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## Engagement begins on a plan for a network of marine protected areas in B.C.'s northern coast

- *Residents are invited to provide input on a draft Marine Protected Area Network Action Plan for the Northern Shelf Bioregion now through to the end of October*
- *The proposed Network of marine protected areas will work to conserve key habitats, species, and areas of cultural importance to First Nations while minimizing economic costs*
- *This made-in-B.C. solution is the outcome of over a decade of conversations, consultations and collaborations between three levels of governments along with industries, communities and residents*

**Haida Gwaii, North Coast, Central Coast, and North Vancouver Island, B.C.** – Beginning today, residents are invited to provide input on a draft Network Action Plan to guide implementation of a [network of marine protected areas \(MPAs\)](#) in the Northern Shelf Bioregion from North Vancouver Island to the Alaska border. The draft plan summarizes the approach used to develop a design for the MPA Network and provides recommendations for how it will be implemented, governed, and managed. This work is the result of many years of collaboration between First Nations, the Province of B.C., and the Government of Canada.

“The ocean waters of B.C. have been a source of food and prosperity for First Nations communities over countless generations,” said **Christine Smith-Martin, CEO of Coastal First Nations**. “Unfortunately, our waters are increasingly threatened by new development, overfishing, pollution and climate change. Now more than ever, we need to work together on solutions that go beyond short-term measures and single species approaches. A network of marine protected areas is an important tool that will help make our coastal ecosystems and communities more resilient for all future generations.”

Marine Protected Areas are used around the world to protect and conserve marine habitats and species. They help regions recover from stressors, protect and conserve ecological values, and create ecological, cultural, social and economic benefits for the entire area. The Northern Shelf Network would combine federal, provincial, and Indigenous marine management tools to protect and conserve key habitats, species, and areas of cultural importance to First Nations. The new cohesive network would also support economic security in the region, as ecosystem and biodiversity threats are reduced and greater resource sustainability achieved.

“Protecting vital marine habitats and species along B.C.’s coast is a priority for our government, especially as we continue to experience threats like extreme weather,” said **Josie Osborne, B.C. Minister of Land, Water and Resource Stewardship**. “As partners, we are stronger together than any one of us can be alone, and this work between the Province, Canada and coastal First Nations not only ensures greater stability and resilience for marine ecosystems, it will help preserve cultures and sustain economic well-being for communities and people for generations.”

First Nations cultures and communities are inextricably tied to the marine environment. Indigenous people have lived along the Northern Shelf for thousands of years, sustained by the water’s rich resources, which also shaped the communities’ cultural values. Many First Nations with traditional

territories in the Northern Shelf have been engaged throughout the planning process and consultation will continue with all First Nations in the region as the process advances.

“Indigenous peoples have lived along the Northern Shelf for thousands of years, sustained by the water’s rich resources, which continue to shape the community’s cultural values,” said **The Honourable Joyce Murray, Minister of Fisheries, Oceans, and the Canadian Coast Guard**. “Our government understands that only with the community’s input and vast knowledge can we reach the important commitment to protect 25 per cent of Canadian marine waters by 2025. The Northern Shelf Bioregion MPA Network is a significant investment in conserving and protecting the marine environment.”

Residents are invited to provide input on the draft Network Action Plan through surveys (that go live in mid-September), webinars and in-person open houses from now until the end of October. At the same time, First Nations consultations are happening with in-person and virtual sessions at the request of Nations. Input from all engagements will be considered as the plan is refined and finalized. Preliminary findings from the public engagement will be shared this winter and a full report will be shared in spring 2023.

While the MPA Network process began in 2015, this is the outcome of more than a decade of conversations, consultations and collaborations between three orders of government along with industries, coastal communities and residents. The Network Action Plan is expected to be completed in early 2023, after which the implementation phase would begin.

Once the plan is endorsed, establishing the new MPA sites can begin. This is a multi-year process that will include more opportunities for engagement and input from First Nations, stakeholders, and the public. During this extensive period, the development of additional details for sites, including proposed management measures, plus ongoing assessments such as socio-economic analysis, will be finalized.

**Notes to editor:**

- Learn more about the MPA Network in the Northern Shelf Bioregion, upcoming webinars and open houses, and access the online survey by visiting: <https://mpanetwork.ca/engage>

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