

Received March 15, 2012

Mr <<Initial Request for 2012-001-00616.TIF>> . Gaye Smith
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Dear Mr. Smith:

Thank you for your correspondence of February 4, 2012, addressed to the Right Honourable Stephen Harper, Prime Minister, concerning the Royal Society of Canada Report on Marine Biodiversity. Your email was forwarded to me for my consideration as Minister of Fisheries and Oceans.

The development of Canada's network is being guided by a new National Framework for Canada's Network of Marine Protected Areas (National Framework), which Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) produced in collaboration with Parks Canada, Environment Canada and provincial and territorial government partners. The document sets out an overarching direction for the establishment of 13 nationally consistent bioregional networks of marine protected areas, in accordance with internationally accepted best practices. Four of the bioregional networks will occur along Canada's Pacific coast, five in the Arctic, three in Atlantic Canada, and one in Canada's Great Lakes. The National Framework is available on DFO's website at < <http://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/oceans/publications/dmpaf-eczpm/framework-cadre2011-eng.asp> >.

With the approval in principle of the National Framework on September 1, 2011, by the Canadian Council of Fisheries and Aquaculture Ministers, DFO is now in a position to steer establishment of the bioregional networks of marine protected areas, starting with bioregions in the Pacific and Atlantic oceans. The steps in developing Canada's networks of marine protected areas include: identifying where vulnerable, ecologically important habitats occur; determining where there are gaps in protection of these vulnerable habitats; determining which protection or conservation measure is most appropriate for each vulnerable area; and identifying which government authority is best placed to fill each gap, over time, as resources allow.

Not every vulnerable area in the marine environment requires the level of protection provided by a marine protected area. In some cases, more targeted and flexible management measures such as Fisheries Act closures may be applied to achieve conservation objectives. The National Framework recognizes that a variety of marine conservation tools can contribute to Canada's network goals, and choosing the appropriate tool for each conservation need will ensure the timely and efficient protection of valuable marine and coastal resources.

Of the existing 810 federal-provincial-territorial marine protected areas within Canada's oceans and Great Lakes, eight were established by DFO under the Oceans Act. As part of ongoing network development, an additional seven candidate marine protected areas (known as Areas of Interest) are currently in varying stages of completion. Four of the candidate areas (Hecate Strait Glass Sponge Reefs, Laurentian Channel, St. Anns Bank, and Gaspésie (American Bank)) are among the twelve marine ecosystems recommended for protection by the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society. The remaining eight marine ecosystems fall under the purview of Parks Canada or Environment Canada.

Anticipated designation over the next few years of a number of these marine ecosystems will make a significant contribution toward the Government of Canada's commitment under the Convention of Biological Diversity to conserve 10 percent of coastal and marine areas within an ecologically representative network of marine protected areas by 2020.

Regarding sustainable fisheries management, DFO seeks to manage Canada's fisheries resources in a sustainable manner for the benefit of all Canadians. DFO continues to put into action many practices that focus on both rebuilding stocks and protecting those that are in a healthy state.

Managing Canada's fisheries is complex. Perfect knowledge of fish populations is never available; as such, decisions are made based on the best available scientific information. DFO has adopted management methods such as the precautionary approach, in order to ensure the completion of conservation goals and reduce the risk of making decisions that may threaten the long-term sustainability of a fishery. The precautionary approach, among other things, calls for decisions to err on the side of caution. This management practice has been implemented in the groundfish fishery.

Furthermore, DFO takes conservation into consideration when making fishery management decisions. To this end, the Department works with fish harvesters and other fishing interests to develop Integrated Fisheries Management Plans (IFMPs), which use the best available science to set limits on fishing gear and catch quotas, set fishing times, and incorporate various conservation measures designed to conserve fisheries resources. For more detailed information about Canada's various IFMPs, you may wish to visit DFO's website at < <http://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/fm-gp/peches-fisheries/ifmp-gmp/index-eng.htm> >.

In addition to IFMPs, the Department is operating under a Sustainable Fisheries Framework (SFF) that not only provides the basis for ensuring sustainable use, but also incorporates existing fisheries management policies with new and evolving policies. Overall, the SFF provides the foundation of an ecosystem-

based and precautionary approach to fisheries management in Canada. Additional information on the Framework can be found online at < <http://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/fm-gp/peches-fisheries/fish-ren-peche/sff-cpd/overview-cadre-eng.htm> >.

Thank you for your support of this important initiative.

Yours sincerely,

Original Signed by

Keith Ashfield

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