

Call out to protect sponge reefs

By Lynda Lafleur
The Daily News

Saying the North Coast needs to protect "B.C.'s living Jurassic park," a German scientist addressed conservation concerns revolving around the sponge reefs of the Hecate Strait.

With only a day's notice, the World Wildlife Fund Canada managed to fill a meeting room Friday night with a presentation from Dr. Manfred Krautter, one of the world's leading experts in sponge reef research. He gave a slide presentation and short video about the hexactinellid sponge reefs of Hecate Strait.

While the study of these sponge reefs is interesting of itself, it is the potential they may hold for the north coast that intrigued the 30 plus participants Friday night. Krautter addressed the impact oil spills would have on the reefs, and the need to protect them.

The reefs located in the Hecate Strait are the only ones in the world.

Sponges themselves can be found in oceans elsewhere, but the only remaining reefs are along the B.C. coast. These reefs are fragile, and have faced damage from nets used in trawling. Krautter explained that

when the nets are dragged along the ocean bottom, they tear apart the sponges and, at the same time, destroy the nets.

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A German scientist, who visited Prince Rupert last Friday, is among those spearheading a drive to protect rare sponge formations in the Hecate Strait.