

# MPA NEWS



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## MPA Perspective: A National MPA Network for Canada by 2012: How Do We Get There from Here?

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**By Sabine Jessen**

The Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS) has assessed the factors delaying Canada's progress toward its international commitment to establishing a network of MPAs by 2012, and has identified opportunities to reach the 2012 goal. Our findings are detailed in the report *Challenges and Opportunities in Progress towards Canada's Commitment to a National Network of MPAs by 2012* (see box at the end of this article).

The primary source of information for our study was interviews with people working on MPAs in every region of Canada, with a focus on an "inside government" perspective. As a result, more than half of the interviewees were in federal agencies, with 13% from provincial agencies and the rest from environmental NGOs. Regardless of the affiliation of interviewees, the diagnoses of challenges and opportunities were remarkably similar.

Given the limited progress to date and the relatively ineffective existing process to establish MPAs in Canada, meeting the commitment of a national network of MPAs by 2012 will be a major challenge for Canada. Serious issues of leadership and governance must urgently be addressed if Canada is to ensure the conservation of biodiversity in ocean ecosystems.

Canada has made both national and international commitments to establish marine protected areas. At the international level these commitments include the World Summit on Sustainable Development (2002), World Parks Congress (2003) and Convention on Biological Diversity (2004). At the national level, these commitments date from 1992, and include: Canada's Ocean Strategy (2002); Canada's Oceans Action Plan (2004); and federal budgets (2005, 2007).

Canada has a suite of legal tools that enable the establishment of different types of protected areas in our oceans, including marine protected areas under the Canada Oceans Act, national marine conservation areas under the Canada National Marine Conservation Areas Act, marine wildlife areas under the Canada Wildlife Act, and migratory bird sanctuaries under the Canada Migratory Bird Sanctuaries Act.

Canada has responsibility for a vast ocean territory of 5.87 million km<sup>2</sup>, equivalent to more than half of the country's land mass and one of the largest EEZs in the world. So far, including the April 2008 designation of Bowie Seamount MPA, about 33,000 km<sup>2</sup> is currently in some form of federal marine protected area status. However, while this may appear to be a significant area, it amounts to only 0.56% of Canada's total ocean area. Given that Canada has been working on MPAs for over 20 years, there should be more to show!

With well less than 1% of its marine area protected, Canada's MPA system remains among the least advanced compared to other countries' efforts, as well as compared to our own land-based protected areas system which is now over 8%. In a recent Yale and Columbia Universities environmental performance index, Canada received a score of 5 out of 100 percentage points for its establishment of MPAs, while the average score for other countries in the same income group was 38.6 (see <http://epi.yale.edu/Canada>). This is certainly not the leadership position on oceans that Canada has attempted to stake since it was the first country to pass a comprehensive Oceans Act in 1997.

Currently, the approach in Canada to the establishment of MPAs is on a site-by-site basis, and it generally takes between 6 and 10 years from idea to final designation for each MPA. The pace of MPA establishment in Canada was commonly described by interviewees in our study as disappointingly slow.

CPAWS has identified a number of recommendations for Canada to achieve a national network of MPAs. Key among these is the need for high-level political direction and a plan for achieving the 2012 target, including timelines and milestones to ensure accountability at both the political and bureaucratic levels. Canada has an excellent opportunity, through current and future ocean-planning processes convening governments and stakeholders on each coast, to ensure that a key deliverable is a network of MPAs. In addition to developing more effective coordination among federal agencies, interim protection of identified areas of high biodiversity is needed while efforts are made to address the cumbersome and lengthy designation processes. Canada can learn from international best practice for implementing MPA networks, and should move to a network approach from the current site-by-site approach to ensure that marine biodiversity in conserved in its oceans. Overall, it remains a concern that oceans issues are not a high priority for the Government of Canada. A national-level dialogue on oceans, including MPAs, is urgently needed.

### For more information

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**BOX:** The CPAWS report *Challenges and Opportunities in Progress towards Canada's Commitment to a National Network of MPAs by 2012* produced with funding support from the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, is available at [http://cpaws.org/files/report\\_mythandmadness.PDF](http://cpaws.org/files/report_mythandmadness.PDF)

An accompanying document, *Myth and Madness: Conquering the tragedy of marine protection in Canada* presents a summary of key findings and recommendations from the report, and is at [http://cpaws.org/files/booklet\\_mythandmadness.PDF](http://cpaws.org/files/booklet_mythandmadness.PDF)

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