

A Strong Trust Policy Statement (Policy Statement) is Crucial to Protecting the Natural Environment of the Trust Islands and their Natural Environment

Islands Trust Bodies Explained: Before reading this article about the significance and importance of the Trust Policy Statement, it is necessary to understand the three Islands Trust decision-making bodies created by the Islands Trust Act (Trust Act).

Trust Council: A 26-member corporate body comprised of the two elected trustees from each of 13 major trust areas/islands (including 2 councillors Bowen Island Municipality). Trust Council approves the Islands Trust budget, is responsible for determining the content of the Trust Policy Statement and other trust-wide policies.

Trust Council Executive Committee: A four-person committee of Trust Council comprised of a Chair and three vice chairs elected by Trust Council from among its members. The Executive Committee is responsible for the day-to-day management of Trust Council business and approval of all bylaws submitted by local trust committees.

Local Trust Committee (LTC) for each trust area/island: Each of the 12 local trust committees is a separate corporate body comprised of the 2 locally elected trustees and a chair who is a member of the Executive Committee. Bowen Island elects two Trustees who are also municipal councillors. LTCs have authority for land use regulation under the *Local Government Act* for the purpose of carrying out the [Object of the Trust Act](#).

Trust Policy Statement explained and why it is critical for protecting the trust area: In 1989, a new Trust Act replaced the 1974 Act and established the Trust Council and the Executive Committee we have today. In addition, the 1989 Act required Trust Council to establish the Trust Policy Statement bylaw.

The Policy Statement sets out how the Islands Trust is to carry out SEC. 3 of the Trust Act, also called its [Mandate or Object](#). The bylaw establishing the Policy Statement must be approved by Trust Council and the Minister of Municipal Affairs. The Policy Statement contains background and general information about the Act's purpose and contains three types of policies: commitments, recommendations, and directives.

Directives are the only mandatory provisions. In other words, there is no requirement that commitments or recommendations be followed. The Directives control what bylaws local trust committees can pass. The Executive Committee is only supposed to approve bylaws passed by LTCs that are consistent with (not at variance with), any Directive in the Policy Statement. Amendments to a LTC's Official Community Plan also requires the approval of the Executive Committee and the minister who are supposed to make the same assessment. The wording of, the Directives and how they are enforced are critical to how effective the Policy Statement is in achieving the Trust Object.

However, there have been examples where the Executive Committee has approved bylaws that were, in our opinion, not consistent with the Policy Statement. For example, the current Policy Statement section 4.4.2 says that “neither the density nor intensity of land use is increased in areas which are known to have a problem with the quality or quantity of the supply of freshwater.” This provision should preclude or constrain density increases in areas with short groundwater supply. However, there have been examples where projects and zoning density increases were approved in areas with known groundwater shortages or without sufficient testing to confirm an adequate supply.

Trust Policy Statement review and reinterpretation of “unique amenities”: Recently a public document stated that “Council’s view is that unique amenities are broad-ranging and may include issues such as, but not limited to, housing, livelihoods, infrastructure and tourism.” We disagree. Services such as these, are provided by regional government not the Islands Trust or local trust committees. Land use regulation may in some cases facilitate such services but cannot directly provide them. We fear that this new interpretation is setting the stage for amendments to the Policy Statement that will further weaken implementation of the Islands Trust Mandate as it was originally intended — to protect the natural environment and unique (meaning one of a kind) amenities of the trust Islands.

Friends of the Gulf Islands is carefully monitoring suggested changes to the Policy Statement that may weaken its efficacy and will, if necessary, raise our objections to Trust Council, Trust Executive and the Minister of Municipal Affairs. We will also ask our members to speak up if need be.

But in the end, the best way to protect the environment of the islands is to elect Trustees who implement and enforce a Trust Policy Statement with directives that will protect the natural environment of the Trust islands. We, are working on that as well. See the [News](#) section of this website for updates on the Trust Policy Statement project.

By: Friends of the Gulf Islands