks, expanding Bodega Ridge Provincial Park by more than a quarter of the current area, with the province setting aside protected areas in the west and central areas of the island.

"We are extremely pleased to have been able to support this application which will see the establishment of a protected area," said Louise Decario, Galiano Island Local Trust. “This rezoning and the resulting land transfer to BC Parks will advance an official community plan objective to maintain a forest base on Galiano while at the same time permitting coterminous residential use on a subdivided portion of the island.”

"The adoption of this rezoning is the culmination of several years of work by the Local Trust Committee, Islands Trust, BC Parks and the local trustee. This is a local trust’s role to support the community, says Louise Decario, Galiano Island Local Trust. "This rezoning and the resulting land transfer to BC Parks will advance an official community plan objective to maintain a forest base on Galiano while at the same time permitting coterminous residential use on a subdivided portion of the island."

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Comments are closed.
James Hansen has studied climate change for over thirty years. Over that time his alarm has grown steadily about the world’s grandchildren will live in, as the accelerating climate crisis takes hold. The retired NASA climatologist has been speaking out about climate change since the 1980s. He now confesses that his earlier projections, while accurate about increasing global temperatures, “failed to explore how quickly climate change will take hold.”

What does Hansen think can be done? He thinks a steadily rising carbon tax is one of the best ways to limit carbon pollution. This is why BC’s carbon tax took a lot of attention at an international conference of the Citizens Climate Lobby in Washington DC, where Hansen spoke recently.

Conference attendees were eager to hear about a climate change policy that actually has a track record. At the conference, which included over 400 meetings with US Senators, Members of Congress, and the White House, BC’s tax was viewed as a model successful and one that enjoys the support of two-thirds of BC residents. Mr. Déry, the head of the conference, said the BC model is “clearly the best we have.”

The question of who has the responsibility to protect the ‘documentary heritage’ of Canadians is a thorny one. It took over a week to get the current interim Librarian and Archivist on the phone. And when I did, it turned out two officials from Heritage Canada were in the room as ‘observers.’ Mr Déry confirmed that he has not been informed of the lawsuit. He claimed it is none of his business if records, books and research are destroyed as it is in the ‘discretion of the Librarian.’

When I decided to phone the Librarian and Archivist of Canada, I was told that Parliament recognizes the importance of protecting knowledge as a critical part of any democratic society. The Act establishes a set of protections for all government records held by any and all departments. The mandate to protect the documentary heritage of Canada is held by the Librarian and Archivist for Canada. The current Librarian and Archivist is Hervé Déry—appointed in May 2013 on an interim basis. According to the Act,

12. (1) No government or ministerial record, whether or not it is surplus property of a government institution, shall be disposed of, including by being destroyed, without the written consent of the Librarian and Archivist....

I have spoken with the Librarian and Archivist of Canada, who has a very clear responsibility to protect the ‘documentary heritage’ of Canadians. It took over a week to get the current interim Librarian and Archivist on the phone. And when I did, it turned out two officials from Heritage Canada were in the room as ‘observers.’ Mr Déry confirmed that he has not been informed of the lawsuit. He claimed it is none of his business if records, books and research are destroyed as it is in the ‘discretion of the minister.’

The last question in Question Period as House resumed on January 27 was to challenge the legality of these actions:

‘Mr Speaker, Canadians have been outraged by the dismantling of government libraries such as those dealing with fisheries, forests and health. Under the Library and Archives of Canada Act, these materials are protected as the documentary heritage of Canadians. Surplus materials are to be disposed of in the agency’s own reading room, not by being ‘called’ that made me realize this had to be illegal.

The Act covering publications and records held by the Government of Canada is the Library and Archives of Canada Act. Reviewing it, it seems clear that the act was not followed. The Library and Archives of Canada Act exists to protect and preserve our ‘documentary heritage.’ The Act’s preamble makes it clear that Parliament recognizes the importance of protecting knowledge as a critical part of any democratic society.

Island Tides phone number has changed to 1-250-216-2267. Please make a note of it!
That syrup is made from sugar cane, a plant grown in the tropics. The sugar is extracted from the cane and refined to produce sugar syrup.

In the late 19th century, the production of sugar began to shift from the Caribbean to the mainland United States, particularly to Florida and Hawaii. This shift was driven by the need for a more stable and reliable source of sugar, as the Caribbean islands were prone to disease and poor farming conditions.

By the early 20th century, the United States had become the world's largest producer of sugar, and the production of sugar syrup had become a major industry. Today, sugar syrup is still produced in the United States, although it is not as common as it once was.

Sugar syrup is used in a variety of products, including baked goods, candies, and beverages. It is also used in the production of alcoholic beverages, such as beer and wine.

In conclusion, sugar syrup is a product that has been around for centuries and has been used in a variety of ways over the years. Its production and use have changed over time, but it remains an important ingredient in many of the products we enjoy today.

## Readers' Letters

### Those Sugars

**Dear Editor:**

I was having an enjoyable read of the latest column by Brian Crumblehulme on plant extracts when struck by the sentence 'We all recall the days when sugar corn syrup is essentially synthesized sucrose and glucose.'

I'm not sure what syrup he is referring to but I am unaware of any corn-derived syrups with significant sucrose content. Regular corn syrup is mostly glucose and dextrose derived from the corn starch, while the sweetener of industry (HFCS, High Fructose Corn Syrup) is mostly fructose (the same sugar given labels as the ‘poster child of 2014’ earlier in the same paragraph).

I don’t think the fructose content of HFCS makes it any healthier though and I agree with Mr Crumblehulme that it is better to consume our nutrients in whole unprocessed foods when we can.

Niall Parker, Pender Island

**Writer’s Note from Brian Crumblehulme:** I was having an enjoyable read of the latest column by Brian Crumblehulme on plant extracts when struck by the sentence 'We all recall the days when sugar corn syrup is essentially synthesized sucrose and glucose.'

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Niall Parker, Pender Island

**Kind of like you, re-sorting through your seeds getting ready for another gardening season. If you are short of any, those seed catalogues have arrived—feast your eyes! Not to mention seed exchange events. Think on to harvest time and fall fair entries.**

Chris Miles, Pender Island

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**Christa Grace-Warrick**

**IRTD Visits Pender**

In the meantime, keep your eyes peeled for ways to enjoy the dark evenings in good company. Kathy Pfidrhum on Pender had her thinking cap on. Kathy is one of the same faces you meet at TrueVal and food store. She has the best connections with Scottish band Tamannah Weavers. When she heard that Vancouver, the only Canadian stop on the band’s North American tour had been cancelled, she gladly ran them through Pender—now it’s the only Canadian stop on the tour.

Sounds like an event not to miss. It’s coming up, look at ‘What’s On’ page 8 for details.

6th Annual Scrabble Fundraiser

If you want to soak up the writing scene for a weekend and rub shoulders with some glitterati, Galiano’s got it this month. Lots of options to participate, from full immersion to dabbling your toes to hear you favourite author read. Once again, check it out in ‘What’s On’ Galiano’s fabulous booklets, Galiano Book, is the mover and shaker of this one, with lots of proud sponsors. Owler Lee Treendate and her knowledgeable staff have created something special.

6th Annual Scrabble Fundraiser

Meanwhile, still in literary mode, the Salt Spring Grandmothers to Grandmothers group is holding another Scrabble Fundraiser in March, in support of the Stephen Lewis Foundation, helping turn the tide of the HIV/AIDS scourge in Africa.

The fundraiser lasts five days! Both recreational and competitive Scrabble players are invited. The kick-off is at 2pm on Tuesday, March 4 and Wednesday, March 5 at the Salt Spring Inn. The tourney ends at the Clubhouse Bar & Grill (Salt Spring Golf Course) with final games, a silent auction and awards on Saturday, March 8 at 6pm.

There are several ways to play and donate—get pledges, pay to play, or if you can’t get out to a game, the Grandmothers suggest inviting some friends in for a private event. Charitable tax receipts are available for donations of $20 or more.

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**Growing Those Veggies - Ken Clarke**

If you’re like me, you’re sorting through your seeds getting ready for another gardening season. If you are short of any, those seed catalogues have arrived—feast your eyes! Not to mention seed exchange events. Think on to harvest time and fall fair entries.

On Pender, this year marks the 50th anniversary of the MacKinnon Trophy for the Best Collection of Vegetables. The trophy has been won by the likes of Nip Grundin and Victor Menzies, John Smith, and Tekla Deverell, and Whaleys.

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**Scottish Visits Pender**

For more information go to: www.islandsfolkfestival.ca and http://providence.bc.ca/.

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**Island Tides**

Every Second Thursday of each month: the only Free & Mail-Delivered Newspaper 16,447 print copies delivered to households on 13 Gulf Islands

2,853 print copies on Ferry Routes and in Victoria • Saanich • Sidney • Cobble Hill • Mill Bay • Crofton • Duncan • Chemainus • Mill Bay • Crofton • Duncan • Chemainus Ladysmith • Nanaimo • Bowser • Courtenay Port Alberni • Campbell River

3,000 online readers each edition

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**Contributors:**

Harry Burton, Matt Damon, Ken Clarke, Andy Lamb, Robin Goldie, David Suzuki

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**Salt Spring • Mayne • Galiano • Pender • Saturna**

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**Vancouver, the only Canadian stop on the band’s North American tour had been cancelled, she gladly ran them through Pender—now it’s the only Canadian stop on the tour.**

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**Our pedal microphones are designed and appointed to be:**

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**Affordable luxury ...Starting at $3,950**
Greenpeace matriarch ‘walked in the light’

Barbara Stowe

Marie Bohlen, a consummate artist known for her nature illustrations and a founding matriarch of Greenpeace, died January 5 at age 89, passing away peacefully at her home in Courtenay.

Besides a distinguished career as an illustrator and her seminal role in the founding of Greenpeace, Marie will be remembered for her deeply lived testimony as a member of the Society of Friends (Quakers) to the values of pacifism, simplicity, social activism and speaking truth to power.

Born in Pennsylvania on July 4, 1924, she graduated from the Moore College of Art in Philadelphia and became a well-known illustrator of children’s and nature books. North American Birds—first published in 1965 by Women’s Day magazine and later reissued by Prentice-Hall in 1969—includes 200 full-color paintings and earned acclaim from art critics. The Pittsburgh Press noted: “In addition to their striking beauty, Mrs. Bohlen’s portraits give details of plumage and marking seldom captured by even the most accurate cameras.”

A lifelong pacifist, Marie vowed the day her son Paul would go to war, “she would never go to war.” Her profound faith in the power of nonviolence predated the American antiwar movement by decades.

The Gulf Islands have a centre to help folks with eating disorders, it’s at the Woodstone Inn on Galiano Island. Staff are also helping with a provincial awareness campaign.

Marie’s further contributions to the founding of Greenpeace were well documented. She and Paul created the first Greenpeace button, which bore the stamp of her artistry. Forbidding black outlines and funky font characterized many buttons of the Sixties, but this one spoke with a softer tongue, sandwiching the word ‘Greenpeace’ between forest-green ecology and peace symbols rendered in an elegant clarity against a soft unembroidered yellow background. Marie, Jim, Lance, and friends sold these buttons for 25¢ as an initial fundraising effort towards chartering a boat to sail to Amchitka Island to protest the atomic blasts.

She was married to the Vietnam War raging, the couple left the United States for Canada to shelter Marie’s 19-year-old son Paul Nonast (from her first marriage) from the Vietnam war draft. They also brought with them two other children, Margot (14) and Lance (11), from Jim’s first marriage. Arriving in Vancouver, the Bohlens went to an antiwar march, looked for the Quaker expression to ‘walk in the light’. Her artistry and passionate commitment to the Earth have earned her a singular place in the annals of history. She will be well missed.

Barbara Stowe

Manhattan Arts International has announced the winners of its annual award—founded in 1999 to build understanding of the challenges of climate change. The Gulf Islands have a centre to help folks with eating disorders, it’s at the Woodstone Inn on Galiano Island. Staff are also helping with a provincial awareness campaign.

Manhattan Arts International has announced the winners of its annual award—founded in 1999 to build understanding of the challenges of climate change.
Here we are all well into a new year, living and loving and organizing to accommodate the turn of seasons and live fruitfully. Jon and I are still in Vancouver following Jon’s treatment plan for leukemia at Vancouver General Hospital. We find that part of our day, when we are blushing in color and now we see the grime of winter—and the fat buds of spring with the earth making its way ready to burst forth.

In the last months, I have been home several wonderful times to roll around and romp with the dogs. I have been able to catch up with the community, dear friends and the wonderful young couple that are living at Haggis Farm. It is ravel to have two full lives—rural and urban—the Vancouver life and the Island life. Both are powerful and interact to provide a commentary on the choices we make in either one.

As Jon’s health has improved, my deep angst and stress is much lifted and allows me to participate more fully in either life? What has changed for me, forever, is the baseline, the premise of my life. Earlier, as in several months ago, my life was predicated on the same rationale as those 20-year-olds who believe they will not die. Not that I would have been a wild one or running down the street but I did believe that this lively thread of circumstance and individual choice I had connected as my life would never snap or slowly fray to nothing. Why would it? No fire had ever burnt right up to the base of the walls of my mind.

Life is much more poignant and brilliant now. These qualities are gifts to be sure—front row seats!“Do not be disciplined enough to live in the present with such acuity but not pre-play some conjured up ending in a weak moment. Life in Vancouver, in the depths of winter, has its high point in winter well enough to be a tourist in this town. Healing means resting and taking the slow time to participate and be with people without the sense of urgency or need for timelines. Many of our friends on Saturna Island are part-timers who have a house on Saturna and a home in Vancouver. The main part of their professional and social lives has been lived in Vancouver with Saturna more of a respite. We have spent lots of time with them when they are in resting mode but hardly ever taken the opportunity in our busy full-time Saturna lives to peek into what they have created in their urban lives, still very close to the familiar outlines of Saturna, which can be seen from any high place in the city.

Part-time Saturna householder, Judy Meyers, Professor Emeritus in Zoology at UBC and presently researcher and graduate student advisor showed us the Beauty Biodiversity Museum that has many wondrous displays, the knock-out being a skeleton of a 27-metre blue whale killed off of Prince Edward Island. The whale, killed by a large ship, was burned in two for 40 years and recovered by a lady named Maria who, incidentally, attended last May’s Moby Doll Whale Symposium on Saturday.

Judy has had a many year project conducting research on Saturna Island and the wildlife island on the population cycles of tent caterpillars, which we are all familiar with on the Gulf Islands. Her research is about what biological forces makes tent caterpillar populations boom and crash.

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Aframax tanker; the total moving exclusion zone would be ~1.25km long by 1km wide). A 'one way' system is used), Sidney, and around Victoria, involves a network of contract and volunteer groups. Outside the Strait of Juan de Fuca, a Transition For Transition Pender Community Transition (PCT) is proposing to become the Heartwood Folk School for Sustainability & Resilience. This requires the non-profit PCT Society to become the non-profit Heartwood Folk School Society, and then, in future, in applying for federal educational charity status. Heartwood's goal would be to focus on types of skill-building education not currently available on island, in cooperation with valuable local/area experts and groups. You can see more at www.heartwoodfolkschool.ca.

PCT is inviting all interested persons or groups (not only current PCT members) to take part in a discussion, starting at noon, on Saturday, February 8 at the Community Hall.

Mexida Action Now Takes On Ferries A community group which was formed to support the environmental, social and economic fabric of Texada Island is calling for major changes to the Coastal Ferry Act. Texada Action Now (TAN), representing the concerns of 1,000 Islanders living just west of Powell River, notes that while the ferry corporation is promoting vacation packages which 'bring the coast within reach,' the reality could not be further from the truth. 'While BC Ferries is paying huge cheques and bonuses to its execs, the cost of using the ferry has gone beyond the reach of many people,' said TAN spokesperson Leslie Goresky. The Coastal Ferry Act needs changes which recognize that ferries are an essential, fundamental transportation link which connects ferry-dependent communities with the outside world. Ferries are our highways and should be funded as such.'

TAN also called for the service cutbacks slated for April 1 to be delayed until changes can be made to the ferry system, which came close to succeeding (57.7% of voters) in a referendum in 2005. A Citizens Assembly on Electoral Reform a few months later. This assembly recommended a made-in-BC single transferable vote system, which came close to succeeding (57.7% of voters) in a referendum in 2005.

Brockie Ledge, off Esquimalt. The passage down Haro Strait, past Saturna, South Pender, Moresby, Turn Point (off Stuart Island, a sharp turn, where a ‘one way’ system is used), Sidney, and around Victoria, involves a network of contract and volunteer groups.

For oil spill response, WCMRC should:

- have at least ten 150-tonne community ‘response packages’ of equipment located along the route.

- be able to handle 20,000 tonnes of oil (more than the capacity of two tanks of a double-bottomed Aframax tanker).

- be able to clean shoreline at 3000m/day; and

- have ten 150-tonne community ‘response packages’ of equipment located along the route.

Recommendations from TMEP

The Western Canada Marine Response Corporation (WCMRC), mainly financed by a fee on petroleum shipments, maintains equipment and staff to capture and clean-up oil spills in Canada’s coastal and inland waters. Administered by Parks Canada, the Act helps ensure Canada’s maritime history is protected for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations.

Canadians have nominated hundreds of lighthouses to be considered for designation. Two other BC lightouses, East Point and Fisgard, were designated in May 2013.

Political Changes

Well-loved BCHNDP MP Jean Crowder has announced she will not stand again in her riding of Nanaimo-Cowichan. She has been the electoral area’s representative for ten years and looks forward to spending more time in her community and with her family when her term ends in 2015.

Vancouver city councillor Adriane Carr has stepped down as Deputy Leader of the Green Party of Canada. Many will remember Carr as the proponent, in 2002, of an Initiative under BC’s Recall and Initiative Act to hold a referendum on whether to adopt a mixed member proportional electoral system in BC.

Called the ‘Free Your Vote’ campaign, it brought together a broad coalition of British Colombians and included the official support of trade unions and the BC Nurses Union. While the initiative did not garner the 50% of the voting numbers required, the nearly 100,000 signatures it did gather increased awareness and support for electoral reform. Many credit it with the establishment of a

For oil spill response, WCMRC should:

- be able to handle 20,000 tonnes of oil (more than the capacity of two tanks of a double-bottomed Aframax tanker). Aframars are significant reef-building organisms, on which the capacity of two tanks of an Aframax tanker; the total moving exclusion zone would be 1.25km long by 1km wide).
Sea Stars In Trouble - Andy Lamb

On any given low tide, at least six sea star species are exposed in abundance along these shores for kayakers, beach combers and others to easily encounter. On the most extraordinary low-tide events, as few as four or five are occasionally exposed to view. For the recreational sea star enthusiast, at least 20 different sea stars inhabit readily accessible depths.

The marine environment of the Pacific Northwest is one the planet’s epicentres for sea stars. This coastline, from California to Alaska, has the greatest number and diversity of temperate sea star species as well as the most total mass of sea stars. The number of species, depending upon where exactly the geographic ‘line’ is drawn, is in the neighborhood of one hundred. Several of these are also amongst the largest and fastest-moving in the world. Biologically, our iconic sea stars are amazing life forms that possess anatomical features and behaviours that are most unique.

Amateur and professional scuba divers have now become very involved as ‘citizen scientists’. Suddenly, late this past summer the catastrophic event initially seemed to target two large and obvious species, the giant pink sea star Piscaster oregonensis and the sunflower star Pycnopodia helianthoides. Later reports and photography have documented two other species, the nodding sea star Endemida brevispina and the morning sun star Solaster danae as being involved as well. Affected specimens simply seemed to totally disintegrate after severe internal disruption. This phenomenon is being referred to as ‘sea star wasting disease’. More and more such observations from concerned divers were reported electronically, resulting in considerable on-line conversation.

Eventually, organizations such as the Vancouver Aquarium, The University of BC and the Department of Fisheries & Oceans began to take notice. What is the cause?

The centre of this catastrophe continues to lie in Howe Sound. However, divers have apparently found more affected sea stars in Indian Arm, along the Sunshine Coast, off Victoria, in Sechelt Inlet, and off Saturna and Savary Islands.

In November, Seattle Aquarium divers found a similar outbreak in their area. This was the first report of ‘sea star wasting disease’ in Puget Sound and Washington State. A return to the site is planned to collect samples for scientists at Cornell University, New York to investigate. Even more recently observers divers found photographed an afflicted specimen at Day Island, near Tacoma, further south in Puget Sound.

The second week of November, Peter Luckham (49th Parallel Dive Charters) and I found many afflicted specimens on shallow reef next to the Boeing 747 artificial reef, near Chemainus, Vancouver Island and our Thetis Island home base.

Some initial samples sent to DFO and UBC have not isolated a specific causative agent for this sea star die off. More samples are being collected and additional test will be conducted. A definitive answer will eventually arrive– hopefully.

As distressing as this event is for those of us in the Pacific Northwest, similar events have occurred elsewhere over the last 30 years. Sea stars have perished in alarming numbers in Mexico, California and other localities. In some cases, the particular causes still remain a mystery.

However, several of the particularly valuable divers sea stars are intertidal. This situation provides beachcomers, kayakers and other surface-based naturalists an opportunity to help too.

For a terrific summary and up to the moment developments, check out Jackie Hill’s blog at gogoghe ‘The Marine Detective’ and the sea star wasting syndrome.