

# BRITISH COLUMBIA'S COASTAL MARINE STRATEGY

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# INTRODUCTION

The BC coast is home to generally healthy, productive and pristine marine ecosystems that support abundant sea life and vibrant communities. Our coast is a valuable treasure, we support and commend BC's efforts to create a cohesive strategy that protects what makes our coast so special. Along the coastline of BC, communities dot the shore, each with its own unique history and culture, and each shares a life-sustaining relationship with the water. The ocean is at the heart of these communities – providing food, transportation, recreation, a sense of place, a spiritual connection, and much more. The relationship between these communities and the ocean helps to define their economic, social, and cultural fabric. The culture of Indigenous and non-Indigenous coastal communities in this province is intimately bound to fisheries and seafood.

Today, the communities along the coast of British Columbia are facing a number of pressing challenges that are affecting the holistic health and well-being of local people. Coastal communities are dealing with a disconnect from decision making, a changing climate, rapidly evolving ecosystems, declining investments, loss of community infrastructure, increasing competition over

marine space, loss of access to fisheries, and increasingly complex marine management regimes<sup>6,4</sup>. Local communities are feeling the impacts of these pressures and changes in very real ways. Research into communities on the BC coast suggests that they are experiencing loss of livelihoods, declining economies, outmigration of youth to urban centers, loss of food security, increasing drug use, and a suite of physical and mental health challenges<sup>9</sup>. The isolation caused by Covid has exacerbated some of these issues.

Investing in the communities along the BC coast is absolutely vital. The presence of thriving communities on the coast is important for the entire province, as coastal communities can strengthen rural economies and rural-urban dynamics, support robust food systems and economies, be the eyes on the longest coastline in the world, act as first responders in the case of emergencies, and work to steward the marine environment<sup>6,4</sup>. The creation of a Coastal Marine Strategy presents a great opportunity to address the needs of communities along the coast and enhance the abundant ecosystem they call home.

# VISION

British Columbia deserves a coastal marine strategy that protects our marine ecosystems and ensures our coastal communities thrive together.

- Our coast deserves an ecosystem based management approach where integrated and collaborative decision making helps us to decide how best to protect our ecosystem while ensuring our coastal communities thrive together.
- We need our fisheries to be a cornerstone of the marine economy to support local food security, to strengthen marine stewardship, and to bring local knowledge to decision makers. BC deserves fisheries systems where harvesters and coastal communities are connected to adjacent resources.
- Coastal communities need infrastructure to remain linked to each other, and to link to adjacent fisheries resources, with local landings, processing and distribution possible from remote coastal communities.
- BC can be much more than a Pacific Gateway, the province can be a connected coast, one with a marine highway linking our communities together. BC can be a destination, a place to live, raise a family and grow old, one connected to incredible seafood, beautiful marine-scapes, robust cultures and sea stories to share for generations.

The future of our coast is ours to shape, the BC Coastal Marine Strategy should provide the vision for this future. This report outlines the recommendations from the TBuck Suzuki Foundation for this strategy.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

*It's important to remember, there are no easy fixes.*

In the 1970's, almost 50 years ago, researchers from the Institute of Ocean Science in Sidney were looking for the perfect control site to check on the reach of pollutants. They set up stations in our Arctic and to their horror they found the most remote sites on the planet had toxic levels of the man-made chemicals they feared the most. On testing the wildlife they found some of the highest levels found anywhere. They found clear evidence that the Earth's land, ocean, and atmosphere, our biosphere were coupled to human activity.

There is no escape: atmospheric deposition can take pollutants everywhere the wind blows, and with time they will move through the food web. As much as we'd like to believe it's possible, we cannot put a box around an area, restrict activity and think it is protected, including our coast. Our ability to tackle these problems is coupled with our ability to work with our neighbours. Collaboration is not easy, but it is necessary. In order to plan a sustainable future for the coast we need to find ways to live in harmony with the ecosystem, and with one another.

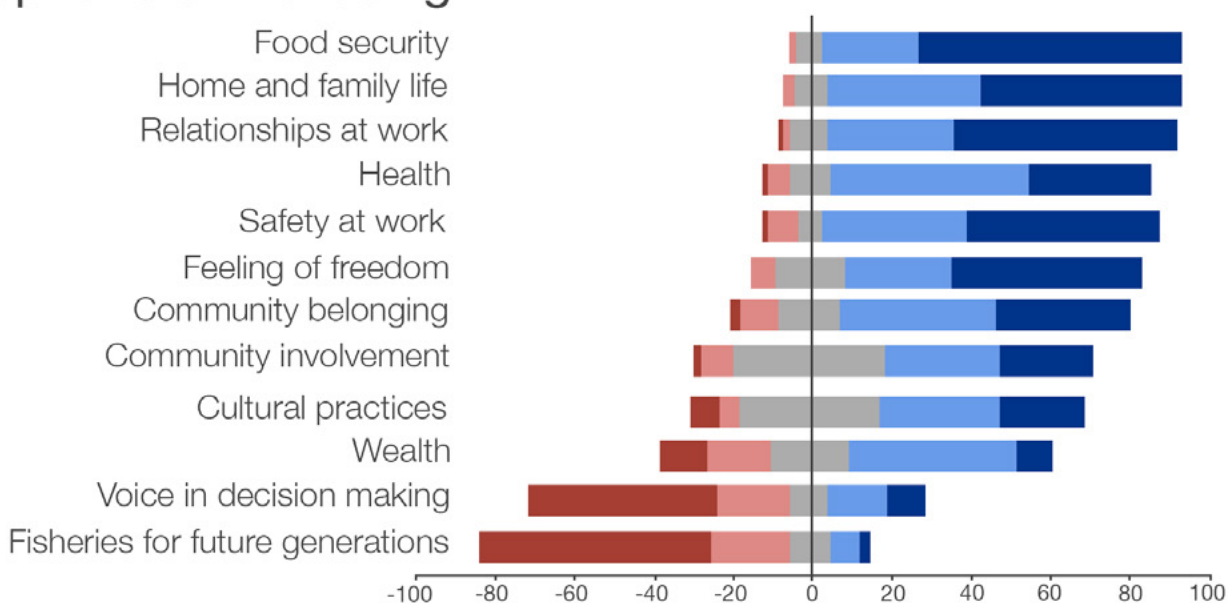
# COLLABORATIVE OCEAN GOVERNANCE

*A governance approach that ensures processes are transparent, and engages all communities and stakeholders who are a part of the ecosystem.*

Open, transparent and collaborative governance is key for creating a resilient coast. Good facilitation can help diverse voices sing, and make knowledge accessible for decision makers. Currently communities and stakeholders feel disconnected from decision making regarding the marine resources they rely on for their livelihood. For example, fish harvesters are suffering from feelings of disempowerment and inability to create a stable future in the industry. A survey of Indigenous and non-Indigenous harvesters asked participants to rate how satisfied they are with their voice in decision making, and found that over 60% of harvesters were unsatisfied with their voice in decision making. In addition, harvesters were unsatisfied with the future outlook<sup>3</sup>. The act of prospection can make life more meaningful especially when one feels they can influence the future, but can raise anxiety if not<sup>1</sup>. A full 77% of harvesters interviewed were concerned for future generations, they felt powerless to influence this future, effect positive change for their communities or offer secure livelihoods for future generations of harvesters<sup>3</sup>. Creating opportunities for a more engaged and local decision making process gives communities the opportunity to be heard and their needs considered, and it gives decision makers an opportunity to see first hand the communities their decisions effect.



## Perceptions of wellbeing



A 2021 gathering of active salmon harvesters created a roadmap for a more viable, and sustainable commercial salmon fishery.

“The present management process is convoluted, opaque, and needs to be completely reviewed. A way must be found to make management decisions accountable; fishermen are not given reasons when DFO does not implement advice heard from local fish harvesters.”

-The Future of BC Commercial Salmon Fishing, 2021

Although these issues point at federal decision making, the province has a role to play in holding the federal government accountable when our coastal economy suffers. In order to support coastal communities we need more regionally appropriate, adaptive and timely decisions that will support resilience and sustainability. Often we need in-season decisions based on real time data and observations of fish stocks. As climate change leads to more frequent stochastic events including shifts in marine species activity, distribution, and timing of life events, fisheries management needs to be able to adapt responsively and responsibly. This is only possible by utilizing the knowledge, insights, and observations of those who work on the water with these resources – fish harvesters.



# RESEARCH AND KNOWLEDGE

*Experienced fish harvesters bring unique insights from our coast. They should be treated as valued sources of data, information and local knowledge.*

The world we live in is very complex, we know very little, and often what we think we know is wrong. We need to be open to new information and new insights in order to continue learning. By learning we can adaptively manage. BC would benefit from creating a set of indicators for our coast that provide baseline on our ecological, social, cultural, economic, and governance values. Social scientists and natural scientists should be tasked to help come up with a starting set unique to the BC coast. Indicators need to be tempered with local, traditional and technical knowledge.

Industry professionals are often some of the most in-tune with the environments they work in – especially in industries such

as wild fisheries. Fish harvesters have a vested interest in healthy marine ecosystems that support biodiversity and abundance; they can provide timely and critical firsthand information on resource status and environmental health. Valuing the voices of harvesters can help increase sustainable fishing activities and help support resilient coastal communities. The local, traditional, and experiential knowledge held by coastal populations needs to be respected in collaborative management of ocean spaces. Additionally, long-term workers in industry should be held-up as leaders in their respective industries when consulting and working on collaborative decisions.



# ECOSYSTEM HEALTH

*Create more opportunities for coastal communities to act as stewards of the ecosystem they are part of.*

Those that live and work along our coast, including all mariners, are highly invested in the long term sustainability of the ecosystems that support them. Creating more avenues for stewardship, and removing financial barriers to use more sustainable practices will allow residents to take on a greater role in protecting the ecosystem. The province can help by encouraging and allowing processes for

more regional stewardship by coastal communities. Allow regional development of industries to reflect what is needed for local wellbeing; certain areas may require different industries to prosper, environmentally, socially and economically. The costs of infrastructure and technology upgrades can be prohibitive for remote coastal communities, the province can provide financial support for more sustainable options.



# HUMAN WELL-BEING

*Currently coastal communities are facing mounting challenges that are impacting both individual and community wellbeing.*

Overall, human wellbeing in rural coastal communities is declining. This is driven, in part, by declining access to fish and a deterioration of a vibrant fisheries economy. The results of this include declining investments in coastal communities, crumbling infrastructure, lower retention of youth, reduced access to capital, declining local transportation, school closures, increasing costs for goods and services, higher unemployment, and increasing drug and alcohol use, and mental health challenges<sup>7</sup>. Over the past year, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the closures of and reductions to many important West Coast fisheries have only compounded these issues.

It is imperative that the Coastal Marine Strategy keep the wellbeing of coastal communities at the forefront, and strongly consider the importance of less tangible values of the coastal economy: food systems, transportation, ecosystem connections, stewardship and monitoring of local resources, and intergenerational transfer of knowledge<sup>5</sup>.

Coastal communities will also benefit from a Coastal Marine Strategy that considers our ocean through the lens of human wellbeing; a sustainable ocean is a place that contributes to human wellbeing. In recent decades, all marine sectors in BC are faced a challenge commonly referred to as a 'greying of the fleet'. The average age of professional mariners on coastal BC continues to climb and recruitment of young folks to ensure the

viability and sustainability of the marine sector is lagging. The Coastal Marine Strategy can help ensure the marine sectors in BC thrive by supporting new entrants into the sector.

"A sustainable fishery respects the ecological integrity of the ocean and its resources; is ethical, responsibly governed, economically viable and technologically appropriate; supports local communities; draws on local culture, heritage, and diverse knowledge systems; and enhances health, wellbeing and the public good,"  
- Definition of sustainable fisheries, CFRN, 2019<sup>8</sup>.



# ECONOMIC STABILITY

*The BC Coast, and all of Canada will benefit from a focus on enhancing the whole value chain of fisheries in BC.*

BC is currently missing out on opportunities to create a more robust economy along the value chain of West Coast fisheries. Commercial processing is no longer a coastwide activity, but is restricted almost entirely to urban centres. The shift of processing from coastal to urban areas has resulted in loss of jobs and development opportunities. Local communities have lost access to fresh seafood, and lack the capacity to capitalize on potential new fisheries due to a loss of infrastructure<sup>9</sup>.

Enhancing the whole value chain of fisheries in BC will improve economic value, create stable middle class jobs in coastal communities, and increase the socioeconomic wellbeing of coastal adjacent communities and beyond. Creating more local food economies and more local value-added opportunities for fisheries before trade will allow for more robust local economies to emerge. Commercial Salmon harvesters have identified rural processing of seafood as a key opportunity for success.

“Commercial fish harvesters call for food security provisions and link their future resilience with local processing and the local community support and jobs created. The Province should energetically promote B.C. processing of B.C. salmon and support processors who process salmon in rural coastal communities,”

-The Future of BC Commercial Salmon Fishing, 2021.

Investment in every level of the value chain of BC fisheries will not only result in economic benefits, but also the variety of intangible benefits that a robust fishery has to offer<sup>5</sup>.

Additionally, working fishermen are covered by BC labour legislation, such as WCB, Labour Code, Fishing Collective Bargaining Act, Employment Standards Act. The Province should broaden its role to ensure that federal fisheries policies benefit BC fishermen, workers and communities.<sup>2</sup>



# ABOUT

## *The TBuck Suzuki Foundation*

The T. Buck Suzuki Foundation was founded in 1981 by commercial fishermen to protect habitat, prevent pollution, and promote sustainable fisheries. The Foundation strongly supports ecosystem based management using integrated marine planning to get there, connecting decision makers with affected communities and stakeholders through open, collaborative processes.

Website - [www.bucksuzuki.org](http://www.bucksuzuki.org)



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