

Ucluelet Harbour Appreciation Day

Five organizations, 25 people, and a little bit of bottled air helped move Ucluelet Harbour towards a cleaner future last month. On July 15, Uu-a-thluk, West Coast Aquatic, Ucluth Fisheries, the Tofino Streamkeepers, the Ucluelet Aquarium, and Ocean Planet Adventures came together to deliver Ucluelet Harbour Appreciation Day.

Beginning early, visitors and volunteers gathered in Ittatsoo to take part in a clam survey organized by Uu-a-thluk biologist Katie Beach, in partnership with Tad Williams of Ucluth Fisheries. While digging clams for a study in heavy metal contamination, participants also learned harbour facts and history.

“Ucluelet Harbour is one of the only Canadian harbours completely closed to shellfish harvest,” Beach said. “There have been various attempts to clean it up, but because of ongoing concerns, people aren’t able to eat shellfish from the harbour yet. The hope is that people will again one day.”

These ongoing concerns include problems with heavy metal and fecal contamination. The clam survey continued earlier work done by Uu-a-thluk and Ucluelet First Nation to survey harbour crabs for heavy metal toxicity. As for the fecal contamination: “Last year Ucluelet was hooked up to a sewer, but some communities still aren’t connected,” Beach said.

Participants involved in the clam survey later sampled the area for forage fish

spawning habitat, moving around the harbour to four different locations. The sampling ended in front of the Ucluelet Aquarium, where Jake Martens of West Coast Aquatic led a beach-clean up.

While everyone was taking part in educational and clean-up activities, divers from Ocean Planet Adventures were gathering garbage out of the water off the Whiskey Dock. Shopping carts, broken bottles, car and boat batteries, and bicycles were just a few of the treasures unearthed from the salty water.

“We wanted to strengthen the linkages between the communities of Ittatsoo and Ucluelet for the benefit of the harbour and everyone who lives here.”

—Uu-a-thluk biologist, Katie Beach

“There was so much garbage, they didn’t have to go far,” Beach said. “They said there were motors down there too, but they couldn’t pick them up.”

Back in the 1990s, the Ucluelet Harbour Society cared for the harbour with regular beach clean-ups and stewardship projects. Resurrecting that society was one of the day’s ultimate goals. Following the morning’s activities, participants discussed this possibility over lunch in Ittatsoo. Fresh food from local gardens and Barkley Sound sockeye provided added encouragement.

“We wanted to strengthen the linkages between the communities of Ittatsoo and Ucluelet for the benefit of the harbour and everyone who lives here,” Beach said. “Although the clean-up was just a drop in the bucket, it enabled everyone to work together and see what is possible.”

Special thanks to the Clayoquot Biosphere Trust, who provided funding to help investigate metal toxicity in Ucluelet Harbour clams.

Tad Williams of Ucluth Fisheries



Volunteers take part in a survey to test harbour clams for toxic metals.



Garbage pulled from the ocean near Ucluelet Harbour’s Whiskey Dock

Dave Hurwitz of the Ucluelet Aquarium (right) and Uu-a-thluk intern Damon Rampanen (left) help volunteers dig clams during a toxicology survey

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