

SeaBlue Canada



July 31st, 2018

Members of the National Advisory Panel
on Marine Protected Area Standards

Dear Panel Members,

SeaBlue Canada is a coalition of Canadian environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOs) working together as a unified voice asking for more marine protected areas (MPAs) with stronger protection provisions. Our six groups work across Canada and in all three oceans. Our core organizations are; Ecology Action Centre, David Suzuki Foundation, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, WWF Canada, West Coast Environmental Law Association, and Oceans North. We also collaborate with many provincial and regional ENGOs throughout Canada.

The benefits of MPAs are well-documented: MPAs can conserve biodiversity, improve fisheries, mitigate climate change effects, reduce disaster risk, and restore ecosystems, among other benefits. The Canadian government's public commitment to meet the Convention on Biological Diversity's Aichi Target 11 by protecting 10% of its ocean area by 2020 is admirable. However, the effectiveness of these designations will be defined by the quality of the protection standards applied to MPAs. Currently, the lack of consistent, robust standards for marine protection leaves Canada exposed to further biodiversity losses, creates inefficiencies in the protection process and, in some cases, risks pitting ocean industries against one another.

Without improving marine protection standards, Canada's efforts to preserve biodiversity through spatial protection risks the integrity of the nation's conservation efforts. Insufficiently protected, any area, regardless of size, will not provide the benefits required to halt and reverse marine biodiversity loss. However, addressing standards for marine protection could set the stage for Canada's leadership in the international arena. SeaBlue Canada recommends the adoption of these principles as core elements of marine protection standards reform.

Principles of Marine Protection Standards:

1. All protection mechanisms should lead to the same biodiversity outcomes.

Canada uses various legislative tools to establish areas that contribute to Aichi Target 11, however, not all protected areas are created equal. SeaBlue Canada recognizes that there is not one type of marine protection designation (Oceans Act MPA, Fisheries Act Marine Refuges, NMCA etc.) that is best in every scenario, but we highlight the need for the weaknesses of each protection type to be addressed in order for each designation to provide appropriate protection that qualifies against Target 11 goals.

2. Industrial Activities should be excluded from areas under any type of marine protection.

Canadians have been shocked to learn that MPAs in the Atlantic and elsewhere are still eligible for oil and gas exploration and development. Canada has proposed to protect at least 10% of its vast ocean area. Excluding industrial activities like oil and gas, unsustainable fishing practices, open net-pen aquaculture, and seabed mining from protected areas is what Canadians expect for marine areas under some type of protection designation.

Protection standards should include legislated prohibitions to permanently exclude harmful industrial activities within MPAs. Any allowed activities in MPAs should be low-impact and support traditional uses in the nearshore areas. The Canadian Government should also seek to grow sustainable economic activity, including by the development of regional tourism and recreation plans for MPA locales in collaboration with local communities, providing the protection of biodiversity is not jeopardized.

3. More governance types should be utilized in the protection of marine spaces.

Protected area co-governance and co-management with Indigenous Peoples is an important part of the government's commitment to reconciliation. Co-governance with Indigenous Peoples should be a minimum; with full Indigenous governance as an option when this is desired by those Indigenous Peoples within whose territories the MPA lies. There may also be places where Indigenous governments wish to establish protected areas under their own laws and authority. The Canadian government should, as appropriate, recognize, support and safeguard these areas from industrial activities, to ensure their continued ability to protect biodiversity.

4. Raise conservation goals for MPAs and other area-based conservation measures to meet Aichi Target 11 standards.

Under Canada's current standards – or lack thereof – some MPAs and other area based conservation measures are not adequately protected. IUCN guidelines for protection requirements, and in many circumstances even the Canadian Government's own standards, are not being met. For this reason, the estimated 7.75% of Canadian waters currently counted as protected is not an accurate reflection of appropriate protection for biodiversity by international standards. Conservation objectives and area-based targets must be achieved through translating protection on paper into 'real' protection in the ocean that serves to maintain, and where necessary, recover marine biodiversity.

5. Canada should adopt the IUCN Guidelines for marine protected areas.

We would also like to take this opportunity to respond to the Panel's question regarding the application of the IUCN guidelines in Canada. In short, we believe that these are effective, thorough and thoughtful guidelines that Canada should adopt. Using IUCN guidelines as Canadian standards would: increase certainty and reduce confusion; reduce consultation time and regulatory review; build trust between stakeholders; allow for international bodies to assess effectiveness; allow Canada to compare its efforts to other nations; and allow Canada to conduct meaningful scientific research.

Overall, the benefits of using international standards will help Canada pursue meaningful conservation and will allow Canada become an international leader in marine protection. Furthermore, IUCN guidelines include standards for research, monitoring, evaluation, and review, which could improve tangible biodiversity conservation within existing and future areas under protection. Specifically, the IUCN guidelines recommend involving the local community in research and monitoring. This could allow Canada to expand its research capacity while also improving relations with coastal communities and Indigenous nations. These efforts could also result in areas of marine protection that have greater 'buy-in' from stakeholders and in turn greater durability of protected areas.

Conclusion:

SeaBlue Canada recommends the following principles on MPA standards:

- Marine protected area standards should ensure the same biodiversity conservation outcomes regardless of the legislative tool used to implement the

protection.

- Industrial activities should be excluded from areas under marine protection.
- Co-governance with Indigenous Peoples should be a minimum with full Indigenous governance an option when this is desired by those Indigenous Peoples within whose territories the MPA lies. Areas already under Indigenous protection or conservation should be recognized, supported and safeguarded, as appropriate, from industrial activities that would impact biodiversity.
- Canada should ONLY report areas that already meet the IUCN MPA standards, to the World Database of Protected Areas to be counted towards Aichi Target 11. This would create an incentive for Canada to improve its protection standards and create more MPAs in order to meet and exceed its 2020 goal.
- Canada should adopt the IUCN Guidelines as the standard by which they establish, and manage marine protected areas in Canada.

We would also like to thank the Panel members for their dedication to an important topic for Canada's oceans.

Sincerely,

The SeaBlue Canada Steering Committee

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