

Canada takes small step for ocean health and marine protection

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VANCOUVER — Canada's announcement today to ratify a plan that guides how people use and protect its North Pacific coastal waters marks a small but positive step toward meeting biodiversity targets and supporting coastal ecosystems and communities, the David Suzuki Foundation said.

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"This conservation framework has been 10 years in the making," said Foundation science projects manager Bill Wareham. "Moving ahead is an important step to prevent human-based ocean activities from harming one of the world's richest marine biodiversity areas."

Fisheries, Oceans and Canadian Coast Guard Minister Dominic LeBlanc is also expected to announce a marine protected area for Hecate Strait's glass sponge reefs tomorrow.

"These prehistoric reefs are considered one of the Pacific Ocean's most awe-inspiring treasures," Wareham said. "Protection will help ensure the reefs survive and provide vital habitat to marine life."

Although most Canadians are familiar with city planning, few are aware of how activities are zoned and regulated in oceans. The initiative — in what is known as the Pacific North Coast Integrated Management Area — maintains ecosystem health and biological richness as the foundation of all marine-use decision-making.

"This approach highlights the dependency of human communities and economies on healthy ocean ecosystems," Wareham said. "We know that human activities must respect biological limits if we hope to support cultures, communities and economies over the long term."

Ratifying the plan and establishing the new protected area bring Canada closer to meeting international biodiversity commitments, including the responsibility to protect at least 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas by 2020. The initiative supports communities that depend on the marine environment for fisheries, sustainable aquaculture and tourism. It also respects Indigenous rights and title and is designed to use traditional knowledge in managing marine resources.

Managing this ocean area's rich biological wealth to support local livelihoods and future generations is one of the most important issues facing B.C.'s coastal communities. "With Canada, B.C. and First Nations co-governing, we're hopeful this ocean area can support some of the best-managed and productive marine areas anywhere in Canada," Wareham said.

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