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Protecting Canada's Ocean Ecosystems: Scaling up efforts to complete Canada's network of marine protected areas

Recommendation: CPAWS is calling on the federal government to accelerate efforts to establish a national network of marine protected areas as an essential step to conserve marine life and support sustainable fisheries.

To achieve this, Canada should:

1. Act quickly to complete the establishment of current marine protected area proposals;
2. Launch regional marine protected area planning processes to systematically identify effective marine protected area networks in all three oceans, including a large marine sanctuary of at least 150,000 sq km in each ocean.
3. Ensure that in Canada's 13 marine bioregions, at least 30% is strictly protected - that is closed to all fishing, as well as non-renewable resource development. (refer to map)

The issue:

While Canada has been making progress over the past several years on establishing marine protected areas, only 1% of our oceans have been protected to date. Meanwhile the health of Canada's oceans continues to decline from over-fishing, warming temperatures and acidification due to climate change, industrial activities, and pollution. Healthy oceans provide numerous ecosystem services essential to human well-being. They provide much of the oxygen that we breathe and food that we eat; they control the world's climate through ocean currents, winds and water cycle activity.

Completing current MPA candidate sites:

The federal government has three laws that it can use to create marine protected areas: the National Marine Conservation Areas Act (NMCAs) (Parks Canada); the Canada Wildlife Act (Environment Canada) and the Oceans Act (Fisheries and Oceans Canada).

By Oceans Day (June 8) 2015 we are calling on the government of Canada to:

- 1) Complete Oceans MPAs for the Hecate Strait sponge reefs, BC; Laurentian Channel, NL; St Anns Bank, NS; and, Anguniaqvia Niqiqyuam (Darnley Bay), NWT.
- 2) With the BC government, agree in principle to the Southern Strait of Georgia NMCA, and begin negotiations on a federal/provincial agreement leading to its establishment;
- 3) Complete the feasibility study phase for Tallurutiup Tariunga Lancaster Sound NMCA in Nunavut and move to a federal/territorial agreement for establishment;
- 4) Commission a representivity analysis for the west coast of Vancouver Island, the only marine region in Canada for which Parks Canada has not completed such an initial study;
- 5) Work with the QC government to complete the feasibility study for a MPA for les Iles de la Madeleine;
- 6) Begin planning for a network of MPAs in the Bay of Fundy bioregion off the shores of NS and NB.

By the end of 2016 we are calling on the government of Canada to:

Complete the Laurentian Channel, American Bank; as well as the Scott Islands marine National Wildlife Area, and significant progress on the Gulf of St. Lawrence and Shediac Valley Oceans Act MPAs.

The need to transition to a “network approach”:

Creating marine protected areas one at a time is a slow and inefficient way of building a system. We need to scale up our efforts by transitioning to a more systematic “network approach”. In 2010, the international community, including Canada, endorsed a new 10 year framework for action to save biodiversity and enhance its benefits to people, under the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity. This plan includes a commitment, known as the Aichi target, to protect at least 10% of coastal and marine areas by 2020.

In 2011, the federal, provincial and territorial governments released “*A National Framework for Canada’s Network of Marine Protected Areas*” which provides guidance for such a systematic approach, starting by planning regional marine protected area networks. Implementing this approach will not only speed up progress and improve the effectiveness of Canada’s marine protected areas it will provide more certainty for industry, communities and other partners and stakeholders. The Canadian public strongly supports measures to protect our ocean environments through the establishment of marine protected areas.

Why marine protected areas?

The value of marine protected areas as a tool to protect ocean ecosystems is now recognized around the world. There is strong scientific evidence that well designed and managed marine protected areas help to sustain marine life, and sustainable fisheries.

However, to achieve the full environmental and socio-economic benefits, marine protected areas need to be well designed and managed as regional and national networks, and have big enough areas off-limits to commercial fishing, so marine life can recover, and “spill over” into adjacent ocean areas. In 2011 CPAWS published science-based guidelines for marine protected area networks, which include a recommendation that at least 30% of each marine bioregion be strictly protected, with fishing and other industrial uses prohibited¹.

What you can do: Support the completion of the current MPA candidates in Canada, and a scaling up of efforts to establish Canada’s network of marine protected areas with an interim goal of meeting the internationally agreed-to target of protecting at least 10% of our oceans by 2020. This will require adequate federal investment, while we acknowledge that the National Conservation Plan made a five year funding commitment for marine and coastal conservation, the amount falls considerably short what is needed.²

For more information:

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¹ Jessen et al (2011) Science based guidelines for MPAs and MPA Networks <http://cpaws.org/news/mpa-guidelines>

² The Green Budget Coalition is recommending an investment of \$20 million per year on-going to establish and manage marine protected areas