



Gwaii Haanas Tour Operators Association

Fostering Quality, Ethics and Communication

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Honourable Geoff Regan
Minister of Fisheries and Oceans
House of Commons
Parliament Buildings
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

Members of the Gwaii Haanas Tour Operators Association (GHTOA) provide guided tours through South Moresby / Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve & Haida Heritage Site (Gwaii Haanas), located on the south end of the Queen Charlotte Islands, BC. We use a variety of crafts; from sea kayaks to sailing vessels. GHTOA members have a long history of successfully advocating and practising the conservation of cultural, terrestrial and marine resources.

The GHTOA fully supports the concept of reducing pressure on fish stocks, yet we have serious concerns regarding the flawed and inequitable restrictions imposed on the waters surrounding Gwaii Haanas by the recently implemented Rockfish Conservation Areas (RCAs).

For decades, GHTOA members and their guests have engaged in the sustainable and respectful tradition of food-fishing. GHTOA members adhere to a detailed and unambiguous code of conduct, which includes the following points:

- We limit our catch to what we can eat during the trip.
- We ensure that each person who fishes possesses a valid license.
- We limit the catch of salmon to one per licensee per day.
- We refrain from “catch and release” of salmon.

For decades, several guided kayak tour operators have provided self-supported, multi-day trips in regions which are now completely encompassed within the new Rockfish Conservation Areas. People on these kayak tours are now unable to legally food-fish; the recently imposed restrictions have eliminated their right to hook-and-line fish for any species, including salmon and rockfish, within the new RCA designated regions. The new RCAs are so vast that many weeklong kayak tours would be unable to paddle outside the RCA boundaries in order to catch a fish. People on these wilderness tours are now unable to legally fulfil the quintessential Canadian experience of catching a fish from a kayak, paddling ashore and cooking it over a campfire.

Meanwhile, the new RCAs continue to permit commercial salmon fishing by seine and gillnet. Also permitted is the continued commercial harvest of groundfish (rockfish) by mid-water trawl. Clearly, within a few days, a single vessel utilizing these technologically advanced commercial fishing methods would be capable of harvesting a quantity of fish that far surpasses that which all the kayak tours could possibly catch and eat during an entire season.

Also permitted within RCAs is the continued “traditional” harvest of fish by First Nations people. By virtue of their ancestor’s long history of sustainably harvesting fish from paddle-craft and other simple means, the Canadian Government has permitted First Nations people to continue “traditional” fishing. Today, First Nations people are permitted to fish within RCAs, using any modern and technologically advanced means available to them, including the commercial fishing methods described above. GHTOA members have witnessed very few truly traditional fishing methods used by First Nations people during the last several decades.

With commercial and First Nations fishing permitted at such high levels within Rockfish Conservation Areas, we can see no reason why kayak tour participants would not be permitted to drop a hook to catch a fish for dinner.

During the last few years, the GHTOA has shared communications with the Canadian Government, through Parks Canada, regarding the topic of fishing rights in the waters surrounding Gwaii Haanas. Details of these communications may be viewed online at: www.gwaiihaanastours.bc.ca/issues.htm

The Canadian Government assured us that “...*any decision on closures will be made in consultation with residents and stakeholders, including tour operators.*” This promise was broken and as a result, the public consultation that preceded the RCAs was considerably flawed.

Clearly, the Canadian Government failed to notify or consult with the GHTOA before implementing RCAs in the waters surrounding Gwaii Haanas. Instead, the Government notified the GHTOA of the concept of Rockfish Conservation Areas only after implementing the RCAs.

Several more related points could be raised to shed further light on the inequities of these fishing restrictions. We would like to believe that our Government will promptly and appropriately address these issues. However, if this is not the case, we are prepared to present additional details in forthcoming letters and media packages.

We have two requests:

1. Until satisfactory consultation has been achieved and appropriate food-fishing exceptions are authorized, we request our Government to rescind the Rockfish Conservation Areas from the waters surrounding Gwaii Haanas.
2. Furthermore, we request that the implementations of additional RCAs are delayed until the food-fishing issue is adequately addressed.

We are familiar with our Government’s past tendencies of attempting to sidestep accountability by declaring some other Government agency responsible for flawed decisions, inappropriate policies, broken promises and inadequate consultation. However, in these modern times, Canadians want and deserve a Government that makes informed decisions and accepts accountability for its’ mistakes. Furthermore, we deserve a governing body that functions effectively and cooperatively with other Government agencies.

Fisheries and Oceans Canada and Parks Canada have demonstrated a dysfunctional inter-agency relationship and a significantly flawed RCA public consultation process.

Gwaii Haanas visitors who want to catch and eat a fish should not have to desist due to our Government’s flaws and dysfunctions.

We ask that you reply at once to confirm receipt of this letter. Please include in your initial reply an indication of when we may expect to receive a detailed response to our two requests.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Gord Pincock
GHTOA Co-President

cc:

- Honourable Stéphane Dion, Minister of the Environment
- John Reynolds, MP; West Vancouver - Sunshine Coast - Sea to Sky Country
- Nathan Cullen, MP; Skeena - Bulkley Valley
- Ernie Gladstone, Superintendent; Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve
- Gary Logan, Fisheries and Oceans Canada
- Larry Pynn, Journalist; CanWest Global Communications