



Protecting Our Coast

A New Coastal Strategy and Law for British Columbia

Issue

BC needs a coastal strategy and law to leverage and coordinate the work of provincial ministries, local communities, First Nations, and stakeholder groups to protect our coast.

Discussion

The Government of BC has taken an impressive number of initiatives to protect our coasts and support coastal economies including a wild salmon policy, increasing ferry service, marine planning and marine protected areas, sustainable aquaculture, and oil spill regulations. The province's commitment to implement UNDRIP will impact co-governance of marine and coastal space.

BC exercises considerable jurisdiction in the marine and coastal realm, however, unlike all of the Atlantic provinces, BC has no coastal strategy. Provincial ministries continue to work on an ad-hoc basis to address current and emerging issues. In addition, the current array of provincial policy and legislation that address marine and coastal issues was not designed to deal with today's pressures of development, climate change, and user conflicts.

A new coastal strategy and law would strengthen the integration of this work and would assist in the delivery of commitments related to environmental protection, food security, coastal infrastructure, First Nations reconciliation and capacity-building, economic development, and technology and innovation.

The idea of a coastal strategy and law has been contemplated at various times in BC since the elimination of the BC Ministry of Fisheries. With the government's numerous commitments to coastal communities, the time is right to provide for a new legislative framework to support their implementation.

Recommendation

For the government of BC to introduce a coastal strategy and law.

Background

BC's iconic coastal and marine areas are vital to our identity, culture, and economy. However, critical issues threaten the health of our coast and affect the development of sustainable ocean-based industries such as marine plastics, derelict vessels, and pollution affecting Southern Resident Killer Whales and shellfish aquaculture. Ocean-based activities contribute \$17 billion annually to the BC economy and employ over 170,000 people in coastal communities (for comparison, BC's forestry and technology sectors contributed \$15.7 and \$14.6 respectively).¹

¹ G.S. Gislason and Associates. 2007. Economic Contribution of the Oceans Sector in British Columbia. (numbers updated to 2018 dollars)

Why do we need a BC Coastal strategy?

To assert jurisdiction and leverage engagement from other orders of government

A BC Coastal strategy will clearly articulate provincial jurisdiction and enable the province to engage more powerfully with Canada, whether to leverage new investments or to advance shared objectives.

To better advance and integrate provincial policy objectives

A coherent BC Coastal strategy will enable provincial agencies to find opportunities for greater integration and increase the impact of diverse programs on environmental protection, coastal infrastructure, training and capacity-building, economic development, and technology and innovation.

To advance reconciliation

A BC Coastal strategy will support reconciliation with coastal First Nations by recognizing First Nations' rights and title and upholding the province's commitment to implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

To signal to the world the importance of BC's ocean and coastlines

A BC Coastal strategy will provide a vision, goals and strategies to guide actions in the increasingly crowded coastal zone and highlight the importance the government places on these vital areas. In addition to protecting BC's coast, sensitive marine ecosystems, and vulnerable species, a strategy will also protect our coastal communities and economies.

A strategy will also provide the foundation for a new provincial law.

Why do we need a BC Coastal Law?

To provide a comprehensive legal response to a broad suite of cross-cutting issues

BC does not have a comprehensive coastal protection law. No marine counterpart to the *BC Land Act* exists, and piecemeal legislation and policy govern numerous coastal marine activities.

To establish a home for coastal issues within the government

The province of BC used to have a provincial Ministry of Fisheries, which became a division, then a branch. Now coastal and marine responsibilities are scattered throughout various Ministries. A law could establish a new governance body such as a BC Coastal Management Council or Authority.

To keep wild places wild

A new law will preserve coastal and ocean health, and halt coastal habitat loss. It will accelerate the completion of a network of marine protected areas to benefit fisheries, biodiversity and the economy. A law can better regulate clean water: it can set marine environmental quality objectives from upland activities. It will help communities adopt ecosystem-based approaches to manage risks from flooding due to extreme weather events, sea level rise, climate change, and ocean acidification.

To implement enforceable coastal and marine zone plans, similar to land use plans

The notable plans from the Marine Planning Partnership for the North Pacific Coast (MaPP) developed collaboratively with First Nations contain zoning and management directions for a wide range of marine uses and activities under provincial jurisdiction like monitoring and enforcement, pollution, and tenured activities. A new law can provide a clear pathway for legislative implementation of these plans.

To enhance food security by ensuring local access to marine food resources.

A new law will support the implementation of the Wild Salmon Strategy as well as a comprehensive approach to sustainable aquaculture.

To support coastal communities and ocean-dependent economic activities and jobs.

A law can set the rules for blue carbon initiatives, similar to the successful provincial experience with forest carbon offsets. It can establish a new regulatory regime for ocean renewable energy. BC's local governments seek provincial guidance on coastal zone management, particularly on how to plan for sea-level rise and protect ecologically significant foreshore.

To provide more certainty about BC's priorities to the public, to industry and to other governments

Setting clear legislated goals will provide certainty and lower investment risks for businesses and resource users.

A new BC Coastal Strategy and new Coastal Protection Act will ensure that the government of BC has the right tools in place to protect the sea and the coast and keep our ocean healthy and secure for the future.

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