

## MARINE ISSUES

# Feds vow to reduce anchorage impacts



DRIFTWOOD FILE PHOTO

Freighter anchored off Southey Point in May of this year.

## Islanders seek an end to freighter 'parking lot'

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Island residents and organizations calling for the end of freighter anchorages in the Salish Sea are hopeful a new commitment by federal authorities to manage Port of Vancouver freighter traffic ends up being more than a mirage.

Minister of Transport Omar Alghabra provided welcome news Thursday by announcing the Vancouver Fraser Port Authority will work with partners to design a new collaborative system to manage marine traffic and thus reduce reliance on the freighter anchorages located around the southern Gulf Islands and as far north as Gabriola Island.

The Islands Trust has made freighter anchorages one of its key areas of advocacy over the past few years.

"We have worked alongside First Nations, communities, conservation protection groups, other government and individuals. Today, we are pleased to know these voices were heard, but we will continue to advocate for the complete elimination of commercial freighter anchorages in the Trust Area," Trust Council chair Peter Luckham said in a statement issued Friday.

According to the federal announcement, the Vancouver Fraser Port Authority and Transport Canada will engage with the port, other partners, Indigenous groups and local stakeholders to design a system to better manage marine traffic, reduce congestion at the port and improve efficiency and reliability. The system design is to be ready by March 31, 2022. Once implemented, it is supposed to reduce environmental impacts to marine animals, including southern resident killer whales, by limiting unnecessary vessel movements; to reduce overall anchorage use; and to implement a code of conduct for vessels at anchorage.

Timing of the announcement and past experience has led some to question the sincerity of the effort.

"There's a lot of promising language in their pre-election announcement. However, it's very nuanced, and it's language. What we really need to see is positive action," said Aaron Kipnis, who is a member of a grassroots Salt Spring group called Protect the Islands Sea.

Kipnis said historically, use of the remote anchorages was rare and mainly limited to emergency needs, but in the past several years they have become full-time auxiliary parking lots for overflow port traffic. Multiple groups and elected government officials from the region have been advocating for a vessel arrival system that would

provide more oversight on when freighters arrive and leave the port, with requirements on how early ships can arrive before they load or unload cargo.

"These ships are not here for 48 hours. They're here for many more days, weeks and up to a month," Kipnis said, adding there are multiple associated environmental impacts to the extended stays as well as constant noise and light pollution.

Kipnis lives on the northern part of Salt Spring within view of an anchorage off Penelakut Island. With ships' generators and lights running at all hours, he likens the experience to having a tractor trailer idling in a residential neighbourhood with its headlights directed into neighbours' front windows. In addition to ruining humans' ability to sleep or rest, the noise and ballast could be harming other life in an area that's been marked out as a future marine conservation area, he said.

"The solution is not to find a kinder, gentler version of anchorages," Kipnis said. "There is a solution and it is about managing the Port of Vancouver in a way that they don't really need these anchorages anymore."

Advocates like Nanaimo-Ladysmith MP Paul Manly have pointed out an ideal model already exists in the Port of Newcastle, Australia, which used to have similar problems with waiting vessels. As Manly wrote in a letter to Minister Alghabra dated Aug. 6, their vessel arrival system was only implemented after a freighter slipped its anchor and washed up on a local beach, but the port is now successfully managing its marine traffic.

"Two-thirds of vessels loading at Newcastle no longer anchor at all, and the remainder have dropped from an average of 11 days at anchor to just three days," Manly wrote. "Slowing freighters down for just-in-time loading has the added benefit of burning less bunker fuel at sea and burning less diesel at anchor, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and creating cost savings for the shipping companies."

Transport Canada said consultation will be a key part of designing the new system. Luckham confirmed the Islands Trust will be one of the stakeholders involved.

"We look forward to participating in this consultation," he said. "Working in partnership to address concerns and find solutions is a welcome approach."

Kipnis said advocacy groups are not convinced their voices will be sought, since the federal government had previously promised consultation when establishing interim protocols on anchorage use three years ago.

"All through the interim protocols, I'm not aware of any conversations that have taken place with residents or Indigenous people and their leaders," Kipnis said.