



# Haida Gwaii Northern Abalone Community Action Plan

September 2003

partner groups



Council of the Haida Nation  
Haida Fisheries Program



Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve/  
Haida Heritage Site



Laskeek Bay Conservation Society



Skidegate Band Council



World Wildlife Fund Canada



Old Massett Village Council



Haida Gwaii Marine Resources  
Group Association



Fisheries and Oceans Canada  
Environment Canada

## INTRODUCTION

This Community Action Plan was developed by the Haida Fisheries Program in partnership with the Laskeek Bay Conservation Society, Haida Gwaii Marine Resources Group Association, World Wildlife Fund Canada, Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve/Haida Heritage Site, Fisheries and Oceans Canada and Environment Canada. It was initiated in July 2000 with funding from the Government of Canada Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk. BC northern abalone populations declined dramatically in the 1970s and 1980s and the fishery was subsequently closed to all harvesting in 1990. These declines were due to a large commercial fishery and suspected high levels of illegal harvesting. Northern abalone were subsequently listed in 1999 as a threatened species by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC). This Action Plan is complementary to the National Recovery Strategy and National Recovery Action Plan for Northern abalone that are being developed by Fisheries and Oceans Canada. Recovery efforts are also consistent with the Species at Risk Act that is currently in the process of being ratified.

## objectives

The eventual goal of the Action Plan is to restore abalone populations to self-sustaining levels that could support harvest for food. The initial objectives are to:

stewardship

- Promote stewardship of abalone throughout Haida Gwaii by building local community partnerships, providing information and inspiring community action;

rebuilding

- Test potential abalone rebuilding strategies that could be applied locally; and

monitoring

- Assess methods to monitor abalone rebuilding and provide feedback to the community.

## community workshops

In March 2001, two community workshops were held on Haida Gwaii. **The purpose of the workshops was to share information, provide a forum for discussion about community concerns around abalone and to engage community members in developing a Community Action Plan for the rebuilding of abalone populations around the Islands.** The workshops consisted of presentations on abalone biology, stock status and management in BC and California, and local dive research activities. Following is a summary of key issues that were identified during discussions by workshop presenters and participants.

## KEY ISSUES

**The main problem is that despite a complete ten year fisheries closure for all abalone harvesting on the BC coast, abalone populations around Haida Gwaii/ Queen Charlotte Islands have not increased.** In fact, coastwide surveys since the closure indicate that populations may even be declining along much of the BC Coast. Northern abalone was officially listed as a threatened species by COSEWIC in 1999. Sea otters, if and when they return to the Islands, will also change the balance of the present kelp forest ecosystem. No one knows for sure why abalone populations have not rebuilt but there are a number of likely causes.

## ecological factors

**First of all, there may be ecological factors that affect the natural rebuilding of abalone populations** including:

local depletion

- Localized depletion of abalone populations to the point where they are unable to reproduce successfully;

competition

- Competitors for space or food such as red sea urchin or predators; and

environment

- Environmental or habitat changes.

Although these factors are known to have effects on abalone population dynamics, the role and relative influence of each factor is not known.

harvest for sale

**Secondly, harvesting of abalone for sale is known to occur.** Although there have been no convictions on-island to date, fisheries seizures of abalone in other areas of the coast show that all abalone are taken indiscriminate of size. The coastline of BC is extensive and it is impossible to monitor all the activities that may occur. So despite the coastwide fisheries closure, it is likely that very few abalone poachers are ever caught and the harvest of abalone for sale is likely significant.

harvest for food

**Thirdly, some Haida food fishing for abalone is openly acknowledged. Recreational food harvesting by other Islanders and visitors is also likely.** Both Haida food and other recreational harvests are believed to be relatively small. But the effects of even relatively small harvests are unknown, so community awareness about the depressed state of abalone populations is vital to rebuilding efforts. How many abalone need to be in an area to maintain a viable population? How would conservation limits for abalone be different for Haida food and traditional harvests compared to other harvests, due to the constitutional priority of aboriginal rights fisheries? Would limits be different for recreational food harvest by Island residents and by visitors?

GOALS

**The proposed goal of the Community Action Plan is to rebuild Haida Gwaii abalone populations to levels at which they will support food fisheries.** It is clear that a new direction must be taken and new pathways blazed if we are to be successful at meeting this challenge. The past 11 years of federally imposed fisheries conservation closures have not been effective at rebuilding Northern abalone populations from depressed levels. Many issues must be addressed including a shortage of enforcement resources to curb harvesting activities and a lack of understanding of ecological factors affecting natural rebuilding.

APPROACH

**The Community Action Plan aims to address these issues through community stewardship of abalone beds in Haida Gwaii, raising community awareness through education, and conducting appropriate applied research.** Research includes testing methods to monitor abalone populations in selected areas and experiments to provide insight into ecological issues. The results of this research and monitoring will be made publicly available in order to encourage the Island community to share collective responsibility for the rebuilding and maintenance of abalone populations.

**The approach to rebuilding abalone populations must address the following key issues: community stewardship, ecological factors that may be limiting abalone recovery, harvest for sale, and harvest for food.**

KEY ELEMENTS

**Key elements of the Community Action Plan include:**

stewardship areas  
rebuilding  
community  
involvement  
awareness  
feedback  
CoastWatch

- Establishment of Abalone Stewardship Areas as the initial focus for rebuilding efforts;
- A coordinated approach to rebuilding abalone populations;
- Active involvement by all interested Island communities, organizations and individuals;
- A variety of activities to engage the community;
- Mechanisms for community feedback and monitoring of success; and
- Establishment of a CoastWatch Program to help address the issue of harvest for sale.

Details of the proposed Community Action Plan are summarized in a table on Pages 6 and 7.

## abalone stewardship areas

Research Activities

baseline data

abalone growth and survival

juvenile abalone studies

**The Abalone Stewardship Areas are a key building block of the overall rebuilding strategy.** Initially we are proposing to establish two stewardship areas: North Coast Graham Island from Wiah Point to Langara Island, and Juan Perez Sound including Hotsprings Island and Windy Bay (Map on page 5). Establishment of these areas will provide opportunities for natural rebuilding to occur, allow testing of alternative rebuilding strategies, and facilitate the gathering of baseline data and monitoring changes. The success of these activities will depend on our success at curtailing or limiting the impact of abalone removals. Initial research activities have been conducted in both these areas by the Haida Fisheries Program and Fisheries and Oceans Canada over the past 3 years, including:

- Collection of on-going baseline abalone density and habitat information;
- Tagging and monitoring of individual abalone to determine growth rates and possibly estimate survival; and
- Placement of collectors to monitor abundance and growth of juvenile abalone.

**Abalone Stewardship Areas are necessary for us to start understanding the dynamics of natural abalone populations.** In order for stewardship areas to be successful, the community must agree to a set of guidelines for activities within these areas and the community must enforce those guidelines for everyone's benefit. If our efforts are successful in these areas then the approach can be applied to other parts of the Island.

## community working group

**A community working group will be needed to coordinate the implementation of the Community Action Plan,** including the rebuilding plan, monitoring and enforcement activities, and community outreach and feedback. The composition of the working group and their roles and responsibilities will need to be clearly defined for efficient implementation of the Community Action Plan.

## CoastWatch Program

cooperative monitoring and enforcement

**Establishment of a CoastWatch Program, to initiate and coordinate community-based monitoring and enforcement activities,** will be another key component of the Community Action Plan. Existing monitoring and enforcement activities are clearly insufficient to curtail abalone harvest for sale. A cooperative approach to monitoring and enforcement of the waters around Haida Gwaii – involving the Haida Guardians, Haida Watchmen, community members, commercial and sports fishers, tour operators, Parks Canada staff and federal fisheries officers – will efficiently use limited resources and engage the community in active stewardship of their marine areas.

## COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

education

presentations

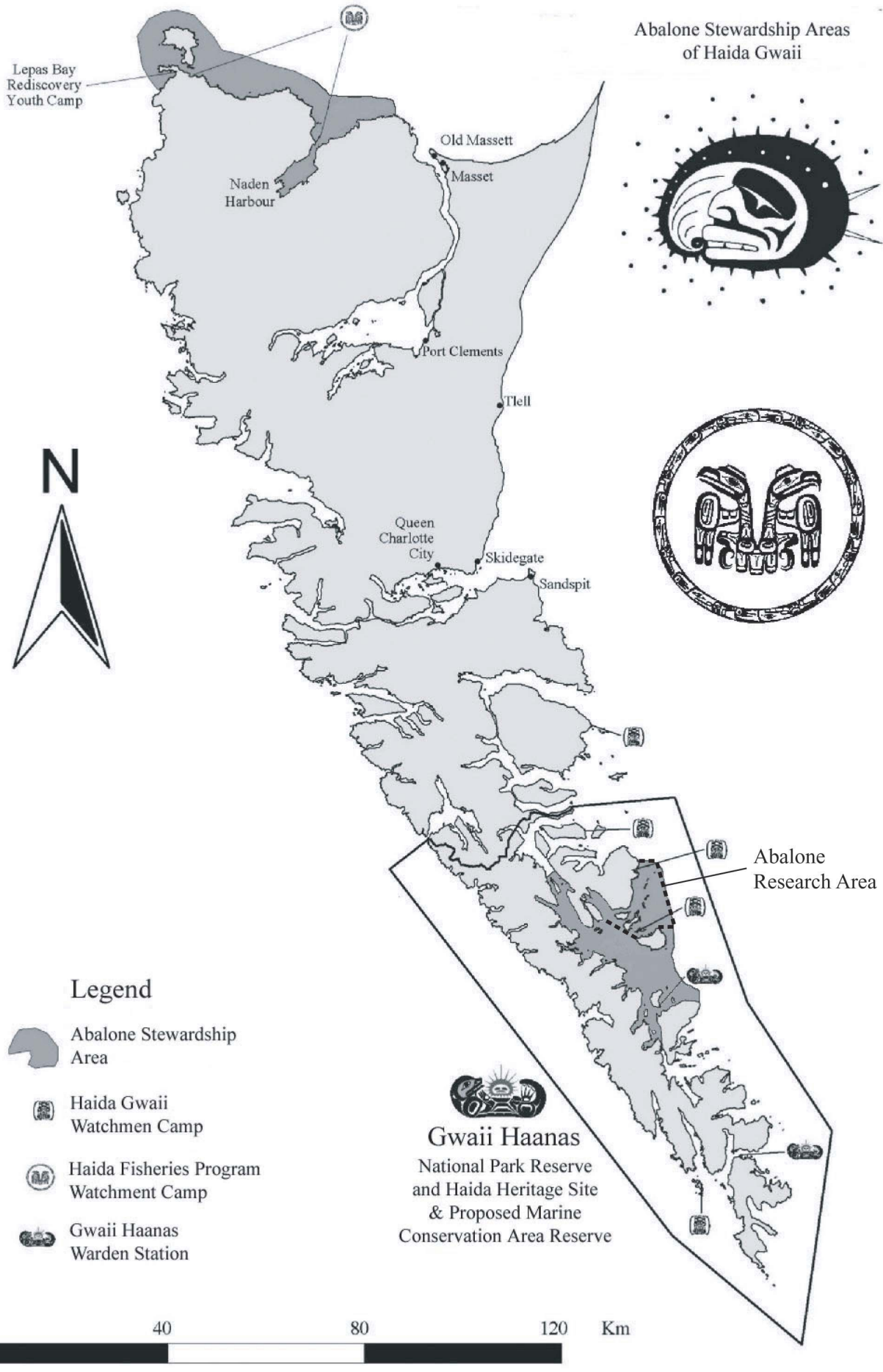
awareness

dialogue





**Communication strategies to engage the community in Abalone Stewardship activities** include the following:

- Abalone Stewardship presentations and educational activities in the schools;
- Community presentations by local and guest speakers about abalone conservation issues;
- Presentations to discuss issues around harvesting for food and the need for stewardship action; and
- Dialogue with interest groups such as tourism operators, commercial fishers and sportsfishing charter operators to inform them of the program and its objectives, share information and build cooperation in rebuilding and monitoring efforts.

Abalone Stewardship Areas of Haida Gwaii



Legend

-  Abalone Stewardship Area
-  Haida Gwaii Watchmen Camp
-  Haida Fisheries Program Watchment Camp
-  Gwaii Haanas Warden Station

  
**Gwaii Haanas**  
 National Park Reserve  
 and Haida Heritage Site  
 & Proposed Marine  
 Conservation Area Reserve

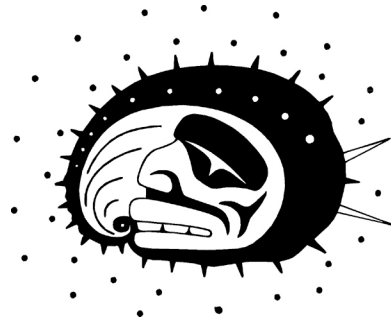
# Community Action Plan Summary

Issues	Action Plan Elements	Details of Action Plan
Community Stewardship	Rebuilding Activities	Establish Abalone Stewardship Areas with increased community surveillance to facilitate natural rebuilding
		Request closures of commercial fisheries in Stewardship Areas that have potential to compromise stewardship efforts
		Monitor changes in abalone stocks in Stewardship Areas
		Develop or provide input to management plans that affect Stewardship Areas
		Establish a working group to coordinate implementation of the Community Action Plan
		Consider applying this strategy to other areas of the Island over the long term
Ecological Factors	Applied Research Activities	Collect ecological baseline information on abalone populations and habitat
		Monitor juvenile abalone abundance and recruitment
		Develop systems to collect data and observations from commercial fishermen
		Test methods to aggregate broodstock as a potential method to improve reproductive success
		Investigate other potential rebuilding methods such as red sea urchin removal and rearing enclosures for juveniles
	Enhancement	Monitor success of other coastal projects to develop and test technology to release hatchery-grown juveniles into the wild
Harvest for sale	Monitoring (CoastWatch)	Develop guidelines for a community-based monitoring program (CoastWatch Program) including clear objectives
		Actively involve CHN Haida Guardians and Haida Watchmen
		Actively involve youth and unemployed fishers
		Encourage voluntary monitoring by people who are on the water eg. Tour operators, local guides, etc.
		Investigate real-time on-board video monitoring of commercial dive fleet similar to the crab fishery
		Secure funding for program elements not available through cooperating organizations

Issues	Action Plan Elements	Details of Action Plan
Harvest for sale (cont.)	Enforcement	Support strict fines and penalties for abalone poaching eg. Confiscating all diving gear, boat, loss of commercial license, etc.
		Develop additional deterrents such as a protocol to publish names of offending individuals within the community - policing based on respect
		Encourage pooling of resources between CHN, DFO and Parks
		Secure funding for enforcement to complement community-based monitoring
		Investigate feasibility of abalone sniffing dog to spot check vessels
		Investigate mechanisms to empower Guardians and Watchmen with the ability to stop and seize vessels with abalone until enforcement personnel arrive
		Support market surveillance to assist in tracking illegal operations and gauge level of poaching activities
	Establish toll-free Tips line to report suspicious activities	
	Community Awareness	Sponsor additional workshops in the community to encourage community participation in the Action Plan
		Continue education of the general public to create a respectful awareness of the issues surrounding abalone
Sponsor education programs in the schools - encourage children and parents to share information and improve their awareness		
Harvest for food	Fishery Guidelines	Establish baseline conservation objectives under which Haida food harvesting is acceptable
		Establish baseline conservation objectives under which recreational food harvesting by Islanders is acceptable
		Establish a respectful food harvesting protocol, including a permitting system
		Require mandatory catch reporting from food fishing activities, including information such as location of harvest, number harvested, size of harvested animals, etc.
		Foster community-based enforcement of guidelines based on the premise of mutual respect for others and for abalone
	Community Awareness	Same as under Harvest for sale

## FEEDBACK MECHANISMS

**Feedback from the community will be a vital component of any rebuilding strategy.** Clear lines of communication must be established including developing a network of interested community members, anonymity for reports from concerned citizens, and feedback mechanisms to review and adapt the Community Action Plan.



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