



Georgia Strait Alliance

2020

# WINTER NEWSLETTER

Caring for Our Coastal Waters

[www.GeorgiaStrait.org](http://www.GeorgiaStrait.org)

## Tumultuous & Transformative

Here we are. We are approaching the end of 2020, which has been challenging, historic and different in so many ways while also staying the same. While the arrival of the pandemic was novel, forests that continued to burn in the Pacific Northwest and flooding near the upper Fraser River and other parts of the province were not.

2020 has also given way to a societal awakening that is leading to long overdue change. Many people and organizations are finally recognizing that there is systemic racism in their sectors and institutions. They are taking action to dismantle racial and colonial injustices, and they are re-evaluating the importance of investing in people and the planet.

At Georgia Strait Alliance, we advocate each and every day for climate-forward solutions to marine and environmental threats. And this year, we have marked three decades in marine conservation. With your support, we are dreaming of a future with a resilient Salish Sea that is healthy and thriving, supporting diverse and inclusive communities that are more just, equitable and safe, and where nobody is left behind.

Thank you so much for your continued or first-time support; we couldn't do it without you.

Photo: Kristendawn (Pixabay)



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# Societal Tremors

by Christianne Wilhelmson, Executive Director

At this point in our journey through the COVID-19 pandemic, I have run out of ways to describe the experience. ‘Unprecedented’ has been the most popular term, but we know that a societal tremor like this isn’t really unprecedented. My grandmother’s generation survived the Great Depression, my mother’s the Second World War, and Millennials have already survived the major economic downturn of 2008. And of course, the world recovered from the 1918 Spanish influenza pandemic.

Political, economic or health upheavals have happened before, leaving deep scars on a society and uprooting deep revelations. This pandemic is no different, though the revelations are having reverberations of their own.

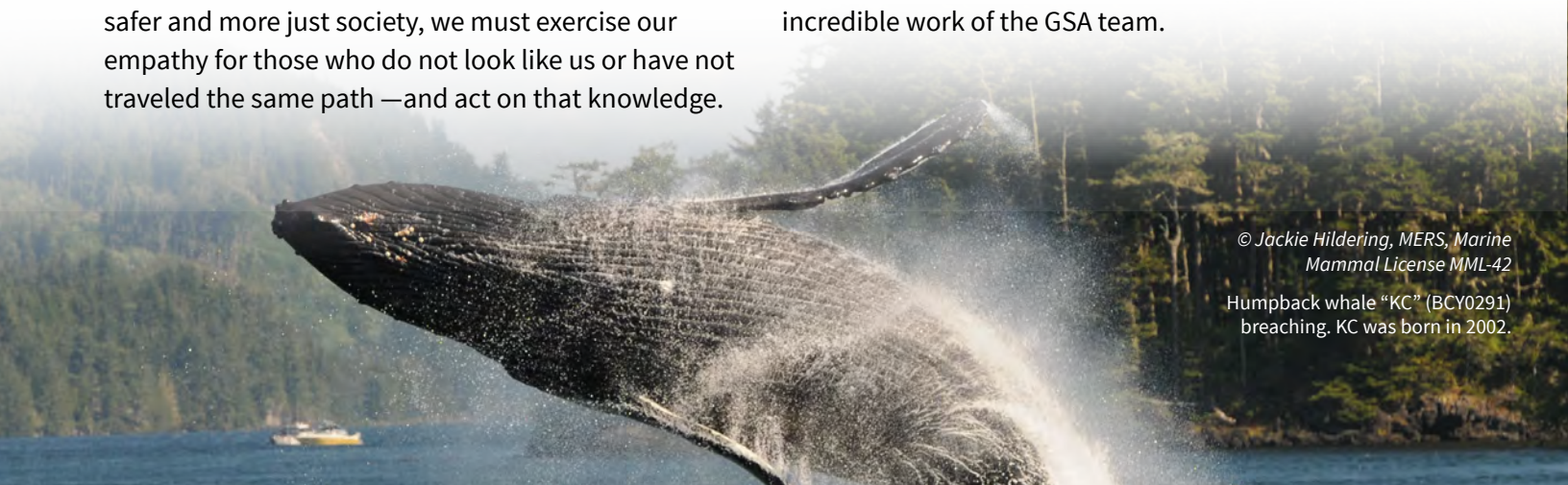
So what can we learn this time? Let’s start by recognizing that each individual experience of this event is different: we’re all in the same storm but not in the same boat. The pandemic is disproportionately impacting women, racialized communities and those in more vulnerable socio-economic situations. We have also deepened our understanding that there are other lived experiences than our own. To build a healthier, safer and more just society, we must exercise our empathy for those who do not look like us or have not traveled the same path—and act on that knowledge.

We are also deepening our understanding of systemic racism and how it expresses itself in our organization. With the help of a consultant, people in our organization are doing individual work to understand white supremacy and our role in supporting its structures, and we’re exploring how this is showing up in the work we do. Our focus is on how we will transform our organization to become more inclusive and effective advocates for this region, and we plan to share how we will do this in the months to come.

We have also continued to be present for our team of staff and volunteers so that they remain healthy, supported, and involved with marine protection.

In September, GSA turned 30-years-old, and it’s almost as though the organization is entering a new stage of life: one with greater maturity and where we are able to self reflect on what we’ve accomplished, where we are today, and where we want to be heading into the future—and your support makes all of this possible.

Our most recent successes can be found in the pages you’re about to read. I hope you’ll take heart from the incredible work of the GSA team.



© Jackie Hilderling, MERS, Marine Mammal License MML-42  
Humpback whale “KC” (BCY0291) breaching. KC was born in 2002.

We acknowledge that our work takes place on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the Coast Salish peoples.

Photo: David Herrera (Flickr)

# BIODIVERSITY

## Almost there...

Metro Vancouver’s largest wastewater treatment facility, the Iona Island Plant, is on the verge of ensuring the scheduled upgrade includes advanced treatment. Right now, we need to make sure that the plant’s tertiary-level design includes full nutrient removal and accelerated resource recovery – and that decision-makers seal the deal in January without delay.

**Together, let’s stop harmful contaminants in undertreated sewage from flowing into local waters.**

**TAKE ACTION ON OUR WEBSITE**



**We each use 450 litres of water a day!**

Most runs down drains and on to treatment facilities before it gets discharged into nearby waterways.

Wastewater from the Iona plant goes directly into the mouth of the Fraser River, not far from where the Roberts Bank Terminal 2 project is being proposed (see page 5).



## Baby orcas!

The endangered Southern Resident orca population grew by two to 74 in September with the back-to-back births of a male (J-57) and another calf (J-58) – and there may soon be another baby because L-72, also known as Racer, is pregnant.



Photo: National Ocean Service

We provided compelling, science-based evidence to Metro Vancouver in the summer about the importance of advanced wastewater treatment.





Photo: Marneejill (Flickr)

# Discovery Islands' Fish Farms

Two days before the Cohen Commission's September 30, 2020 deadline for open net-pen salmon farms to be removed from the Discovery Islands — and despite 101 First Nations, commercial fishers, ecotourism operators, and environmental non-profits making a unified call for their removal — the federal government declared these specific farms pose “minimal risk” to migrating wild salmon, continuing their support for an industry that is harming local oceans and salmon stocks.

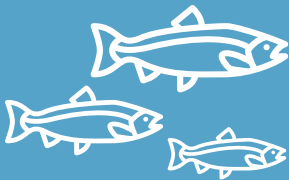
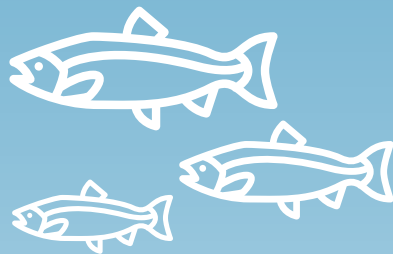
Interestingly, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) made this conclusion using peer-reviewed risk assessments for nine pathogens, which did not include sea lice – even though science confirms that sea lice has significant negative impacts on the health of wild migrating salmon.

We have heard, through our allies, that many First Nations are deeply upset with the decision to leave the farms in the water, as are we. At Georgia Strait Alliance, we are amplifying the concerns of First Nations and working with our allies for definitive action to remove these harmful, unsustainable farms from habitat critical to wild salmon.

## Government-to-Government

**Seven First Nations and the federal government** recently began consultations regarding the 18 fish farms in the Discovery Islands, which is a critical migration route for salmon. The process aims to inform aquaculture licenses in the area before their December 2020 expiration, which is just around the corner.

Homalco  
Klahoose  
K'ómoks  
Kwiakah  
Tla'amin  
We Wai Kai  
Wei Wai Kum



## Fish farm licencing 101

In B.C., it is the provincial government that issues land tenures for aquaculture, and beginning in 2022 new rules will require (a) approval from First Nations whose territory would house the operations and (b) proof that the operations will not adversely impact wild salmon.

This appears to be positive, however, there is a problem: roughly half of all aquaculture licenses do not expire until between 2023 and 2046, meaning the new regulations do not align with the federal government's commitment to transition fish farms to land-based closed containment facilities by 2025.

# Roberts Bank Terminal 2

The federal government needs to hear a chorus of voices, collectively calling on it to not put the largest estuary on North America's Pacific coast at risk. The Fraser River estuary provides critically important and irreplaceable links between fish, birds and marine animals. At risk of destruction are 177 hectares of intertidal and sub-tidal habitat, as well as the potential to change aspects of Indigenous peoples' current and cultural resources, if a proposed port expansion in Delta, B.C. is approved.

In March, following the quiet release of a federal environmental review panel, a process where GSA was an intervenor, the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Jonathan Wilkinson requested additional information from the Vancouver Fraser Port Authority, the project sponsor, in order to assess mitigation efforts of the project.

In response to this, Georgia Strait Alliance is looking to offer feedback to the Port's additional submission. To that end, we are working with our partner Ecojustice to obtain clarity on what our role could be in this process. During this time, while the project's timeline is delayed, it is important to maintain pressure on the government to reject this harmful project.

TAKE ACTION ON OUR WEBSITE



Photo: David J Laporte (Flickr)



Thank you to the thousands of people who have written letters, signed petitions and tweeted Minister Wilkinson, asking the federal government to reject Roberts Bank Terminal 2.



# CLIMATE & ENERGY

Photo: Andreas (Pixabay)

## Natural gas and climate destabilization

In B.C., there continues to be a 22 percent gap between the Province's strategy, known as the Clean BC climate plan, and our legally binding requirement to reduce emissions by 2030.

We know that fossil fuels are climate destabilizers and yet the projected emissions of LNG Canada's project to develop a liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminal in Kitimat, B.C. represent approximately 63 percent of the Province's gap. The project, owned by the subsidiaries of large international oil companies, plans to ship LNG overseas to Asia. If this one single project were shelved, B.C. would be well on its way to closing its mandated climate gap.

Those are the facts. So are the \$998 million in subsidies granted to the LNG industry last year by the Province, which in turn, received \$198 million in revenue from royalties from the industry—an industry that employs less than 0.5 percent of people in B.C.

The consequences of climate change are becoming more apparent every day. Flooding, fire, and smoke are visible reminders that we've destabilized our climate. Shrinking glaciers are leading to warmer rivers and streams, lowering salmon numbers, and coastal waters growing more acidic. This is the reason we have worked to make sure B.C. takes stronger and faster climate action.

### Actions that GSA is taking include:

- 1 Pushing for stronger climate measures at the provincial level.
- 2 Advocating for fossil fuel companies to be held to account for the impacts of their products.
- 3 Calling for the Province to end fossil fuel subsidies to dirty oil and gas producers.
- 4 Calling for a shift to a just transition that builds the green, inclusive economy that our climate and our society need.

Natural gas is a greenhouse gas that is **95%** methane.

Methane is responsible for **25%** of current human-caused warming.

Natural gas traps **84x** as much heat as carbon dioxide.

**The core business of fossil fuel companies is oil and gas development—and that isn't climate action.** The LNG industry is economically viable because it is being deeply subsidized by taxpayers. It is the beneficiary of public money that could be better spent supporting resource-dependent communities in a just transition, helping build the green economy that the planet requires.

At the beginning of the summer, the Trans Mountain pipeline spilled approximately 160,000 litres of light crude near Lightning Rock—a cultural and burial grounds of the Sema:th First Nation and St̓x̌lō Coast Salish Peoples in the Upper Fraser Valley region (Abbotsford B.C.). Over 18,000 tonnes of waste had been trucked away by October 2020.



We facilitated nearly 2,000 people telling John Horgan to stop the Trans Mountain project when the Province was re-examining the conditions for the pipeline's environmental certificate.

### B.C. can require Trans Mountain to:



Prepare for large-scale shoreline clean up efforts



Assess the health impacts of an oil spill



Plan thoroughly for spill recovery work



Post bonds for the full cost of clean up

Icons: Flaticon.com



Photo: Markus Spiske

With the provincial election behind us, Georgia Strait Alliance is focusing on the development and oversight of strong and stringent climate targets. The Province is now required to:

- ☑ Set interim targets to reduce greenhouse gases by December 2020.
- ☑ Determine sectoral targets for the different parts of the economy by March 2021.
- ☑ Listen to an independent body of experts, which requires stronger reporting standards and oversight.

Photo: Mike McHolm (Flickr)





Photo: Art Tower (Pixabay)

Sightings of humpbacks in the region are no longer unusual. These whales love the dark waters off the coast of B.C. because there is an abundance of plankton that feed the krill and small schooling fish, like herring, which make up the diet of humpbacks, says marine educator Jackie Hildering of the Marine Education and Research Society (MERS).



At Georgia Strait Alliance, we're collaborating with MERS and with Boating BC to improve boater awareness and safety for sharing the waters with large whales.

By increasing awareness, Georgia Strait Alliance is helping to reduce risks to large whales and prevent human injury and material loss. This includes helping watercraft users, whether in motorized boats, sailboats or paddleboards, to understand the impact of disturbance, collisions, and entanglements.

It's The Law!

- ✓ Stay at least 200 metres from all whales, dolphins, or porpoises if they are resting or with their calf, and 400 metres from orcas in southern B.C. coastal waters between Campbell River and just north of Ucluelet.
- ✓ Stay at least 100 metres from all other whales & porpoises.



Humpbacks are extremely large. Adults are approximately the size of a bus. They move through the water in big and unpredictable ways and can suddenly surface after long dives that last 20 minutes or more.



Humpbacks do not have bio-sonar as toothed whales do so they can be oblivious to the proximity of watercraft.

See a Blow? Go Slow!

- ✓ Be vigilant for blows and other indicators of whale presence, such as aggregations of birds.
- ✓ Take extra precautions in areas where whales are known to frequent.
- ✓ Recognize and consider using the **Whale Warning Flag** (right) to signal the presence of nearby whales to other watercraft.



Large Whales on the South Coast

	Colour	Size	Additional Details
Humpack	Gray to black, with some white on underside.	12m – 17m	Approx. 200-400 in Southern B.C./Washington area.
Grey	Mottled grey colour with differing pigmentation.	11m – 12.5m	In addition to those Grey Whales migrating farther north, there are approximately 100 individuals, designated as the Pacific Coast Feeding Aggregation, which can be found in B.C. waters in the summer and fall.

Photo: anoldent (Flickr)



Photo: Alan Wilson

Don't abandon ship. Retire your vessel responsibly.  
[www.georgiastrait.org/boatdisposal](http://www.georgiastrait.org/boatdisposal)

EVENTS, OUTREACH & VOLUNTEERS

We're proud of the digital opportunities that we created over the past several months because they allowed us to connect and engage with people in coastal communities. We appreciate these spaces as places to have meaningful conversations, and to share knowledge that might help people make ocean-smart decisions.



Our **monthly virtual Community Coffee Breaks** have provided an interactive forum for community members to meet for guided discussions that focus on specific topics and issues that matter to them.

We also hosted a series of larger digital gatherings that took deep dives into:

- New orca protection measures.
- A roundtable discussion on new protections for orcas with Terry Beech, Parliamentary Secretary for Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard.
- Making ocean-safe cleaning products, in partnership with Sea Smart, in a Do-It-Yourself webinar.
- A virtual celebration for World Rivers Day, where we got creative and illustrated our vision for the future of the Fraser River.

Perhaps our biggest interactive success was the Great Salish Sea BioBlitz.

Community members around the Salish Sea region submitted more than 3,000 observations of marine-life sightings, and nearly 1,000 species were identified!

**Did you know?** The most observed species in the region were Rockweed, Ochre Sea Star and the Pacific Oyster, while Mottled Star, Orange Sea Cucumber and Violet-green Swallows were also discovered.



Photo: Ramon Cliff (Pixabay)

Keep an eye out for more virtual gatherings!

- Over the past few months, we hosted sessions on:
- Orca Protection
  - Green Boating & Paddling
  - Charitable Giving with Vancouver Foundation guests

SUPERSTAR volunteer



This is **Ryan Ruttan** of StarAirVision.com, Port Alberni, B.C.

*"I volunteer because I've personally seen a decline in fish stocks. I've stopped fishing my old grounds in Nanoose Bay because of this decline and I'm happy to see that those locations are now protected. I want a better future for my twin three-year-old boys. I feel really good knowing that I'm actually doing something to help local ecosystems."*

*I first heard about GSA decades ago. I just wish I had started volunteering sooner. GSA is a great way for me to give back."*

Volunteer with us!  
[georgiastrait.org/volunteer](http://georgiastrait.org/volunteer)





# Corporate Giving

Receiving support from a variety of sources increases our sustainability, and we’re so happy to have businesses increasingly investing in our efforts. Businesses of any size can contribute to keeping Georgia Strait Alliance strong and able to advocate for the health of all of the communities in the Salish Sea.

## Unique contributions

**Patagonia** has some unique ways of supporting causes that matter to them. Read on *page 12* how Patagonia’s Action Works website connected a generous 24-year-old donor with GSA!

**C-Tow**, which assists vessels in distress, sponsors our Clean Marine BC program.

GSA recently gained the support of Ben Walker of **BNQ Management**, a marketing company for the natural grocery industry. Through their 1% for the Planet commitment, Ben and his company are donating one percent of their gross revenue to GSA this year!

### Did you know that 45% of British Columbians don’t have a legal and up-to-date will?

Consider leaving a charitable gift in your memory, knowing that you will make a significant contribution to the future sustainability of charitable and not-for-profit organizations that matter to you.



We honour the intention of your donations, whether that means investing in the overall sustainability and long-term economic position of the organization, or investing in people, systems, tools or specific issues or campaigns. General donations are a critical element in our fiscal management; they allow us to pivot quickly so we can take advantage of opportunities and navigate challenges wherever these might appear.

# NEW TO THE TEAM



Following our Annual General Meeting in September, **Kathy Fletcher** was appointed to the role of President of the Board of Directors, and **Kristin Street**, **Sheldon Fernandes**, and **Charlotte Fox** have assumed the roles of Vice-President, Treasurer and Secretary, respectively.

Sheldon is one of three new directors on the Board. He is a manager at Brightspot Climate in Vancouver and has focused the last decade of his career on sustainability and climate issues. Also new to the Board are **Maya Stano**, a Vancouver-based lawyer who practices natural resource, environmental and Indigenous law; and climate-change professional **Christopher Hakes**, who leads business development at Climate Smart.

## Goodbyes

We’ve recently bid farewell to **Gillian Der** 謝美華 who helped us to advance our Climate Accountability campaigns at the municipal level, to **Anita Noon** who worked with us for five years from Ladysmith as our member services representative, and to **Tessa Danelesko** who led our Biodiversity portfolio, including our orca initiatives.

We also want to offer our unwavering gratitude to outgoing President **Lesli Boldt**, who has left the

Board after nine years of tireless work. Her passion, enthusiasm, strategic advice, and commitment — in particular as President over the last two years — were invaluable to an organization in transformation. Thank you, Lesli! We are so lucky to continue to count on her expertise as Past-President (ex officio). We also bid goodbye to Director **Zoe Greenberg**, who completed her term on the Board this past September.

**All of these individuals had an indelible impact on our work and our organization, and we will miss them all.**

## Thank you to some of our recent funders and partners...



We also acknowledge the financial support of the Province of British Columbia.

# YOU MAKE IT POSSIBLE!

## Meet Connor Callaghan

Connor Callaghan is a 24-year-old mechanical engineering student who fights wildfires in the summer. This year he was based in Merritt, B.C.

***“I see first-hand how much worse the fires are getting every year.”***

A few months ago, Connor's truck was stolen. It happened while he was on the frontlines of firefighting. All of his belongings were in his truck, including his camping gear, his computer and his school bag. On his behalf, Connor's sisters fundraised for a new truck but luck would have it that Connor didn't end up needing the money: Penticton Toyota and Toyota Canada gifted him a 2010 Toyota Tundra.

Connor decided to donate the money raised, including making his first-ever donation to an environmental organization – and he chose Georgia Strait Alliance! He discovered GSA while browsing Patagonia's grassroots activism webpage.

“He chose Georgia Strait Alliance because:

**It is close to home and has a local impact.  
The education piece is also really important; education is better than being reactive. Educating people about how to make decisions with the environment and climate impact in mind — that is something that my friends and I always consider.**

”  
**Your tax deductible donation is an investment in the protection of local waters, today, and for years to come.**

Donate today: call 250-753-3459  
email [giving@GeorgiaStrait.org](mailto:giving@GeorgiaStrait.org)  
[www.georgiastrait.org/donate](http://www.georgiastrait.org/donate)