

CENTRAL COAST NATIONAL MARINE CONSERVATION AREA RESERVE CONSULTATION

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INTRODUCTION

As connected sector associations focused on the marine tourism environment, we appreciate the opportunity to provide input into the proposed Central Coast National Marine Conservation Area Reserve (CCNMCAR) as a follow-up to the recent briefing provided by Parks Canada to various stakeholders.

To begin with, we agree that the Central Coast region within the Great Bear Sea is one of the richest marine environments in the world. Protecting it from multiple stressors and/or restoring areas that have been damaged is paramount to ensure the health of the entire marine ecosystem in this beautiful part of British Columbia.

At the same time, we are concerned about both the notion of a permanent conservation reserve and its potential impact on the tourism industry, as well as components of the consultation process that we only recently learned of.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS ON THE COASTAL MARINE ENVIRONMENT

The greater part of British Columbia's West Coast is considered to be wild and remote. Indigenous communities form the majority of the population, utilizing the regions' natural resources for food, economic, social and cultural well-being. The coastal region also generates similar benefits for non-Indigenous residents and the rest of the province.

The restoration, sustainability and management of coastal regions in BC are critical for the health and welfare of Indigenous peoples, local residents, and tourism-related businesses that operate in the marine environment, as well as inland.

The challenges facing the present and future planning, management and utilization of the coastal region are confounded by the current jurisdictional conflicts, overlaps and competing interests. Coupled with the lack of a unified vision and no one government to provide a consistent legislative and governance model, the managing for the future sustainability of the coast is a daunting task.

That said, each stakeholder can take measures to start working collaboratively toward a more sustainable future, while the province and federal government can take measures to align policy so that ministries/governments are not working at odds against the desired future state, or conversely, can work toward solving the current problems within the marine environment.



SPECIFIC CONCERNS & OBSERVATIONS ON THE PROPOSAL

Following a (virtual) briefing by Parks Canada on April 18th on the proposed Central Coast National Marine Conservation Area Reserve, several sub-sectors of the BC marine tourism industry met to identify specific concerns related to the CCNMCAR and offer recommendations for consideration by Parks Canada, the six First Nations, the Province of British Columbia, the Government of Canada, and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO).

The questions raised are as follows:

A. When is non-Indigenous stakeholder and community consultation and engagement (versus updates or information only) planned?

B. Can we be assured that decisions will not be made that effect communities or stakeholders until appropriate and meaningful consultation is conducted?

C. Is this initiative and feasibility assessment integrated with the MPA network development or MaPP processes? If so, is the intention to include this proposal in discussions in those as yet-to-be-held community and stakeholder engagement sessions as well?

D. How is consideration being given to potentially displaced fishery and economic activity and the effects or impacts on adjacent, yet still sensitive areas? Should transition plans be anticipated?

E. Should an MCAR be declared, would the area be governed or managed by federal and provincial governments and First Nations, only governments, or only by First Nations?

F. How will permissible or prohibited activities and access be determined?

G. In the briefing, it was shared that new business licences will be required if a MCAR proceeds. Who would administer the business licence? Will there be eligibility requirements? What is the cost for a licence? Would there be additional fees for access or are they being considered? If so, how would they be determined and how would they be monitored or administered? To what purpose would fees collected be dedicated?



Guy Kimola/Haida Gwaii Tourism

SPECIFIC CONCERNS & OBSERVATIONS ON THE PROPOSAL

Based on the limited information that has been provided to date, the concerns raised by the tourism industry and residents, along with the potential for significant negative impacts, we cannot support the creation of the MCAR at this time. The following are recommendations and requests to support positive progress towards responsible management of the Central Coast marine assets:

H. Considering the complexity of managing migratory marine species and mixed stock fisheries, it is critical that the federal government maintain a role to help coordinate management and to support a long-standing coast-wide approach.

I. Meaningful consultation with non-Indigenous stakeholders should be conducted prior to any next steps.

J. During the briefing it was stated that tourism and recreation are the same. We do not support this position and recommend that Parks Canada engage with the tourism sector to share points of differentiation and discuss opportunities for supported values sharing.

K. Should a conservation area reserve proceed, open and extensive communication on the potential benefits, challenges, and implementation process should be undertaken.

L. Should a conservation area reserve proceed, it is important that sufficient time be given for commercial tourism interests to adjust their operations and compensation be provided for loss of business viability.



Destination BC/Grant Harder

CONCLUSION

There are additional stakeholders involved in the marine tourism sector including scuba-diving companies, kayak guides, and others that, like the signatories to this submission, need to be sufficiently consulted as part of this process.

We strongly encourage Parks Canada and its partners in this initiative to consult with all segments of the marine tourism industry during every phase of the Central Coast National Marine Conservation Area Reserve to ensure that the sector's voice is heard, and that it can continue to contribute to the environmental, social, cultural, and economic needs of coastal communities and the province as a whole.

ABOUT BC'S TOURISM SECTOR

Tourism is a critical sector within BC's economy. In 2022, the tourism industry generated $18.5 billion in revenue, an increase of 56.5% over 2021. In addition, tourism contributed some $7.2 billion in GDP through nearly 17,000 businesses that employed over 154,000+ people.

Aside from economic benefits, tourism also generates environmental, social, and cultural benefits for all British Columbians by supporting the viability of community amenities and increasing international exposure to our Indigenous heritage, education system, trade opportunities, and immigration prospects.

In spite of challenges with wildfires, flooding, drought, and the pandemic in recent years, and unlike many other natural resource sectors, BC's visitor economy is on a positive trajectory due to increasing demand for our tourism products and services, largely attributed to the marketing efforts led by Destination British Columbia and its destination management, community, and sector partners. Tourism is one of the province's largest industries with potential for further growth, particularly within Indigenous and rural communities.



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