

**Haida Gwaii Abalone Stewards  
Coast Watch Incident Report**  
Toll-free Reporting Line: 1-800-465-4336



Date of this Report

**Observations**

Date of Incident	Time of Incident
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Vessel Name, Number and Description

Location and Description of Incident (be specific)

**If you wish to remain anonymous, do NOT include your contact information**

**Your Contact Information (optional)**

Name, Address & Phone Number

**Please report observations to:**

**Haida Fisheries Program**  
PO Box 98 . Queen Charlotte, BC . V0T 1S0  
p: 250.559.8945 or 1.877.559.4468 f: 250.559.8951

**or DFO Conservation and Protection**  
PO Box 99 . Queen Charlotte, BC . V0T 1S0  
p: 1.800.465.4336 f: 250.559.4678

**Be Aware**

If you hear anything about abalone poaching or see suspicious activities, record your observations and report them to the Coast Watch tips line at 1.800.465.4336. You can choose not to identify yourself when reporting activities. The attached *Haida Gwaii Abalone Coast Watch Occurrence Report* form highlights important information to record. This form is also available on our website and at our offices.

**Abalone Coast Watch**

Our community-based monitoring network deters poaching by keeping active eyes and ears on the water. Float plane flights also document marine vessel activities. Haida Watchmen monitor and protect culturally significant areas, while engaging in conservation and cultural education for locals and visitors. Individuals, groups and agencies are all part of our network – please contact us to join.



**Every Tip Counts**

Even the smallest tip can help. A few years ago, an Islander heard people joking about getting abalone and reported the comments – this turned out to be the biggest abalone poaching tip of the year. Those people were linked to poaching on Vancouver Island and the tip aided investigations by focusing enforcement efforts on specific individuals and vessels.

**Community Engagement**

Community events, workshops, presentations and school education programs, are ongoing abalone stewardship activities that foster community awareness of Haida Gwaii abalone. Visit our website at [www.marinematters.org/programs/abalone](http://www.marinematters.org/programs/abalone) for our school curriculum, outreach materials, events and more.



Community outreach at the Tlell Fall Fair (left . Bart DeFreitas). Delivery of abalone biology and conservation lessons in Haida Gwaii schools (right . Marcia Morash).

**The Haida Gwaii Abalone Stewards**

Concern for abalone prompted community and conservation organizations, individuals and government agencies, to collaboratively protect Haida Gwaii abalone. Our common goal is to rebuild local abalone to abundances that will support sustainable food fisheries. Together with the Islands' communities, we are implementing the *Haida Gwaii Northern Abalone Community Action Plan*, focusing on stewardship, education, research and monitoring.

**Partners**

-   
Council of the Haida Nation  
Haida Fisheries Program
-   
Laskeek Bay  
Conservation Society
-   
World Wildlife Fund Canada
-   
Skidegate Band Council
-   
Old Massett Village Council
-   
Gwaii Haanas National  
Park Reserve and Haida  
Heritage Site
-   
Fisheries and Oceans Canada
-   
Environment Canada
-   
Simon Fraser University  
Centre for Wildlife Ecology

**Contact us**

c/o Haida Fisheries Program  
PO Box 87  
Masset, BC V0T 1M0  
p 1.250.626.3302  
f 1.250.626.3309  
[www.marinematters.org/programs/abalone](http://www.marinematters.org/programs/abalone)

**Haida Fisheries Program**

Skidegate 1.250.559.8945  
Masset 1.250.626.3302

**Fisheries and Oceans Canada**

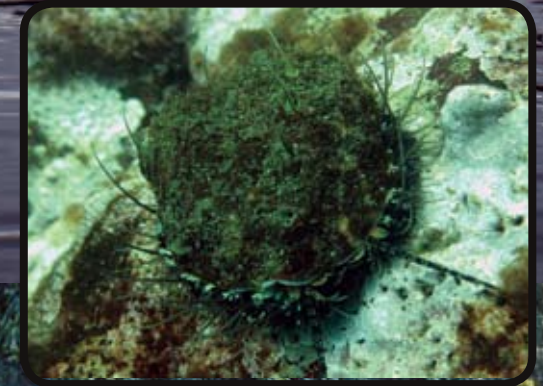
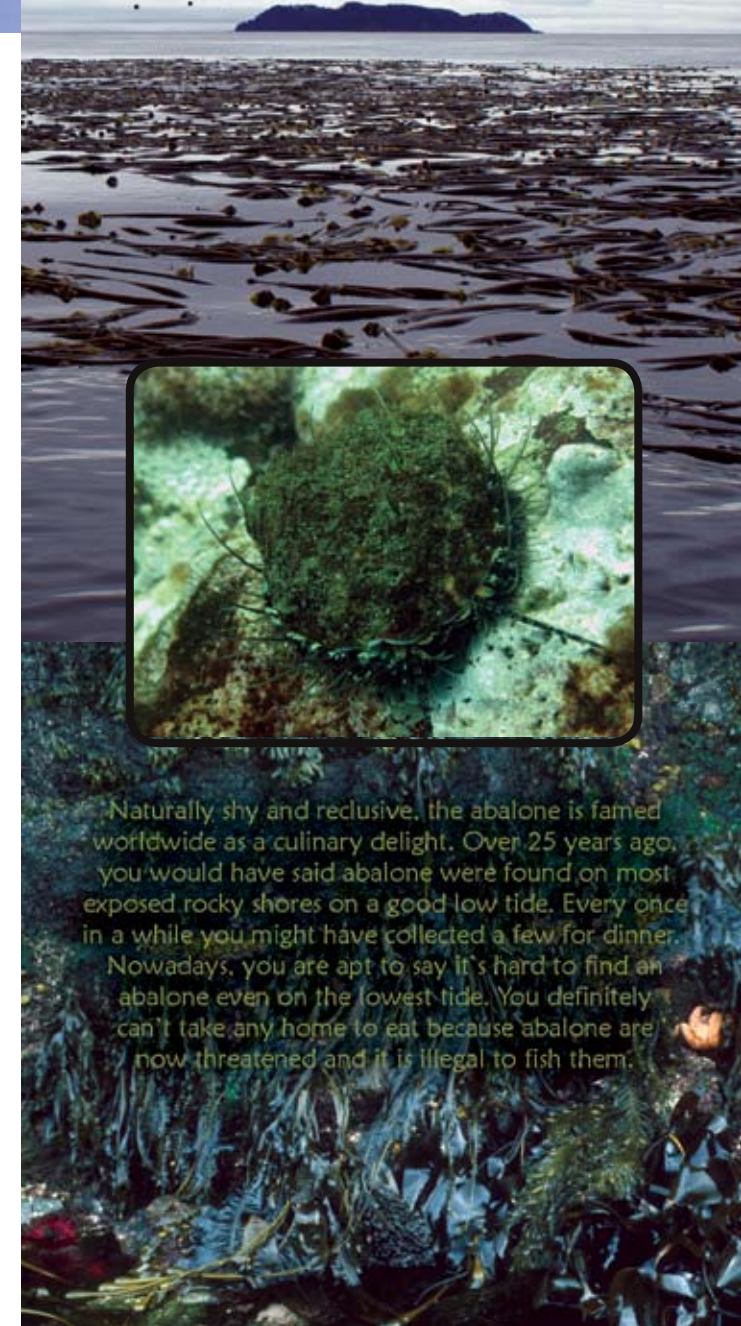
Queen Charlotte 1.250.559.4413  
Masset 1.250.626.3316



Art by Haida Gwaii Elementary School student

**Funded by the Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk,** a Government of Canada program managed cooperatively by Environment Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada and Parks Canada.

**HAIDA GWAII  
ABALONE**



Naturally shy and reclusive, the abalone is famed worldwide as a culinary delight. Over 25 years ago, you would have said abalone were found on most exposed rocky shores on a good low tide. Every once in a while you might have collected a few for dinner. Nowadays, you are apt to say it's hard to find an abalone even on the lowest tide. You definitely can't take any home to eat because abalone are now threatened and it is illegal to fish them.



Rocky shore abalone habitat at low tide . Lynn Lee

### Galgaahliyaang . Galguuhlkyan

These are two Haida names for abalone, a traditional food handpicked and speared along rocky intertidal shores by Haidas for untold generations. Scientists call these marine snails *Haliotis kamtschatkana*, meaning “sea ear” in Latin for the shape of their shell. In Canada they are known as northern abalone, and elsewhere also as pinto abalone.

### Population Decline

British Columbia’s northern abalone population declined dramatically in the 1970s and 1980s. In 1990, all abalone fisheries were closed due to conservation concerns. Large commercial fishery catches and suspected high levels of illegal fishing (poaching) are thought to be the major causes of decline. Despite the coastwide fisheries closure, abalone abundance has not increased. In fact, ongoing coastwide surveys indicate continuing population decline along much of the BC coast, including Haida Gwaii.

Cover Images . Surface of a kelp forest & abalone inset . Bart DeFreitas  
 Rocky intertidal habitat . Lynn Lee  
 Haida abalone design . Frank Williams  
 Publication Design . Lynn Lee



Research divers surveying abalone and habitat. Bart DeFreitas



Abalone seized on the North Coast. Fisheries and Oceans Canada Conservation and Protection Branch

### BC Abalone Threatened

Northern abalone is listed as a *threatened* species by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) and under Canada’s Species at Risk Act. This colourful mollusc is the first marine invertebrate in Canada to be considered “likely to become endangered if limiting factors are not reversed.”

### A Valued Commodity

Abalone continues to be highly valued worldwide. The black market for abalone provides incentive for large and small scale poaching despite stiff penalties. Given BC’s remote and complex coastline, monitoring and enforcement is a challenge and poaching activities likely occur without being detected.

### A Tangled Web

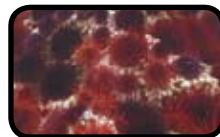
Relationships in the natural world are complex and no one knows exactly why the BC abalone population is not rebuilding. Many possible factors – both human-related and ecological – are limiting abalone recovery.

### Past Overfishing & Current Poaching

Overfishing may have reduced the abalone population to so few individuals that they do not reproduce successfully. Large-scale poaching continues today and small-scale fishing for food is also known to occur.

### Ecological Connections

Natural predation, competition by other species seeking the same food and habitat, and environmental conditions may also limit natural rebuilding of abalone. Research efforts on Haida Gwaii continue to examine these critical relationships.



Red sea urchins compete for the same habitat as abalone, yet their spine canopies may provide protection for juvenile abalone.

Bart DeFreitas



Abalone grouped at high density in a local area. Bart DeFreitas

### A Bit about Abalone

Abalone are seaweed-eaters that prefer to live in boulder and bedrock habitat along semi-exposed coastlines, especially in or near kelp forests. Juvenile abalone are camouflaged and hard to find, hiding under rocks and in crevices. Abalone are mature when they reach about 5 cm in length. The larger they grow, the more eggs and sperm they can produce. By 10 cm in length, about 7 or 8 years old, most abalone are visible on rocky surfaces. Given the chance, abalone may live for 20 years or more. Most adults are found from the lower intertidal area down to 10 m depth.

### Broadcast Spawners

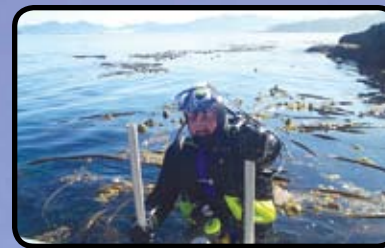
Abalone spawn by releasing (broadcasting) their eggs and sperm into the water – therefore spawning abalone must be in local densities high enough for fertilization to succeed. From June to August, abalone group together in shallow water to increase spawning success. Even small losses from these spawning groups could have a large effect on future generations.

### Survival of the Fittest

As they grow, abalone must survive many predators including sunstars, octopi, rock crabs, ravens, lingcod, river otters and, in some places, sea otters. When attacked, the generally slow-moving abalone rapidly twists its shell and “runs” to flee from voracious foes. Rubber-suited poachers further challenge their survival.



Two predators of abalone - sunstar (Lynn Lee) and lingcod (Bart DeFreitas).



Haida Fisheries Program research diver. Bart DeFreitas

### Abalone Stewardship Areas

Large coastal Abalone Stewardship Areas are identified along northwest Graham Island and southeast Moresby Island to provide opportunities for baseline data collection, monitoring of changes over time, and research into rebuilding techniques. Community support is vital to ensure that poaching does not compromise rebuilding efforts.



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

### Research Efforts

To measure abalone growth, survival and movement, over 3,000 abalone were individually-tagged between 1998 and 2002. Ongoing monitoring of over 150 artificial habitat structures at 36 sites documents relative juvenile abundance between years and locations.

Adult abalone were grouped at higher densities during the spawning period to test this as a possible rebuilding strategy. Although most relocated abalone dispersed within a year, the strategy may be useful under some conditions.



Juvenile abalone on an artificial habitat structure - concrete blocks in a modified crab trap. Bart DeFreitas