Commercial Fishing in the Great Bear Sea MPA Network

FAQ

For over 10 years, First Nations have worked in partnership with the Government of Canada and the Province of British Columbia – and with the involvement of industry, community and local governments – to design a proposed network of **Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in the Great Bear Sea**, otherwise known as the Northern Shelf Bioregion. The MPA network will designate levels of conservation and permissible industry activities in areas of importance, to protect and enhance culture, biodiversity and thriving coastal communities for generations to come.

Once complete, the MPA network is expected to cover 30 per cent of the Great Bear Sea, including existing and new protected areas. Leaders shared and endorsed the MPA Network Action Plan in February 2023, at the IMPAC5 marine conservation summit.

Quick facts

1 The proposed MPA network will only affect about 8% of fisheries by landed value on the BC coast.

2 The MPA network is being created by the coast, for the coast. Input from the commercial fishing industry continues to be sought.

3 The MPA network protects more than just fish and considers a whole ecosystem approach that will benefit all who live there, from kelp to fish to whales to humans.

4 There are several examples of improved yields and economic benefits to fisheries adjacent to a marine protected area.

5 The MPA Network is attracting new investment that will provide long-term, sustainable economic drivers in areas like eco-tourism and more, to help support a sustainable coastal economy.

Will fishing be eliminated within the MPA network?

No. Most MPAs in the Great Bear Sea will **remain open to sustainable commercial fishing**.

The proposed network supports ecological and cultural conservation priorities and limits the potential impact of closures to commercial fisheries to approximately **8% of commercial fishing effort across the region by landed value**. This equates to approximately $9 million in annual profits. These figures are based on a socioeconomic impact review conducted by the Nations, Canada and BC, with a clear and transparent methodology.

Who is creating the MPA network?

The MPA network is being **made by the coast, for the coast**. The development of these initiatives is led by 17 coastal First Nations, in partnership with the Government of British Columbia and the Government of Canada. Many First Nations began working on community marine use and stewardship plans more than 20 years ago, born from a desire to protect the coastal and marine ecosystems in the Great Bear Sea.

Why is it needed?

Our coast is facing several challenges, including overfishing and habitat loss, that are leading to species declines. MPAs help protect fish, corals, seabirds, whales, other marine wildlife, and their habitats from multiple stressors and destructive activities (e.g., certain MPAs can protect fish habitat from damage caused by bottom-trawling, deep-sea mining and industrial development, among other activities). MPAs have been shown to help maintain or improve the health, productivity and resilience of entire ecosystems.

MPAs provide a functionally different purpose than fisheries management by considering the impacts of multiple human activities and limiting certain identified threats to maintain or improve the health of entire ecosystems, recognizing the important connections between habitats and the plants and animals that live on our coast.

MPAs provide the **whole-ecosystem approach that is necessary** to protect the diversity of the Great Bear Sea, which is one of the most productive cold-water ecosystems on Earth.

Doesn't Canada rely on the food provided by the commercial fishing industry in BC?

Most of the MPA network will **remain open to sustainable commercial fishing activity**. The MPA network aims to create thriving waters that support resilient biodiversity and sustainable ocean economies.

Several studies have shown fully-protected marine areas conserve biodiversity without negatively impacting fishing and food security. There are several examples of economic benefits to commercial fisheries adjacent to a marine protected area. These include increased fish stocks and catch volumes, higher reproduction and larval "spillover" to fisheries outside the MPA. Other studies also reported larger fish and other species close to existing MPAs.

How will it affect the economy and jobs in BC and Canada?

The MPA network **considers both people and place**, and includes funding for stewardship and sustainable economic development. It is anticipated that investments through the Great Bear Sea will create 3,000 new jobs and provide 32,000 hours of skills training. Industries like eco-tourism, renewable energy and other sustainable activities can expect to see growth.

These anticipated results are modeled on a proven track record. The 2007 Great Bear Rainforest agreements have generated approximately 1300 permanent new jobs, with over 130 businesses created or acquired.

Was the fishing industry consulted during the development process?

Stakeholder engagement and consultation has been, and continues to be, an important aspect of the development of the MPA network. Since 2016, the MPA Technical Team has held dozens of sessions with stakeholders, including the commercial fishing industry. The first consultation session with the commercial fishing industry was held in person in 2017, and since then there has been frequent and consistent engagement. A full list of stakeholder consultations can be found on Page 9 of Compendium 1 of the MPA Network Action Plan.
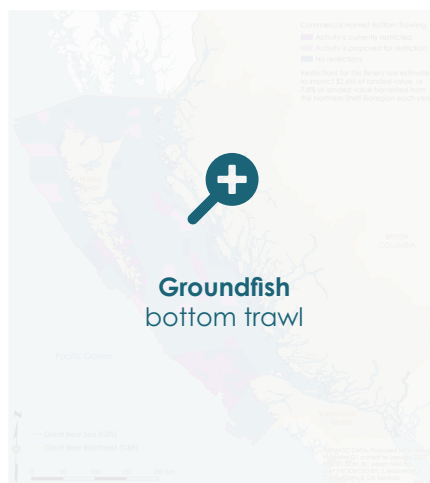
Feedback from the commercial fishing industry has been integrated into the MPA network in many ways. For example, Zone 427 was reduced by 40 per cent to limit impact to the crab fishery there. Multiple Nearshore Haida Gwaii zones were changed to maintain access for dive fisheries. And in Queen Charlotte Sound, zones were fully redesigned in partnership with commercial fisheries to limit economic impacts as much as possible, while still achieving conservation objectives. These changes and others reflect the collaborative process of the MPA network to maximize benefits for everyone who relies on the coast.

What is the timeline?

The MPA network is a collaborative and phased process, and work continues to determine an approach that creates maximum benefits for everyone along the coast. Further analysis and stakeholder consultations are ahead, as parties work together to establish new MPAs in the coming years.

Maps

View the maps linked below, which provide an example of the areas in which the proposed MPA network would impact certain fisheries:

Salmon
gillnet

Groundfish
bottom trawl

Shellfish
crab or prawn by trap

How can I find out more?

Visit **ourgreatbearsea.ca** to learn more about the Great Bear Sea, or **mpanetwork.ca** for information on the MPA network.

ourgreatbearsea.ca