



Charting coastal currents

Canada's Pacific
communities
talk climate,
culture, oceans
and the future



David
Suzuki
Foundation



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CELEBRATING
COASTAL CONNECTIONS
WITH DAVID SUZUKI

COMMUNITY CELEBRATION, BIG HOUSE, ALERT BAY

CHARTING COASTAL CURRENTS

BY PANOS GRAMES

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DEDICATION

This report is dedicated to everyone who participated in the public events and made comments. This tour, our United Nations submission and this report are founded upon your shared perspectives.

We also dedicate this tour and report to those who suffered the traumas of the residential school system.

This report is also dedicated to Daniel Kingsbury, a vibrant and dedicated environmental advocate who died on June 1, 2015, the day the Celebrating Coastal Connections tour began. Daniel founded The Jellyfish Project, an environmental education campaign that continues to bring people together with music, then informs them of the issues—and solutions—facing our oceans. His organization and his inspirational campaign style live on. Learn more at www.thejellyfishproject.org

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HUMPBACK WHALE (ABOVE)
AND HARBOUR SEAL (RIGHT)
BY THEMARINEDETECTIVE.CA

INTRODUCTION

From June 1 to 12, 2015, a David Suzuki Foundation team travelled Canada's vast Pacific coast, visiting a dozen communities in the traditional territories of 12 First Nations. Our goal was to listen—to hear first-hand from coastal peoples about their hopes and concerns for the future of their surrounding ocean environment.

We were welcomed into homes, community centres, auditoriums and bighouses, greeted with grace, generosity and welcoming feasts that vividly expressed the intersection of nature, culture and food. People were also generous with their stories, allowing us to record more than 1,500 contributions.

More than 3,500 people came to these events from a wide variety of backgrounds. We heard from children and elders, commercial fishermen and loggers, environmentalists and scientists, Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. ➤





VIEW FROM BELLA BELLA, B.C.

Over and over again we heard deep fear and anguish about the loss of people’s way of life, and that industrial projects with catastrophic impacts received government approval with little or no consultation. We also heard from coastal community leaders and residents grappling with how to end extreme poverty and improve social conditions.

People worried their children would not be able to live and enjoy the places they’ve enjoyed. Some wondered if it was responsible to have children, given the threats to their life-sustaining environments.

There was also an overarching sense of hope, pride and the need to take action to preserve the foundation of their heritage—a healthy ocean.

Coastal people are ready to defend against unsustainable industrial projects and desperately want to co-ordinate collective action to move the region and the wider world toward more sustainable practices in fishing, energy production and other industries.

They have a deep understanding of and concern for the ocean that borders their home. It’s an underwater world with 26,000 kilometres of winding shoreline, home to trillions of plankton, billions of fish, millions of seabirds and thousands of whales among forests of kelp and eelgrass, glass sponge reefs, deep sea canyons and hydrothermal vents.

Coastal residents repeatedly told us that the Pacific Coast is much more than a globally

In June, 2015, a David Suzuki Foundation team—including DSF co-founders David Suzuki and Tara Cullis—visited 12 communities along B.C.’s coast: Nanaimo, Port Alberni, Comox, Campbell River, Fort Rupert, Alert Bay, Bella Bella, Smithers, Kitimat, Prince Rupert, Masset and Skidegate. All of the events were held on First Nations territories, many on reserves.





(L) STUDENTS ATTENDING EVENT IN COMOX; (R) HARBOUR SEAL PHOTO: THEMARINEDetective.CA

significant ecosystem, that the ocean is more than just a backdrop—it's the architecture, the food store, the economic lifeblood and the essence of the people who live along its shores, providing the air they breathe and the food they eat. The nutrients and oxygen in their blood and bodies are inseparable from the ocean.

Climate change, ocean acidification, pollution and industrial pressures—combined with economic and social challenges in coastal communities—make this a critical moment in human history. Because Canada has the longest coastline of any nation, our country holds deep responsibilities to its citizens and the world.

During the tour, we told participants we would bring their words to a provincial, national and international audience.

So in February 2016, the David Suzuki Foundation delivered a summary of concerns to the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural rights—a body that monitors Canada's compliance with international human rights obligations—as part of Canada's first periodic review in 10 years.¹

Based on our submission, UN Committee members repeatedly questioned Canada on its environmental record, including the rollback of environmental protections in the 2012 omnibus bill, the rapid development of the oilsands and Canada's lack of action to implement the 1996 *Oceans Act*.

The Committee made strong recommendations in their concluding observations that mirrored the concerns of coastal residents, validating and reinforcing that their fundamental human rights have been violated.

The next step is for the Government of Canada, the Province of British Columbia and other levels of government to take the words of coastal residents seriously by enacting policies that protect and enhance the foundation of their economic, social and cultural lives: a healthy environment. Recommendations for specific policies can be found near the end of this report.

This report outlines the connections between a healthy environment and people's daily lives. The most important part of this report—and the best articulation of the issues—is in the words of coastal people. Of all elements of this report, please pay closest attention to their words.

The following sections will start with a brief context synopsis and relevant research in each section, followed by sample quotes that illustrate the broad themes.



INSPIRATION FROM YOUTH

At most of the events, the audience, guests and David Suzuki Foundation staff were treated with student art projects inspired by their connection to the ocean. The art projects were a moving and important part of community events, revealing visual elements of the ocean's vitality that are difficult to express in words. Children's artistic renderings of their connection to coastal ecosystems offered a vibrant backdrop to discussions and animated a perspective that is often ignored in public policy development and enhanced conversations.

ART THIS PAGE BY JILLIAN BROWN'S
ECOART GROUP, EAGLE VIEW ELEMENTARY



COMMUNITY CELEBRATION, BIG HOUSE, ALERT BAY

Truth and reconciliation

On the second day of our coastal tour, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada released its findings and calls to action after six years of gathering evidence.² The report's release was a historical moment for Indigenous people and all Canadians and heightened the recognition during our coastal tour that colonialism's historical wrongs must be redressed.

First Nations elders spoke about witnessing environmentally destructive industrial projects—authorized without their consent and in violation of their right to self-determination—as resonating with the horrific colonial legacy of residential schools. The Truth and Reconciliation report was both a reminder and release of the sorrow and loss brought to bear by residential schools. Part of the reconciliation process will require Canadian institutions to resolve destruction wreaked by resource extraction and acknowledge their damaging cultural effects.

There is a parallel between what was done to First Nations and what is being done to our whole community. Government needs to reconcile with the entire nation for promoting environmental genocide.

—PORT ALBERNI, B.C.

It's hard to be a First Nations person. Our families were affected by colonization, our parents and the way they parented us. The environment gives us the opportunity to come together and work together for something that we all need. It's pretty emotional. Our food, our culture. We believe everything is connected, so if we lose one part it's really going to affect our lives. There are ways, like solar energy, wind. There are answers there. We just need to implement them. —SKIDEGATE, B.C.

Aboriginal peoples are the first stewards of the land and water, however the federal government has yet to accord them a proper place in the management of aquatic resources. —NUU-CHAH-NULTH



DISCUSSION AREA AT NANAIMO EVENT

WHAT WE HEARD

The importance of conversation

Most communities we visited were convinced that decision-makers outside the region didn't care about what happened in their communities and that decisions with major impacts on local people and environments were made outside of the region without due process or consultation.

Their concerns were echoed by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural rights, which reminded Canada of its obligations to consult communities, especially Indigenous peoples, on extractive industrial projects, stating in their concluding observations that Canada should “ensure that environmental impact assessments are regularly carried out in the context of extractive industry activities.”

The lack of oversight felt by coastal residents was also validated by Canada's Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development in her January 2016 report. She found that the National Energy Board has not adequately tracked company implementation of pipeline approval conditions, or consistently followed up on company non-compliance with regulatory requirements.³

Oil tanker traffic and mining operations are the two industries that have the potential to destroy whole ecosystems and the livelihood of coastal communities ... The cost analysis of these operations should factor in the cost of destroying the environment and the livelihood of nearby coastal communities. —UNSPECIFIED COMMUNITY, B.C.

The main feeling of helplessness stems from the policy of our coastline being under federal jurisdiction. How can we create a reality for decisions—important decisions—to be made at a more local level?

—TLELL, HAIDA GWAI



YOUTH WITH BOOKS, ALERT BAY



COMMUNITY FEAST, HAIDA GWAI

THE IMPORTANCE OF CONVERSATION continued

I am fourteen years old and I am worried that the governments neglect to protect B.C. from the threat to the environment. Our government doesn't seem to care about the threat of pollution. Whether it be from fossil fuels or any other things the government seems to like to ignore B.C.'s complaints. —PORT HARDY, B.C.

I work as a natural resource officer for the B.C. government. Over time I have seen a decline in my ability to prosecute for environment issues. I seem to have no real recourse and regulation is very weak. My federal counterparts in DFO feel demoralized and restricted. We need well thought out legislative changes. —LOCATION WITHHELD, B.C.

I came here by water in 1977. I've watched the chopping of Environment Canada, the chopping of the DFO. This is my home and to watch the lies, and the outright destruction of something that is stunningly beautiful, that's all of our right. It's almost like we're dealing with sheer insanity. There is actually no protection for our environment happening right now. I am out in it all the time. I fish, I hunt this area. This is my home, this is my backyard. —PRINCE RUPERT, B.C.



YOUTH ARTWORK, ALERT BAY



OCHRE SEA STARS PHOTO: THEMARINEDETECTIVE.CA

Deep-rooted connections to nature

Coastal peoples expressed great pride and joy in the link between the natural and cultural wonders of their West Coast home. They have a deep connection to the place and ecosystem in which they live. Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people talked about their love of their natural surroundings, often with familial affection.

Growing up on the West Coast, the ocean is the backdrop to every memory, family meal, adventure and teaching. Education and conservation in the modern day are essential to preserving the sometimes invisible relationships that thoroughly exist between every human and other living creature and the great water bodies on our planet. —UNSPECIFIED COMMUNITY, B.C.

I grew up fishing on my traditional territories, my mother grew up fishing, my grandmother, too! I want my son growing up and being able to fish there—and his children! —KITIMAT, B.C.

When the fish come home or pass by Campbell River this whole community comes alive. When the fishing begins, I imagine how our ancestors, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, celebrated the coming of the salmon. We spend time together harvesting and putting away our food for the winter. Without the fish, a large piece of our island culture goes with them. —CAMPBELL RIVER, B.C.

I give thanks every day for clean healthy water, our easy abundant access here in Canada and on Haida Gwaii and of course the diversity of life in the oceans ... and our rich abundant foods provided for us here. Wow, I'm always in awe. —HAIDA GWAI



YOUTH ARTWORK, ALERT BAY



NORTH COASTLINE OF HAIDA GWAI

Witnessing change

Along with expressing their deep connection to the natural world, coastal people shared their observations about long-term shifts in ecosystem health, abundance and human well-being. Participants observed their environment through direct contact with Pacific coastal ecosystems. For years, decades and sometimes generations, they have walked the beaches, rivers and streams, travelled the waters and hiked the forests and mountains, studying the environment and wildlife through scientific fieldwork, recreational hiking and boating, sailing, diving, commercial fishing, logging, boating, harvesting traditional foods and gardening.

They also learned and shared histories of their environment and ecosystems through traditional knowledge, science, art and oral histories from current and previous generations.

People expressed sorrow that their fellow human beings might not have the opportunity to experience the wonder they had. However, many hoped a corrective course now would allow others to share their joy and connection to the natural world far into the future, and allow coastal residents to secure sustainable livelihoods.

In my lifetime I have seen the mountains go from green to brown, from rainforest to barren and streams that have dried up. Starfish melting. Fish disappearing. The crucial snow hasn't come. Thunder, lightning and storms have become more frequent. Very hot summers. Elk disappearing. Invasive species are becoming more dominant. —PORT ALBERNI, B.C.

In the past two summers it's been so dry we can see the salmon dying at the mouth of the rivers because the water levels in the riverbeds are so low. —PORT HARDY, B.C.

I hadn't been out to my traditional territory for a few years. It's one area where I hunt. And when I got out there and saw the vast clearcut and the loss from the pine beetle and the logging—the loss of habitat—I cried and cried. I thought: Where are the moose? Where are the deer? Where are the squirrels? Where are the bears? Where is everything? It's gone. I have no answers, but I'm sad. —BELLA BELLA, B.C.



(L) DISCUSSION AREA AT NANAIMO EVENT; (R) ALABASTER NUDIBRANCH PHOTO: THEMARINEDETECTIVE.CA

Climate change

Witnessing extreme and unpredictable weather patterns was also a key theme. The statements made by coastal peoples about climate change impacts are consistent with observations and predictions made by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a body that represents a global scientific consensus about the dangers and causes of climate change.⁴

Coastal peoples described more frequent thunder and lightning storms, very hot summers with drought conditions, less snow in the winter, changes in cloud cover (one resident noted observing more cumulus clouds in winter months), increasing ocean temperatures, rising sea level, decreasing snowpack, increased frequency of mudslides, receding glaciers, low water levels, and dry river and stream beds.

Like everyone I know, I am alarmed at how rapidly our climate is changing and I am deeply disappointed by our leaders' reluctance to address the serious issues. —PORT ALBERNI, B.C.

I have worked in First Nations communities as a nurse and I have seen the impact of climate change in their diet especially in remote areas. —PORT ALBERNI, B.C.

We can have a strong economy without destroying our environment ... Governments need to make climate change solutions their number one priority. —SECHELT, B.C.

I'm worried about glaciers melting and therefore less groundwater for people with wells, insects that kill trees, less foliage on the aspens and therefore more windfall; the potential for vast forest fires due to hot summers. —TELKWA, B.C.

I've lived on the same creek for 33 years and it's the lowest at this time of year that I've ever seen it. I'm picking strawberries 3 weeks earlier than ever before. —PORT ALBERNI, B.C.



FELT ART BY LORI KNORR, SMITHERS, B.C.



SIGNS IN OLD MASSET, HAIDA GWAI

Fossil fuels, pipelines and shipping

Concern about oil tankers and pipelines was the most commonly raised issue for coastal residents. Most often, people talked about the devastating impact of an oil spill, with links to climate change and ocean acidification. Many then looked to solutions such as increasing renewable energy infrastructure to reduce dependence on oil. A frustration with public processes and lack of government oversight were commonly connected to the potential increase in tanker traffic. People also saw conflict about development leading to community discord.



FANNY AISHAA PAINTING,
BASED ON ORIGINAL PHOTOGRAPHY
BY MICHAELA MCGUIRE

Tankers, pipelines and spills pose huge risks to the environment. The risks outweigh any economic benefit that may be gained. The potential to develop tidal energy as a renewable energy source needs to be further studied and developed. —NANAIMO, B.C.

Concerned about pollution of the marine environment (spills, garbage and noise pollution). Concerned that we don't have adequate spill response plans and resources. Disappointed that Canada is not leading the way in alternative energy. We have such potential. —BELLA BELLA, B.C.

Concerned about Enbridge. Concerned about SO₂*. Concerned about the division between neighbours in small towns over the issues. —KITIMAT, B.C.

I am concerned with the water in our Kitimat River. This is where our salmon live and breed. It is also our source of drinking water. I am concerned about an oil pipeline that could potentially destroy our use of this river. If this were to happen, Kitimat could no longer exist as a viable community. —KITIMAT, B.C.

*Sulphur dioxide from the Rio Tinto Alcan smelter in Kitimat



COMMUNITY CELEBRATION, BIG HOUSE, FORT RUPERT

Other environmental concerns

Many people pointed to specific causes of environmental damage and biodiversity loss. Aside from pipeline and tanker concerns, common themes were resource extraction such as logging, mining and liquefied natural gas development; overconsumption with the resulting garbage and plastics; and the current structure of our economic and political systems. Among the highest concerns for coastal residents, especially those on Vancouver Island, are the effects of aquaculture operations (fish farms).

As a veteran of the early days of salmon farming on the coast I have a hard time supporting its evolution to corporate control and focus on imported species. The impact of open-pen farming on migration routes of wild species is not acceptable. Conversion to closed-containment, land-based or even more innovative approaches need to be encouraged or mandated. —POWELL RIVER, B.C.

B.C. has the best natural salmon runs in the world. We must do everything to protect them. No more fish farms in B.C. Get them out of the ocean. —ALERT BAY, B.C.

Get rid of fish farms from migration routes! And everywhere in the ocean! —ALERT BAY, B.C.

The logical explanation for the plight we are in is simple: continuous growth economy. This is the driving doctrine behind the global economy and until it is openly questioned, nothing is likely to change.

—SOINTULA, B.C.

I've lived all my life on the coast—first in Richmond, then Victoria, Klemtu, Cortes Island, and Campbell River. We have always eaten from the sea—fishing, oyster farming, digging. The amount of garbage we have picked up is monumental. —CAMPBELL RIVER, B.C.



YOUTH ARTWORK, ALERT BAY



ENDANGERED SOUTHERN RESIDENT KILLER WHALES PHOTO: THEMARINEDETECTIVE.CA

Marine protection and planning

Along with comments about the lack of oversight and management, coastal residents showed a strong desire to protect what we have and to manage for multiple uses. Many pointed out that the ecosystems' complexity required equally complex understanding and a suite of policies to manage environmental threats.

The changes I have seen, the depletion of salmon stocks, herring, old growth forests, the need to protect our watersheds, marine ecosystem. We say "hish tok tsa walk": everything is connected, everything is one, the need to be sustainable as our ancestors have taught us. —BAMFIELD, B.C.

Our whole ecosystem depends upon the health of the ocean and it's all connected in one big cycle: The salmon coming up the streams and the bears pulling them into the forests. How we treat the forests is going to affect the ocean and how we treat our oceans and our salmon run is going to affect the forests. And to me living here, it's really important that we start to think about these things and how we're managing them. —PORT ALBERNI, B.C.

One of the opportunities is to develop more eco-tourism options together with First Nations. There should be a separation between tourist places, harbours, and marinas and industrial areas. —PORT ALBERNI, B.C.

Government has committed only 1.1 per cent of our oceans as protected park space. We are so far behind other nations in protecting our oceans. In my 54 years, I have seen our ocean dying and much of the sea life we enjoyed as youngsters disappear. We must act soon. —NANAIMO, B.C.

I spent this weekend with my three little nephews and my niece. I had the most joyous time, wading through the water the whole day looking for sand dollars and crabs. I can't think of anything more grounding, more healthy, more beautiful than this, and it went through my mind how important it is to preserve this beautiful ecosystem. —NANAIMO, B.C.



DAVID SUZUKI WITH YOUTH, FORT RUPERT; ART BY JILLIAN BROWN'S ECOART GROUP, EAGLE VIEW ELEMENTARY

Future generations

Coastal peoples called for urgent collective action to ensure future generations will experience and enjoy the natural world as we do today. The concerns regularly linked environmental damage and biodiversity loss to food security and cultural continuity.

My family has lived in the Kemano and Kitlope River valleys since pre-contact with Europeans. We have survived off the abundance of natural foods. Salmon, oolichan, moose and mountain goat are held in high respect amongst my community. With the influx of industrial activity within Kitimat B.C., oolichan and moose have suffered greatly. I hope that it is not too late to save and recover what is remaining. —PRINCE RUPERT, B.C.

As a mother, I am afraid my children will not have the same foods, joys or opportunities that I have had on the coast. I live and work in a First Nations Community, my children are First Nations and I will strive to make a change. —PRINCE RUPERT, B.C.

I am Nisga'a and love to eat sea lion, but it is too toxic to eat now. —PORT ALBERNI, B.C.

I want to be heard as a youth. All of our beauty, food, hobbies and overall lifestyles will be damaged if we let industry push their way in and walk all over us. I want to continue to traditionally harvest salmon, oolichan, seaweed, clams, herring eggs and all the delicious berries! Oil and gas will ruin everything that we have and if not right away ... slowly. —KITIMAT, B.C.



YOUTH ARTWORK, ALERT BAY



STUDENTS FROM DEPARTURE BAY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AT NANAIMO EVENT

FUTURE GENERATIONS continued

The fish count is getting lower every year and that scares me. I grew up eating fish and I would love it if I could show my grandchildren everything I knew about fishing and our traditional ways of using fish as food.

—KITIMAT, B.C. SELF-IDENTIFIED AS MEMBER OF GITXSAN AND SQUAMISH NATION

We on the West Coast are not protesting pipelines and terminals for tankers just to be awkward or selfish. We are thinking about our children and our children's children and what life could be like for them if these proposed developments are allowed to proceed as suggested.

—VICTORIA, B.C.

I am afraid to have children because I don't know if they will have a suitable environment to live in. —SMITHERS, B.C.

Please protect our whales, sea stars and octopus.

—ALERT BAY, B.C. AGE SIX



YOUTH ARTWORK, COMOX



SALMON COOKING, BIG HOUSE FEAST, FORT RUPERT

Disproportionate impacts on vulnerable people

The disproportionate impacts of climate change and environmental degradation on vulnerable people, as well as the threats to food, culture and health, are widely recognized in international law and policy.⁵ These factors are also recognized by people in the communities we visited, many of whom face extreme social and economic challenges and difficult decisions.

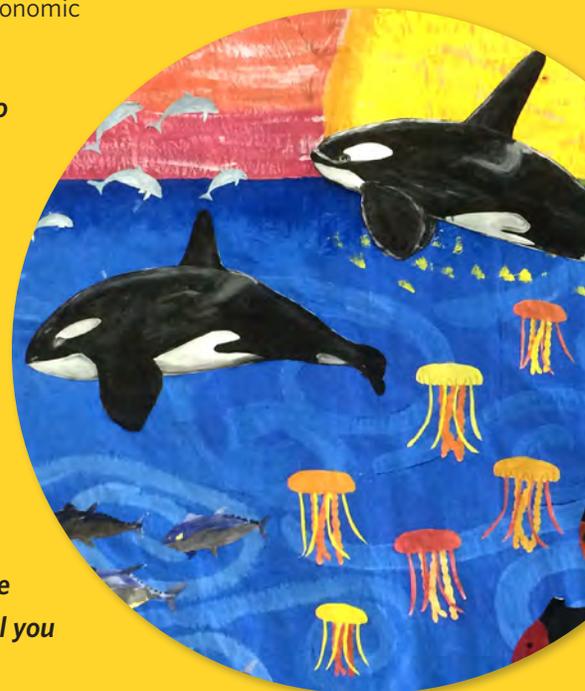
Human rights are impacted negatively but also unequally. Those who rely directly on the environment are impacted first, while those with financial means can deny that impact. —PRINCE RUPERT, B.C.

There are so many human rights issues including poverty, addiction, mental health issues and violence in our communities which makes us easy prey for big industry to sweet talk people into accepting money in lieu of our national resources. I think if we can find a way to first help people live humanely we will have a chance at stopping the constant battle to keep these lands safe. —TERRACE, B.C.

The oceans are the lifeblood of this community. If you thought the situation of a First Nations community was bad right now, it would be much worse if an oil spill disaster happens. As an engineer, let me tell you ... machines fail all the time! —ALERT BAY, B.C.

If we want to make changes to the environment we need to be able to create other jobs for people, because people want jobs and people need to be making a living. What I am afraid of is because of the lack of work opportunities, they are not going to want to listen to all these environmental concerns. —PRINCE RUPERT, B.C.

According to the UN special rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous people, Indigenous peoples in Canada face the highest risks to their health, economy and cultural identity from environmental degradation related to resource development.⁶



YOUTH ARTWORK, FORT RUPERT



COMMUNITY CELEBRATION, BIG HOUSE, ALERT BAY

Human rights and the environment

Coastal people articulated a clear understanding of how their right to clean air, water and soil requires a healthy environment.

We asked participants for their view on the connection between human rights and environmental degradation by posting questions on whiteboards in event auditoriums or reception areas. During intermission, people crowded around and provided insights, including the intersection between climate change and human rights, and the connection between environmental protections, human rights obligations and violations of rights that occur when corporate and state power are too closely aligned.

When we think of human rights, we think of equality, freedom, democracy. But what good are any of those if we don't have clean air, soil and water? It has to start with nature. —UNSPECIFIED COMMUNITY, B.C.

Although not recognized, we all have the right to a peaceful, healthy existence. Climate change and environmental degradation prevents too many people from obtaining those rights. —CAMPBELL RIVER, B.C.

All human rights are affected by climate change. There is not a person who is not affected. —PRINCE RUPERT, B.C.

Everyone has the right to a clean environment. Everyone needs fresh, clean air... If there were no trees or water we wouldn't be able to breathe. —NANAIMO, B.C.

The Special Rapporteur on the environment and human rights, John Knox, has also articulated the connection between human rights and the environment. Pointing to a range of United Nations Human Rights Council resolutions and other interpretations of international law, Knox made a powerful case for the existence of environmental protections within human rights. He concluded that human rights are dependent on “an environment that allows them to flourish.”⁷ At the December 2015 climate talks in Paris, the international community agreed that climate change is an “urgent and potentially irreversible threat to human societies and the planet.”⁸



FORT RUPERT PANEL DISCUSSION WITH DAVID SUZUKI, RUPERT WILSON, TOM CHILD, CHIEF YAKAWILAS COREEN CHILD, JACKIE HILDERING, IAN MAURO, JAY RITCHLIN

UN COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

In February 2016, the David Suzuki Foundation provided a written submission and made an oral presentation to the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights based on testimony heard on the Celebrating Coastal Connections Tour. Our submissions became part of the Committee’s periodic review of Canada’s fulfilment of its human rights obligations under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights during the past decade. Under this international treaty, Canada has obligations to respect, protect and fulfil rights to food, water, health, culture, self-determination and a range of other rights.

*Environmental protection of economic, social and cultural rights on the Pacific coast of Canada*⁹ sets out Canada’s obligations under international human rights law to protect its Pacific coastal ecosystems, and highlights important aspects of Canada’s international human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

During Canada’s periodic review, the UN Committee’s members repeatedly questioned Canada on the rollback of environmental protections of the 2012 omnibus budget (Bill C-38), the development of the oilsands and Canada’s lack of action to implement the 1996 *Oceans Act*.

The Committee agreed with coastal residents’ observations and analysis, stating, “The Committee is concerned that climate change is negatively affecting the enjoyment of Covenant rights by indigenous peoples. The Committee is also concerned that regulations governing environmental protection have been weakened in recent years, notably by the enactment of the Budget Bill C-38 (2012) and in the context of extractive industries.”¹⁰



THE DAVID SUZUKI FOUNDATION’S PANOS GRAMES DELIVERING STATEMENTS FROM COASTAL COMMUNITIES TO THE UN, GENEVA, SWITZERLAND
PHOTO: VINCENT WONG



(L) BULL KELP PHOTO: THEMARINEDETECTIVE.CA; (R) FISHING BOATS, KITIMAAT VILLAGE

Fisheries

The strength of coastal peoples' historical, cultural and economic connection to fishing cannot be overstated. People expressed their concerns that the federal government has not properly managed fisheries, and that their livelihoods and communities were suffering from poor oversight of the ecosystems that support them.

Over the past decade, the federal government reduced Fisheries and Oceans Canada's budget, resulting in negative effects on sustainable fisheries and aquaculture, habitat, general science and species-at-risk programs.¹¹ In 2012, protection for fish—specifically fish habitat—under Canada's *Fisheries Act* was significantly weakened.

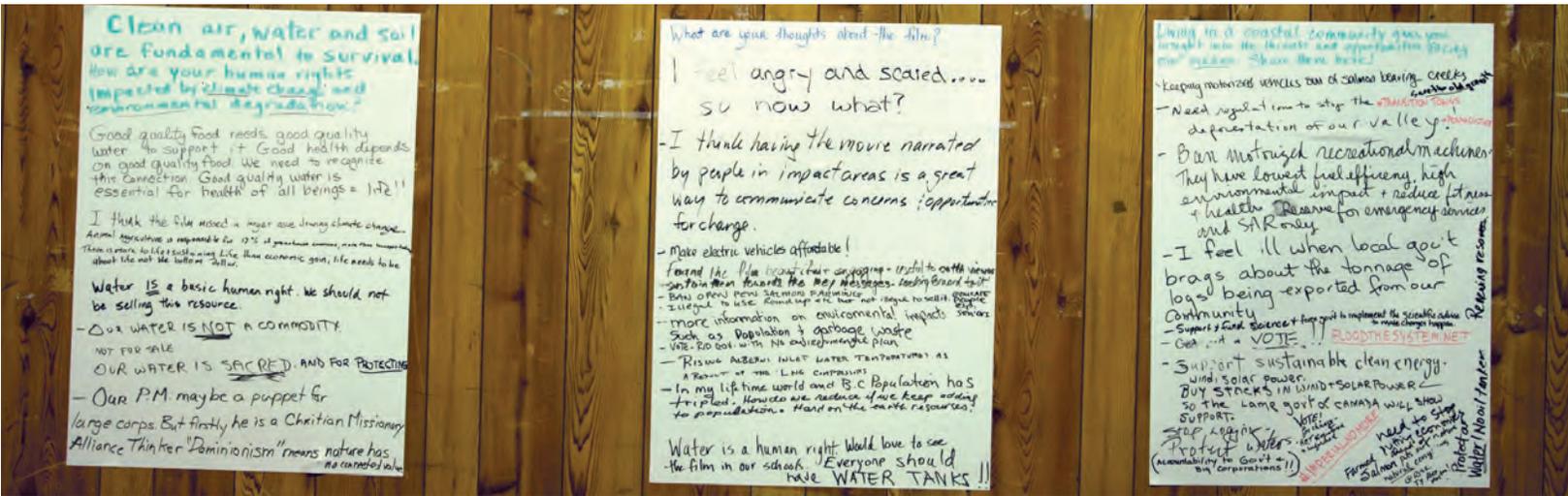
While some funding has been restored under the current government, it does not equal the amount previously reduced. In addition, legal protection of fish habitat in the *Fisheries Act* has not yet been restored. Specific examples relevant to understanding the health of marine ecosystems in British Columbia include the loss of marine contaminant monitoring, insufficient funds for stock assessments (e.g., groundfish, herring), delayed recovery strategies for species at risk and less enforcement of habitat violations.

How do we prepare those who depend on fisheries and other natural resources for the unpredictability of the future with impacts of climate change (i.e., fluctuating/dwindling salmon and oolichan stocks, shifting/declining intertidal communities)? —PRINCE RUPERT, B.C.

Government funding cuts to scientific research need to be addressed and reversed as soon as possible. —PRINCE RUPERT, B.C.

Repatriation of local control of all fisheries. —ALERT BAY, B.C.





WHITEBOARD COMMENTARY, PORT ALBERNI, B.C.

Ideas and solutions

Coastal residents made many suggestions to help reduce environmental impacts, ranging from education, tax incentives, policy reform, better legislation, recycling, waste reduction, and food systems to personal choices.

Too much of the wealth from natural resource extraction goes to multinational corporations. We could harvest sustainably if the wealth and manufacturing was controlled locally, doubling the local wealth while reducing the environmental impact. —PORT ALBERNI, B.C.

Society needs to provide financial incentives to make greener choices. Unfortunately, when we can't have jobs that pay well enough, people are forced to do things/jobs that harm the environment. —NANAIMO, B.C.

They were clear and consistent in their desire for renewable energy to replace the need for fossil fuels and repeatedly stated that alternative energy projects were necessary to reduce demand for fossil fuels.

This recognition of the need for a transition from fossil fuels was reinforced by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural rights. It suggested Canada “pursue alternative and renewable energy production.”¹²

I would want to say to them [decision-makers] that no matter how upsetting the short-term change from fossil fuels to green energy would be, it is necessary if we want to keep this beautiful green planet in a healthy state for use and enjoyment by future generations.
—MAPLE RIDGE, B.C.

We must stop depending on fossil fuels and develop and utilize alternative non-polluting energy. Energy must stop being distributed by large corporations and be independent. —SURREY, B.C.



YOUTH ARTWORK, ALERT BAY



TOUR MEMBERS AT NAIKOOON PROVINCIAL PARK, HAIDA GWAII

IDEAS AND SOLUTIONS continued

Our governments need to start subsidizing greener energies and stop subsidizing fossil fuels. —KITIMAT, B.C.

As a hunter, fisherman and grandfather, I am concerned for the future of the planet and what we are leaving for future generations. I support clean energy, we must make it accessible and affordable for all.

—NANAIMO, B.C.

Haida Gwaii pays huge \$\$ for electricity. Average person struggles. Money leaves the community. We need local sustainable, renewable, non-polluting power. Wind. Tidal. Geothermal. Solar.

Very important for the future of the planet. —MASSET, B.C.

Important to focus on ocean optimism and positive stories to empower people and encourage change. Doom and gloom is not motivating!

Must come up with concrete solutions that people can act on on an individual basis, and teach people about how their everyday choices can impact the environment (the food they buy, their method of transportation, where they shop, etc.). The impacts of our current food system on climate change are huge and should be more talked about—the fossil fuels for growing, transporting, packaging, and selling food are unsustainable. —VANCOUVER, B.C.



YOUTH ARTWORK, SKIDEGATE

RECOMMENDATIONS

The next step is for the Government of Canada, the Province of British Columbia and other levels of government to take the words of coastal residents seriously by enacting policies that protect and enhance the foundation of their economic, social and cultural lives: a healthy environment.

Developing and enacting policies that address the full range of concerns and hopes of coastal residents is complex. Although there is no single answer to address all the problems, the David Suzuki Foundation believes meeting the following goals will help set a course toward healthier, sustainable communities by protecting the ecosystems that support them.

- 1** The Government of Canada should develop a comprehensive approach for marine planning and protection that meets the obligations of Canada's *Oceans Act*.

This approach should include full implementation of the *Species at Risk Act* and the Cohen Commission Final Report, including the Policy for the Conservation of Wild Pacific Salmon in Canada. The Government of Canada should also integrate the Marine Planning Partnership marine use plans—established between the Province of British Columbia and 18 coastal First Nations—with the national marine protected areas network strategy. To meet promises that 10 per cent of marine areas are protected by 2020, Canada should invest in robust community-based processes that establish marine protected areas where full protection is the primary management prescription.

- 2** All levels of government should act with urgency to address climate change and ocean acidification, and ensure that ocean protection is a priority objective in domestic and international climate change agreements and actions. Policies should include cutting carbon emissions to 35 per cent below 1990 levels by 2025 and moving to 100 per cent renewable energy production (i.e., zero emissions) by 2050.
- 3** All levels of government should fully adopt and implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's recommendations and follow processes that ensure free, prior and informed consent with First Nations. The Government of Canada should take serious steps to fulfil its domestic and international human rights obligations, including acknowledgement of Aboriginal and treaty rights and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- 4** The Government of Canada should reinstate the environmental protections removed in the 2012 omnibus budget, including but not exclusive to the *Navigable Waters Act*, the *Fisheries Act* and the *Environmental Assessment Act*. It should also reinstate the oil tanker moratorium on British Columbia's North Coast.
- 5** The Government of Canada should implement its Sustainable Fisheries Framework for all Pacific fisheries and integrate the marine protected areas network to achieve conservation benefits for fisheries where possible, and fund open and transparent scientific research about the presence and spread of fish pathogens associated with open net-pen fish farming.

About the events

In June 2015, a David Suzuki Foundation team—including DSF co-founders David Suzuki and Tara Cullis—visited 12 communities along B.C.'s coast: Nanaimo, Port Alberni, Comox, Campbell River, Fort Rupert, Alert Bay, Bella Bella, Smithers, Kitimat, Prince Rupert, Masset and Skidegate. We wanted to make sure we didn't just talk to audiences during the tour. We were there to listen. All of the events were held on First Nations territories, many on reserves.

We offered a variety of ways for people to comment, including:

- Video recording
- Audio recording
- Postcards
- Whiteboards
- An online form
- Talking to a staff member or volunteer

We heard and documented hundreds of ideas, perspectives, hopes, fears and questions—in voice, in writing and in video and audio recordings. We were greeted with enthusiasm and thoughtful commentary from more than 3,000 people who shared more than 1,500 submissions expressing their concerns and hopes for the oceans.

Eleven of the 12 events started with a welcome from the local First Nation, and many featured ocean-inspired artwork from students and professional artists. We then screened a 30-minute film about the local cultural impacts of climate change by filmmaker and University of Winnipeg associate professor Ian Mauro.

Following the film, we asked people to help us better understand the issues facing coastal communities, and recorded video, audio and written submissions with the aid of volunteers.

After the intermission, David Suzuki gave a 30-minute inspirational talk. During that time staff members looked through submissions to determine themes and ideas that were then discussed by panels of participants—including David Suzuki, Ian Mauro and a local expert—facilitated by DSF Western Region director-general Jay Ritchlin.

The participants

Event participants were invited through newspaper, radio and online ads, as well as through the David Suzuki Foundation's contacts. Audiences included recreational and commercial fishers, children, educators, marine planners, nurses, scientists, students, librarians, parents, grandparents, world travellers, kayak guides, pilots, mayors, service industry workers, researchers, community organizers, fish hatchery workers, DFO employees, ecotourism operators and employees, entrepreneurs, journalists, chiefs, band councillors, university students, artists, small business owners, retirees, wildlife rehabilitation specialists, long-time residents and newcomers.



YOUTH ARTWORK, SKIDEGATE

Appendix

Concluding Observation from The United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights¹³

CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

53. The Committee is concerned that climate change is negatively affecting the enjoyment of Covenant rights by indigenous peoples. The Committee is also concerned that regulations governing environmental protection have been weakened in recent years, notably by the enactment of the Budget Bill C-38 (2012) and in the context of extractive industries (art. 12).

54. The Committee recommends that the State party address the impact of climate change on indigenous peoples more effectively while fully engaging indigenous peoples in related policy and programme design and implementation. The Committee also recommends that the State party ensure that the use of non-conventional fossil energies is preceded by consultation with affected communities as well as impact assessment processes. It also recommends that the State party pursue alternative and renewable energy production. The Committee recommends that the State party further strengthen its legislation and regulations, in accordance with its international human rights obligations, and ensure that environmental impact assessments are regularly carried out in the context of extractive industry activities.

Notes

- 1 www.davidsuzuki.org/publications/reports/2016/environmental-protection-of-economic-social-and-cultural-rights-on-the-pacific-c/
- 2 *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (2015), available at: http://nctr.ca/assets/reports/Final%20Reports/Executive_Summary_English_Web.pdf
- 3 Report available at: www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl_cesd_201601_02_e_41021.html
- 4 IPCC, 2014: *Climate Change 2014: Synthesis Report*. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (AR5)
- 5 www.un.org/millenniumgoals/
- 6 UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Addendum: The situation of indigenous peoples in Canada*, 4 July 2014, A/HRC/27/52/Add.2
- 7 http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session22/A-HRC-22-43_en.pdf, para. 10
- 8 *Paris Agreement*, FCCC/CP/2015/L.9/Rev.1
- 9 www.davidsuzuki.org/publications/reports/2016/environmental-protection-of-economic-social-and-cultural-rights-on-the-pacific-c/
- 10 *Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of Canada*. Find full document at: http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E%2fC.12%2fCAN%2fCO%2f6&Lang=en
- 11 Government of Canada, Department of Fisheries and Oceans, see: www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/reports-rapports-eng.htm
- 12 *Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of Canada*. Find full document at: http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E%2fC.12%2fCAN%2fCO%2f6&Lang=en, para. 54
- 13 *Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of Canada*. Find full document at: http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E%2fC.12%2fCAN%2fCO%2f6&Lang=en
- 14 www.oceancanada.org/

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Ask Me

We all have a right to

Clean Water

Ask Me



Ask Me

We all have a right to Fresh Air



We all have a right to Healthy Food



davidsuzuki.org/coastaltour



CELEBRATING
COASTAL CONNECTIONS
WITH DAVID SUZUKI

From June 1 to 12, 2015, a David Suzuki Foundation team travelled Canada's vast Pacific coast, visiting a dozen communities in the traditional territories of 12 First Nations. Our goal was to listen—to hear first-hand from coastal peoples about their hopes and concerns for the future of their surrounding ocean environment.

We heard and documented hundreds of ideas, perspectives, hopes, fears and questions—in voice, in writing and in video and audio recordings. We were greeted with enthusiasm and thoughtful commentary from more than 3,000 people who shared more than 1,500 submissions expressing their concerns and hopes for the oceans.

Charting Coastal Currents brings together themes of the discussions, and offers policy solutions to guide governments and communities.



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