

News Release

For Immediate Release

Government of Canada and coastal First Nations announce progress to protect a large ecologically unique ocean area off the Pacific West Coast

February 7, 2023

Vancouver, British Columbia

Today at the Fifth International Marine Protected Areas Congress (IMPAC5) in Vancouver, the Honourable Joyce Murray, Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard together with the Council of the Haida Nation, Nuuchahnulth Tribal Council, Pacheedaht First Nation and Quatsino First Nation announced progress on the proposed *Tang.gwan — ḥačxʷiqak — Tsigis* Marine Protected Area (MPA), a large ecologically unique ocean area located on average 150 kilometres off the west coast of Vancouver Island.

Covering 133,019 square kilometres, the proposed *Tang.gwan — ḥačxʷiqak — Tsigis* MPA is home to extraordinary seafloor features, including more than 46 underwater mountains, known as seamounts, and all known hydrothermal vents in Canada. These deep-sea biological “hotspots” are globally rare and support deep-water species unique to this area.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) agreement has been reached between Canada and the Nuuchahnulth Tribal Council, the Council of the Haida Nation, Pacheedaht First Nation, and Quatsino First Nation to cooperatively manage the proposed new MPA – a historic step in a multi-year process by Canada and First Nations to protect this important space.

Formerly known as the Offshore Pacific Area of Interest, this deep-water ocean area was first identified for protection in May 2017 and measures to prevent certain fishing activities were subsequently put in place. Designating the proposed *Tang.gwan — ḥačxʷiqak — Tsigis* MPA under Canada’s *Oceans Act* would strengthen marine protection for the area by using zoning to refine fisheries management measures and expand prohibitions to include activities that pose a risk to the protection of the unique seafloor features, including oil and gas activities, deep sea mining and other activities subject to the MPA protection standard. Draft regulations for the MPA will be pre-published in Canada Gazette Part 1, on February 18th, for a public comment period of 30 days.

The new name for the proposed MPA consists of a Haida word meaning “deep ocean” (*Tang.gwan*), a Nuuchahnulth and Pacheedaht word meaning “deepest part of the ocean” (*ḥačxʷiqak*) and a Quatsino word referring to a “monster of the deep” (*Tsigis*). It represents the strong connections and shared values between partner First Nations and recognizes their intimate connection to the marine environment.

The *Tang.gwan — ḥačx^wiqak — Tsigis* MPA would replace the existing marine refuge when designated and would contribute an additional 0.88 per cent to Canada's marine conservation target of conserving 25 per cent of Canada's marine and coastal areas by 2025, making it the largest MPA designated under the *Oceans Act* to date.

Quotes

"We are standing shoulder-to-shoulder with First Nations, in the spirit of reconciliation on this agreement to cooperatively manage the proposed *Tang.gwan — ḥačx^wiqak — Tsigis*. This Marine Protected Area demonstrates Canada's shared determination to protect distinctive ecosystems and our priority to advance reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. Rare and unique species will be protected, contributing to the ocean's health and sustainability."

The Honourable Joyce Murray, Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard

"The Haida Nation looks forward to working together with the Nuuchahnulth Nations, Quatsino and Pacheedaht First Nations along with Canada to develop a management plan with meaningful measures for looking after the *Tang.gwan — ḥačx^wiqak — Tsigis* Marine Protected Area. The Memorandum of Understanding and our designation of the Haida portion of this area as a Haida Heritage Site demonstrates our shared long-term commitment to protecting the ocean and safeguarding the biodiversity that it supports for future generations."

President Gaagwiis Jason Alsop, Council of the Haida Nation

"The Nuuchahnulth Nations are pleased to enter this memorandum of understanding with the Council of the Haida Nation, Quatsino and Pacheedaht First Nations and DFO. It is way past time that DFO and First Nations work collaboratively to strengthen ocean protections with a view to keep the ocean sustainable for future generations."

Cloy-e-iis, Dr. Judith Sayers, Nuuchahnulth Tribal Council

"Pacheedaht First Nation are ocean based people. Our culture and way of life are intricately connected to our marine Territory. The collaborative nations to nations agreement for *Tang.gwan — ḥačx^wiqak — Tsigis* Marine Protected Area is necessary for the conservation and protection of this unique place in our Territory and an important step on the path of reconciliation. We must all continue to find ways for Indigenous governance of our oceans to be respected and honoured."

Chief Jeff Jones, Pacheedaht First Nation

"Quatsino First Nation relies on our ḍams (Ocean) resources in a physical, spiritual, and cultural way. We are proud to stand alongside the other Nations in this collaborative first step in marine conservation. ḍams are the life-blood of our territory."

Chief Tom Nelson, Quatsino First Nation

Quick Facts

- The Government of Canada, Nuuchahnulth Tribal Council, Council of the Haida Nation, Pacheedaht First Nation and Quatsino First Nation have been working collaboratively since 2017 to advance the protection of the proposed *Tang.gwan — hačx^wiqak — Tsigis* Marine Protected Area.
- Over 70 per cent of all known Canadian Seamounts and all known Canadian hydrothermal vents are within the proposed *Tang.gwan — hačx^wiqak — Tsigis* Marine Protected Area.
- Commercial and recreational bottom contact groundfish fishing on the seamounts and in the hydrothermal vents area of the proposed MPA have been closed since 2017.
- The Memorandum of Understanding is a cooperative management agreement that establishes a management board composed of First Nations and the Government of Canada and seeks to operate on a consensus decision-making basis.
- It is proposed that Canada's new marine protected area [protection standard](#) would apply once the area is formally designated.
- Draft regulations for the MPA will be pre-published in Canada Gazette Part 1, on February 18th, for a public comment period of 30 days.
- First Nations partner organizations have designated, or are in the process of designating, Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas within the proposed MPA, including the Nuuchahnulth Tribal Council. The Council of the Haida Nation House of Assembly has designated the portion of the MPA within Haida Territory as a Haida Heritage Site.

Associated Links

- [Tang.gwan — hačx^wiqak — Tsigis Area of Interest](#)
- [Marine Protected Area protection standard](#)
- [Nuuchahnulth Tribal Council](#)
- [Quatsino First Nation](#)
- [Council of the Haida Nation](#)

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Tang.gwan — ḥačx^wiqak — Tsigis Marine Protected Area



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