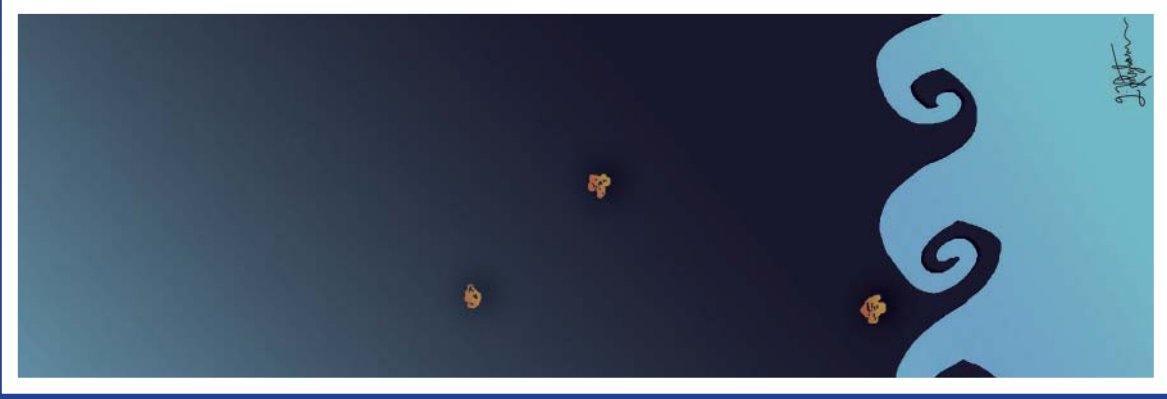


ON THE ROCKS

—healing our dysfunctional relationship with the coast



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Section 7. Making it Happen

THE EAC

plans to use our participation in the open houses and our written submission to the consultation process as an opportunity to put forward recommendations on how the real problems can be fixed. As outlined in this document, we are asking for:

- a provincial commitment to protect coastal ecosystems and habitat,
- legislation and consistent regulations to make sure it's done,
- clear responsibility within one provincial government department to implement and enforce the rules,
- clarification of the roles and responsibilities of other players, especially aboriginal people, municipalities, communities, and the public,
- a chance for the public to review and comment on a draft coastal strategy, and
- a formal role for stakeholders (aboriginal, community, environmental, scientific, business) in overseeing the implementation of the coastal strategy and developing legislation and regulation through a multi-stakeholder Ministerial Advisory committee.

We plan to make these recommendations over and over again on any questionnaires, surveys, written submissions, or other opportunities for public input this process provides. We will also speak out about our recommendations to the media, at public events, during meetings, and at presentations to schools, associations, government departments, and any other chance we get. We hope you'll do the same.

The EAC believes that only by thinking, talking about, and then acting will we fix our troubled relationship with the coast, and foster a new and healthier way of living with our most "significant other".

We think most Nova Scotians feel the same way, so let's use the public consultation process as an opportunity to speak up for our beloved coast.

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Section 6, Getting it Right

OUR COAST is in trouble. However, right now we have no policy to deal with that, let alone a government body that could turn policy into action.

Yet this is also an opportunity to get it right: not just to check off an item called “Coastal Policy” on a list, but to deal with real problems in a realistic way. It is an opportunity to set up rules and structures that will get the coast healthy and keep it that way without spending crazy amounts of money or creating a mountain of regulations.

The EAC thinks the Sustainable Coastal Development Strategy should include the elements we discuss throughout this document: sensible, easily understood and implementable ways to fix what ails our relationship with the coast. These should include:

- A provincial commitment to coastal management based on protecting and maintaining coastal ecosystems, and natural shoreline processes
- A provincial commitment to develop legislation that will ensure effective and consistent management of our coast for the benefit of all Nova Scotians
- Criteria and definitions for consistent province-wide regulation, under new legislation, of coastal land use (including, for example, setbacks, lot sizes, and permitted development which would best protect and maintain the range of coastal characteristics)
- One department with the mandate, authority, and resources to take on accountability for coastal management — and clarify what is to be done, and who will do it, in the future
- Identification of a range of roles and activities for Nova Scotians willing to participate in the full development and implementation of the policy. Some of the important roles citizens might engage in could include sitting on local and provincial advisory boards, collecting scientific information, and on-the-ground stewardship and restoration activities.

We do not argue that this is the only way to go at it, but we do think that if the government has a better problem definition it should say so.

We would like to know what the government thinks is the overall cause of harm to our coast.

We would like to know if the government really believes that a piecemeal coastal regime run by fifteen different squabbling players is not a big part of the problem.

We would also like to know if the government believes that a new policy which has to be approved by the fifteen squabblers before it sees the light of day will have any chance of fixing anything.

And above all, we want to know if our coast matters to our government as much as it matters to Nova Scotians. If (as we hope) the answer is yes, why do we have to ask the above questions?

... We would really like to hear the answers.

But until the happy day when that happens, and despite the short time frame and restricted opportunities the government is allowing for public input, the EAC does think this public consultation process can be used at least to begin the conversations many Nova Scotians need and want to have about their coast. Participating in the process is one way Nova Scotians can show their commitment to making things better and it does provide a space to ask the provincial government to show their commitment to fixing our dysfunctional relationship with the coast.

Preface

“**ON THE ROCKS**” is a discussion paper in which the Ecology Action Centre (EAC) looks at the serious issues facing our coast; why we need to fix them before they become far worse; and how we can do so relatively quickly and easily. We’ve chosen an unconventional tone for a policy brief. We’ve done this not to be frivolous or overly simplistic, but to demystify some of the issues, claims, and language that surround coastal management in Nova Scotia.

A lot of people say that coastal management is too complicated — so complicated that ordinary Nova Scotians can’t or won’t understand it. They also claim that given the complexity, we’ll never be able to get it right. We at the EAC don’t think that is true. On the contrary, we think that coastal management can be understood and discussed clearly, with a minimum of jargon or technical terms. We think the analogy of a relationship gone sour is a good way to explore what’s gone wrong with coastal management in Nova Scotia, and how to fix it.

We have prepared “On the Rocks” to help all Nova Scotians (aboriginal groups, community groups, municipal planners, business people, citizens, media, government, and everyone else) think about and perhaps help influence how our coastal areas are managed and protected. Right now, the province of Nova Scotia is developing a Sustainable Coastal Development Strategy. As it is currently set up, there is a very limited opportunity for the public to participate in the process by attending open houses and making written submissions to the government. (Information about the provincial process can be found at <http://gov.ns.ca/coast>.)

The EAC would like to see the process expanded to allow Nova Scotians to give input on a draft coastal strategy that we expect to be based on clear, unambiguous goals, and a real commitment to do the necessary work to get us there. In other words, we expect the coastal strategy to fix the problems currently plaguing our coast.

We don’t think it is possible to fix coastal issues until we have a clear understanding of the problems. We feel that the background material provided by the provincial government for the development of the Sustainable Coastal Development Strategy contains a great deal of useful information, but it fails to actually identify the real reasons for the problems we are facing. Neither does it offer much direction on a possible way forward. For these reasons, we are offering “On the Rocks” as an alternative analysis. The provincial documents, including “The State of Nova Scotia’s Coast” technical report and summary documents, can all be downloaded at <http://gov.ns.ca/coast>.

The very last section of this document (*Section VI – Getting it Right*) contains a list of results EAC would like to see from the Sustainable Coastal Development Strategy process. We suggest that the Sustainable Coastal Development Strategy should include:

- A provincial commitment to coastal management based on protecting and maintaining coastal ecosystems, and natural shoreline processes

- A provincial commitment to develop legislation and regulations that will ensure effective and consistent management of our coast for the benefit of all Nova Scotians
- Criteria and definitions for coherent province-wide regulation, under new legislation, of coastal land use (including, for example, setbacks, lot sizes, and permitted development which would best protect and maintain the range of coastal characteristics)
- One department with the mandate, authority, and resources to take on accountability for coastal management — and clarify what is to be done, and who will do it, in the future
- Identification of a range of roles and activities for Nova Scotians willing to participate in the full development and implementation of the policy.

To read only our recommendations, you can skip right to page XXX or keep reading for our analysis of our troubled relationship with the coast and how we think it can be improved.

Unfortunately, that's not usually how it happens. Often, "public consultations" seem to be a way for government to check off one more box on their to-do list. Public consultations also work nicely for government if they haven't done their own homework well enough to present clear policy choices backed up by research and good explanations. Or if they don't take time to let people get informed and ask questions and discuss things.

After all, if the public has a lot of different ideas, then the government can always say they need to "balance" these different ideas rather than working through to a good understanding for everybody. Or, if there is no clear outcome of consultations because of confusing information or too little time, governments can offer this as evidence that "it's complicated" and that the public should realize this and accept whatever outcome the government offers.

Between May and June 2010, the provincial government is holding public consultations for the development of a Sustainable Coastal Development Strategy. In this case, members of the public are merely being offered a chance to express opinions on information provided. There is no mechanism for dialogue with policymaker.

It's extremely unfortunate that the government has set an arbitrary and very short deadline (June 30th, 2010) for very limited input by citizens on an issue so many care and know about. As the process is currently structured, this will be the only input citizens will have into a Sustainable Coastal Development Strategy, which is to be completed by December 2010.

It is also disconcerting that these public consultations are not set up in such a way that they do not include opportunities for the many different coastal interests to talk to each other. After all, it is only by bringing people together to talk, listen, and hash things out that we can build the necessary public consensus to bring about change.

In addition to the very short timeline and lack of opportunity for real dialogue, another serious problem is that public input is limited to six issues identified by the government. These issues are:

- Coastal Water Quality
- Climate Change and Sea Level Rise
- Public Access
- Working Waterfronts
- Coastal Development
- Coastal Ecosystems and Habitats

These issues do matter — but what's missing is any explanation of why government sees these as the basic problems, and more fundamentally, what common theme ties them all together.¹

It's also unclear why other important issues such as aquaculture, and renewable energy development are not included in the list of issues.

We need to keep in mind that government is paid — by us — to have good information about issues, to develop ideas, and to explain clearly what practical and realistic ways could be considered to fix problems. That's called policy development, one of the important jobs we pay governments to do. If people are given a policy proposal, and a solid explanation of where it comes from, as a basis for consultation, then they can provide very valuable input on the content and implementation of the policy.

Calling a process 'consultative' does not make it so.

Yes, the EAC does think the priority issues identified by the provincial government (as well as many others like aquaculture, which weren't chosen) are real problems. If you want to know how we would tackle the six issues, you can download our recommendations at <http://ecologyaction.ca/content/coastal>

It's probably worth mentioning that none of this can happen behind closed doors. The coast is a public asset and so the public needs easy access to information about what kinds of decisions are being made about our coast, and some way to appeal when they have evidence that these decisions are not in the public interest.

COHERENCE. Even with one central organization within government primarily responsible for coastal management, there will still be other decision makers and they will still be enforcing relevant coastal legislation and regulations. These will all be part of the toolbox we have for good coastal management. However, for our new approach to work, the entire system has to be coherent. All the regulations under the various pieces of coastal legislation have to make sense together.

PRACTICAL ENFORCEABILITY. The coast doesn't need empty promises. Instead we need to back up our words with deeds, and enforce the rules we create. The clearer and simpler (and more consistently applied) the rules, the easier it will be for everyone — neighbours, community groups, municipal by-law enforcement officers, enforcement staff, fishery officers and developers — to know whether or not the rules are being followed, and for the appropriate officials to enforce the regulations when they are not.

Most people generally agree that the punishment should fit the crime, so we need penalties that reflect the value we collectively place on our coast. As an added bonus, fines for violation of coastal regulations can cover some of the costs of management.

ADAPTABILITY. Our relationship with the coast might be based on clear ground rules, but it doesn't mean that it will never need to be renegotiated. We're going to have to check in every so often to see how we are doing. Our coastline is changing rapidly and we may need to adapt along with it. We may also want to refine our management approach based on how well we are living up to the ground rules. We need to set some easily measured and understood indicators to gauge and report on our progress towards coastal management.

Section 5, The Sustainable Coastal Development Strategy

Although it will take some thought and effort it's definitely possible to put in place a workable system for coastal management in Nova Scotia that will identify and solve or reduce serious problems.

So what are we waiting for?

Well, in case you hadn't noticed, governments are often reluctant to take action on fixing problems and cleaning up messes, even when they know things will get worse if they don't. Governments need to be loved, but it's almost impossible for them to do anything that nobody will criticize. So they tend to tiptoe up to decisions through a maze of reports, studies, focus groups, or public consultations before taking action.

But wait a minute — isn't the idea of consulting the public a good thing? It definitely should be, and can be, if it's used as an opportunity to get all people interested in the coast — the residents, visitors, community groups, business people, realtors, developers, tourism operators and everyone else — to get informed, identifying key problems, and bouncing around proposals for overall coastal management goals and common sense ground rules.

Section 1 "It's just not working like it used to . . ."



NOVA SCOTIANS' relationship with the coast is longstanding. We've always depended on the ocean and the coast for so much — work, food, transportation, recreation, and even spiritual renewal. More recently, we have marketed our sweeping pristine natural vistas and our coastal way of life as a unique attraction both for tourists and for the new residents our economy needs.

We all know that things have been changing on the coast, though, and not for the better. The fishery isn't nearly as abundant and many beaches have shrunk so much they are now mere shadows of their former selves. Populations of many coastal species like Atlantic salmon and Piping Plovers have declined dramatically. Winter storms are packing a heftier punch and many wharves, houses, cottages, roads, and causeways close to the shore are suffering damage. Homeowners along the shore are dismayed to find their wells polluted, or their basements and septic fields flooded. Even the sweeping pristine vistas we've been marketing aren't as sweeping or as pristine as they once were.

Sorting out the confusion around the what (to do) and the who (will do it) of coastal management will also make it easier to co-ordinate coastal management and other key provincial government initiatives like our water resources management and natural resources management strategies.

Section 4 The Ground Rules

IF THE NEW approach is going to stay on track and set in place clear and realistic ways to get our coast and our relationship with it healthy, there should be ground rules (principles) for how our new approach is developed and implemented. Then Nova Scotians can use these ground rules to measure whether the new approach is working.

In light of what's gone wrong in the past, principles like these should apply to how a new approach is developed and run:

DEFENSIBILITY. The new approach has to make common sense, scientific sense, as well as economic and fiscal sense. If people don't understand some part of the approach, there must be a clear and factual explanation that everyone can understand and most can agree with.

CONSISTENCY. Everyone likes to know where they stand and that means the same rules need to apply in Barrington as in Cape Breton Regional Municipality; whether you're developing a lot or your family has lived on for generations or a condominium project run by an out-of-country developer.

FAIRNESS. If we want the coast to be respected, not abandoned, we need to agree to a system that encourages and rewards responsible investors and developers, and people who want to live and work here, while also protecting the coast we all value.

SIMPLICITY AND CLARITY IN LANGUAGE AND ADMINISTRATION. Complexity is a product of confusion. Our new relationship should be straightforward. A simple, deliberate system will be easy to explain and understand, and will be ...

USER-FRIENDLY. Nobody likes a runaround, especially citizens trying to prevent something happening to areas they love, and businesses trying to work or set up shop in coastal Nova Scotia. Our new system has to be easy to navigate for individuals and businesses on any scale. If you want to obtain permission for an activity in a coastal area, you should be able to read clear rules on what's permitted where, and be able to get advice and permits from one government department.

OPENNESS TO COLLABORATION AND CO-OPERATION. As we've already pointed out, the most appropriate lead for coastal management in Nova Scotia is clearly the province. However, keeping the new relationship healthy and up-to-date must involve other people, especially individual owners, professional associations, municipalities, community groups, the federal government, aboriginal people, and no doubt others. All the players need to be clear about what they are responsible for, and have access to the information, resources, and support they need to carry out these responsibilities.

And whether or not we are ready to admit it, those living on the coast know the score. Climate change is causing rising sea levels, while geological subsidence is making many parts of our province gradually sink relative to the level of the sea. Either way, the water is getting higher, which means we are more prone to flooding, erosion, and storm surge damage. Climate change is bringing other change as well including changes in precipitation patterns, warmer temperatures, disappearing sea ice, and groundwater contamination and shortages.

Meanwhile, there are more disagreements and conflicts about what kind of development is appropriate for our coastal areas. People are angry and feel alienated from any role in decisions that affect their community. Nobody likes waking up to learn that an unwanted aquaculture operation or quarry is being proposed in an area that they know is not suited for local conditions. Developers and investors feel frustrated at what they see as endless delays, regulatory confusion, and mixed messages from government.

What's going wrong? Tempers are flaring. Fingers are pointing. Blame is flying. We want things to be like they used to be, when we could take our coast for granted and treat it however we wanted. There's an uneasy sense that things are slipping out of control, and we don't like that.

Really ... this sounds a lot like a relationship problem doesn't it? ...

Could it be that although we love our wild and dynamic coast, we don't really understand or appreciate it like we should? Do we understand that the coast would do so much more to look after us the way it used to if only we would let it? Do we realize that salt marshes and other types of coastal wetlands can still work to purify our water, reduce erosion, and absorb floodwaters? That we just have to stop putting up barriers like roads, that disrupt the hydrologic flow, causing well and septic problems while reducing their capacity to absorb intense events like floods and storm surges?

Do we appreciate how barrier beaches and dunes have always defended us, and still do, from wave and storm-surge impacts? Do we recognize our role when we have breached the dunes or attempted to rein in naturally dynamic beaches with seawalls or other retaining structures?

Do we really not get how vulnerable beaches and wetlands and other coastal systems are to climate change? Or that their ability to rebuild and reshape themselves is being seriously jeopardized by rising sea levels and current patterns of development?

Could it be that the way the coast treats us is a result of the way we treat the coast? We seem to have trouble accepting that while we can damage the coast, we can't control it. This lack of understanding has caused a lot of problems.

The EAC thinks that our relationship with the coast is troubled. And that it's getting worse. And that this is something most Nova Scotians already know. What we need to figure out is what things have gone wrong and why, so that we can work out how to avoid more mistakes, and deal with the ones already made.

The EAC believes that our relationship with our coast can and will be better than ever if we sort through the perceived problems, sort out which ones are real and serious, think through what to do — and get on with it.

The overall purpose of such a new coastal management approach should be:

To protect and maintain coastal diversity, integrity, and shoreline processes since this will ensure that our coast can protect, nourish, employ, and entertain Nova Scotians into the future.

If most Nova Scotians can agree that this goal is the basis for a new and healthier relationship with our coast, what exactly do we need to do to put this in place? First of all, we need to start with a genuine desire for a healthy, productive relationship. This means someone in government is going to have to ...

Make a commitment!

The provincial government should publicly announce its commitment to a coastal management strategy whose starting point and organizing principle will be to protect sensitive coastal ecosystems and maintain coastal features and processes.

While commitment is the foundation, sooner or later the relationship needs to be formalized so that everyone has some guarantees that it will last. That usually means it's time to ...

Make it legal.

The government should commit, right now, to developing legislation and unambiguous practical regulations to ensure effective consistent coastal management. Clear regulations stemming from a clearly stated goal statement will ensure consistent progress towards protecting the health of the coastal ecosystems.

Get everyone playing by the same rules!

We need a coastal zone "land-use bottom line" that is the same throughout the province. This would include minimum land use planning standards for zoning, buffers, and setbacks in the coastal zone to which all players must adhere — municipalities, businesses, developers, community groups, private landowners. If anyone wanted to apply stricter standards, this would be allowed, but no one would be permitted to do less than the minimum required in the coastal zone throughout the province.

The current chaotic system with its confusion and constant fighting between different government departments and municipalities encourages bullies to exploit loopholes, take advantage of inconsistencies, and generally do whatever they want. So, to set new rules and standards to establish good coastal development, while deterring the harmful practices we all agree we don't want anymore, we're going to need to ...

Work it out already!

Someone has to be in overall charge of coastal management within the province. We need to establish one centre of responsibility and accountability within government for developing and implementing our new approach to coastal management, as well as for its ongoing evaluation and enforcement.

Once we're clear on what we're trying to do — manage the coast to protect coastal ecosystems and processes — and once we identify a single department accountable for making it happen, it will become relatively simple to figure out what other players should be involved and how to meet the overall goal. Then we can clarify the role of other levels of government, provincial government departments, aboriginal peoples, community groups, and the general public in coastal management. This will get everyone headed in the same direction, lighten the regulatory load, avoid duplication and conflict, and save money.

Section 2 Relationship Problems

IN THE PREVIOUS section, we explored how while we all claim to love the coast, we don't really understand it very well. Could it be that we also have a very poor understanding of why things are going so badly in this relationship? If we do, it's probably because we're getting such bad advice from so-called relationship experts. As with other troubled relationships, we hear a lot of rumours about what's wrong with the coast. People harp about 'management' issues and how difficult it all is. Most of the time, they're not giving us very good advice. Here's a quick look at what's really hiding behind the rumours and jargon ...

"It's complicated"

People who say our problems with the coast are complicated are actually referring to two very different things. One is that our coast has tremendous variety in its features and ecosystems. The other is that our coast is saddled with bureaucracies which have proliferated like algae bloom — and which have an equally suffocating effect.

Variety in ecosystems is a good thing; this diversity is part of what makes our coast such an irreplaceable asset. The variety along our coast is not a problem — unless we make it so by trying to control what can't be controlled. Coastal ecosystems are dynamic — they move and change in response to forces such as wind, waves, current, rain, ice scour, erosion, and sea level rise.

Problems with our coastal relationship happen when we do not adapt to the nature of the shoreline. Not all parts of the coast are equally suitable for all human activities. That's a fact. The problem begins with our failure to identify this — which in turn leads to more noticeable issues: cottages being moved by surges, erosion control structures being built and causing even worse erosion and other damage elsewhere on the shore, or salinization of wells through salt water intrusion ...

But that's not complexity. That's bad information and bad planning.

"I want to get involved, but I don't do commitment"

The complexity imposed by the multiple bureaucracies with a role in some aspect of the coast is a serious problem. In fact, it's probably the worst threat to our relationship with our coast. There are at least fifteen different players involved in 'managing' the coast. These include municipalities and different departments within both the federal and provincial governments. Each operates under the authority of a different law, and a different set of regulations, permits, inspections, and staff.

The sheer number of decision makers involved isn't even the worst part. The worst part is that while each of these fifteen outfits wants a role and guards its turf, not one of them wants to be responsible or accountable for any decision affecting the coast. Their real specialty is passing the buck instead of saying the buck stops here.

The pile of regulations is thicker than a city telephone book, but there is no common ground about what is or isn't allowed to happen to our coast.

While all the players often agree that there is a problem, each of them will put their real energy into saying it's not *their* problem. They all want to be involved, but they are also all commitment-phobes when it comes to taking responsibility for making sure that the coast stays healthy. "I know that what's happening is terrible — but there's nothing I can do!" Nobody can say "Coastal issues are all we do: we're responsible; we're in charge; it's our job."

There are two basic reasons for this mess. One is that we have gathered legislative clutter over time, much of which was not designed to deal with what is happening now. The other reason is that nobody seems to have a clue about what should replace the clutter. However, there is absolutely no excuse for this to continue. One of the primary jobs of governments is to amend or replace laws that become outdated or are not meeting real needs.

“My way or the doorway!”

This line is a favourite line of bullies, who can be a real problem for our coast and our relationship with it.

Basically, bullies say that we have to choose between a healthy coast and a healthy economy. Only they don't usually put it so bluntly, because then it sounds absurd. To these folks, a 'healthy economy' is one in which there are no constraints on any kind of coastal development anywhere — or else. It seems reasonable to ask: Or else what?

Do we really want or need developers who do whatever they want with our coast and then leave? Do we realize that tolerating their bullying makes it very hard for the many developers and business people who understand the difference between genuinely sustainable development and destructive exploitation? We don't seem to have the self-respect to realize that responsible developers want and need consistent ground rules for development. Without regulatory certainty, it's hard for investors and entrepreneurs to do business in Nova Scotia.

We need to ask ourselves some hard questions about what the bullies have actually done for us lately, in terms of helping to build a healthy economy, or developing a reputation for good coastal management for our province. Have they created many long-term, year-round jobs? Created careers for young Nova Scotians? Helped broaden the tax base? And this is not even considering the costs of bad development for unfortunate buyers and taxpayers, or for our reputation. Do we really want our relationship with our coast to be controlled by folks who tell us that what suits them is the only way to go, or we'll be in big trouble, and who get angry if we dare to ask why? ...

“Oh, come on; you're blowing things out of proportion; it's not as bad as all that...”

Hardly anyone believes that if we just ignore our coastal problems everything will somehow 'just work out'. But some may assume that trying to improve things would be too difficult and cost too much, and that governments always screw everything up anyway. This makes it easier to pretend that things may get better, or that somehow, 'something will be done' when things get really bad.

This way of dealing with trouble is called denial. But we pretty much all know — and everyone living on or visiting the coast *really* knows — that changes are happening, and that we're not dealing with them.

As always happens with denial, pretending that problems don't exist ensures that they'll get worse and be harder to fix. Sadly, in this case denial also makes it easier for the problem-makers to continue with their bad habits.

“Sure, a healthy relationship would be nice, and I'd love to make it happen, but it's bound to be expensive and who has the money these days?”

So, we've taken a look at our problems with confusion, lack of commitment, clutter and bullying; and the way we tend to be in denial about how something needs to be done about them. What else might be getting in the way of a healthy relationship with our coast? Why of course, we can worry about the cost.

Some people say keeping our coast healthy by treating it responsibly would cost a tonne of money, so we might as well forget it. That would be sure to be a major problem if they were right. But guess what — they're wrong.

First of all, most of us believe our doctors when they say “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” We all know that it's far more expensive, time consuming, and potentially risky to wait until a medical problem has become a full blown catastrophe to try to resolve it.

Unlike us, our coast looks after itself very well if we don't try to boss it around. We need to remember that it's not the coast that costs money — it's our own habit of creating problems and then ignoring them until they are too serious to deny. Fortunately, in this case there is still time to get out of an endless cycle of escalating and high-cost damage and damage control, and into habits of health promotion and maintenance.

The second big reason why people think a healthy coast would cost a tonne of money is that they fear it would require a tonne of bureaucracy. After all, this would cost tonnes more money *and* dump a load more regulations on our heads. And while that is a very scary thought, it doesn't have to be that way. And here's why:

Right now our taxes are financing out-of-control bureaucratic and regulatory litter along our coast — nobody's in charge, everybody blames everybody, and everybody has a different set of regulations with a different set of loopholes. This reckless set-up costs a tonne of money without solving any of the real problems we all see. In fact, confusion and buck-passing create new problems and make existing ones worse.

A new approach that deals with the real problems consistently, in clear and specific ways that are linked together, would give us cost-effectiveness for our tax dollars. The money spent, instead of creating litter, headaches, damage, and craziness would get us a healthy coast maintained under clear rules that all work towards the same goal.

Section 3. Fixing the Relationship

OUR FUNDAMENTAL relationship problem with the coast is that our careless treatment has caused damage, which climate change is already starting to make worse. These troubles have been further compounded by an unplanned and increasingly chaotic system of coastal management.

To fix the problem, we're going to have to knock away some of the clutter, and get back to basics. A better approach, focused on steering clear of and solving problems, need not be complex or expensive. It must and can be realistic and practical — something any of us can understand without a lawyer and a bad headache. Simply dealing with well-understood problems can be a lot cheaper and smarter than either doing nothing, or of doing more of what got us into this mess in the first place.

The first thing we're going to have to figure out in our new approach is what we want to achieve. We've already established that it's futile and counterproductive to try to control the coast, and that in fact, coastal variety and dynamism are what make the coast so productive, and allow it to protect us. We also know that the impacts of climate change are going to make coastal change potentially more rapid and unpredictable. So how about if instead of fighting the coast, we made accepting the coast's essentially dynamic nature the basis of our management approach?