



EVALUATION OF WICKANINNISH INTERPRETIVE CENTRE AT PACIFIC RIM NATIONAL PARK RESERVE: FOCUS GROUP RESEARCH



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Executive Summary

The Social Science Unit of the Western and Northern Service Centre (WNSC) conducted four focus groups with area residents at the Wickaninnish Interpretive Centre (WIC) on March 28 and 29, 2007, two of which were conducted with recent visitors to centre (2000 to the present) and two of which were conducted with less recent or non-visitors (before 2000 or never). In total, 32 local residents participated in the four groups over the two days. The goal of the focus groups was to obtain rich, detailed feedback from area residents as to what they like and would recommend as changes to the exhibits in the centre, as well as what they would like to learn about when visiting the centre.

Most participants were aware of the WIC before attending the focus groups, while a few were not. Past visitation to the WIC ranged from recent visitation in the past few months or the previous summer to over 30 years ago. All participants were regular visitors to the Wickaninnish Beach, but many did not necessarily come into the centre during these trips. Participants are much more likely to visit the Wickaninnish Beach or PRNPR area than the WIC.

Some said that while they were quite impressed with the WIC at the time of their visit, they had not returned because they perceived nothing has changed over time. Others said that while they have come to the WIC many times with out-of-town friends and family, they rarely visit the centre on their own time, as, according to one participant, *“it doesn’t pull me in.”*

Participants who have never visited the WIC provided a variety of reasons as to why they have not visited, including it is out of the way / travel distance is far for some, the road signage is poor and not very descriptive of what visitors might find at the WIC, time constraints, unawareness, forgot, laziness, lack of advertising, passive exhibits and displays, and would prefer to participate in outdoor activities.

Some visitors and non-visitors to the WIC expressed frustration and resentment that local residents are required to have a parking pass to enter the park, such as to walk along the trails or to visit the interpretive centre, which was not the case before the national park was established in the area.

Many participants said the WIC’s main target audience is tourists, and in particular first time tourists to the area. Others said they would like the WIC to be more targeted towards several other specific groups, including youth, local residents, and First Nations communities in the area.

According to participants, key factors for displays and exhibits at interpretive and visitor centres include regularly changing exhibits, notifying locals about these changes, incorporating interactivity and hands-on activities, and balancing the amount and type of information with interesting photos. Many said the amount they read on panels depends on their time, the number of other visitors at the centre, the amount of text, and whether the photography or pictures captivates their attention to read the corresponding text. Generally, participants said they do not want to read “too much” information in an interpretive panel or display, although what is defined as too much information is based on personal preference.

In general, participants think an interpretive centre's main function is to educate visitors about the local area rather than just share information (such as tourist or driving information), which they consider more as a the role of a visitor or information centre. Others suggested educating visitors on the bigger picture of how the area, or the national park, fits in with the scope of the world. Others also said an interpretive centre should create interest and focus on the uniqueness of the area.

Many participants discussed the name of the Wickaninnish Interpretive Centre as being somewhat problematic, in their view, for a variety of reasons. The term "interpretive centre" was meaningless to some participants, is not descriptive of what visitors might expect to find upon their visit, or they questioned whether the exhibits and displays were interpreted already or if required visitors to interpret the information themselves (which is more like "work"). Others described the confusion in the community over the "Wickaninnish" name because there are many buildings, organizations, and landmarks in the area with this name, as well as the fact the centre did not receive permission to use the name from the Nuu-chah-nulth First Nations community, which is the name of one of this community's local chiefs.

Participants described the main message of the WIC as being one about the ocean, First Nations culture, the environment or nature, and wildlife. Some said these themes could be better described or detailed in the information panels. Most participants, however, described the WIC as having no main message or theme at all and lacking in a central vision or aim. Further, many said there is a lack of flow and direction within the centre and that they would get lost or were unsure in which direction to travel to next. Many said the second floor hanging panels was the main cause of the lack of direction or flow in the building.

When asked what participants liked and disliked about the WIC after walking around and familiarizing themselves with their surroundings, the following list of exhibits and concepts emerged, many of which they both liked, disliked, and had suggested recommendations:

- Stuffed birds / animals displays / what can be found on the beach
- First Nations displays (large canoe, rubbings of the cave in the theatre)
- Topographic map
- Artefacts / whale bones / baskets / harpoons
- The building / view
- Panels / pictures / photographs
- Selection of books / educational material in the gift shop
- Kayaks
- Display / exhibit showcasing historic sites and national parks elsewhere in Canada

- Hiking / walking trails surrounding WIC
- Murals
- Theatre / video clips / archival footage
- Information board at the front of the building
- Former submarine display

Many participants liked the deep sea mural and suggested to keep it rather than replacing all or part of it with a window. One participant described the large mural as “*a good focal point*” for the entire visitor centre. Some liked the idea of incorporating a small window, such as a skylight or narrow window above the mural or on the sides to allow more natural light into the building. Others said it was unnecessary to add any more windows looking onto the beach or forest area beyond the windows in the solarium area on the second floor. Participants provided several suggestions to improve the mural, including adding sights and sounds (in particular whale sounds) to make the mural more interactive and “*come alive*,” providing better lighting in the area or to the mural itself, adding more information or photographs, or allowing for some flexibility for change over time.

Many participants suggested introducing an aquarium or touch tank in the WIC as they are described them as being interactive and the best way to get a sense of marine life, especially for those who have no other way of experiencing it. Some said that it would continue to encourage visitors to come to the WIC and it would be a good “*hook*.” Some expressed concern about having marine life held in captivity or simply did not like this approach, while others said the presence of significant amounts of water could lead to the building being moldy, smelly or damp, and both options would be expensive and require significant maintenance.

Participants described the exhibits or displays as being static, not very exciting, not well kept up, passive, old, and not captivating to bring visitors back to the centre. Many participants found using high tech exhibits and displays at a national park visitor or interpretive centre to be appropriate and said it would make the centre more stimulating, interactive, hands on, and “*with the times*.” Some suggested touch buttons with sound or visuals, sounds in general, webcams, audiovisual presentations throughout the centre, and exhibits with weather and tidal patterns (such as large computer screens and hook ups to satellite or a plasma screen TV or computer).

Many liked the concept of downloading First Nations dances and songs while at the WIC as it would showcase the local communities in an authentic way and involve this community much more in the centre. However, others were concerned about visitors’ interest level in downloading this information and thought the actual songs and dances would no longer be unique if one was able to take away examples on their IPod after their visit.

In terms of general recommendations for exhibits, displays, stories, and concepts to include at the WIC, the main themes include:

- Adding more First Nations cultural events, teachings, displays, demonstrations and stories, such as involving First Nations people directly at the WIC in the way of interpretive programming and demonstrations
- Telling more of a local history story / uniqueness of the area (what makes PRNPR special), about shipwrecks, evolution of economic activities in the area, and other settlers, particularly the Japanese, to the area
- Including more stories about the natural aspects of the park, environmental stewardship, and about other areas of the park, such as the West Coast Trail, Broken Group Islands, and Barkley Sound.
- Designing more interactive, multi-sensory, not static, and dynamic displays and exhibits, and incorporate more activity and direct visitor participation.
- Integrating more Parks Canada staff and interpreters into the programming
- Maintaining the movie theatre, and / or incorporate more films, videos, and amphitheatre-style programs in the displays.
- Incorporating more and real-looking displays and exhibits, color, and various approaches to interpretive design
- Holding more special events or exhibits featuring guest speakers that are particularly luring and of interest to local residents
- Opening the WIC during the off-season to encourage local residents to visit
- Updating exhibits
- Featuring regularly changing exhibits
- Properly advertising for WIC special events, workshops, discussions, and lectures within the community, as well as providing better signage for the centre on the highway

In terms of views on the WIC gift shop, many indicated they have previously purchased things from other interpretive or visitor centre gift shops and noted how many people like to purchase a physical object as a memory of their trip; however, many have parameters in which they select items. For example, most said it is important for the items to be authentic, genuine, locally made or crafted, unique, and not items that are made outside of Canada. Many suggested the WIC emphasize selling educational resources, such as books, with information on park themes.

Some participants did not like the WIC gift shop, because they found it tacky compared to other interpretive or visitor centre gift shops they had visited, did not like the placement of the gift shop at the front entrance, or thought it inappropriate that Parks Canada should be generating a profit at a national park interpretive or visitor centre, even though the funds would be returned to the WIC for continued maintenance.

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Part 1: Introduction

Background:

The Wickaninnish Interpretive Centre (WIC) is perched on the shore of the Pacific Ocean at the end of Wick Road, 3.5 km from Highway 4. This information centre, interpretive facility, and gift shop focuses on the natural and cultural heritage of Pacific Rim National Park Reserve. The WIC is open mid March to mid October. The WIC also houses the Wickaninnish Restaurant, which is NOT owned and operated by Pacific Rim National Park. Park information services are also located in the Pacific Rim Visitor Centre at the Tofino-Ucluelet junction on Highway 4. At the centre Park staff offer information on all three units of Pacific Rim National Park Reserve, which include: Long Beach Unit, Broken Group Islands, and the West Coast Trail.

Unfortunately, exhibits in the WIC have seen few changes since the centre was built in 1984 and they no longer meet current visitor expectations or park objectives. Parks Canada has committed \$1.7 million towards a three-year exhibit renovation to create a more hands-on, relevant and memorable national park experience in the centre.

Public participation is key to the success of the project. Community members and visitors have been providing input and advice throughout the project to guide the creation of the exhibits. There have been three phases to the research: an intercept survey conducted between March 17 and 26, 2007 (during the Whale Festival), focus groups conducted with area residents on March 28 and 29 at the interpretive centre, and an online survey conducted between August and October 2007. The centre also held a design workshop with Ucluelet Elementary School and Wickaninnish Elementary School on March 30, 2007, as well as continues to hold Nuu-chah-nulth Working Group meetings.

The following outlines the three-year plan:

Year 1 (Sept. '06 – Sept. '07): Vision; Audience Research; Themes & Conceptual Design

Year 2 (Sept. '07 – Sept. '08): Design; Writing; Translation

Year 3 (Sept. '08 – Sept. '09): Fabrication

Purpose of the research:

Public consultation will help redesign the interpretive exhibits in the WIC to create a destination valued by visitors and local communities, and a place to celebrate and learn about the natural and cultural heritage of Pacific Rim National Park Reserve and the region it represents. The goal of the focus groups, which is the focus of this report, was to obtain rich, detailed feedback from area residents as what they like and would recommend as changes to the exhibits in the centre, as well as what they would like to learn about when visiting the centre.

Research Methods:

The Social Science Unit of the Western and Northern Service Centre (WNSC) conducted four focus groups with area residents at the WIC on March 28 and 29, 2007, two of which were conducted with recent visitors to centre (2000 to the present) and two of which were conducted with less recent or non-visitors (before 2000 or never). In total, 32 local residents participated in the four groups over the two days.

Please see the table below for further details.

Group type	Number of females	Number of males	Total number of participants
Recent visitors	6	9	15
Less recent / non-visitors	11	6	17
TOTAL	17	15	32

Caution:

Qualitative research is effective for exploring new issues. Unlike quantitative research, it allows participants to express perspectives and opinions that may not be accommodated in quantitative surveys. It allows clients to “see the issue through their clients’ eyes” more effectively than with survey research. However, caution must be taken when observing qualitative research results as they only represent the opinions of those who have participated in the focus groups and not all PRNPR visitors.

Part 2: Visitor experience at Wickaninnish Interpretive Centre and Pacific Rim National Park Reserve

Visitors to the WIC

Awareness, length, and frequency of visits, and with whom participants have visited the WIC:

Most participants were aware of the WIC before attending the focus groups, while a few were not.¹ While some participants said they had received recommendations from others, or had given recommendations to friends and family to visit the WIC, others said they had heard nothing about the centre from friends and family. One participant noted that perhaps the reason First Nations community members do not visit the WIC is because of the political issues surrounding using the name “Wickaninnish,” which was the name of a chief, as well as poor communication and a misunderstanding of cultures between First Nations and non-First Nations communities.

Past visitation to the WIC ranged from recent visitation in the past few months or the previous summer to over 30 years ago. Among the first group of less recent or non-visitors, only one participant has previously visited the WIC and it had been when he was on a high school field trip. Some participants were frequent visitors to the WIC while other had only visited once or a few times.

A few said they had happened upon the WIC while taking a walk on the Wickaninnish Beach or while frequenting the Wickaninnish Restaurant, while for others the WIC was the main purpose of their visit. All participants had visited the Wickaninnish Beach (and some as frequent as every day), but many did not necessarily come into the centre during these trips. A few said they had meant to return to the WIC, but have not had time.

Participants had mostly visited the WIC with either their children or grandchildren, with a school group (as a participant, parent volunteer, or teacher) or with out-of-town friends or family. Some said the WIC provides a beautiful view of the area and ocean, is interesting, and provides a good overview of the area for out-of-town visitors and school children.

Participants said their visits ranged from a few minutes to look in the gift shop when they were in a hurry to a few hours. However, the norm for most participants was between 30 and 60 minutes per visit.

- A few said their duration in the centre often depended on the timing and length of the films. One participant commented on the difficulty of timing the films with his/her visit, suggesting that people do not have time to wait around to see the next film, which might

¹ Please note this statement is about all focus group participants, not just visitors.

be hours away. This participant suggested being able to start a 10-15 minute film oneself, perhaps in a family size booth, where visitors could also choose the type of presentation and perhaps an interactive activity to follow. According to this participant, *“most people who come here don’t want to spend much time inside. They want to be outside. They want to come in an learn a few things and then get out and enjoy the real world out there.”*

- Participants are much more likely to visit the Wickaninnish Beach or Pacific Rim NPR area, as some visit these areas daily.

When asked, many participants said they would return to the WIC at some point in the future.

There was some confusion on the ownership and management of the restaurant and the WIC. Some were under the impression that Parks Canada or another organization owned and operated both the restaurant and the centre, while others assumed they were separate.

Most memorable things about participants’ last visit to the WIC / what they liked the best:

Participants mentioned a variety of things that were memorable to them about their visit(s) to the WIC, or what they liked best. They include:

- Wealth of information throughout the exhibits. According to participants:
 - *“There are very few places that are like a standard museum. It is easy to go look at trees or the beach, but there is a surprising lack of genuine information around here. [The WIC] always struck me as a place that gave that kind of provision.”*
 - *“It is the only place that has a land-based interpretation of the sea, which is good especially for children. They see something new and different every time they come.”*
- Submarine display
- Big mural with all the whales. According to one participant, *“it is beautiful and it puts the size of everything into perspective.”*
- Films
- Topographic relief map – puts into perspective where one is located
- Totem poles
- First Nations interpretive displays and artefacts



- Displays that describe history, the beach area and what visitors can discover
- Helpful, pleasant, courteous, and informed staff. According to one participant, “[the staff] is about 95% of an experience. If people are ungracious you won’t come back, and I found everyone very gracious.”
- The architectural style of the building – the most memorable part of the WIC
- Cedar shakes on the roof
- Location is ideal
- Display of the beached whale
- The building is described as being “less enclosing” than other tourist destinations, is more comfortable, and gives visitors more a sense of the area
- Pairs “the indoors with the outdoors” with the walking trails in the area, Wickaninnish Beach, and view from the building

When asked what participants have told friends, family or tourists about the WIC, they mentioned saying the following about the centre:

- Much for all ages to do, including films and displays / exhibits
- The fact that it is not in town where there are more tourists
- Can walk along the Wickaninnish Beach for many kilometres
- Can do more in the area then just walk along the beach
- Interesting things, such as murals, information about First Nations history, and beautiful exhibits
- A place to go when the weather is poor
- A place to get a snack or a cup of tea (at nearby restaurant)
- Great view of the waves crashing or when it is storming
- Visitors can walk along the Wickaninnish Beach for many kilometres

Recommendations to visitors often depended on one’s knowledge and experience at the WIC. For example, one business owner who often gives visitors recommendations as to where to visit in the area said that he/she often referred visitors to the Wickaninnish Beach area because of the restaurant, not because of the WIC. According to this participant, “I never even thought to ask them to look at this. I didn’t know anything about it really, and from what I understood it was

just a whale centre. You'd go in and they'd say yep, we've got whales and this is what they look like with no skin on them."

Visitors perceive that little has changed at the WIC:

Some said that while they were quite impressed with the WIC at the time of their visit, they had not returned because they perceived nothing has changed over time. In fact, some said upon initially looking around the WIC before the focus groups started, nothing or little, in their opinion had changed in years, although a few remembered there was formerly a yellow submarine in the building. According participants:

- *"We used to have birthday parties in this room. I remember when it was being built. I watched the mural being painted and thought it was wonderful at the time, but I'm disappointed that it doesn't change. I'm really happy that [the focus group] is happening."*
- *"The beach always changes with every storm we have, but the interpretive centre doesn't seem to change, so you are not that interested in seeing it again, especially in the summer with wall-to-wall tourists. [You would rather] wander down the beach than stand in line. Unless you have a relative who is insistent, my time is better spent walking down the beach rather than coming in and seeing something I saw last fall and have no reason to believe something has changed."*
- *"Now that I've been here and I've walked through the place, why would I come back unless something changes or something added or a special event?"*

Similarly, another participant said that while he/she has come to the WIC many times with out of town friends and family, he/she rarely, if ever, comes to the centre on their own time, as, according to one participant, *"it doesn't pull me in."* Another participant said, *"you are struck by the structure of the building, not the exhibits."* A few other participants had visited on their own time for several other reasons, such as to attend a daylong research presentation or lecture (which had apparently occurred as recently as two weeks prior to the focus groups), to attend an art display, and to check out the renovations to the centre.²

Non-visitors

Non-visitors reasons for not visiting the WIC:

Participants who have never visited the WIC provided a variety of reasons as to why they have not visited, including:

- It is out of the way / travel distance is far for some

² The participant did not say which particular renovations they had wanted to see or when these renovations had even occurred.

- Road signage is poor (not well labelled or marked on the highway), does not describe what one might expect at the WIC, or does not draw visitors in. According to one participant, *“it looks like every other sign on your way [through the park].”*
- Time constraints
- Unaware it existed or have never heard of it
- Did not anticipate an interpretive or visitor centre to be located next to a restaurant, which may have been their main purpose for their visit to the Wickaninnish Beach area
- Forgot about it
- Laziness – intended to visit, but have not
- Not well advertised around the communities (such as in Port Alberni) or in the community newspapers. According to one participant, *“it’s just not a focal point. I thought if it were a focal point they would market it more. I would come out here just for this, but it is out of sight, out of mind.”*
- Includes a passive display and does not grab one’s attention to want to stay or return. According to one participant, *“if you look at the mural there, it’s just a pretty big painting. If there was something more...”*
- There is much to see and do in the area. According to one participant, *“once you have seen something, you move on to see something else. Everything takes time. There is so much to see in a lifetime.”*
- Want to participate in outdoor activities instead, particularly with young children

Costs can be prohibitive to visit the WIC

Some participants were under the impression there is a cost to visit the WIC. One participant noted if residents or tourists do not have access to a vehicle, the \$65 cab ride from Tofino to the centre is prohibitive, although there is a beach bus available to tourists and residents during the summer months. According to one participant, *“it’s the government – you have to pay for everything!”* A few noted if visitors frequent the restaurant that they receive a two-hour free parking pass, which is helpful if they also want to visit the WIC. Some visitors and non-visitors to the WIC expressed frustration and resentment that local residents are required to have a parking pass to enter the park, such as to walk along the trails or to visit the interpretive centre, which was not the case before the national park was established in the area.

Target market for the WIC

We asked participants who they think is the target market(s) for the WIC and whether it should be more focussed on certain target groups.

- Many participants said the WIC’s main target audience is tourists, and in particular first time tourists to the area. A few said the hours of operations / seasonality of when the WIC is open lends itself to a tourist market. Participants pointed out that not only does the WIC close during the off season, but so do many of the Ucluelet and Tofino restaurants and other establishments, such as the Wickaninnish Restaurant attached to the WIC.
- Others said they would like the WIC to be more targeted towards several other specific groups, one of which includes young people³, as some participants noted they tend to be more environmentally and ecologically focussed than older age groups.
- Other participants suggested local residents should be more effectively targeted to visit the WIC as interest and awareness if not as high as it could be. Many participants provided suggestions for exhibits and displays that would specifically attract a local residents’ market (which will be included in a later section), while a few suggested providing a shuttle buss or some transportation to encourage locals to visit the centre and not have to incur parking fees. Some specifically mentioned that exhibits and displays should regularly change and to communicate these changing exhibits to local residents. Others noted the issue with local residents is that they often say or think they will visit the WIC whenever they want because of its proximity, but that it rarely happens, perhaps as there are no specific incentives or communicated messages to locals on the derived benefit in visiting the WIC. According to participants:
 - *“I think the local people come to visit the beach and people who are not local come to visit the centre because they want to learn about the area.”*
 - *“I’m puzzled about who your audience or market is. The local people are by far the secondary market. The WIC is mainly for people who have never been here before, so our interests are maybe not served here except to bring people. So if you want local people involved here, use them to educate others who visit. Perhaps there could be a volunteer or buddy system, so the locals are coming here to help the visitors.”*
 - *“There is nothing encouraging locals to come here, especially if you have been here once already.”*
- A few others said the WIC should allow First Nations communities to showcase their artwork in the building as a way to involve or target these groups.
- A few participants said that everyone should be considered a target audience, no matter the group type, nationality, or type of visitor, as there is something to tell all groups about the area.

³ Some noted that surfers – who are primarily young people – should be a target audience as they often use the Wickaninnish Beach.

Part 3: Museum, interpretive centre experiences, and visitor experiences at other centres

Most participants said they travel to national parks for the nature, wilderness, lack of people, to view certain species of wildlife, and to camp. According to one participant, he/she visits a national park for the “*vast openness and the beauty of it, without a Starbucks sitting in the corner.*”

Many had visited interpretive or visitors centres on their travels to these national (and possibly provincial parks) as they said it was the best source of information about the area and natural history, especially speaking with staff and retrieving maps, brochures and other print material on the area. Others visited these centres for more operational tasks, such as to register for a campground or to hike in the backcountry, or to use the washrooms.

A few said they were unsure if they had to pay to visit a visitor or interpretive centre, and as a result did not frequent them.

Key factors for interpretive displays and exhibits at interpretive and visitors centres

Regularly changing exhibits:

When asked what would make them return to an interpretive centre, regularly changing exhibits was most commonly mentioned. Equally as important to participants is the fact they are notified about these changes to encourage them to visit. Many said that it is unnecessary to change all of the exhibits all the time, but only a portion a few times per year. Some said the WIC could incorporate traveling exhibits from other museums or facilities rather than creating their own to make changing exhibits more feasible. Some suggested having wildlife, plant, various regional areas in the province, or First Nations history exhibits regularly changing. Some suggested changing the exhibits anywhere from once per month, to once per season, to a few times per year, to with natural occurrences in the area, such as the migration of the whales.

Amount of information included in interpretive centre panels – how much is too much?:

When asked how much information they read on panels and displays, all responses emerged.

- While some read everything, others read some to determine their level of interest in the topic and then would decide whether to move on or read the remaining information. A few said they do not read panels at all.
- Many said the amount they read depends on a few factors, such as their time, the number of other visitors at the centre (and are they competing with them to read the material), the amount of text, and whether the photography or pictures captivates their attention to read the corresponding text.

When asked how much information is “too much” in an interpretive centre panel or display, participants said the following:

- Generally, they do not want to read too much information, although what is defined as “too much information” is based on personal preference. Some suggested there just be an overview of information and perhaps a discussion on where one could find out more, while a few others said there should be the option for more information (i.e., an overview, and then text later on with more detail or the option of speaking with a PC staff person / interpreter). According to one participant, *“if there is too much written, people will only read so far and then move on to the next, so it has to be concise.”*
- Others said that the pictures or photography is key to drawing visitors in to read the panels. One participant said that he/she prefers seeing larger pictures and less writing, or just the main points rather than significant information.
- Another participant said the panel text or stories should be written in an interesting manner and not *“talk down”* to visitors.
- Some participants said they like panels with detailed information, although perhaps this depends on one’s interest level in the topic area.
- Another participant said, *“it is not about the information, but about the experience. You don’t want to just look at a plaque, but you want to feel that you have connected with nature, or you’ve connected with something in the past. That’s the key for me.”*
- Others said there should be different ways for visitors to access this information at the interpretive centre to take into account all learning styles. Some suggested having written information, and information delivered by audio or audiovisual presentations in earphone or touch button formats, for example.

Interactivity

In order to understand how participants want to learn and experience things at an interpretive centre, museum, or historic site through interactivity, we first wanted to understand what “interactive” means to them.

- Some participants were more descriptive than others in what “interactive” means to them, suggesting that the term meant actively participating in a display or activity, but did not articulate what “active participation” actually means. Others said interactivity means they are using all five senses when experiencing an exhibit or display. In particular, “touch” seems to be very important. Perhaps this could mean being able to do a craft, or try beadwork or First Nations dancing while at the WIC (as part of a display or exhibition).
- Some said they prefer learning or experiencing things through various information sessions that would involve some degree of staff resources. They include:

- **“Ask an expert” sessions or workshops** held at regularly scheduled times, particularly during the off-season so to benefit locals. In this way, the WIC could hold these sessions quite regularly without incurring high costs for expensive, changing exhibits.
 - **Discussion groups** where community members could engage one another on certain WIC-related topics.
 - **Interpreter or expert lead guided tour**, where the WIC could provide local visitors with the tools to guide their children, and out-of-town friends or family around the centre. Some said it would be important the interpreters or experts be local, as they would have more of a familiarity with the area.
 - **Interpreter-lead presentation of artefacts** on how they were excavated or found.
- Others mentioned more audio or visual stimulation that would be self-operated as being interactive for them, such as incorporating or creating dioramas, films or movies (even IMAX-style movies), computers with audiovisuals, murals that would come alive with sounds and action of some sort in an amphitheatre-type style, guided audio tours (with earphones) where visitors can go at their own pace in the language of their choice, and voice activated push buttons where the audio would explain the display.
 - Some said they would like the ability to see, touch, and experience sea life and the sea in general through an aquarium, touch pool, or tide pool. This type of interactivity would provide participants with physical interaction with a piece of nature.
 - A few said that detailed information being incorporated in a corresponding visual display rather than simply naming a type of animal, bird, or operation, would be what they are looking for in the way of interactivity.
 - Others suggested interactivity for them would mean incorporating the outdoors indoors in the displays, programming and activities, although they did not specifically suggest how to do this.
 - One participant said that interactivity is not as important as being able to see and experience something that is real, such as wildlife, sea life, or plants.

When asked how they would like to learn or experience things at an interpretive centre, museum, or historic site, many mentioned similar themes in terms of what interactive meant to them, but they also mentioned specific ways they like to learn or experience things, including:

- Hosting special events designed for adults and kids, such as a camp for children where they would experience the beach, the WIC, and the local area
- Combining education and entertainment in the displays and exhibits

- Reading panels and other information
- Distributing leaflets or maps of the area
- Seeing examples of wildlife from the park in the WIC (stuffed), so they can feel and see the texture and size of the animals

Role of interpretive centres

When asked about the role of an interpretive centre, three main responses emerged. They believe an interpretive centre should:

- Educate
- Create interest in the local area
- Focus on the uniqueness of the area

Participants in general said an interpretive centre's main function is to educate visitors rather than just share information about the area (tourist or driving information), which they consider more as a the role of a visitor or information centre. Specifically, participants thought the WIC's role was to educate visitors about the local area and national park, history, flora and fauna, settlers and First Nations communities who first settled in the area and their present cultures and way of life, drivers of the economy (forestry or logging, and fishing in this case), and natural landscape, environment (such as the sea, beach, and rainforest), and weather patterns. Others suggested educating visitors on the bigger picture of how the area, or the national park, fits in with the scope of the world, as well as "did you know" facts about the area, such as that Tofino is warmest and receives the most amount of precipitation then any other place in Canada.

A few participants cautioned against including too many topics about the local area in an interpretive centre so interpreters and displays are not spread thin or watered down, respectively, and perhaps only the most important themes should be included. Others suggested mitigating this problem by rotating exhibits based on theme and topic a few times per year, where the main displays and exhibits would remain, but a segment of the centre would change regularly.

When asked about the difference between a visitor centre and an interpretive centre, or if there is one, many participants suggested a visitor centre is designed specifically for tourists looking for maps, brochures, and commercial information on the area, such as accommodations, restaurants, driving directions, and things to do. An interpretive centre, on the other hand, provides more of a learning experience and education about the uniqueness of the area. Some said that while they would not expect visitor centre staff to answer all of their questions on the area (outside of commercial activities), they would expect this of interpretive centre staff, who would also rely on photography, pictures, displays and other things to showcase the area.

Role of movie theatre and restaurant at interpretive and visitor centre

We were interested in participants' patterns when visiting an interpretive or visitor centre, and whether they take in the movie, visit the restaurant, and enter and / or purchase something from the gift shop. Most indicated they do all these things regularly on their visit to an interpretive or visitor centre.

- A few participants did not think it is necessary for an interpretive or visitor centre to have a restaurant as that was not the main purpose of their visit, whereas others noted it depends on one's proximity to the centre and the length of time they plan on staying (such as over a meal time).
- Some described the movie in an interpretive or visitor centre as important as it is another tool for information dissemination.
- Participants provided several comments about the gift shop. Please see Part 5.

Issues with the name "Wickaninnish Interpretive Centre"

Without prompting or specific questioning on the topic, participants in each of the focus groups specifically discussed the name of the Wickaninnish Interpretive Centre as being somewhat problematic, in their view, for a variety of reasons:

- Most participants commented on the "interpretive centre" aspect of the name, describing it as sounding *heavy, scientific, like homework, requires learning a new language, not open to the public, and formal*. The term "interpretive centre" was meaningless to some participants, is not descriptive of what visitors might expect to find upon their visit, or they questioned whether the exhibits and displays were interpreted already or if it required visitors to interpret the information themselves (which is more like "work"). Please see the table below for participants' comments:

Participants said...

- *If you called it a natural history museum or something along those lines, then it would give people the idea that there is something here to educate and excite you about the natural life on the west coast and so on. This name [WIC] wasn't created by a marketing expert.*
- *[The name sounds] like maybe you can't go in. Something the NP does that we're not involved in. It doesn't sound open to the public.*
- *The interpretive centre part of it is also ponderous, it doesn't sound fun, and these days there are much more lively names attached to museums and places like this and with creativity you could come up with a more attractive name that would bring people in.*
- *I agree, the name doesn't really draw [you in], if I hadn't known somebody who was coming here I would never had driven down this road other than to come to the beach. The "interpretive centre" doesn't sound very exciting to me.*

- A number of suggestions emerged, but primarily, participants said the name must be descriptive of what the centre includes and should capture the inside and outside, as well as the culture and history of the area, which is difficult in one name. These suggestions included *museum*, or specifically a *nature* or *natural history museum*, or a *visitor, information, heritage, nature interpretive, or local interpretive centre*.
- Some participants described the confusion in the community over the “Wickaninnish” name because there are many buildings, organizations, and landmarks in the area with this name, as well as the fact the centre did not receive permission to use the name from the Nuu-chah-nulth First Nations community, which, as mentioned earlier, is the name of one of this community’s local chiefs. Some participants said the “Wickaninnish” name is especially confusing to tourists, although to residents as well, as according to some participants, “*the WIC means different things to different people who live in Ucluelet versus those who live in Tofino. Those from Ucluelet think of the restaurant attached to this interpretive centre, and those in Tofino think of the Wickaninnish Inn.*”
- A few participants liked the name and described it as being beautiful and reflective of the area and national park.

Part 4: Views and recommendations on WIC exhibits and displays

Things participants liked / disliked / found memorable at the WIC

Participants walked around the WIC for about 15 minutes partway through the group to refresh their memories on the exhibits and displays before commenting on what they liked, disliked, and found memorable. This was especially helpful for those who had never visited or whose last visit was many years ago.

- When asked what they found to be most memorable about the WIC, participants mentioned items such as the large canoe, mural featuring the sea life, the whale skull and bones (hands-on activity), the tent on the second floor, and the display of Parks Canada national parks and historic sites around the country, most likely as all of these items are very visual and somewhat unique to the WIC.
- Interestingly, although not surprising, many of the things they liked and found memorable they also disliked or provided suggestions for improvements. Please see the table on the next page for what they liked and disliked about the WIC as well as reasons or specifics for their opinions.⁴ In some cases, participants provided specific reasons for why they liked or disliked certain aspects of the WIC, while in other cases they did not elaborate on their opinions.



⁴ The check mark in the respective boxes in the table on the next page denotes the fact that participants mentioned this item as something they liked or disliked. In some cases, there is no check mark but a comment, in which case means that participants did not necessarily say they liked or disliked the item, but they provided a specific comment or suggestion about that item. As already mentioned, some participants mentioned they both liked and disliked the same thing, or provided suggestions for improvement. Many of these items will be further discussed in the section on recommendations for changes / improvements to the WIC.

What participants liked / disliked about the WIC		
Theme / item	Liked – reasons	Disliked / suggestions – reasons
Stuffed birds / animals displays / what can be found on the beach	√	√ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stuffed animals and birds are not well kept and described as dusty, old, and poorly designed. According to a participant, <i>“I don’t like the stuffed animals either...I remember the very dead dusty seagull, and I think that is why I stopped coming here. I couldn’t stand the dead seagull, and there were lots of seagulls alive outside and there was a dead one in here. I guess it is acceptable if it is done really well by a good taxidermist by presenting a species that is rare or endangered.”</i> - Suggested all animals and birds are real and not replicas (or mention the animal / bird is a replica). According to one participant, <i>“having a proper specimen here too...sure you can have a replica skull, but if you want a sea bird, you want it to look like a healthy seagull, not a scrawny thing that fishes guts out of a boat.”</i> - Complaint that animals / birds spread all over the WIC with no continuity – some suggested to put the animals into sections as if someone was walking along the beach or in the national park - Suggested to include an explanation of the animals and birds along with the displays to provide an educational component (perhaps on migration and feeding habits)
First Nations displays (large canoe, rubbings of the cave in the theatre)	√ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>“I think the native rubbings are pretty impressive. To know that they existed around here and to see representations of them.”</i> - Like life-size canoe 	√ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Would like more information about the displays / exhibits, such as the canoe - Prefer bottom floor as there are more First Nations displays
Topographic map	√	- Does not show entire area
Artefacts / whale bones / baskets / harpoons	√ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Like how the bones are life-like / real / life-size rather than simply showing a picture - Ability to touch the bones / artefacts 	- Suggestion to have entire animal skeleton in the WIC rather than just some of the bones
The building / view	√	
Panels / pictures / photographs	√ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Like the “did you know” facts 	√ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Panels are too close together / blocking traffic / difficult to walk around upstairs / makes it difficult to view displays “inside” of

		<p>panel displays / can't see from one end to the other / easy to lose children or family members among the panels / hits you in the head</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prefer the main floor as a result - Described as claustrophobic and even "creepy" the way the panels move as you walk by / have to move them to pass by - Some panels have too much text / information - Some photos were described as not grabbing participants' attention, looking all the same, not very attractive, or incomplete and not showing the whole picture of the animal
Selection of books / educational material in the gift shop	√	
Kayaks	√	
Display / exhibit showcasing historic sites and national parks elsewhere in Canada	√ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Like layout, seeing vastness of / where parks and sites are across Canada 	√ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pictures are old – would like something to entice visitors to return to the WIC
Hiking / walking trails surrounding WIC	√	
Murals	√ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Likes the larger sea life mural as it showcases <i>"how impressive the building is and the beauty of the architecture. There is a different scope. It's bigger than us, it relates to a theme that we're just a small part of nature – we're not that big."</i> - Large mural features sea life that many may not have the opportunity to see otherwise - Described as showing or having movement 	
Theatre / video clips / archival footage	√ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Like seeing footage and hearing information about the past 	√ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recommend to change the films periodically to feature different national parks / sites / themes / features of Canada
Information board at the front of the building	√ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Like information on tide heights and table, and local forecast 	
Submarine	√ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A few would like the submarine display to return (interactive) 	

Main message or theme of the WIC

We also asked participants to describe the main message, theme, or what the centre as a whole is about, as well as what interpretive themes or message should be included in the WIC, and what makes Pacific Rim National Park Reserve special.

- Participants described the main message as being one about the ocean, First Nations culture, the environment or nature, and wildlife. Some said that these themes could be better described or detailed in the information panels, which would make the centre more interesting. These messages were found to be appropriate to the WIC.
- However, most participants described the WIC as having no main message or theme at all, lacking in a central vision or aim, being a “hodgepodge,” “a bit jumbled,” “helter skelter,” a collection of things with no connection or “just to fill up space,” or not matching in theme with outside the WIC (the beaches in particular). These participants agreed that it is important for the WIC to have a central theme or focus. According to participants:



- “You walk around here, but it’s just a collection of things someone happened to have. It’s not there for a purpose really, you don’t get a sense of why you’ve come here...you’ve just come to see what people have donated.”
- “It’s a grab bag, it’s almost like rejects from other places have just been thrown in here. There is no pattern really. There is nothing to lead you through it, it’s a hodgepodge.”
- “If you drive right up to this centre and come right in, you will not get the same message if you walk along the beach...If your goal is to come here, after you experience a bit of the ocean, the sounds, the birds, and the beach, the message



will be totally different than if you get out of your car and come look [at the WIC].”

In terms of suggestions for themes or messages, participants mentioned the following (some of which are currently included in the WIC):

- The fact that the park is a protected biosphere, and what that means in general and to the community or area
- A chronological path over time, beginning with First Nations culture dating back many years, and then progress to now and then of life and the economy of Ucluelet and Tofino (transformation from fishing and forestry economy to a tourism-based economy)
- The themes or messages are consistent within each area of the building (include a bird area, First Nations area, changes over time with Ucluelet and Tofino, etc., in their own areas rather than scattered throughout the WIC)
- Visitor environmental stewardship, including educating visitors on picking up litter, preserving water, what they can do at home, how their behaviour can affect the pollution in the ocean, and what items should not be brought to the beach (such as plastic and Styrofoam, etc.)
- How the national park reserve is designated to protect this area
- An emphasis on more environmentally friendly practices, such as recycling bins around the WIC
- Nature
- A nautical theme
- The connection between humans and nature and how they interact rather than separating the two by floor
- Wildlife – land and deep sea

Others suggested that there be more display cases and more explanation of the displays and exhibits rather than just a picture, panel, photography, or replica (“stuffed” bird or animal) to provide visitors with as much information as possible rather than, as mentioned earlier, giving the impression of a collection of things with no connection or just taking up space. A few others suggested three-dimensional displays or panels that visitors could touch rather than what is currently in the WIC, or pamphlets / materials that visitors could take.

We also asked participants about the ease of getting around the WIC and whether there was enough signage to direct them through the building.

- Many said there is a lack of flow and direction within the centre and that they would get lost or were unsure in which direction to travel to next. For example, a few said when they first entered the building, they were unaware there were exhibits and displays upstairs, or in which direction would take visitors upstairs.
- Many said that in their opinion, the second floor hanging panels was the cause of the lack of direction or flow in the building. One participant described feeling like he/she was in an office with cubicles with no flow, or that the panels stop or block traffic flow.

Components of the visitor centre

Murals:

Both unaided and aided, participants provided many comments about the murals. When asked what they liked, disliked and found memorable about the current visitor centre, many said they liked the murals, although had suggestions. It is important to note that most participants referred to the large underwater view mural rather than the smaller one in the gift shop area as some participants said they did not notice the smaller mural.



We also asked participants specifically how important it is to maintain the 20 by 80 foot painted whale mural and whether it is important or appropriate to include a deep sea theme in the visitor centre.

- Many participants liked the mural and suggested to keep it rather than replacing all or part of it with a window. One participant described the large mural as “*a good focal point*” for the entire visitor centre. In particular, many liked the size of the mural (the whale specifically), and how the mural showcases the rich marine life of Pacific Rim National Park Reserve.



Further, we asked their views on removing the mural or a portion of it, and then adding a window looking onto the beach in this space.

- Some liked the idea of somehow incorporating a small window, such as a skylight or narrow window above the mural or on the sides to allow more natural light into the building.
- Others said it was unnecessary to add any more windows looking onto the beach or forest area beyond the windows in the solarium area on the second floor. Some thought adding a window would provide visitors with the identical view as the solarium and would not add value to visitors' experience. According to another participant, *"you can walk outside and see exactly what you have been looking at. What is the point?"*
- A few others said an added window might distract from the exhibits and displays inside.
- While some said they found the mural too dark and suggested better lighting in the area or lightening the mural itself, a few said to leave it as dark as it is in the area as it is realistic to the darkness in the deep sea.
- Others said from a practical standpoint, windows of that size are hard to keep clean, particularly near the salt water on a beach, would be very costly to add, and there may be a loss of space for other exhibits and artefacts as a result of this addition.

Participants provided several suggestions to improve the mural, including:

- **Add sights and sounds (in particular whale sounds), make the mural more interactive, hands on, "come alive," or amphitheatre in style:** such as a 3D, plasma screen, diorama, or movie presentation of sea creatures swimming, First Nations people fishing and speaking in their native language showing whaling practices, and shipwrecks in the area. A few suggested adding headphones where visitors could hear the sounds of and information about the sea creatures in the mural on their own rather than everyone in the visitor centre at the same time (a less intrusive approach). A few participants noted that the current mural's "don't touch" signs blocks visitor access to the area. Others mentioned the whalebones in the area should be in one central area rather than scattered along the mural area (and suggested to possibly hang the artefacts to free up floor space). A few suggested curving the mural for more visual appeal.
- **Provide better lighting in the area or in the mural itself:** some suggested to add color lighting that would change or suggested altering the lighting based on time of year or weather patterns (and show how this affects the sea creatures), perhaps on a time sequence, to add more visual interest and appeal
- **Add more information or photographs:** of scuba diving in the area, and about the sea creatures in the mural, such as whether the mural is showing their true size, how the sea creatures ended up in Pacific Rim and are they native to the area, how the creatures were identified or first discovered, whether a fishing boat in the area had caught these types of creatures, and their prey and predators. A few suggested that information on shipwrecks (if shown in the mural) could also be added to this area.

- **Allow for some flexibility for change:** such as changing the artefacts or objects in the area or hanging from the ceiling, as the mural itself would be permanent. A few described the mural as being “*passive*” or “*fake*.”

Aquariums and touch tanks:

Many participants suggested introducing an aquarium or touch tank in the WIC. Some suggested showcasing the deep-sea creatures in the area more realistically by adding an aquarium or touch tank rather than incorporating this concept in the mural.

Most participants liked the idea of either an aquarium or touch tank in the WIC as it was described as being interactive and the best way to get a sense of marine life, especially for those who have no other way of experiencing it. Some said that it would continue to encourage visitors to come to the WIC and it would be a good “*hook*.”

Some expressed concern about having marine life held in captivity or simply did not like this approach. A few suggested to change the marine life that was in the tank or aquarium periodically, either for a change in the exhibit or to minimize the overall impacts on the sea creatures. A few also mentioned that by having any large quantities of water in the WIC may cause the centre to be damp or moldy (and smell as a result), and stressed the importance of good air and water filtration systems. Others noted other practical elements, such as high cost and maintenance in terms of cleaning the tanks, and feeding and caring for the sea creatures.

Overall, having either an aquarium or touch tank would be a powerful exhibit that would most likely continue to attract visitors, provide the interactivity at the WIC that some participants suggest is missing, and would serve as an excellent educational tool for all ages, particularly children. A touch tank allows for that further step of interactivity compared to an aquarium as they like the ability to touch marine life they would not normally have the chance to touch. Some said incorporating either an aquarium or touch tank would make their WIC visit more memorable.

Overview of displays and exhibits:

As noted in the section on what participants liked, disliked, and found memorable about the WIC, in general, participants described the exhibits or displays as being static, not very exciting, not well kept up, passive, old, and not captivating to bring visitors back to the centre. Many suggested the displays be more dynamic, descriptive and provide more information on what they represent or showcase, and use audiovisual technology to its maximum capability (without becoming too high tech).



Incorporating more high tech exhibits and displays:

We asked participants' views on the use of technology in a national park interpretive centre, incorporating high tech components at the WIC, and in particular the concept of creating pod casts of First Nations, songs, dances, etc., for visitors (especially youth) to download on their IPods and cell phones while at the WIC.

- Participants said using high tech at national park visitor or interpretive centres is appropriate. They suggested it would be more stimulating, interactive, hands on, “*with the times,*” entertaining, and dynamic then what is currently being offered at the WIC so to engage visitors rather than relying on passive or static displays or panels (particularly applicable to younger visitors). In this way, visitors will learn and retain more of the information by participating, watching, or listening to messages or sounds of the park. According to one participant, “*any useful technology [should be used]. Why stick with something obsolete?*”
- In terms of the examples of high tech exhibits or displays that could be incorporated, participants provided the following suggestions:
 - Touch buttons that would provide audio or audiovisual information on various subjects as this is more entertaining and interactive than a panel
 - Sounds (particularly of whales and birds), as participants thought this could be easily and inexpensively incorporated using DVDs or other similar technology
 - Weather and tidal wave patterns (including storms and tsunami warnings) – this could involve large computer screens / stations with high speed Internet connections to various weather sites, satellite imagery, and wave / tidal machines, monitors, or webcams where visitors could listen or watch the waves outside and various sea creatures in the vicinity
- However, some cautioned on maintaining a balance between high tech exhibits and featuring the natural aspects of the park.

When asked about the iPod technology concept of being able to download First Nations dances and songs while at the WIC:

- Many participants liked this concept as it would showcase the local communities in an authentic way, and provide more First Nations content at the centre. Others noted this concept would be a practical use of space at the WIC rather than brochures or exhibits, although a few questioned why the downloading had to be done at the centre and could not be done online using the park's website. A few suggested expanding this technology to include being able to download other local sites about and photographs of the WIC.
- Some participants had reservations about this concept, stating that many youth do not listen to First Nations music or would not be interested in listening to it after having left the WIC, or that it would lose its charm and uniqueness if able to listen or watch First

Nations music and dances while at home and not at the WIC. One participant suggested playing First Nations music or show dancing (either live or in video format) at the WIC in the First Nations exhibit area rather than the downloading option. Another participant emphasized how it would be important for visitors to make a connection with the music with the help of Parks Canada interpreters while at the WIC so visitors would continue to listen to it after their visit. A few also noted the importance of working in collaboration with the First Nations communities on this initiative to present their music and dances authentically and accurately as their songs and dances have significant meaning.

Recommendations for events, exhibits, displays and stories at the WIC that would encourage visitors to return to the WIC:

When asked what events visitors have come to the WIC in the past, as well as their recommendations on what would encourage them to visit the WIC (again or for the first time), a number of themes emerged:

- **Add more First Nations cultural events, teachings, or displays:** Some suggested incorporating elders or First Nations people in general into the interpretive programming where, dressed in native costume, they could speak their native language, tell their stories about the area, appreciation and importance of nature, teach or demonstrate skills such as basket weaving, beadwork, crafts, artistry, or native languages, have dancing and pow-wow demonstrations (with visitor participation), or show artefacts. Participants would generally like to see a physical presence of the First Nations community at the WIC in these exhibitions. This approach would make the presentation of artefacts, for example, “*move lively*,” according to one participant, as well as assure that First Nations people are telling their own stories in their own words. They would also like a greater emphasis on First Nations artefacts, photos, and displays in the WIC and more information on these artefacts. Participants are specifically interested in learning about First Nations history and how they lived off the land centuries ago compared to present day, as well as their beliefs, spiritual connection with local flora and fauna, respect for or role of animals in their culture, and food and clothing (what it is made out of and what it feels like). Some also mentioned wanting more information on the cultural exchange of resources and methods between First Nations groups and Europeans.
- **Tell more of a local history story / uniqueness of the area (what makes PRNPR special):** Some suggested to achieve more of a balance in telling the history of both local First Nations AND non-First Nations groups in the area, including early settlers and immigrants to the area such as the Japanese community. Many focused on nautical, marine, and fishing themes and history in the area, including types of fish caught in the area, fishing practices, information and maps of shipwrecks from the 1800s (including the number of people who died and the affects of the storms), lighthouses found in the area, plant and deep sea life, and ocean weather systems, such as wave height, size, shape, and duration shown graphically, emphasizing the dangers of this coast. Others noted wanting to know information about specific economic activities in the area and changes over time, including logging, whaling, and mining industries. Some said they would prefer the WIC

to emphasize more on the history and changes to the area across time rather than plant and deep-sea life, as well as environmental stewardship. According to participants:

- *“I want people to come away knowing how special this area is that we’re really on the brink of big changes in this planet, and that it’s not just come here and see little otters and eagles and I feel better now. I want them to love that it’s here but be motivated to do something to protect the area.”*
- *“I think it is important that you see something unique here that you have never seen anywhere in your life. [What is currently in the WIC] is not unique. The plastic kayaks, you can see them in any sporting goods store.”*
- **Design more interactive, multi-sensory, not static, and dynamic displays and exhibits**, and incorporate more activity and direct visitor participation. Specifically, participants suggested many high tech exhibits, although some mentioned personal interpretation approaches, including:
 - Touch buttons or screens with sounds, information, voices and stories
 - Headphones with more in-depth explanation that could be used as a self-guided tour
 - Puppet show
 - Story telling
 - Dressing up in costume
 - Short live theatre presentations
 - Webcams of live animals or sea life in the park
 - Arial view or helicopter tour of the park on a large screen
 - Audiovisual or amphitheatre-style presentations (plasma screens)
 - Interactive displays, puzzles, or games about flora and fauna in the park
 - Actual live flora or fauna from the park.
- Participants identified hands-on activities, such as the ability to touch artefacts (whale bones, canoe, bark, etc.), and to directly participate in something as being memorable experiences. Many said the experience should be multi-sensory where you could smell and hear things relating to the park, such as CDs playing in the background of a paddling

canoe, First Nations languages, and animal and sea life sounds (whale and birds in particular).⁵

- **Integrate Parks Canada staff and interpreters into the programming**, to provide more interactivity and mingling with visitors so they feel more engaged in what they are seeing and learning. According to one participant, *“if you read a little card, it’s not the best thing for me compared to when you walk in the door and the staff person engages a child and tells them something about a shell and how it was found on the beach, that’s great. That’s what they remember. When [visitors] just look at a seal skin, there’s nothing that draws them to it. It’s very static.”* Some participants said they would like more resources put towards hiring more interpreters to give explanations to visitors over high tech exhibits (or the iPod concept, for example).
- **Maintain the movie theatre, and / or incorporate more films, videos, and amphitheatre-style programs in the displays**. Some participants suggested showing shorter films or those focusing on the West Coast or Vancouver Island in the theatre and / or in the other displays, while others suggested using the theatre for other activities, such as story telling, lectures, and community events to better utilize the space.
- **Incorporate more and real-looking displays and exhibits, color, and various approaches to interpretive design**, where stuffed replicas and pictures of animals are not as authentic and captivating as the real animal. Some said replicas of wildlife and plants are sufficient as long as they are done well and tastefully. Others said having the real animal or at least an actual, realistic picture of animal showing its real size is important, as it provides the visitor with more context and connection to nature.
- **Invest in a shuttle bus for locals and tourists to take to the WIC** (either from the highway or throughout the park) to encourage more locals to visit rather than having to pay for parking and to accommodate tourists who do not have a vehicle. According to one participant, *“there has been a resentment for a long time among locals with even the existence of the park. Suddenly the park is here and now the park is for visitors and not for residents. We have to pay to park in the national park.”* Another participant noted the 30-minute shuttle ride would be a great time for a Parks Canada interpreter to begin the tour or provide information about the park or the WIC as these visitors would be a captive audience.
- **Do a better job of bringing the outdoors indoors**, such as adding more windows, webcams to show wildlife close ups or under water that would periodically change, and somehow showcasing the scenery in the area. According to one participant, *“the connection to the outside is missing. You are in a different space and there are mostly*

⁵ One participant suggested integrating interactive displays where visitors could ride a bike and play an interactive video game at the same time, for example, with Parks Canada messaging. Visitors could be made to feel like they are on a small boat with waves coming at them.

dead objects. On the outside everything is alive and the two should be meshed in some way.”

- **Hold more special events or exhibits featuring guest speakers** that are particularly luring and of interest to local residents, and capitalize on the close proximity of the WIC to Ucluelet.
- **Open the WIC during the off-season** to encourage local residents (who avoid destinations like the WIC during the summer when there are many tourists).
- **Feature mini-art exhibitions with local artists** who specialize in painting, drawing, sculpting, pottery, basket weaving, jewellery creation of sea animals and seascapes, which could be changed fairly regularly, and could add another partnership element with the First Nations community. Some said it would be important to have a live exhibit with the artist present and explaining his / her art rather than just featuring his / her work.
- **Update exhibits**, such as the “dead seagulls” and in general, make the exhibits more modern and up-to-date.
- **Feature regularly changing exhibits** to generate repeat visitation among locals
- **Achieve a balance between too much and the right amount of information in the displays** and not concentrate the centre with too many panels and too much information to read
- **Maintain hiking and walking trails around the WIC**, which are very popular with locals
- **Properly advertise for WIC special events, workshops, discussions, and lectures within the community**, as well as **provide better signage for the centre on the highway**
- **Better utilize the space at the WIC**, as one participant described the WIC as being *“pretty sparse. I want more things that people have made, like art and cultural items, grouped together in a more interactive way. The space is underutilized.”*
- **Other exhibit ideas:** A few participants suggested including displays and exhibits on endangered species in the park, information about the construction of the WIC itself (when was it built, how was it built, who built it, and what materials is it constructed out of), and incorporate a holistic theme of how all plants and animals on land and in the ocean are connected.

Other stories or themes participants would like included in the exhibits and displays of the WIC include:

- Natural aspects of the park, such as wildlife and sea life (in particular, the whales and birds), rainforest, plants, trees, natural beauty of the park, how the park is located on a peninsula, and the natural process of life.
- Conservation or protection aspect of the park, how humans, wildlife, and nature interact or co-exist, and humans' effects on the environment, and why the area has been designated as a national park.
- Other areas of the park (or surrounding areas), such as the West Coast Trail, Broken Group Islands, and Barkley Sound, especially as not all visitors have the time and resources to visit all of these locations.

Part 5: Views on gift shop

We asked participants whether they had noticed the WIC gift shop while walking around the building, whether they go into interpretive or visitor centre gifts and if they purchase something, what factors do they consider before making a purchase at a gift shop, and what is appropriate and inappropriate to sell at a gift shop. We mentioned several types of products to participants as examples (when needed). Please see the moderator's guide in Appendix A for this list.

- While many indicated they have purchased things from interpretive or visitor centre gift shops in the past (such as t-shirts, posters, post cards, sea shells, books or games) and noted how visitors to the area like memorabilia from their visit they can physically touch and hold, participants did have some parameters in which they made their purchase decisions. Most said that it is important for the gift shop to sell authentic, genuine, locally-made, hand-crafted and / or designed, and unique products, and not items that are *“made in China,”* or that do not fit with that type of gift shop, or not *“just a zip lock bag with some sand and a postcard of Tofino.”*

When asked about the types of products appropriate to sell at the WIC gift shop, participants provided the following suggestions:

- Pictures, post cards, gift cards and photography of the area
- Recordings of whales found in the area
- Beach toys for children
- Clothing (t-shirts with good pictures or are not “cheesy” looking, rain ponchos)
- Snacks, water, and pop
- Items that showcase the history of the area
- Books on birds and wildlife found in the park
- Native artefacts, jewellery, and other hand-crafted items made by First Nations people in the area



There was some debate over whether t-shirts and Canadiana items are appropriate for the WIC gift shop, as some described them as being tacky, can be found in any gift shop, and not necessarily reflective of the park or West Coast.

Others also debated whether the WIC gift shop should sell educational materials and resources or Tofino or Ucluelet mementos for added convenience for visitors (so they do not have to make a special trip elsewhere to purchase mementos). Many suggested the WIC gift shop focus on materials that are educational, have substance, and provide visitors (particularly children) with lasting memories and remind them they learned something at the centre; that is *“something more than your average t-shirt.”* In this way, many suggested educational books on park themes, such as biodiversity in the area, birds, wildlife, the forest, and how the park is protected, as ideal gift shop items, as well as aerial videos of the area. One participant said it is important to remember gift shops are largely for tourists and not local residents.

Some participants did not visit the WIC gift shop for several reasons.

- These participants described the WIC gift shop as being tacky, could be improved, and *“badly done”* compared to other museum or interpretive centre gift shops they had visited. Others did not like how the gift shop was at the front of the visitor centre and suggested it be moved to the back somewhere, such as the case for many other interpretive and visitor centres, or museums.
- While some participants thought it appropriate for Parks Canada to have a gift shop where the proceeds were returned to the WIC for continued maintenance, others did not. Some said that if it was posted or mentioned by a staff person that the proceeds from gift shop purchases went back into rebuilding the WIC’s infrastructure, visitors might be more likely to purchase an item or at least walk into the gift shop. Others disagreed that Parks Canada should be generating a profit at a national park interpretive or visitor centre, as *“it doesn’t make you feel that you are Canadian. That is part of who we are – the pride of having national parks. It’s ours and we don’t want to have to buy something. We want to come here to find that link – what is the land about, and what is the First Nations about? I’m very leery of anything commercial [at the WIC].”*

APPENDIX A: MODERATOR'S GUIDE



MODERATOR'S GUIDE: PACIFIC RIM NATIONAL PARK RESERVE VISITOR AND NON-VISITOR EVALUATION

INTRODUCTIONS: 10 MINUTES

My name is Tracy Bowman and I am a Social Science Specialist with Parks Canada from the Winnipeg office. One of the things that I do is moderate focus groups.

- Has anyone attended a focus group in the past? If not, a focus group is a group of 8 to 12 people, like you, recruited to **discuss a range of issues or topics**. I have a list of questions that I need to go through, but I find the best focus groups are where **you do most of the talking** and I do the least amount of talking.
- The great thing about focus groups is there are **no right or wrong answers**. We simply want your opinion. If you really, really like something we want to know, and if you really, really dislike something we also want to know. If you feel the opposite from the rest of the group, please speak up – we are interested to hear your opinion.
- We recruited you today to talk about the Wickaninnish Interpretive Centre and your ideas for possible exhibit re-designs. We will mostly be talking in a round table discussion, but we will also be walking around the interpretive centre and we will also be filling out a **questionnaire at the end**.

Before we begin, I have a few meeting rules / things to keep in mind.

- Please try to **speak one at a time**. Try to avoid side conversations to your neighbour. Please tell the whole group your opinions.
- Please try to **speak up** (as we are audio recording the session).
- We are **audio recording the session**. (I have to write a report and prepare a presentation on the groups after this. I can't remember what was said in each group.)
- When I draft the report, **none of you are identified**. I just state, "the group said this / the group said that."
- While I am a Parks Canada employee, feel free to **express your honest opinions**. I have no stake in your opinions about the Wickaninnish Interpretive Centre.

Are there any questions before we begin?

Let's first go around the room and **introduce ourselves**. If you could please say your name, in which community in the surrounding area you live and for how long, where you work / go to school, and the number of people in your household.

PART 1: VISITOR EXPERIENCE – 20 MINUTES

FREQUENT / LESS FREQUENT VISITORS

1. By a show of hands, who have visited the Wickaninnish Interpretive Centre? When was your last visit?
2. Was today your first time or have you visited previously? When else had you visited WIC?
3. Why did you visit WIC at this time? Why do you visit WIC in general? Did / do you visit WIC as part of your visit to Pacific Rim NPR / Long Beach?
 - Prompt: Did you happen upon the WIC as part of your visit to the park / beach? Was it an unplanned visit / planned on visiting the centre as part of trip to park / main destination?
4. On average, how frequently do you visit WIC? Why this often? Why not more often? Who do you usually visit with? Why these people?
 - How does this compare with the frequency of your visits to Pacific Rim NPR? Wickaninnish Beach area?
5. Do you recall approximately how long you spent in WIC? Why this amount of time? Did you think this was sufficient / insufficient amount of time to spend in WIC? Why? Did you wish you had more time to explore? Why / why not?
 - How does this compare with the duration of your visits to Pacific Rim NPR? Wickaninnish Beach area?
6. With whom do you usually visit WIC? Why these people?
7. Where had you heard about WIC? What did people tell you? Did it encourage you to visit / make no difference? Why / why not?
8. What do you remember about your last visit to WIC? What did you do / see in the centre?
 - Viewed exhibits on main floor
 - Visited the upper/mezzanine floor
 - Viewed films in theatre
 - Participated in a special event (Which one?)
 - Participated in educational program offered by PC staff

- Handled items (e.g., bones)
 - Used the washrooms
 - Looked in the gift store / bought something
 - Spoke to park staff
 - Purchased a park pass
 - Visited the Wickaninnish Restaurant beside the Interpretive Centre
9. Overall, what was your experience like? What do you like / dislike about WIC? Why? What was the most memorable thing / highlight for you on your last visit to WIC? Why? Was this the same for everyone in your party? What was the highlight for them? Why?
 10. Would you / are you planning on returning to visit WIC? Why / why not? (Prompt: is your impression that the same thing / programs are offered at WIC / no reason to go / nothing new is offered / Importance of changing exhibits?) What would encourage you to visit WIC again? What would you like to see that is different each time?
 11. Would you recommend others visit WIC? Why / why not? Have you ever brought visitors or relatives to WIC? Why / why not?
 12. Who do you think is the target market for WIC? Why? Should WIC be more focussed on a certain target group? Why / why not?

NON-VISITORS

13. Did you know about WIC before being asked to join us here today? What had you heard?
14. Have any of your friends and family ever visited WIC? What have they told you? Did they like / dislike their experience? Why?
15. What did you think would be (you would find) in the WIC? Why these things? Do these things interest you? Why / why not?
16. Why have you not visited WIC before today / visited more recently? Had you heard of it / aware of it?
17. Would you attend WIC events? Why / why not? What would encourage you to visit?

PART 2: MUSEUM / INTERPRETIVE CENTRE EXPERIENCE / VISITOR EXPERIENCE AT OTHER CENTRES – 20 MINUTES

18. What brings you to a national park? Why? Do you make a point of visiting the visitor or interpretive centre at these locations? Why / why not? What attracts you to the visitor / interpretive centre? Why?
19. What would make you return to an interpretive centre? Why? (Prompt: is change in exhibits necessary? Why / why not? How frequently?)
20. What do you want to learn / experience at an interpretive centre? Why?
21. What other visitor / interpretive centres have you visited (in British Columbia or elsewhere) that you enjoyed? Why did you visit these places? What can we learn from other centres you have visited? Why?

INTERPRETIVE / INTERACTIVE DISPLAYS

22. **How** do you want to learn or experience in a museum / historic site / interpretive centre? Why?
 - Self-guided tour or guided with a tour guide / PC staff
 - Audio guide
 - Demonstrations
 - Engage all senses – feel, touch, smell, taste, hear, etc.
 - Static panels
 - Hands-on exhibits
 - Touch screens / buttons
 - Participate in an activity (i.e., crafts)
 - Interact with uniformed PC staff versus staff in historical costumes
 - Listen / watch movie – tolerance of length of movie
 - Sculptures
 - Murals
 - View street theatre / actors with dramatic vignettes
 - Touch things (whale skull, etc.)

- Mess around with equipment

23. What does interactive mean to you?

- Put on headphones?
- Touch something?
- Test your knowledge?
- High-tech – see static panels come in and out on timed series?
- Touch screens?
- High tech versus low tech?
- Joysticks?
- Personal media experience?
- Passive approach?

Does it matter if the displays are high tech? Why / why not?

AMOUNT OF INFORMATION AVAILABLE

24. How much information is too much information to be displayed at the interpretive centre (panels)? What makes one panel more interesting than another? If there is a lot of text, do you just skip past it, or do you read a bit of it to see if you are interested and then read the rest if you are?

PART 3: INTERPRETIVE CENTRE – 5 MINUTES

ROLE OF INTERPRETIVE CENTRE

25. What is the role of an interpretive centre?

- How much sculptures / artefacts / murals should be in an interpretive centre?
- Should it give visitors a better understanding of the area? People? Cultures? Traditions?

26. In your opinion, what is the difference between an interpretive centre and a visitor centre? Is there a difference? How should they be different?

27. Has anyone visited the Pacific Rim National Park Reserve Visitor Centre (at the junction of Hwy 4 and the Tofino-Ucluelet Hwy)? How is it different from the Wickaninnish Interpretive Centre? Do they provide different experiences / information / functions?

28. When you visit an interpretive centre / visitor centre, do you tend to view the movie, or go to the gift shop and restaurant? Do you purchase anything at the gift shop / buy food? And would this be pre or post visit through the centre? Why at this point?

PART 4: CURRENT EXHIBIT DISPLAY – 65 MINUTES

WALK AROUND INTERPRETIVE CENTRE. RETURN TO SEATS.

29. What do you **like** / **dislike** about the interpretive centre? Why? What was the best / worst aspect of the centre? Why?
30. What were you the most attracted / drawn to? What kept your attention the longest? Why?
31. Did you read any panels / information on the walls? Why / why not? Was there anything missing from WIC? What was it?
32. What do you think is the main message / theme of the centre?
- Is there a main message / theme? What do you think of the main message / theme?
 - What interpretive theme / main message ideas should be included at WIC? Why?
 - What do you think the exhibits are about? What is the centre – as a whole – about?
 - What makes Pacific Rim National Park Reserve special? Why?
33. What did you think of the murals in WIC? Why? Should they be left or should changes be made to them / new murals be produced? What images should be included on new murals?
- (Prompt: How important is it to maintain the 20 x 80 painted whale mural? Is the deep sea an important / appropriate theme to include? Why / why not?)
 - One idea is to remove the mural or a portion of it and add a window looking onto the beach at this space. What do you think of this? Why?
34. Was it easy to get around WIC? Was there enough signage? Do you have any suggestions in this regard?
35. What suggestions for changes / additions to WIC do you have?
- What **exhibit designs** / **activities** / **facilities** do you think the Wickaninnish Interpretive Centre should include / consider? Why?
 - (If not mentioned) What do you think of including an **aquarium** at the WIC? Why / why not? Do you think the public would be interested in this? Why / why not?

- What do you think of including a **touch tank** (aquarium where visitors may touch the creatures under staff supervision at WIC) at WIC?
36. What stories do you want to hear / see at the WIC? Why these exhibit ideas? What role does the interpretive centre have in telling stories of the region / area / national park?
- What would you most like to learn about Pacific Rim National Park Reserve? What about the following:
 - The other units of the park (that is, Broken Group Islands & West Coast Trail)
 - Climate / Weather
 - Geology
 - European exploration, trade and settlement
 - Intertidal life (i.e., plants, animals, and habitats of the part of the shore that is sometimes covered with water)
 - Nuu-chah-nulth First Nations heritage
 - Rainforest life (i.e., plants, animals, and habitats of the coastal temperate rainforest)
 - Recreational information
 - Subtidal life (i.e., plants, animals and habitats of the ocean beyond the lowest low tide)
 - Wildlife
 - Current research and projects
 - What would you most like to learn about Nuu-chah-nulth First Nation culture at WIC?
37. What do you think of the idea of using technology in a national park interpretive centre (such as: high tech audiovisual panels / timed sequences / touch screens / computer interactives, etc.?) Does it fit?
- One idea we are considering through the WIC First Nations working group is to create 'podcasts' of First Nations songs, dances, etc., for visitors (especially youth) to download on to iPods and cell phones. What do you think of this idea? Why?
38. Did anyone notice the items sold in the gift shop? What are they?

- What factors do you consider before purchasing something at a visitor / interpretive centre / historic site / museum?
- (Prompt: product must be authentic, unique, made in Canada / by local artists, is representative of the region) Why?
- What would you be interested in purchasing at WIC? Why / why not?
- What should not be included in the store?

What about:

- Local First Nations art
- Vancouver Island art
- Canadiana
- Beach toys
- Kids books
- Field guides
- Fiction books re. West coast
- Pacific Rim National Park clothing – t-shirts, hats?
- Posters
- Prints / gallery-quality artwork
- Small, inexpensive items, like postcards, key chains
- Snacks
- Water/pop

39. What would make WIC an ideal place for the community to visit? What is the role of WIC in the community? To bring your family and friends? To recommend to others to visit?

40. What would encourage you to return to WIC? Why?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME.