

Backgrounder

Marine Protected Area Network for the Northern Shelf Bioregion

Protecting the world's oceans and marine environment is a shared responsibility. Today's announcement of the joint endorsement of the Marine Protected Area (MPA) Network Action Plan (the Action Plan) for the Northern Shelf Bioregion (NSB) is an important and vital step in ensuring healthy coastal ecosystems now and into the future.

The endorsement of the Action Plan by 15 coastal First Nations, the Government of Canada, and the Province of British Columbia will support efforts to conserve 25 per cent of Canada's oceans by 2025 and 30 per cent by 2030 by providing a planned approach to the creation of new protected areas in the NSB. The Action Plan represents the culmination of nearly a decade of collaboration between Indigenous Peoples, federal and provincial governments, Canadians, experts and stakeholders.

Marine Protected Areas and Marine Protected Area Networks

MPAs are regulatory tools which are used to spatially protect and conserve a range of species, habitats and features by prohibiting, or requiring mitigation of activities that pose a risk to the conservation objectives of a marine site. MPA Networks are a collection of individual MPAs that work together, contributing to improved species resilience and adaptation to future pressures including climate change beyond what any single MPA would be able to achieve. MPA Networks can include a variety of MPAs, including *Oceans Act* Marine Protected Areas, Indigenous Protected and Conservation Areas (IPCAs), National marine conservation areas and marine National Wildlife Areas.

First Nation, federal and provincial governments, Canadians and stakeholder groups work together to plan and establish conservation networks such as the NSB MPA Network. These collaborative efforts enable all partners to establish a coordinated approach to marine protection across multiple jurisdictions, informed by Indigenous knowledge, science, and other best available information.

Marine Protected Area Network Action Plan for the Northern Shelf Bioregion

In 2006, many First Nations of the Bioregion began the development of comprehensive marine plans that articulated their Nations' values and interests. These plans have since informed other marine spatial planning exercises such as the Marine Plan Partnership (MaPP), the Pacific North Coast Integrated Management Area (PNCIMA) and in particular the MPA Network for the NSB.

In 2014, Canada and B.C. released [the Canada-British Columbia Marine Protected Areas Network Strategy](#) to guide the development of MPA Networks in the Pacific Region and to outline a regional approach to applying the [National Framework for Canada's Network of MPAs](#). Creating an MPA network in the NSB is a primary objective of the [Pacific North Coast Integrated Management Area Plan](#), which provides a strategic approach to support ecosystem-based management.

The Northern Shelf Bioregion stretches from Campbell River, north to the B.C.–Alaska border. The MPA Network planning process began in 2015 and included years of consultation, planning, and collaboration involving coastal First Nations, industries, stakeholders, provincial and federal partners, and coastal communities and peoples.

With the joint endorsement by the 15 Coastal First Nations, the Government of Canada and the Province of B.C., the Action Plan can now be used to inform the implementation of an MPA Network in the NSB using a planned approach. It identifies new areas that contain collaboratively identified

ecological and cultural conservation objectives to be considered for protection using Indigenous, provincial, and federal spatial protection tools, which may also contribute to Marine Conservation Targets for 2025 and 2030.

A new model for Collaborative Governance, sustainability and reconciliation

The MPA Network planning process represents a ground-breaking model of collaboration between Indigenous governments, the Province of British Columbia, and the Government of Canada to advance integrated, ecosystem-based marine planning and conservation. It responds to shared commitments to reconciliation and calls to action by both the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

In addition to endorsing the MPA Network Action Plan, the partners will work together to advance a model of collaborative governance in coordination of the Network, establishment of individual MPA sites and their ongoing management and operations. Partners will also work to advance the establishment of a sustainable funding model that will support the ongoing management of the Network.

Project Finance for Permanence

Effective long-term finance is essential to sustain effective stewardship and management of marine protected areas while also delivering positive economic and social outcomes. The partners will work together to develop a conservation finance arrangement using the partnership-based Project Finance for Permanence (PFP) model. PFPs coordinate investments from the public, private, and philanthropic sectors, to support initiatives in which all interested parties have a common goal.

This model, which maximizes certainty and durability for all parties, was first developed by First Nations, BC, and Canada in the Great Bear Rainforest in 2007. Since then, these investments – managed through the Indigenous-led conservation finance institution Coast Funds -- have created over 1300 jobs and over 120 new businesses, grown family incomes, and helped drive regional economic development and diversification. The PFP model has been adapted to support large-scale conservation initiatives in countries all around the world.

The Great Bear Sea is one of up to four Indigenous-led conservation initiatives for which Prime Minister Trudeau announced Canada's commitment of up to \$800 million in new federal funding support in December 2022. Once completed, these projects could protect an additional up to one million square kilometres.

February 2023