

# ISLAND COUNTY MARINE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

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## Minutes

Prepared by Elise Adams

## December 2, 2025

HYBRID MEETING

**PRESENT:** Present: **Jill Lipoti**, Chair, **Paul Ben McElwain**, **Andi Kopit**, **Kirk Larsen**, **Ken Collins**, **Scott Chase**, **Greg Easton**, **Patrick Havel**, **Jeff Wheeler**, **Barbara Bennett**, **Joshua Berkowitz**, **Florian Graner**, Technical Advisor, **Janet St. Clair**, IC Commissioner, **Elise Adams**, MRC Staff

**ABSENT:** **Kelly Webb**, **Melanie Bacon**, IC Commissioner ex-officio

**VISITORS:** **Kelly Zupich**, IC Shore Friendly Coordinator, **Renee Zavas-Silva**, IC Surface Water Quality, **Jen Schmitz**, IC Natural Resource Manager, **Shawn Morris**, IC Public Health Director, **Maddy Buehrer**, Whidbey Conservation District Natural Resource Planner, **Melanie Prentice**, Hakai Institute, **Heather Vitiaz**, WSU Extension – Island County, **Fran Horvath**, **Brad Thompson**, **Marena Salerno Collins**

**CALL TO ORDER:** Jill called the meeting to order at 3:00pm. **INTRODUCTIONS:** Introductions were made. **QUORUM:** A quorum was declared. **AGENDA:** The agenda approval was made by Patrick Havel, seconded by Ken Collins. **MINUTES:** A motion to approve the Minutes from November was made by Ken Collins, seconded by Josh Berkowitz, and approved unanimously.

### **TRIBAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:**

We acknowledge the lands we're on today are the ancestral and current homelands of Indigenous Nations who have stewarded them since time immemorial. We respect their sovereignty, support their Treaty rights, their right to self-determination, and we honor their sacred spiritual connection with the land and water.

**ART & CULTURE:** Reading from the "Muse of the Wild."

**PRESENTATION:** Dr. Melanie Prentice, Hakai Institute Research Scientist, presented "The causative agent of sea star wasting disease"

### **LEADERSHIP REPORTS:**

Report from Commissioner Janet St. Clair:

Island County Comprehensive Plan Draft Elements will be available starting December 10<sup>th</sup>. The IC Commissioners will be reviewing the new elements and discussing them. Public comment period will run for 60-days and the Commissioners/Planners welcome date-driven information and comments to be submitted. The IC Commissioners are also looking at how to update the Conservation Futures plan into the future by looking at elements such as mapping shoreline and habitat corridors and conserving the ecosystems as a whole and focusing on the relationship between different Island County, and nearby county, habitats.

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## IC DEI Consultant Report update:

BOCC wants to restabilize term appointment's and trying to not do all new appointments at the same time. MRC Coordinator highlighted the November 12<sup>th</sup> IC BOCC Work Session discussion following the DEI consultant report. The consultant's finding summary included: 1) consistent issues in recruitment, representation, and process clarity, 2) inconsistent inclusion practices, 3) persistent vacancies (though it was noted this was a pause due to waiting for the consultant report), 4) unclear or opaque recruitment processes, 5) limited public outreach and accessibility, 6) lack of demographic reporting. The consultant also suggested recommendations for the short-, mid-, and long-term, with the BOCC requested IC Human Resources work to streamline these processes. More detailed discussion notes have been sent to the MRC and can be found on the IC BOCC work session minutes. Commissioner St. Clair suggested that the BOCC was ready to consider new applicants but wants to do so in a way that doesn't have all new applicants coming at the same time but instead have them be staggered. One of the DEI consultant's key recommendations is to look at the Community Health Advisory Board; a board currently diverse and conducting business in a way that the BOCC approves of and figuring out how to make all IC boards and commissions mirror that.

Kelly Zupich noted that IC committees and boards have differing work requirements and functions, and it may be difficult to set up all committees and boards the same way. She also noted that it would have been helpful for the DEI consultant to have spoken to the IC Coordinators themselves to get that feedback and insight and be included in these conversations. She also noted that it would be appreciated if Commissioner St. Clair came back to be the IC Commissioner representative to the MRC.

Commissioner St. Clair noted that when looking at board and committee member needs, the BOCC looks at what the IC demographics are and is interested in including more diverse socioeconomic perspectives (working families, younger members, etc.) who aren't normally involved in these committees and boards.

Josh Berkowitz noted that when the position on an IC board or committee is not compensated or commitments are during the workday, it is hard for working community members to be actively involved (and offers a question/solution on if a stipend or funding as a possibility for diversifying committee membership - Kelly Zupich noted that she looked into stipends and it is not a possibility). He also noted that having meetings later in the day could be more accessible for working community members. Jill Lipoti noted that the MRC did change the MRC meeting to a later time but made it difficult for IC staff to attend with the workday ending. (It was noted that IC staff do have the ability to flex time to attend these meetings.) MRC members will discuss meeting times and incentivized participation during the upcoming 2026 retreat.

**SHORE FRIENDLY:** IC Shore Friendly has received their two-year funding and is about to put out their RFP for consultants and site visits. Kelly submitted a pre-application for a bulk-head removal in the Greenbank/Holmes Harbor area. Shore Friendly requests a MRC letter of support for that work once the application gets approved to the next step. Kelly will put together the application information and any materials the MRC would need to draft a letter of support. There

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are a handful of other removal projects in the works that Kelly will continue to inform the MRC on.

Josh Berkowitz brought up the MRC's Shoreline Armoring Report and asked what types of IC conversations are currently happening regarding unpermitted bulkheads. Kelly noted that in her new Shore Friendly position, she is completely non-regulatory, but the work can continue through the MRC Coordinator and the MRC (Jen Schmitz will be continuing these discussions as well.) Discussing the Shoreline Armoring Report would be a good MRC retreat agenda item. Kelly noted that all Western Washington tribes have a copy of this report.

## COORDINATOR UPDATE:

- Jan Holmes Volunteer of the Year Award nomination form is open (on the MRC website) and will be open for nominations until January 4<sup>th</sup>. Jill and Andi will sit on the selection committee with WSU Extension and Sound Water Stewards.
- Island County Comprehensive Plan public comment period opens on December 10<sup>th</sup> and runs for 60 days.
  - In the past, the MRC has put together recommendations to the IC Planning Department and Comprehensive Plan. The policy committee will streamline the MRC through the next stage of the IC Comprehensive Plan draft to prioritize on a few main comments/recommendations on behalf of the MRC (the MRC has been informed that as the Planning Department/IC are so far along in the process, it would be most beneficial to focus on a few main comments or draft pieces that were left out from last time).
- 2026 position nominations are due to Elise by December 15<sup>th</sup> – she will send out a formal position responsibility document.
- Sound Waters University is February 7<sup>th</sup> – those interested have told Elise and she will put in a formal IC reimbursement request for MRC members to register themselves.
- Retreat planning – Elise has sent out a Doodle Poll for members to fill out by 12/8.

**THANK YOU, BARBARA BENNETT:** – Jill and the MRC celebrates long-time MRC member, Barbara Bennett, as she departs the MRC. Jill and the MRC Coordinator presented Barbara with a farewell gift and certificate of appreciation for his many years of stewardship. Thank you, Barbara!

**PUBLIC COMMENT:** No public comment.

Meeting adjourned at 4:50pm.