

Coastal communities fall under spell of corals and sponges

Dr. Manfred Krautter wows British Columbians

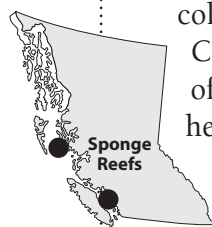
by Megan Baker

In November 2006, CPAWS-BC went on the road with internationally renowned glass sponge reef expert, Dr Manfred Krautter to raise awareness of BC's glass sponge reefs and cold water corals.

Thought to have become extinct during the Jurassic Era, Hexactinellid sponge reefs, also known as glass sponge reefs, were discovered in Hecate Strait in 1989. Smaller reefs have more recently been discovered in the southern Strait of Georgia and the Sunshine Coast. They can form structures up to 25 metres (8 stories) tall and



Glass sponge. Photo: Manfred Krautter



are found nowhere else on earth. Recent research shows that the reefs provide important habitat for juvenile rockfish.

Very little is known about cold water corals in British Columbia. To date, 61 species of corals have been identified here and an additional 50 species may also be present, based on studies in Washington and Alaska.

Unfortunately, corals are being damaged by fishing gear before we can identify where they grow and thrive. Most of the data that we have is from fishing bycatch records.

From Sechart to Queen Charlotte City, we received an enthusiastic response in each community. The folks in Port Hardy even braved hurricane force winds to come to our presentation! We spoke to hundreds of people and were asked the same question time and again— “Why haven't the sponge reefs received protection?”

We took that question to Ottawa where we presented to the Senate Committee on Fisheries and Oceans and met with key members of parliament, Senators and Fisheries and Oceans Canada staff to make

our case for protecting the globally unique glass sponge reefs.

In 2007, we will continue to work towards long-term marine protected area status for the glass sponge reefs and a greater understanding of cold water corals. And you can help!

- Send letters to your local MLA, MP and Fisheries Minister Loyola Hearn telling them that the

globally unique glass sponge reefs and cold water corals on the BC coast need protection.

- Visit our website at www.cpawsbc.org for up-to-date information.
- Pick up a sponge poster at the CPAWS-BC office.
- For more info please contact Megan Baker at 604-685-7445 ext 24 or megan@cpawsbc.org



CPAWS and Dr. Manfred Krautter make waves with the Senate Committee on Fisheries and Oceans in Ottawa. From left to right: Senator James Cowan (Nova Scotia), Senator Larry Campbell (British Columbia), Sabine Jessen, Dr Manfred Krautter, Senator Elizabeth Hubley (Prince Edward Island), Senator Charlie Watt (Quebec), Senator Janis Johnson (Manitoba). Photo: Megan Baker