

Penelakut Tribe



October 23, 2020

Alistair MacGregor

MP Cowichan-Malahat-Langford

Since the beginning of man's existence on earth, Aboriginal People have utilized the waterways and oceans of the Southern Gulf Islands to sustain life. These waterways and oceans have provided life sustaining foods such as oysters, clams, prawns, goeey duck, salmon, and a host of other foods. These important foods continue to play a vital role in Aboriginal life. Penelakut Tribe members continue to this day to harvest these seafoods to survive and to continue the customs of the past where the ocean provides life sustaining foods.

Since colonization, Aboriginal people have been relocated to marginal and isolated areas with very limited opportunities for economic development. At present, the majority of Penelakut Tribe members rely on the Federal Government for financial support. Penelakut Tribe have created their own commercial seafood company in an attempt to lessen our dependence on Government hand outs by creating our own source revenues and by creating employment opportunities for our members. However, both our current way of life and our future way of life are being destroyed by the Federal Government turning our traditional waterways into ocean freighter parking lots. Over the last few years, volumes of freighters parking in our traditional waters has grown astronomically and continues to grow. As the volume of freighters parking in our waters has grown, we have experienced drastic declines in our traditional seafoods. We are experiencing invasive species on our beaches and waterways which are a direct result of freighter parking. Dialogue with DFO has confirmed that the pumping of ballast tanks, pumping of bilges, dragging of anchors, dumping of garbage and waste, and continuous noise from generators have combined to seriously threaten our livelihoods and traditional ways of life. Of further concern is the lack of monitoring and implementation of safety response measures surrounding these freighters. Penelakut Tribe experienced a severe storm two years ago of such force that it wiped out our ferry dock leaving us isolated for 2-1/2 weeks. With numerous freighters located within ¼ mile of our beaches and the closest spill response 8 hours away in good weather we are extremely concerned. A freighter dragging or breaking anchor in a storm would completely devastate not only our beaches but the entire southern gulf. We have also experienced unsolved missing and murdered women on our island which could be a result of the total lack of security that surrounds these freighters and their crews.

Aboriginal peoples have the Constitutional Right to be consulted on changes which may impact their well-being or way of life. The Federal Government have the lawful obligation to consult with us prior to permitting freighter parking in our traditional waters. Penelakut Tribe have had absolutely no consultation from the Federal Government in spite of letters sent to the Prime Minister and Alistair MacGregor putting our issues in front of The House of Commons. We are currently in the process of preparing legal action to force an end to the violation of our Aboriginal rights.

Penelakut Tribe are fully supportive of Alistair MacGregor's proposed amendments to section 23.1 of the Canada Shipping Act 2001 to prohibit the anchoring of freighter vessels in the Southern Strait of Georgia and specifically the Southern Gulf Islands.

Chief Joan Brown