

MPA: More Protection ASAP

Ban Extractive Activities in Canada's Marine Protected Areas

Endangered Species Coalition, n.d.

Executive Summary

As part of its obligation to the Convention on Biological Diversity, Canada has pledged to protect 10% of its marine waters by 2020. So far, nearly 3.5% of Canada's oceans have been designated as Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)—but extractive activities (e.g. fishing, mining) are allowed in over 97% of these refuges. As a result, Canadian MPAs are unlikely to achieve their primary objective: preservation of biodiversity and ecosystem services. Thus, it is critical that the Government of Canada **bans extractive activities in all new MPAs** and acts immediately to **stop them** in at least **50% of existing MPAs**. It should also commit to **regular revision of MPA policies** to ensure they reflect best conservation practices.

What Is the Problem?

In 2010, Canada committed to meet the 20 Aichi Biodiversity Targets set during the 10th Convention on Biological Diversity¹. Aichi Target 11 focuses on the need to increase the **amount** and **quality** of protected areas and establishes a target of **10% protection of the ocean by 2020**¹. So far, Canada has made significant strides in increasing the **quantity** of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). The federal government has set-up 12 MPAs under the *Oceans Act*, which account for nearly **3.5%** (212,000 km²) of Canada's oceans². However, the **quality** of protection enforced in Canada's MPAs is not meeting international standards. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) suggests that all extractive activities (e.g. industrial fishing, sea-bed mining, oil and gas extraction) are prohibited in MPAs³, yet less than **3%** of Canadian ocean in MPAs is subjected to this regulation⁴.

Beccaria, 2016



Vonin, n.d.



Two types of extractive activities currently allowed in Canada's MPAs: oil extraction (top) and bottom trawling (bottom).

¹ CPAWS, 2018a

² SeaBlue Canada, 2019

³ National Advisory Panel on Marine Protected Area Standards, 2019

⁴ CPAWS, 2018b

Why Does It Matter?

According to the IUCN, the primary objective of an MPA is to “**achieve long-term conservation of [biodiversity] with associated ecosystem services**”³. In 2017, a group of marine scientists conducted a study examining how effective fully-protected MPAs (in which all extractive activities are prohibited) are in achieving this objective compared to their partially-protected counterparts⁵. They found that fish biomass and ecosystem structure and complexity are restored and sustained over time in fully-protected MPAs, but not in those with partial protection. As a result, fully-protected MPAs have **350% more fish biomass**; **greater resilience to climate change**; and **larger benefits to nearby fisheries** (through spill-over effects) than partially-protected ones. These findings suggest that Canada’s current MPA network, which allows extractive activities, is unlikely to achieve its main objective.

ANTICIPATED BENEFITS OF FULLY-PROTECTED MPAs⁵

- **Ecological:** preservation of marine biodiversity; greater resilience of marine ecosystems
- **Economic:** spill-over effects; long-term fishery stability; opportunities for eco-tourism
- **Societal:** better water quality and coastal protection; food security; preservation of cultural practices related to the sea

What Can Be Done?

If Canada continues to implement MPAs without effective standards of protection, long-term conservation of biodiversity and ecosystem services in Canadian waters will not likely be achieved. This could negatively affect fisheries, tourism, water quality, coastal communities, and social well-being⁵. Thus, it is crucial that the Government of Canada amends the *Ocean Act* to **prohibit all extractive activities** in future MPAs. Furthermore, the Government should work with relevant stakeholders, local communities, and First Nation groups to **cease extractive activities** in at least **50%** of each existing MPA. Lastly, the Canadian government should commit to **regular revision** of policies regarding MPAs to ensure they stay up-to-date with international standards. Through these actions, Canada will have greater success in preserving marine biodiversity, and its associated ecological, economic and social values, for generations to come.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

**BAN EXTRACTIVE
ACTIVITIES IN ALL
NEW MPAs**

**STOP EXTRACTIVE
ACTIVITIES IN AT LEAST
50% OF CURRENT MPAs**

**COMMIT TO REGULAR
REVISION OF MPA
POLICIES**

⁵ [Sala et al., 2017](#)

⁶ [Kenchington et al., 2003](#)

Intended audience:

The Canadian Ministry (Justin Trudeau and his appointed Cabinet)

Policy to be sent to:

The Honourable Jonathan Wilkinson, Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard

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