



# ABALONE WATCH

May 2005

published by  
Haida Gwaii Abalone Stewards



Council of the Haida Nation  
Haida Fisheries Program



Laskeek Bay Conservation Society



Haida Gwaii Marine Resources  
Group Association



Skidegate Band Council



Old Massett Village Council



World Wildlife Fund Canada



Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve  
and Haida Heritage Site



Fisheries and Oceans Canada



Environment Canada



Centre for Wildlife Ecology at  
Simon Fraser University

# 1.800.465.4336



Research vessels *MV Haida Guardian 1* and *CCGS Vector* working in Haida Gwaii waters.

## Thank you for your part in Abalone Watch

~ A community effort to protect abalone in the waters around Haida Gwaii! We bring you this newsletter to provide regular updates about abalone news.

## Abalone Watch Survey

Haida Fisheries will be contacting *Abalone Watch* participants to assess our collective observations over the past year. We are looking for ways to assist you in your volunteer efforts and to improve our community outreach.

*We look forward to talking with you over the next few weeks!*



## \$25,000 Fine for Illegal Abalone Fishing

Late last month, provincial courts fined Richard Kieu Du \$25,000 for unlawfully possessing abalone, following a year of investigation. \$20,000 of that money is slated to support abalone recovery efforts by groups like the Haida Gwaii Abalone Stewards.

The number of calls to the *Abalone Watch* toll-free reporting line has increased with heightened community awareness and vigilance over human activities in coastal waters. Convictions for illegal possession of abalone have also become more common.

## Working Towards Common Goals

In consultation with the Islands communities, we developed the Haida Gwaii Abalone Recovery *Community Action Plan* with a long-term goal of rebuilding abalone and restoring food fisheries.

For several years now, the Government of Canada *Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk* has contributed to Haida Gwaii Abalone Stewards' activities, including \$60,000 last year. Our activities include

## Common Goals - continued.

regular working group meetings, public outreach and education, development of the *Abalone Watch* network and research and monitoring of abalone populations.

## Enforcement Challenges

In March, we sponsored public presentations in Queen Charlotte City and Masset on illegal wildlife trade. Ernie Cooper, the representative to TRAFFIC North America, described international efforts to curb wildlife trafficking under the *Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species*, although no abalone species are currently listed.

Bryan Jubinville, Fisheries and Oceans enforcement officer, described recent successes in prosecuting abalone poachers

The main challenges to abalone rebuilding are low population levels, low numbers of young abalone and illegal abalone fishing.

in BC. Fines under the *Species at Risk Act* can be quite hefty. In November, an individual from Vancouver Island was fined \$25,000 for 13 counts of fishing for, possession and selling of abalone. One of their secret weapons is Chrissy, a specially trained dog who can sniff out whether abalone has been on a boat.

Be aware that under the *Species at Risk Act*, it is illegal to possess abalone shells – even those you picked up on the beach.

## Sadly, No Sign of Abalone Rebuilding

The Haida Fisheries Program dive team has regularly joined Fisheries and Oceans Canada on underwater surveys of abalone 'index' sites that have been conducted every 3 to 5 years since 1979. Sadly, results of the 2002 survey showed no sign of abalone rebuilding. This brings home the message that abalone recovery is a long-term prospect. Continued efforts are needed to support the coastwide abalone fishing closure, in place since 1990.



### 2002 Survey Results

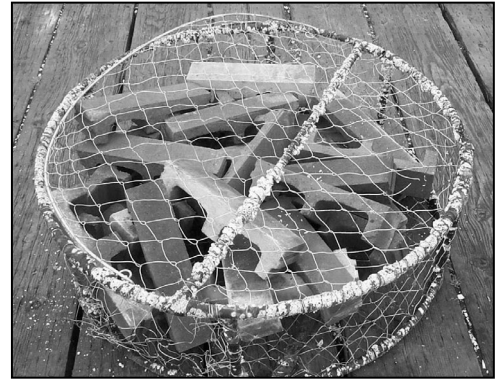
- Total # sites surveyed = 68
- Total # sites with abalone present = 45
- Overall density of abalone of all sizes = 0.34 abalone per m<sup>2</sup>

Statistically lower values than previous surveys for:

- Overall abalone density (except in 1994);
- Historic legal-sized abalone (100mm shell length) density; and
- Mature abalone (70mm) density.

## The Elusive Young Abalone

One successful tool for monitoring abalone populations is the baby abalone recruitment tracker, developed locally by Haida Fisheries biologist Bart DeFreitas. Each structure is made of concrete bricks housed within a modified crab trap.



Once installed on the ocean floor, a coating of diatoms and encrusting algae grows on the concrete to provide food and shelter for juvenile abalone. Divers survey the structures once or twice a year to measure and count all abalone. The smallest abalone found so far was 4mm in shell length, barely large enough to see!

Finding elusive young abalone is tough, but certainly more efficient in these structures than in the wild. Haida Fisheries hopes to use them to see if abalone rebuilding efforts are increasing the next generation.

### Haida Fisheries Dive Team

Bart DeFreitas, Biologist  
George Wesley  
Robert Russ  
Brad Setso  
Vanessa Bellis

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