

Backgrounder

Tang.əwan – Һačx^wiqak – Tsigis Marine Protected Area

Fisheries and Oceans Canada is working in collaboration with First Nations to advance the designation of the proposed Tang.əwan – Һačx^wiqak – Tsigis Marine Protected Area (MPA) to help safeguard this sensitive deepwater marine environment and its unique seafloor features. The establishment of this new MPA will contribute approximately 0.88 per cent to Canada's goal to conserve 25 per cent of our ocean by 2025, making it the largest MPA off the Pacific West Coast in Canada.

The proposed Tang.əwan – Һačx^wiqak – Tsigis MPA contains globally rare features such as seamounts and hydrothermal vents with deepwater species that only exist here. Over 70 per cent of all known seamounts and all known hydrothermal vents in Canada are found here.

The MPA covers approximately 133,019 square kilometres and is located on average 150 kilometres off the west coast of Vancouver Island (approximately 95 kilometres at its closest from Vancouver Island) and just over 80 kilometres southwest of Haida Gwaii in the southern portion of the Offshore Pacific Bioregion. The site was first identified as an Area of Interest for the Marine Protected Area (MPA) in 2017 and a marine refuge of 88,000 square kilometres was subsequently created within the Area of Interest with prohibitions to prevent select fishing activities that pose a risk to the conservation objectives of the area. The Offshore Pacific marine refuge and its associated protection measures will remain in place and provide interim protection to the area while regulations for the new MPA are developed.

MPA planning and design process

First Nations and DFO worked collaboratively to design the MPA, including completing risk assessment work, providing key additions to the conservation objective and developing content for the Regulatory Intent Statement. The Offshore Pacific Advisory Committee was established in September 2017 to oversee planning and design and included representation from First Nations, the Province of BC, communities, marine industries, non-governmental organizations and academia. Input from First Nations and stakeholders was incorporated throughout the MPA planning and design process.

Collaborative Management with First Nations

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) agreement was signed by Canada, the Nuuchahnulth Tribal Council, the Council of the Haida Nation, Pacheedaht First Nation and Quatsino First Nation that outlines how the parties will collaboratively work together in the planning and cooperative management of the proposed MPA.

The MOU provides for an MPA Management Board with First Nation and DFO representation that will make best efforts to provide consensus advice to the decision-makers of all parties. This is a historic achievement that highlights the importance of Canada and First Nations working together in the spirit of reconciliation to cooperatively manage this MPA.

First Nations partner organizations have designated, or are in the process of designating, Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas within the proposed MPA, under their respective authorities, including the Nuuchahnulth Tribal Council. In October 2022, the Council of the Haida Nation House of Assembly designated the portion of the proposed Tang̱wan · ḥač̱w̱iqak · Tsigis Marine Protected Area lying within Haida Territory as a Haida Heritage Site. The Haida Nation and Canada also co-manage Sgaan Kinghlas-Bowie Seamount Marine Protected Area, the shallowest seamount on the west coast of Canada.