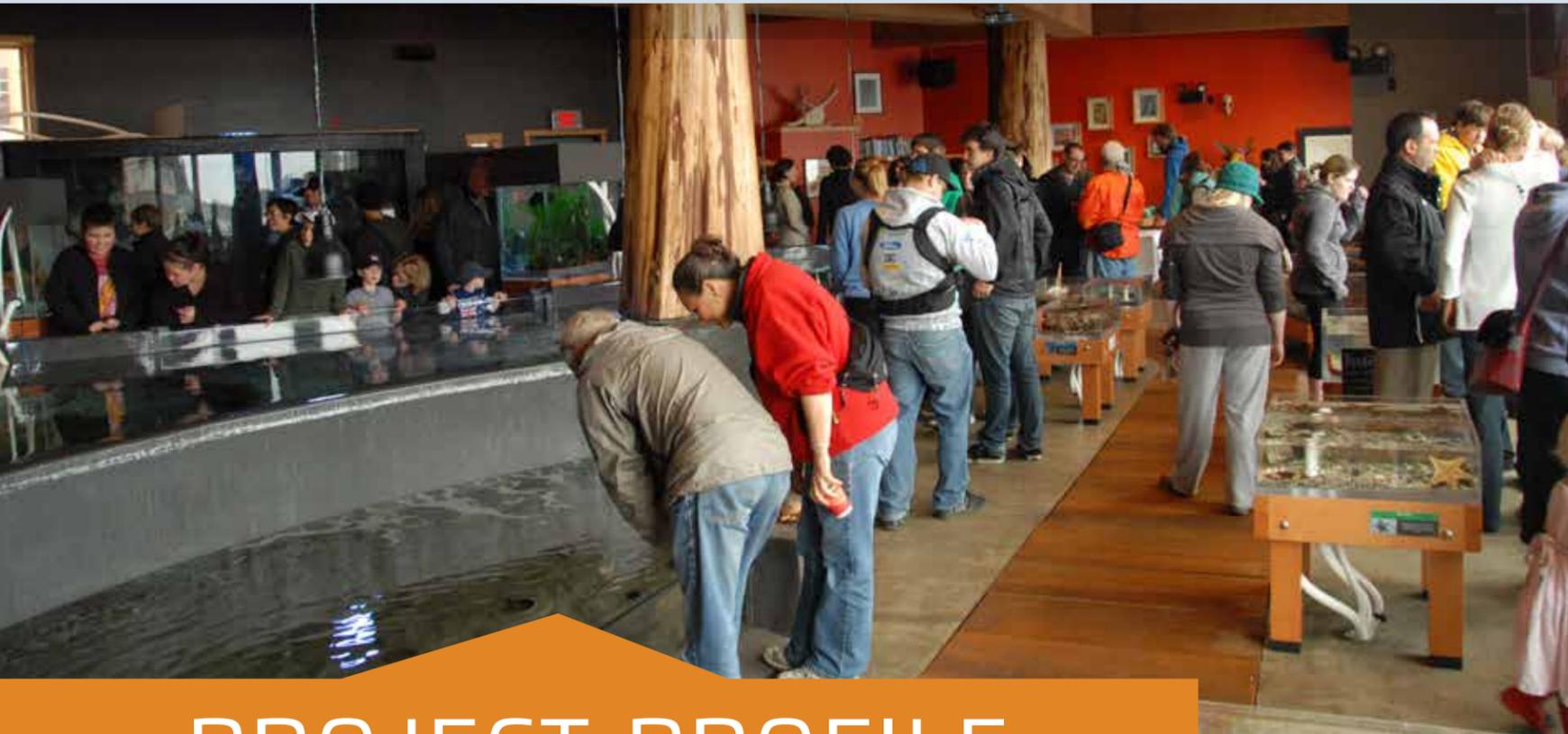


## AQUARIUM 2.0: UCLUELET'S UNIQUE APPROACH TO LEARNING ABOUT LOCAL SEA LIFE



# PROJECT PROFILE

## UCLUELET AQUARIUM



### IT ALL BEGAN WITH REIMAGINING

the traditional aquarium, in a small double wide trailer, with a few glass tanks and very high hopes.

“The idea started with my close friend and collaborator – Philip Brueker – in the late 90’s when he dreamt up a reaction to the traditional aquarium,” explained Bill Morrison, President of the Ucluelet Aquarium Society and project champion. “His idea was to connect people a little more closely and to create a much smaller facility that had only local species: no amazon gallery. We would catch the species, show them for a short time, and then release them.”

As the region worked together to create other experiential-tourism draws – like the ICET supported Wild Pacific Trail – visitor numbers to the region and the mini-aquarium grew exponentially. This created an opportunity to develop a new, larger facility which would be instrumental in helping Ucluelet become the key regional visitor destination it is today.

“The number of visitors to the Aquarium has almost doubled since 2013,” said Aquarium curator Laura Griffith-Cochrane. “We are expecting 2017 to set new records, with more than 35,000 visitors. For a community of less than 2000 residents, that’s quite impressive.”

... THIS EDUCATIONAL TOURISM MARKET IS SOMETHING THAT THE REGION IS BUILDING ON TO CREATE GREATER YEAR-ROUND SUSTAINABILITY...

The Ucluelet Aquarium, together with the Wild Pacific Trail, are the two “must do” activities in Ucluelet. Designed to resemble a whale tail, it features more than 3000 sq. ft. of aquarium displays and amenities including: touch tanks for hands-on experiences; display areas for static and interactive exhibits; demonstration and teaching stations; a multipurpose lecture and seminar room as well as a marine observation area. All specimens are gathered from local waters and later released in public participation events.

An innovative system integrates the Ucluelet Aquarium with the local marine ecosystem as fresh water from the harbour flows through the tanks providing the specimens with all of the fresh nutrients found in the wild.

The model dovetails perfectly with the type of visitor that Ucluelet and region already attracts: active, engaged and environmentally-conscious.

“The Aquarium has become much more than an attraction for children and families,” explains Ucluelet Mayor Dianne St-Jacques. “People are coming for short term courses and experiential learning opportunities centered around marine wildlife. This educational tourism market is something that the region is building on to create greater year-round sustainability for our community and our businesses.”

Beyond education, the Aquarium plays an important role in regional environmental stewardship, leading initiatives such as beach cleanups and harbour cleanups.

“The amazing thing, is how the community has participated and embraced these cleanup initiatives,” explains Griffith-Cochrane. “These one-time projects have now taken on a life of their own, with groups coming forward to grow and sustain them over the long term, allowing us to refocus on new projects.”

Since the opening of the Aquarium, the historic downtown core has seen a renewed economic dynamism, with three new businesses opening up. The draw of the Aquarium has exceeded expectations and led the municipality to acquire a parcel of land to deal with increased demand for parking in the area.

“The Community has fully embraced this Aquarium, it’s a true love-in,” adds Mayor St-Jacques. “Residents, and even short-term visitors, will purchase season passes so that the kids can go back over and over again, to learn about the new creatures or participate in different activities.”

St-Jacques adds, “We couldn’t have imagined a better triple bottom line — positive impacts for business, environmental stewardship as well as community pride and enjoyment.”

\$1.8 MILLION  
BUDGET

\$515,000  
ICET CONTRIBUTION

2012  
OPENING DATE