



Georgia Strait Alliance

# SUMMER NEWSLETTER

2021

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

## We're all in this together...

Climate is one of the biggest societal issues of our time — and yet it is frequently compartmentalized as something solely “environmental.” This creates an inaccurate oversimplification because the climate emergency impacts all aspects of society, and it gains urgency with each new day, as do the ways this issue affects each person and ecosystem on the planet.



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# Living with contradictions

By Christianne Wilhelmson, Executive Director



I HAVE BEEN THINKING A LOT of late about how life is filled with contradictions. It's always been the case but it seems that in these pandemic times, they are more keenly felt.

During the past year, our need to stay connected to people has grown but — to keep our families, friends and communities safe — we have had to stay apart.

We see some in our community struggling to make ends meet as sectors have shrunk or temporarily disappeared, while others are working harder than ever before juggling work and home life, while demands for their services and products rise.

We see COVID-19 cases rise as more and more people are getting vaccinated.

These are contradictions that on a day-to-day basis are hard to hold, but over time we know they will reconcile as most of us get the vaccine and can come together in community, safely.

Our work to protect this region today is no less filled with these contradictions.

For example, the past few months have brought good news for our local environment after decades of hard work: the announcement to remove 19 Discovery Island fish farms, and the reality that the Capital Regional District of Victoria finally has advanced sewage treatment. However, we still face the contradiction that our provincial government thinks that climate action involves subsidizing the fossil fuel industry and expanding LNG production.

This same government believes that a federal oil spill response regime, which it castigated several years ago for being unable to protect our coast, is now somehow magically effective because this belief prevents them from having to take action to improve provincial spill response systems.

The road to healthy communities and a healthy environment is long. Sometimes looking at the day-to-day challenges can make it feel like we'll never reach the balance between economic security, social justice and a healthy environment.

At Georgia Strait Alliance, we've always taken the long view. It's by keeping our eye on the ultimate goal that we achieve it when the day-to-day setbacks and distractions can seem to undermine what we are trying to accomplish: a healthy and equitable Salish Sea region.

Within all the turmoil of 2021, there is hope. There are three new baby Southern Resident orcas born in the past several months, and some protection measures are starting to show benefits to these whales.

We are on the right path.

However, there are still miles to go and much work to do on many fronts, including our efforts to make GSA a more equitable and just organization, but the community that is GSA will stay united, working towards that future we all want.

Thanks to all of you for supporting that vision.



Photo by Paxson Woelber / Unsplash

# BIODIVERSITY

Photo by Bureau of Land Management/ Flickr



## The long journey to #FishFarmsOut

SALMON RUNS ARE DECLINING in B.C. waters for many reasons, one of which is the introduction of pathogens and waste into the marine environment of migrating wild salmon passing through open net-pen fish farms in coastal waters.

Last December, the **Minister of Fisheries, Oceans, and the Canadian Coast Guard** Bernadette Jordan made a bold and decisive decision: to immediately begin an 18-month phasing out of all 19 fish farms in the Discovery Islands.

That decision went against the recommendations of DFO staff — a department which has consistently prioritized the promotion of salmon aquaculture at the expense of wild salmon, the wild salmon economy, and many First Nations who don't want these harmful factory farms in their territories. It included a ban on adding new fish of any size into the open-water pens in this region. But it was challenged: two fish farm operators took the federal government to court, asking for an injunction to be able to continue restocking their pens.

GSA joined that court proceeding in our fight for wild Pacific salmon. We were an intervenor, alongside several other environmental groups and independent biologist Alexandra Morton, all represented by Ecojustice.

Unfortunately, the federal court granted the injunction, allowing these operators to potentially be able to restock three fish farms. But, because a transfer permit is still required, we have another opportunity to continue our fight for wild salmon — and we're taking it!

Stay tuned...



Working with our partners, we're putting pressure on DFO Minister Jordan to deny the transfer of farmed salmon into wild salmon migration corridors. Let's protect vulnerable wild salmon that would pass by these nets.

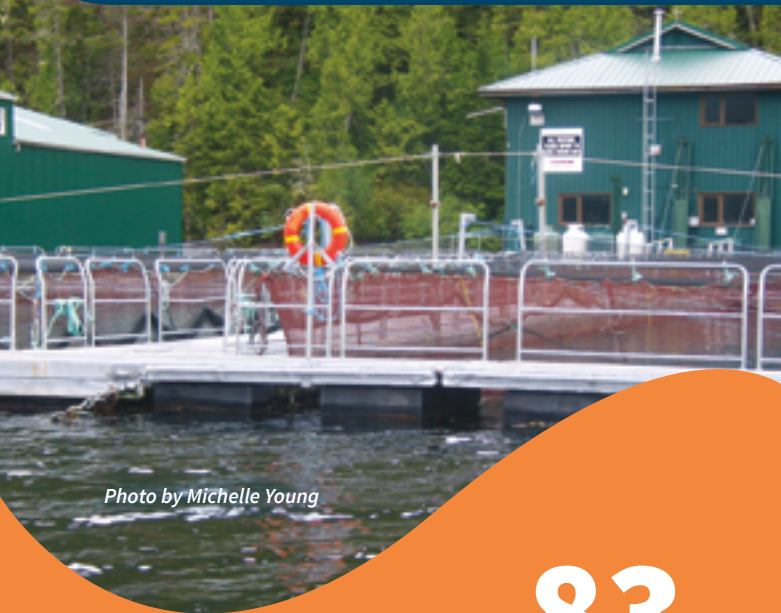


Photo by Michelle Young

83

active and licensed marine fish farms in B.C.



23%

The 19 Discovery Islands' factory fish farms represent 23 percent of all active and licensed marine fish farms in B.C.

## Nets out of Discovery Islands

THE PATH TO THE NETS COMING OUT of the waters of the Discovery Islands began many years ago, for example when the Homalco First Nation had a farm removed from their territory in 2005. It was in 2012 when the \$37-million **Cohen Commission** inquiry, in which Georgia Strait Alliance was an intervenor, called for the prohibition of open net-pen salmon farming in this region by September 2020.

At the time, Judge Cohen outlined that if the DFO Minister was not satisfied that these farms pose, at most, a minimal risk of serious harm to the health of migrating Fraser River sockeye salmon, they should be removed.

With the open-net pens now poised for removal, a viable solution for the aquaculture industry is to transition their operations to closed-containment facilities that are on land — a solution already used in many countries around the world. These systems retain and create jobs, reduce the input of diluted waste into the ocean, and position the wild salmon industry for a rebound.

## Nation-to-Nation consultation

Minister Jordan's decision to begin to phase out Discovery Islands' fish farms also comes after Indigenous consultation with seven First Nations on whose territory these farms have been located — and who wanted the nets out of the water.

However, the recent injunction granted by a federal court may allow operators to restock some farms, meaning the leadership of the Homalco, Klahoose, K'ómoks, Kwiakah, Tla'amin, We Wai Kai and Wei Wai Kum First Nations was ignored. Also troubling is that the Sister Nations were not granted leave to participate in the court hearing related to the restocking of the farms on their traditional territory, forcing them to go to court on this issue.

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

## Federal consultation on fish farm transition

THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT has begun a consultation process to determine the transition plan of open net-pen cage salmon farms to closed-containment facilities. It is led by Terry Beech, who is Member of Parliament for Burnaby North-Seymour and the Parliamentary Secretary to the DFO Minister.

With allies in the **Safe Salmon** coalition, GSA is pressing for a plan with clear objectives that include:



Confirmation the nets will be out of B.C. waters by 2025.



Inclusion of regular reporting.



Development of a plan to support the communities affected with new economic opportunities, including closed containment aquaculture jobs and a rebounding wild salmon economy.

## The connection to orcas

Chinook is the main food source for endangered Southern Resident orcas, which eat upwards of 200 pounds of Chinook each day. Fish farms use the ocean to dispose of waste, introducing pathogens and feces directly into the migration routes of wild salmon, including Chinook. Last year, we saw one of the lowest salmon numbers on record — and predictions for 2021 are even lower.



## New baby orcas

There are three new babies in the Southern Resident orca population, bumping the total to **75 individuals!** Male and female calves **J57** and **J58** were both born last September, while the L-pod had its first birth since 2019, with the arrival of **L125** early this year.



At Georgia Strait Alliance, we've been working hard behind the scenes to keep these waters healthy and safe for all orcas. In the early part of this year, we met with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Transport Canada, and Environment and Climate Change Canada, where we made specific requests for improvements to this year's federal orca protection measures (more on page 8).





# CLIMATE & ENERGY

## The impossible balancing act

THE PROVINCE’S CLIMATE CHANGE ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT, released late last year, confirmed that the actions required to meet the legislated climate target for 2030 are heading towards failure. It showed that continued emissions growth has made the size of the gap between B.C.’s policies and our legislated climate target has increased to as much as 44 percent from 25 percent in 2019 — and the major contributor is the oil and gas industry.

Perhaps the biggest obstacle to B.C. realistically reaching its climate target is the unbuilt **LNG Canada** project in Kitimat, which has received \$5 billion in provincial subsidies to date. Poised to be the largest single source of carbon pollution in Canada, this project is a carbon bomb. Moving forward, it will require new and additional fracking to feed it.

Meanwhile — and in this same context of subsidizing LNG expansion — the Province established sectoral targets in March in an effort to mitigate climate emissions. It divided industries into four different categories, segmenting oil and gas as the only standalone industry group.



**At GSA, we agree with setting an industry target for the oil and gas sector, but it falls short, particularly when the Province is simultaneously subsidizing the expansion of LNG. It’s time to end subsidies to fracking and oil-gas operations that further destabilize a delicate climate.**



**GSA’s position is similar to the position once taken by the Province: TMX mitigation measures should have specific outcomes, demonstrated effectiveness, and a long-time horizon. Relying on speculation about the performance of future measures falls short of using every tool in the toolbox to make this risky project less dangerous.**

## Shorelines not safe from TMX

THE PROVINCE’S LAST KICK AT THE CAN to make B.C. shorelines as safe as possible from the Trans Mountain expansion project is closing. The Province promised to use all the tools in the toolbox to take action for this coast, but instead it is passing responsibility to the federal government, the pipeline’s owner.




The Province now says that the federal programs and initiatives, largely provided through the Oceans Protection Plan, will protect the B.C. coast. However, these are exactly the same measures that B.C. said weren’t good enough and hadn’t been proven effective. In its arguments to the National Energy Board in 2018, the Province criticized these measures for not clearly setting clean-up goals, having no demonstrated effectiveness, not being funded over the long term and lacking enforcement mechanisms. **And now B.C. intends to rely on these: how does that make sense?**

**“We’re in a climate emergency, and we must act like it.”**




## Environmental Assessment Office submission

GEORGIA STRAIT ALLIANCE made a submission to B.C.’s Environmental Assessment Office (EAO) regarding TMX that:

-  Focused on the lack of regulation on issues pertaining to shorelines, demonstrating gaps that the EAO has the power to address.
-  Suggested the proposed report on human health include an examination of oil spills on mental health, and assess health impacts with consideration of the social determinants of health.
-  Highlighted concerns about the EAO’s approach to Indigenous Rights and Title, noting that the report pushes aside the concerns of participating First Nations.

*Photos by Windrader, Nicole Tarasuk & Clay Banks / Unsplash*

## Did you know?

-  The oil and gas sector in B.C. emits more climate pollution than the combination of all the other industries in the province. It produces 20 percent of B.C.’s carbon emissions, and provides three percent of GDP, and less than 0.5 percent of provincial employment.
-  The Province provided nearly \$1 billion dollars of taxpayer-funded subsidies to fossil fuel corporations for their operations in B.C. last year.






## Choose Climate Action

Through an online tool on our website, more than 1,500 people, like you, have told Premier Horgan to stop providing taxpayer subsidies to the fossil fuel industry and to direct that money towards a greener economy.

## The Measures

Despite the Province now saying that the shoreline clean-up measures are sufficient, it is **not known if they will work** because they have never been tested. We do know they’re not to the standards of other coastal jurisdictions in the Pacific Northwest, such as Alaska. Additionally, these proposed measures are extremely light on details, including:

-  **Clean up:** There is no specific standard set for the amount of oil that needs to be cleaned up.
-  **Equipment:** The types and amounts of equipment required are not specified.
-  **Workforce:** The number of people required to execute each spill recovery action and where these people will come from are not outlined. Expert analysis from the Cowichan Tribes indicatest a minimum of 3,000 personnel would be required for several weeks after a large spill.





## PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

### Celebrating 30 years

Georgia Strait Alliance is now **30-years-old** and we hosted a big birthday bash — digitally, of course — to mark our efforts of keeping marine ecosystems healthy.

**Emcee Joanna Piro** was live, guiding viewers on a Journey through Time and Place, with music performances by local artists Desirée Dawson, Luke Wallace, Dan Mangan and Carmanah, a quartet whose touring van runs on filtered vegetable oil that is donated by Victoria restaurant Pink Bicycle.

#### Special guests:

Andrea Reimer (UBC), Bruce Hayne (Boating BC), Dr. Elaine Leung (Sea Smart), Elizabeth Warren (U.S. Senator), Erich Hoyt (whale expert and author), Fin Donnelly (MLA and Rivershed Society), John Cashore (former B.C. Minister of Environment), Margot Venton (Ecojustice), and Rebecca Schijns (GSA volunteer).



AS THE PANDEMIC CONTINUES, we've adapted the delivery of our popular marine spill training sessions, taking them online. Over the past few months, we have conducted two webinars where 53 participants from 24 boating facilities learned skills and tips to prevent spills, and heard case studies from experts in the field.

These spill response training sessions began five years ago as a way to support boating facilities with skilling up and with spill planning and preparation so they have the knowledge and resources onsite to be able to respond to small-scale spills at their docks.

THE FESTIVAL OF OCEAN FILMS was 10 days of documentary films for \$10 — and it was a great success! We curated the screenings of documentaries that were all made by filmmakers in the Pacific Northwest, who focussed on people with passions, concerns and solutions to some of the region's most pressing environmental issues.

These documentary films brought more than 330 people, including supporters like you, into some incredible stories of water, wilderness, wild salmon and whales. Audiences witnessed collaboration and conflict, interwoven with marine life, commerce and Indigenous knowledge.

In these disconnected times, we wanted to do more than offer at-home film screenings, so we upped our digital game and created welcoming spaces for further connection, and inspiration with:



**Behind the Scenes:** five virtual conversations and Q&As with filmmakers and local changemakers



A do-this-from-home **Filmmaking Workshop** by partnering with Reel Youth

Photos by Peter Fitzpatrick & Brian Yurasits / Unsplash

### New orca protection measures

The 400-metre distance rule between vessels and killer whales has been expanded to include **Barkley Sound and Howe Sound** on the South Coast from Campbell River to Ucluelet until further notice.



We're involved in spill response training because the potential damage to water and ecosystems can be mitigated when marinas and other facilities operating on and near the water are trained to provide quick responses to marine spills at their docks.

### Did you know?



Oak Bay Marina, which is a Canadian Border Services marine point-of-entry, is the newest facility to fly the Clean Marine BC flag. It achieved a four-anchor rating on its eco-certification. It is the first of Oak Bay Marine Group's four CMBC-enrolled facilities to complete its certification.

### Connecting with industry

GSA connected virtually with people who work in marine industries, providing updates on our Clean Marine BC green boating and marina eco-certification program by way of virtual presentations to the conferences of Boating B.C. and the Harbour Authority Association of B.C.



Teaming up with a bright green sustainability magazine called **Asparagus**, we co-hosted a complimentary screening of the documentary: "The Story of Plastic," followed by a live panel discussion with plastics and climate justice experts.



Behind the Scenes: Documentary filmmaker Natalie Lucier, Kirsten Mathison (GSA) and independent biologist Alexandra Morton talk with digital audiences about the film "To the Orcas with Love."



# HONOURING A LOVED ONE

IN LIEU OF FLOWERS, many families make requests for donations to be made to a charity that was important to the person who has passed. The family of **Donald Munro**, who was a sailor until the age of 91 when he passed away last December, did just that.

Friends and acquaintances have joined the Munro-Wright family to donate in Donald's name to GSA, with each one of these donations honouring Donald's love of the ocean and his appreciation for GSA's work to keep local waterways pristine and healthy.



## Avid sailor and nature lover

HOW DONALD MUNRO came to know about GSA is something that no one in the family can pinpoint. "Probably the genesis of becoming aware of GSA is because he loved the water," says Alison Wright, Donald's partner of more than 20 years.

Born and raised in Scotland, Donald came to Canada in the 50s, settling in West Vancouver where he became an avid sailor and protector of "the incredible environment we live in," says Donald's youngest daughter Nancy Munro.

Being on the water was, perhaps, where Donald — aka Captain Snowy, a nickname that referenced his pure white hair and beard — was happiest. He frequently sailed around Bowen Island, in-and-around the Strait and often ventured farther afield, one time sailing his Ericson 27-footer, with an outboard engine, all the way to Haida Gwaii.

It was on one of these many sailing trips that Donald imagined and appointed himself president (as well as

all of the other executive management functions) of Boaters Against A Noisy Environment (BANE), jesting that lifetime member status is granted by calling out boaters for noise contamination.

"He was full of beans and welcomed any opportunity to have fun, but he was also at his core an educator — and he raised my sisters and me to appreciate the outdoors," says Nancy.

Donald's commitment to supporting local environmental groups doing good work also rubbed off on Nancy's husband, Scott, who learned to sail with Donald. It was on the sailboat where Scott decided to become a GSA donor.

"For years, my dad donated to humanitarian and environmental organizations in our names, really reinforcing to me the importance of sharing things forward and supporting any organization that is going to help make the world a better place," Nancy says.

Both Alison and Nancy say that Donald was always on the lookout for small organizations and was keen to get behind local environmental grassroots initiatives, making GSA — and the work it does for the marine environment and all of the communities who depend on it — right up his alley.

“He had such a nice way of sharing his causes; he wasn’t shoveling it on people,” says Nancy.

# COMINGS & GOINGS

Photo by Texada / Unsplash



**Introducing** Lucero González Ruiz: GSA's new Biodiversity Campaigner. Lucero, who hails from Mexico City, came to Vancouver to study Biological Sciences, Conservation, and Evolution at SFU in 2015. Before joining Georgia Strait Alliance, Lucero worked with Ocean Wise and held various research assistant roles at SFU. Lucero is passionate about climate change, social and environmental justice, and about ensuring local communities are involved in solutions to these challenges.



**Gratitude** to Lesli Boldt, who has dedicated nine years of passion, enthusiasm, strategic advice, and commitment to GSA, particularly as Board President over the last two years. At GSA, we are incredibly grateful for her invaluable leadership to an organization in transformation. Thank you, Lesli; we'll miss you! But, we're lucky to continue to count on Lesli's expertise as our Past-President (ex officio).

## In Memoriam

IN RECENT MONTHS, the world lost two wonderful individuals whose lives were intertwined with the people and initiatives of Georgia Strait Alliance. We feel such tremendous sadness for losing these bright souls, while we find comfort in the deep pleasure of having worked alongside both of them.

**Wayne Bradley** passed in April after a recent cancer diagnosis and very brief illness. He worked on oyster farms and planting trees, and later became a founding member of the World Community Development Education Society, as well as serving as a director on many boards, including ours in the 90s.

GSA staffers describe Wayne as clear and thoughtful, straightforward, honest and always fiercely ethical. His involvement on the GSA Board prompted many discussions about ethics, most notably how the organization should handle a donation received from Shell, following the murder of Ken Saro-Wiwa and other environmentalists in Nigeria in 1995. At Wayne's urging, the money was returned.

In Wayne's words, "our responsibilities are to our brothers and sisters around the world, working for justice and environmental integrity." At GSA, we saw Wayne bring his dedication to environmental awareness and activism, and to furthering social and environmental justice issues, into all of his work.

**Chris Straw** died tragically in a construction accident in March on Gabriola Island where he lived with his wife. Chris, who had retired from a long and respected career at CBC, crossed paths with GSA as the founder of No Freighter Anchorages, a grassroots organization looking to balance ship management with marine protection, specifically by raising awareness about the negative marine impact of long-term, unregulated anchorages in the Gulf Islands. GSA staffers who knew Chris describe him as an amazing human being: kind, passionate and committed to protecting this region. At GSA, we very much appreciated the counsel, insight and humour he brought to the initiatives that we worked on together.

Our warmest thoughts are with Wayne and Chris' families and friends at this time.

# YOU MAKE IT POSSIBLE!

## Meet Jessica Alford

"I cherish this place — and GSA really started me on my passion. I love going to the beach and turning over a sand dollar or teaching a child about a periwinkle or that crabs need water for oxygen. I get a thrill of joy that brings me back to loving life. People want to care for their beach neighbours. I love helping our two-legged neighbours understand the strange, wonderful world below the gorgeous waves."

**"**  
**I cherish this place**  
**and GSA really**  
**started me on my**  
**passion."**

Jessica has been a monthly donor for 25 years, starting as soon as she paid off her student loans for university. It was around that time that GSA's founder Laurie MacBride hired Jessica to work on the Nanoose Conversion Campaign in the early 90s to raise awareness about the impact of noise on orcas from the U.S. military's sonar testing.

"The noise impact on the orcas is a really excellent example of where GSA was first to champion the Southern Resident killer whales. Orca and chinook

salmon are very much transborder issues and I really appreciate knowing that GSA's highly skilled staff are in contact with people in the U.S. and at meetings, and are coming away with excellent material.

"I've always appreciated the diligence, consistency and excellence of GSA's work; their commitment to cross-border issues; and all the research and administrative work they do that never gets the public spotlight.

"I don't want this beautiful place to become barren and dead like my home on the north shore of Lake Erie, near Windsor, Ontario. All the fish are dead from pollution. Eating a catfish still carries mercury poisoning risk. You don't want to hear the stories about what happens after ecosystems are destroyed.

"I am so grateful to the Coast Salish Indigenous people for their knowledge, awareness and teachings about the interconnectedness of their unceded Salish Sea."



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



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

### Donate today

call 250-753-3459

email [giving@GeorgiaStrait.org](mailto:giving@GeorgiaStrait.org)

[www.georgiastrait.org/donate](http://www.georgiastrait.org/donate)

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

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