

Defining Protection in Canada's Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)



Bowie Seamount MPA (c) WWF Canada

Define what protection means for Canada's MPAs

In 2016, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau upped Canada's initiative to increase MPA's to 10% of Canadian waters by 2020. However, MPAs in Canada vary widely in levels of protection, with no standard set as to how much protection is given to an established MPA. Treating MPAs on a site by site basis is not congruent with the novel push to meet national and international goals in marine conservation. To ensure that Canadian oceans are properly protected, Canada must not only increase the amount of protected areas, we must define what we mean by protection as a standard in all declared zones. To establish this standard, we propose adding a definition of protection to Canada's Oceans Act that excludes fishing and oil and gas drilling from all Canadian MPAs.

Only 64 200 sq. km of Canada's oceans and lakes are protected - an area the size of Nova Scotia.

1

CHANGE OCEANS ACT

Define a minimum level of protection for all MPAs that excludes fishing & oil/gas drilling

2

ESTABLISH PROPOSED MPAS

New MPAs receive minimum protection immediately.

3

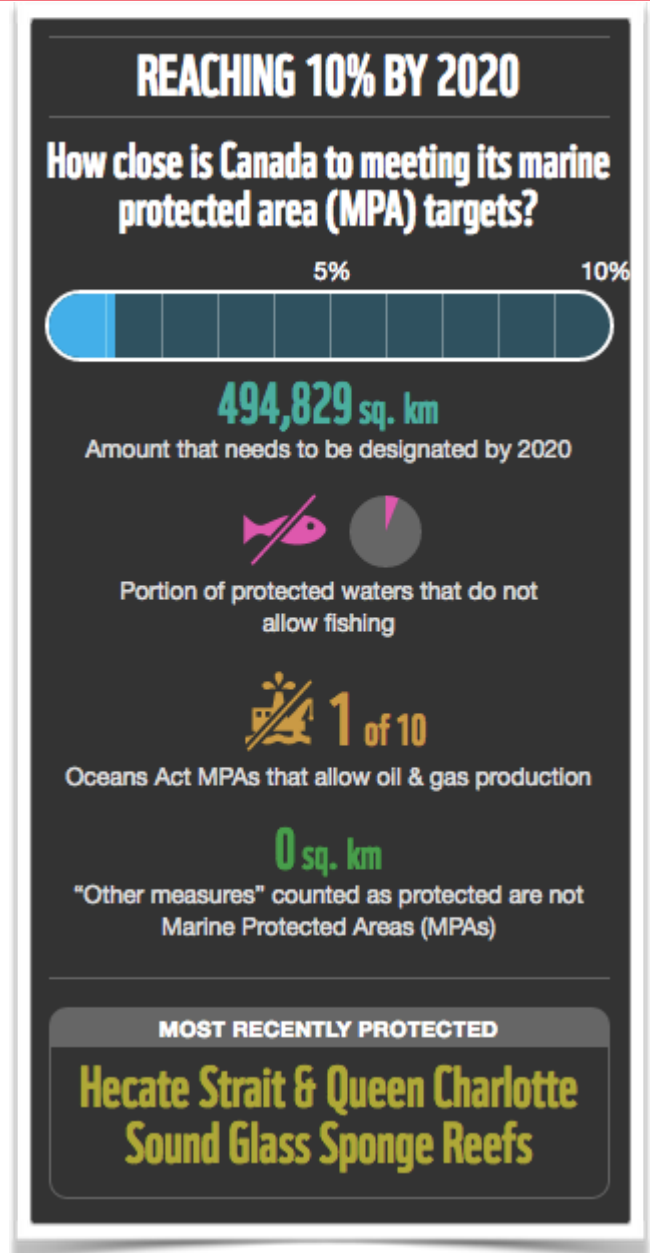
MEET MARINE CONSERVATION TARGETS

“0.01% of Canada’s Ocean is highly protected.” - WWF 2017

Currently, there are few actual no-take areas to offer functional or significant ecosystem protection in Canadian waters. Fishing is allowed in 11/12 existing MPAs due to zoning of commercial and recreational users, despite fishing being the single activity that many associate to be the main pressure on protected areas. If fishing pressure is relieved from protected areas, fish and larval spillover from protected sites will eventually repopulate the surrounding area if anthropogenic pressures are truly removed. In other words, protecting MPAs can improve yield for fishers. Oil and gas exploration are only directly stated as disallowed in 2/12 MPAs, allowing the government to provide licenses in some exceptions. Oil and gas drilling has significant direct and indirect adverse effects on sensitive habitats and organisms and is therefore counter-intuitive to establish drill sites in areas in need of protection. With a continental shelf as long as Canada’s with few relative MPAs, there is no need to be drilling or fishing inside of protected areas.

Healthy oceans need protection.

Canada’s commitment to marine protection is part of our national identity, culture, and economy. If Canada only seeks to increase relevant marine protected area (as suggested in the Prime Ministers 2016 letter to Minister Dominic LeBlanc), instead of defining what we mean by protection, we will not meet national or international marine conservation targets. By establishing a baseline of required protection of no oil/gas drilling or fishing in MPAs, we will see success faster in newly established MPAs. The spillover of larvae and adult organisms from the newly defined protected areas will benefit all areas outside of the MPA over time, as the organisms recover and spread outwards. Additionally, removing threats of pier development and potential oil spill by disallowing oil and gas drilling licenses in MPAs will remove negative pressures on these sensitive locations. Redefining the standard of protection in Canada’s Oceans Act will give these habitats a chance to recover and will improve Canada’s marine ecosystems and economy in the long run.



Graphic (c) WWF 2017

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