

UBCM Asks Province to Withdraw Bill 48

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By Islands Trust

VICTORIA- At its convention in Vancouver this week, the Union of British Columbia Municipalities gave unanimous support to a resolution that calls on the province to withdraw its proposed Bill 48. The Islands Trust sponsored the resolution and Chair David Essig presented it to the convention on Wednesday.

"The unanimous support of local governments across the province demonstrates that we're all concerned with the direction of this proposed legislation," said Essig following the successful vote. "We're very pleased that we now have the weight of other local governments behind our call for the Bill's withdrawal."

The Islands Trust contends that Bill 48, given first reading by the province last May, would further erode the efforts of coastal communities to influence aquaculture along their shorelines. The province proposes to designate coastal areas where its 'Right to Farm' provisions will apply. Those provisions can override the locally adopted zoning regulations that normally guide development.

"Our islands are totally surrounded by shorelines, so this is a major issue for us," said Essig. "Coastal communities put a lot of energy and thought into shoreline planning at the local level and they rely on it for many reasons. It causes a lot of problems when the province overrules the local efforts."

Bill 48 could also weaken several other tools that local governments use to regulate community activities, if the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries feels those tools restrict agriculture or aquaculture.

"We have strongly supported sustainable agriculture in our communities," said Essig, "and we also support aquaculture that is compatible with our ecosystems and community character. But we don't think it should dominate the many other land uses and values that our communities find important. Local governments are in the business of balancing different land uses to reflect local values. We think that locally elected people should continue to make these decisions because they are directly accountable to their communities."

While Essig believes the UBCM support is significant, he stresses that the final decision about the proposed Bill is expected when the provincial legislature sits next month. He urges community members to express their opinion to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries and to their MLA. "Everyone who is concerned about coastline ecosystems and the level of development along the waterfront should be concerned about this legislation," said Essig. "Once local control is gone, I don't expect we will get it back."

More information about Bill 48 is available on the Islands Trust website at www.islandstrust.bc.ca.