



2025 REPORT OF THE COMMISSIONER OF THE ENVIRONMENT
AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT TO THE PARLIAMENT OF CANADA
ON BEHALF OF THE AUDITOR GENERAL OF CANADA

Establishing Marine Protected Areas



Office of the
Auditor General
of Canada

Bureau du
vérificateur général
du Canada

**INDEPENDENT
AUDITOR'S REPORT**

Performance audit reports

This report presents the results of a performance audit conducted by the Office of the Auditor General of Canada (OAG) under the authority of the Auditor General Act.

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- report both positive and negative findings
- conclude against the established audit objectives
- make recommendations for improvement when there are significant differences between criteria and assessed performance

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At a Glance



Overall message

Overall, we concluded that Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Parks Canada, and Environment and Climate Change Canada were not on track to establish protected and conserved areas covering 25% of marine and coastal ecosystems by 2025. We also concluded that the 3 federal organizations had not developed an updated, collaborative plan to establish a network of protected and conserved marine areas by 2030 that are ecologically representative and of significance to biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services.

Oceans support a significant portion of the planet's biodiversity, regulate climate, and produce most of the oxygen we breathe. To help safeguard these critical systems and contribute to the battle against climate change, Canada committed to conserving 25% of marine and coastal areas in Canada by 2025, and 30% by 2030. However, as of March 2025, only 15.5% of Canada's marine and coastal areas were protected and conserved.

The 3 federal organizations have completed important steps to reach the 2030 target, such as identifying new areas of interest, undertaking site feasibility assessments, and engaging with Indigenous governments and organizations and interested parties. They also designed new approaches to protect and conserve areas with Indigenous governments and organizations to advance cooperative management, and they have formalized the requirement to consider and incorporate Indigenous Knowledge when establishing new areas.

Despite these important advances, the 3 federal organizations had not developed clear guidance to implement the Federal Marine Protected Areas Protection Standard to prohibit harmful activities such as oil and gas exploration, mining, bottom trawling, and disposal of waste, dumping of fill, and vessel discharge.

Urgent action is needed worldwide to address the biodiversity and climate crises. Given the years required to properly consult on and establish protected and conserved marine and coastal areas, the federal government must pick up the pace to meet its 2030 commitments.

Key facts and findings



- This audit is part of a series of 3 reports focused on protected and conserved areas across Canada. The 2 other audits are [Establishing Terrestrial Protected Areas](#) and [Federal-Indigenous Management of Protected Areas](#).
- Canada is home to the world's longest coastlines, and 15% of the population lives within 10 kilometres of the coast.
- To advance its marine protection and conservation targets, Canada launched marine conservation targets in 2021, a 5-year \$842.8-million horizontal initiative to conduct conservation activities, such as establishing protected and conserved areas.
- In December 2022, Canada signed on to the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, which commits Canada to conserving 30% of marine and coastal areas by 2030, including areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, while respecting the rights of Indigenous peoples.
- We found that Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Parks Canada, and Environment and Climate Change Canada did not maximize the use of the Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database, which is critical to national as well as international reporting on marine and terrestrial protected and conserved areas.

See [Recommendations and Responses](#) at the end of this report.

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Introduction

Background

Commitment to conserve marine and coastal areas



Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources
Source: United Nations

1. The United Nations recognizes biodiversity loss as one of the world’s most pressing emergencies. Biodiversity is declining in all regions of the world, including in Canada. Healthy ecosystems, both on land and in water, provide habitat needed to maintain biodiversity, as well as services essential for human well-being, such as the provision of food, carbon sequestration, and flood control.
2. The planet’s surface is 71% ocean. Canada has the world’s longest coastline, which includes the coasts of the Pacific, Atlantic, and Arctic oceans. In 2021, 15% of people in Canada lived within 10 kilometres of the coastline. Marine and coastal areas are of global significance and offer many benefits. For example, they sustain biodiversity and deliver economic benefits through fisheries, tourism, and marine shipping and they support the cultural identities and traditions of Indigenous peoples.
3. Over the past several decades, Canada has committed to marine conservation, and important international targets have been established since 2010 ([Exhibit 1](#)). These targets have increased over time due to heightening concern internationally about the continued loss of biodiversity and the threat that this poses to nature and human well-being. The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework aims to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030, building upon the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goal 14 to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development.

Exhibit 1—Government of Canada commitments to conserve marine and coastal areas since 2010

Year	Commitment	Context
2010	Conserve 10% of marine and coastal areas by 2020	Canada, as a signatory to the United Nations’ Convention on Biological Diversity, committed to this target through the Aichi Biodiversity Targets adopted in 2010. This target was incorporated in 2016 in the 2020 Biodiversity Goals and Targets for Canada.

Year	Commitment	Context
2019	Conserve 25% of marine and coastal areas by 2025	This target was introduced in the 2019 Speech from the Throne. Federal Budget 2021 allocated nearly \$1 billion over 5 years to protect the health of our oceans.
2022	Conserve at least 30% of Canada's marine and coastal areas by 2030	In December 2022, Canada adopted the United Nations' Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework under the Convention on Biological Diversity. The framework sets out 23 targets aiming to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030, with a vision of living in harmony with nature by 2050. This commitment to the 30% by 2030 target was incorporated in 2022 in the Federal Sustainable Development Strategy 2022 to 2026 and in 2024 in Canada's 2030 Nature Strategy: Halting and Reversing Biodiversity Loss in Canada.

Source: Based on information from Environment and Climate Change Canada

4. The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework's 30% by 2030 target is both quantitative and qualitative. It is focused on both the total area conserved, as well as the specific qualities of protected and conserved areas needed for effective biodiversity conservation, including:

- to be well-connected, to allow for species to move freely and natural processes to flow unimpeded
- to be representative of the country's ecological diversity
- to protect areas of particular importance to biodiversity; for example, species at risk habitat or areas important to species during their life cycles
- to protect areas of particular importance for ecosystem functions, such as water or carbon cycling, and ecosystem services; for example, climate regulation or flood mitigation

5. Countries that have adopted the target have made the commitment to recognize and respect the rights of Indigenous peoples in the protection and conservation of marine and coastal areas. The countries also committed to full and effective participation of Indigenous peoples in decision making for establishing protected and conserved areas.

6. In this report, the terms “protected and conserved” marine and coastal areas is used to describe: (1) **protected areas, and** (2) **other effective area-based conservation measures**, both of which contribute to the 2025 and 2030 targets:

- **Protected areas** are clearly defined geographical spaces, recognized, dedicated, and managed through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term protection of nature along with associated ecosystem services and cultural values. Marine protected areas are a type of protected area established under legislation. Marine protected areas differ from one another. Some may include strict no-take zones, where fishing activities and extractive activities, such as mining and drilling, are prohibited, while others may include sustainably managed zones. This approach is meant to provide flexibility to meet the conservation objectives of the protected area.
- **Conserved areas** in this report refer to **other effective area-based conservation measures**, which are intended as geographically defined areas, other than a protected area, that are governed and managed to achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the conservation of biodiversity in its natural habitats. A marine refuge is 1 type of other effective area-based conservation measure and is the name given to a fisheries closure that has been recognized as a marine other effective area-based conservation measure.

7. Canada has several legislative tools available for the protection and conservation of marine and coastal areas ([Exhibit 2](#)).

Exhibit 2—Enabling federal legislation to protect and conserve marine and coastal areas

Tool	Lead department or agency	Enabling federal legislation	Description	Result
National marine conservation area	Parks Canada	Canada National Marine Conservation Areas Act	A marine or coastal area established and managed for the purpose of protecting and conserving representative marine areas for the benefit, education, and enjoyment of all.	Long-term protection of an area

Tool	Lead department or agency	Enabling federal legislation	Description	Result
Marine national wildlife area	Environment and Climate Change Canada	Canada Wildlife Act	A marine or coastal area established to protect wildlife (in particular migratory birds or species at risk) and wildlife habitat, for the purpose of conservation, research, and interpretation.	Long-term protection of an area
Migratory bird sanctuary	Environment and Climate Change Canada	Migratory Birds Convention Act, 1994	A marine or coastal area that protects birds, nests, and eggs during the period of migration, nesting, and staging.	Long-term protection of an area
Oceans Act—Marine protected area	Fisheries and Oceans Canada	Oceans Act (established through regulations made by Governor in Council ¹ upon recommendation by the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans)	A marine area established and managed to achieve long-term conservation and protection of marine species (including species that are threatened or endangered or part of a commercial or non-commercial fishery), their habitats (including unique habitats), areas of high biodiversity or biological productivity, and areas for the purpose of maintaining ecological integrity or when conservation and protection of a marine species or habitat is otherwise necessary for the fulfillment of the Minister's mandate.	Long-term protection of an area

Tool	Lead department or agency	Enabling federal legislation	Description	Result
Oceans Act—Marine protected area	Fisheries and Oceans Canada	Oceans Act (designated by ministerial order ²)	A marine area not already established by regulations designated to provide interim protection for up to 5 years, where certain ongoing human activities may continue, but new activities that harm, disturb, damage, destroy or remove marine species, habitats, or unique geological or archeological features are prohibited.	Interim protection of an area for up to 5 years—after which long-term protection is provided, or protections are lifted, or, in exceptional cases, an interim protection is extended
Other effective area-based conservation measure—Marine Refuge	Fisheries and Oceans Canada	Fisheries Act (a fisheries closure can be assessed to determine whether it meets criteria in the Canadian guidance to be recognized as a marine other effective area-based conservation measure)	A marine or coastal area with policy-based status granted to protect marine biodiversity through the provision of long-term biodiversity conservation benefits.	Long-term conservation benefits

¹ Governor in Council—The Governor General, who acts on the advice of Cabinet and, as the formal executive body, gives legal effect to those decisions of Cabinet that are to have the force of law.

² A ministerial order is when the authority for an executive order or regulation is a minister.

Source: Based on information from Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Parks Canada, and Environment and Climate Change Canada

Protecting and conserving marine and coastal areas in Canada

8. In 2021, Canada launched Funding to Implement Canada's New Marine Conservation Targets, a 5-year, \$842.8-million federal government horizontal initiative. The objective of the **horizontal initiative**¹ is to conserve 25% of Canada's marine and coastal areas by 2025 and to work towards conserving 30% of those areas by 2030. Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Parks Canada, and Environment and Climate Change Canada were allocated \$509.1 million from the horizontal initiative to establish, monitor, and manage marine protected and conserved areas as follows:

- \$450.2 million to Fisheries and Oceans Canada for the establishment, management, and monitoring of marine protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures
- \$48.2 million to Parks Canada to expand and conserve Canada's network of protected areas by means of the expansion and monitoring of national marine conservation areas
- \$10.7 million to Environment and Climate Change Canada for the establishment of new marine national wildlife areas

9. Canada's national and international reporting on marine and terrestrial protected and conserved areas relies on Environment and Climate Change Canada's database. The Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database uses information provided by federal organizations, provincial and territorial governments, Indigenous governments and organizations, and other data providers to quantify annually the protected and conserved areas of Canada.

Collaboration to achieve marine targets

10. Canada's 2030 Nature Strategy: Halting and Reversing Biodiversity Loss in Canada, released in 2024, is the country's action plan for the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. The strategy outlines the federal government's national leadership and coordination role. However, there can be challenges to coordination. Marine and coastal areas are largely under federal jurisdiction, but decisions for advancing marine conservation areas often need to be made in collaboration with Indigenous governments and organizations, and provinces and territories as well as other partners. For example, when relevant, the Canada National Marine

¹ **Horizontal initiative**—An initiative in which multiple organizations must work together to achieve shared outcomes.

Conservation Areas Act requires administrative control of seabed and intertidal zones to be transferred from provincial and territorial control to Parks Canada. Activities such as this can take time. In addition, coordination activities can be challenged by unexpected events such as the COVID-19 pandemic where the launch of the horizontal initiative coincided with the start of the pandemic. Pandemic-related restrictions caused delays and challenges to complete scientific assessments and consultations with Indigenous governments and organizations.

Roles and responsibilities

11. **Fisheries and Oceans Canada.** The department is responsible for conserving and protecting Canada's oceans and aquatic ecosystems and aquatic species from negative human impact and invasive species. Since April 2021, the department has been the lead department on the 5-year horizontal initiative on funding to implement Canada's new marine conservation targets. This includes leading collaboration with other federal partner organizations that received funding to conduct activities supporting the establishment of marine protected areas and areas recognized as other effective area-based conservation measures. Fisheries and Oceans Canada has the responsibility to identify marine areas that need conservation or protection in partnership, collaboration, and consultation with provinces, territories, Indigenous governments and organizations, and interested parties. The Minister of Fisheries and Oceans is responsible for:

- recommending the Governor in Council establish marine protected areas by regulation pursuant to the Oceans Act
- designating marine protected areas by ministerial order pursuant to the Oceans Act

The department is also responsible for managing and regulating marine fisheries and protecting fish and their habitats under the Fisheries Act. This includes implementing fishery closures and recognizing some of those fishery closures as marine refuges—the term given to these fishery closures when they are recognized as other effective area-based conservation measures.

12. **Parks Canada.** Parks Canada is mandated to create a system of national parks under the Canada National Parks Act, and to establish a system of national marine conservation areas under the Canada National Marine Conservation Areas Act. Regulations under the Canada National Marine Conservation Areas Act are made by the Governor in Council, some upon ministerial recommendation.

13. **Environment and Climate Change Canada.** The department is responsible for conserving natural heritage including strengthening the protection and recovery of migratory birds and their habitats. This includes the establishment of migratory bird sanctuaries, including those with marine components, under the Migratory Birds Convention Act, 1994. Environment and Climate Change Canada is also responsible for national wildlife areas, including those with marine components, and for marine national wildlife areas under the Canada Wildlife Act. The Minister of Environment and Climate Change is responsible for the recovery of species at risk and conservation of migratory birds and the protection of habitat on federal lands other than those under the responsibility of the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans or under the responsibility of Parks Canada. Environment and Climate Change Canada works with Fisheries and Oceans Canada and Transport Canada when establishing and managing national wildlife areas, particularly for regulating activities that involve shared or overlapping areas of responsibility. The department also maintains the Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database, Canada's official repository for protected and conserved areas information, which is used for national and international reporting. The department also represents the Government of Canada in matters related to the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Focus of the audit

14. This audit focused on whether Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Parks Canada, and Environment and Climate Change Canada were on track to establish protected and conserved areas covering 25% of marine and coastal ecosystems by 2025. It also focused on whether the organizations were planning to protect and conserve areas covering 30% of marine and coastal ecosystems by 2030 that are ecologically representative and of significance to biodiversity and ecosystem functions.

15. This audit is important because urgent action is needed worldwide to address the biodiversity and climate crises. Oceans help regulate climate and support much of the planet's biodiversity. Human activities continue to drive biodiversity loss at rates unprecedented in human history. A network of marine protected and conserved areas of high ecological value would enable Canada to meet its commitments to the international community and contribute to its goal to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030. Meeting commitments could lessen the risks of further degradation of important habitats, weakened ecosystem functions and services, and missed opportunities for reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. Clearly identifying areas that have high conservation value would

increase certainty with infrastructure planning and decision making as the government seeks to expedite project approvals for projects of national importance.

16. This audit is 1 of 3 fall 2025 Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development reports on protected and conserved areas. The other 2 reports are [Establishing Terrestrial Protected Areas](#) and [Federal-Indigenous Management of Protected Areas](#).

17. More details about the audit objective, scope, approach, and criteria are in [About the Audit](#) at the end of this report.

Findings and Recommendations

Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Parks Canada, and Environment and Climate Change Canada were not on track to meet the target to protect and conserve 25% of marine and coastal areas by December 2025

Why this finding matters

18. This finding matters because the federal government has a key leadership role to play in increasing protected and conserved areas. It is important to plan and act in a timely manner to prevent further damage and destruction of marine and coastal ecosystems of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services. One of the main means of conserving biodiversity is by creating a network of marine protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures. Protected and conserved areas have long-term environmental, economic, and health benefits and are essential to ensuring that these benefits are sustained for future generations.

Context

19. In April 2021, the start of the horizontal initiative requiring multiple organizations to work together towards the conservation targets, Canada had conserved and protected 12.5% of Canada's marine and coastal areas. By that time:

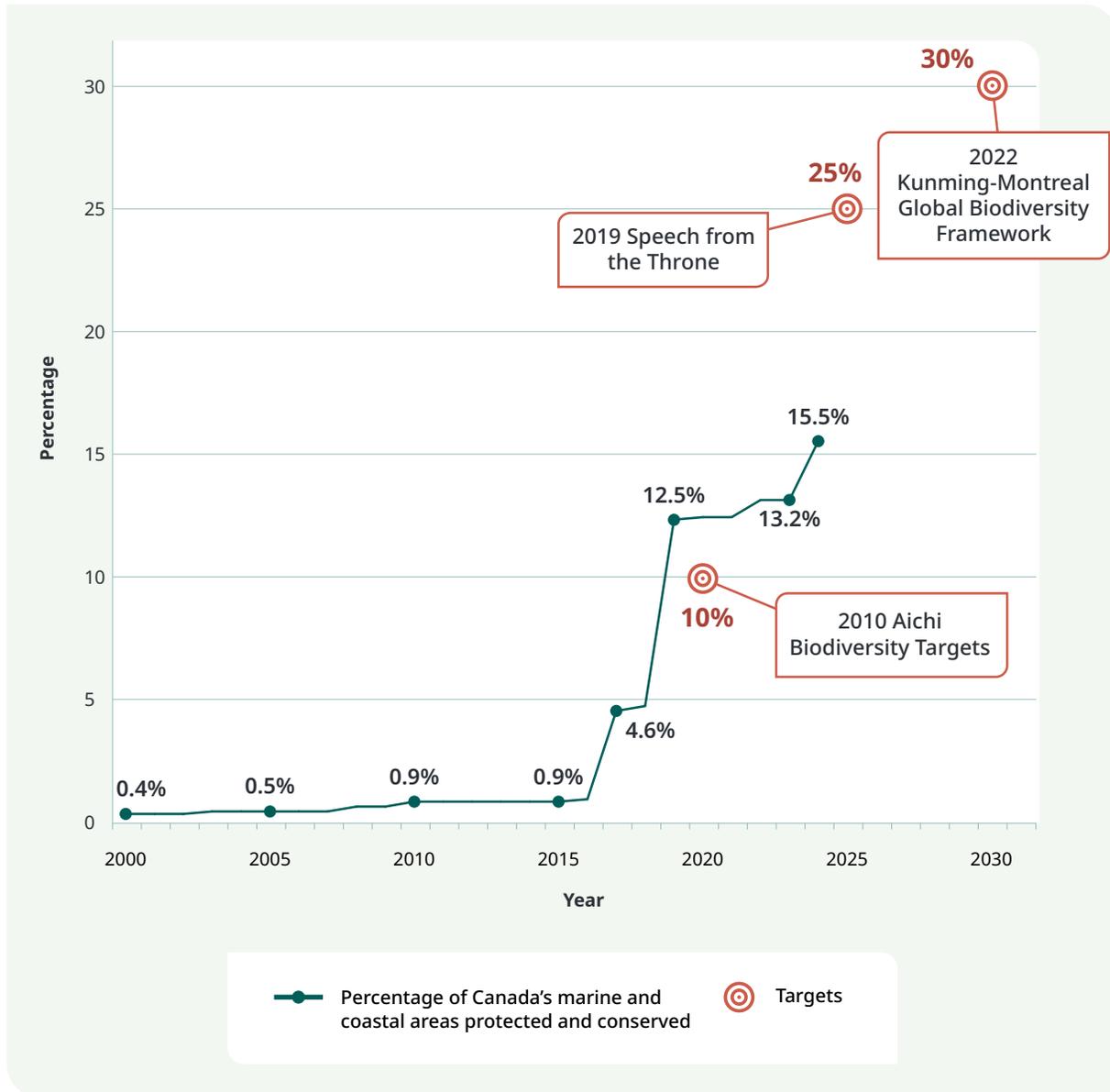
- Fisheries and Oceans Canada had established 12 Oceans Act marine protected areas through Governor in Council regulations; designated 1 Oceans Act marine protected area through ministerial order; and had recognized 56 other effective area-based conservation measures (marine refuges). In 2017, Fisheries and Oceans Canada recognized approximately 48 marine refuges, some of which were part of a mass review of existing fisheries closures to determine which ones could be counted towards Canada's marine conservation targets.
- Parks Canada had established 3 marine protected areas, including a national marine conservation area; a national marine conservation area reserve; and a marine park. The agency also established 1 Canadian landmark and 13 national parks with marine components.
- Environment and Climate Change Canada had established 1 national marine wildlife area. It also had established 44 migratory bird sanctuaries and 10 national wildlife areas that include marine components.

Some progress was achieved towards the target, but work was not completed

Findings

20. We found that Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Parks Canada, and Environment and Climate Change Canada were not on track to meet the December 2025 target to conserve and protect 25% of marine and coastal areas ([Exhibit 3](#)).

Exhibit 3—The 3 organizations were not on track to meet the 2025 target of establishing marine and coastal protected and conserved areas



Source: Based on information from the Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database, Environment and Climate Change Canada, 2024

[Read the Exhibit 3 text description](#)

21. By March 2025, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Parks Canada, Environment and Climate Change Canada and the provinces and territories had protected and conserved 15.5% (or approximately 893,437 square kilometres) of Canada's marine and coastal areas.

Although the organizations had completed important work, this left an approximate gap of 9.5 percentage points (or approximately 544,063 square kilometres) to meet the 2025 target ([Exhibit 4](#)).

Exhibit 4—With all contributions, there was a gap of 9.5 percentage points in attaining the target to conserve 25% of marine and coastal areas by December 2025

Lead authority	Type of tool	Contribution to marine conservation target
Fisheries and Oceans Canada	Marine protected area	8.4%
Fisheries and Oceans Canada	Other effective area-based conservation measure (marine refuge)	4.3%
Parks Canada	Marine protected area	2.1%
Environment and Climate Change Canada	Marine protected area	0.5%
Provinces and territories	Various conservation tools	0.4%
Total (including 0.2% correction to account for overlaps in reported contributions)		15.5%
Total gap in attaining the 25% target		9.5 percentage points

Source: Based on information from the Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database, Environment and Climate Change Canada, 2024

22. **Fisheries and Oceans Canada** set a target in April 2021 of recognizing 3 new marine other effective area-based conservation measures by December 2025. As of March 2025, the department had exceeded this target by recognizing 5 such measures. The department had also started work on assessments of additional sites for other effective area-based conservation measures.

23. In April 2021, Fisheries and Oceans Canada also set a target of establishing 16 new Oceans Act marine protected areas by December 2025. However, as of March 2025, the department had established only 1 new marine protected area, the Tang.gwan — ḥačx^wiḡak — Tsigis Marine Protected Area established in 2024 in the Offshore Pacific Marine Bioregion. Also in 2024, the department re-designated the Tuvaijuittuq Marine Protected Area, in the Arctic Basin and Archipelago marine bioregions, through a second ministerial order extending protection for up to an additional 5 years to complete the required scientific work and consultations by 2029.

24. In addition to these 2 sites, Fisheries and Oceans Canada had 9 marine sites at various steps in its marine protected areas 5-step establishment process. The department had 3 sites at step 3, and 2 of them, the Sarvarjuaq study area and the Qikiqtait study area located within the Nunavut Settlement Area, were targeted to be designated as Oceans Act marine protected areas by ministerial order by the end of 2025 ([Exhibit 5](#)).

Exhibit 5—Fisheries and Oceans Canada had not completed all steps of the marine protected areas establishment process for most of the sites it had identified



Source: Based on information from Fisheries and Oceans Canada

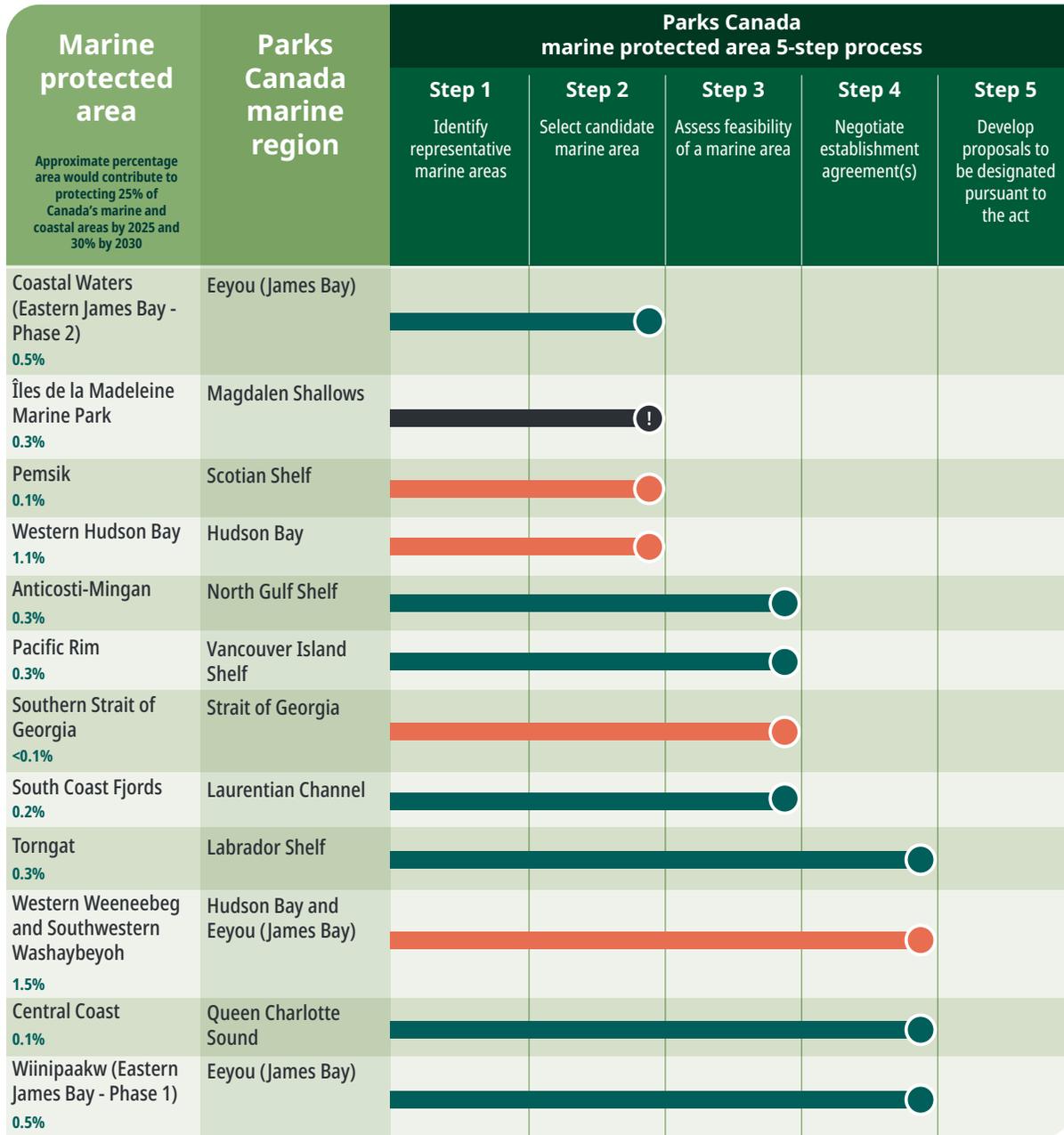
[Read the Exhibit 5 text description](#)

25. **Parks Canada** committed, in 2021, to establishing 10 new national marine conservation areas by 2026, including making progress on 9 by December 2025. By March 2025, Parks Canada had not established any new national marine conservation areas. Parks Canada had work underway on 12 marine sites and had undertaken preliminary discussions with potential partners for considering sites in other marine regions ([Exhibit 6](#)).

26. As of March 2025, Parks Canada, in collaboration with the Province of Quebec, also completed feasibility work and consultations on the expansion of the Saguenay–St. Lawrence Marine Park, established in 1998. While this expansion is significant in terms of increase in size and the level of protection of previously designated Quebec sites, it will not add to the 2025 target as it already has been counted towards the target.

27. **Environment and Climate Change Canada** committed in April 2021 to achieving progress towards the establishment or the expansion of 5 new marine protected or conserved areas by December 2025. As of March 2025, the department had made limited progress on 3 sites that were all in the initial steps of its establishment process. While the original target was 5, the department reduced its contribution to 3 by combining proposed sites and by transferring responsibility for a site to Parks Canada. Environment and Climate Change Canada's sites were intended to protect wildlife and their habitats and to contribute to broader biodiversity conservation; however, during the audit period, the department did not establish any new marine protected areas.

Exhibit 6—Some of Parks Canada’s efforts to establish national marine protected areas advanced as planned



■ Did not advance as planned during audit period
 ■ Proceeded as planned during audit period
 ! Deemed not feasible in February 2025

Source: Based on information from Parks Canada

[Read the Exhibit 6 text description](#)

28. Despite not meeting targets, the 3 organizations undertook foundational work towards the 30% by 2030 target to protect and conserve marine and coastal areas. This included completing important milestones and steps of their establishment processes, such as:

- developing policy and guidance to support effectiveness of marine conservation sites
- identifying areas of interest and new proposed marine sites
- undertaking feasibility assessments of sites, creating advisory committees, and identifying feasible marine sites
- facilitating engagements and consultations with Indigenous governments and organizations and with provinces, territories, and partners
- leading negotiations for conservation planning initiatives, and negotiating and signing agreements with Indigenous peoples, such as Inuit impact and benefit agreements and long-term project finance for permanence agreements, both of which support collaborative, Indigenous-led, large-scale conservation planning of marine sites and long-term stewardship of resources

Funding for the horizontal initiative was set to end in March 2026. There was no additional funding for the 30% by 2030 target as of the end of our audit period.

29. The value generated from these initiatives includes long-term marine conservation planning to conserve biodiversity through the protection of species, habitats, and ecosystems. These initiatives also generate value by preserving Indigenous Knowledge and contributing to cultural continuity and reconciliation efforts with Indigenous peoples. This is done by fostering local initiatives and capacity-building that generate broader social, economic, and cultural benefits.

30. Our recommendation for this section is at [paragraph 40](#).

The organizations did not have an updated collaborative federal or national framework to protect and conserve marine and coastal areas and to achieve the qualitative elements of the 2030 target

Why this finding matters

31. This finding matters because conservation efforts are not just about reaching an overall percentage in terms of the total area protected and conserved, but are also about maintaining and restoring the quality of those areas and recognizing and respecting the rights of Indigenous peoples. Resilient marine and coastal areas contribute to halting and reversing biodiversity loss, and building this resilience depends on establishing protected and conserved areas that include the 4 qualitative elements of the 30% by 2030 target:

- well-connected
- ecologically representative
- of importance to biodiversity
- of importance for ecosystem functions and services

Context

32. Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Parks Canada, and Environment and Climate Change Canada each have their own individual long-term plans to guide their marine conservation activities. In 2005, the organizations developed a federal long-term strategy for a network of marine protected areas. The strategy was followed in 2011 by a national framework in partnership with provinces and territories that outlines the proposed overarching vision and goals for Canadian marine protection and conservation ([Exhibit 7](#)).

Exhibit 7—The organizations have federal, national, and organizational long-term strategies on marine conservation

Year	Document name	Lead organization	Scope	Purpose and relevance of the document
1995	Sea to Sea to Sea: Canada's National Marine Conservation Areas System Plan	Parks Canada	Departmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guides the agency's design of a network of national marine conservation areas by dividing Canada's oceans and Great Lakes into 29 marine regions, with a long-term goal of establishing 1 national marine conservation area per region • Outlines establishment steps and is supported by the 2022 Policy on the Establishment and Management of National Marine Conservation Areas, which updated the commitment to at least 1 conserved area per marine region
2002	Canada's Oceans Strategy	Fisheries and Oceans Canada	Federal (multi-departmental)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outlines that Fisheries and Oceans Canada leads integrated management • Is supported by the Policy and Operational Framework for Integrated Management of Estuarine, Coastal and Marine Environments in Canada, which calls for the identification of ecologically sensitive habitats and areas of interest for marine protected areas, and for integrated management to provide a framework for a coordinated national network of marine protected areas across federal organizations

Year	Document name	Lead organization	Scope	Purpose and relevance of the document
2005	Canada's Federal Marine Protected Areas Strategy	Fisheries and Oceans Canada	Federal (multi-departmental)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plans for a collaborative framework for Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Parks Canada, and Environment and Climate Change Canada to coordinate planning for the establishment of a comprehensive network of marine protected areas • Clarifies roles and responsibilities and articulates how federal marine protected area tools can be used in a complementary and cohesive manner
2011	National Framework for Canada's Network of Marine Protected Areas	Fisheries and Oceans Canada	National (federal and provinces / territories)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sets strategic direction for developing a national network of marine protected areas made up of bioregional networks • Aims to ensure consistency in the development of networks across the country, supporting their collective contribution to an ecologically representative and national network that protects the biological diversity and health of the marine environment
2023	Environment and Climate Change Canada's National Wildlife Areas and Migratory Bird Sanctuaries: Strategic Program Plan and Vision to 2030	Environment and Climate Change Canada	Departmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outlines the department's approaches to manage and expand Environment and Climate Change Canada's existing protected areas network, using the Canada Wildlife Act as its principal legal tool • Outlines establishment steps

Source: Based on information from Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Parks Canada, and Environment and Climate Change Canada

33. In addition, in 2019, the Government of Canada announced the Federal Marine Protected Areas Protection Standard. Its purpose is to provide a common minimum level of protection and greater consistency and clarity on prohibited types of activities such as:

- oil and gas exploration, development, and production
- mineral exploration and exploitation
- disposal at sea of waste and other matter, dumping of fill, and deposits of deleterious drugs and pesticides
- fishing via bottom-trawl gear

As part of the protection standard, Transport Canada is to enhance restrictions on certain vessel discharges that occur within marine protected areas where possible, noting that standard technical and operational exceptions will vary. In 2023, additional details were released on the scope of the prohibitions set out in the standards.

34. Furthermore, in 2019, Fisheries and Oceans Canada also announced the marine Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures Protection Standard. This standard takes a risk-based approach where activities are assessed case-by-case. To implement this standard, the department issued guidance in 2022, which replaced the 2016 interim guidance, to provide a consistent science-based framework and criteria for the recognition of marine other effective area-based conservation measures and to ensure consistency with global standards.

The organizations' plans addressed most of the qualitative elements needed to meet Canada's 2030 target, but they lacked an updated collaborative framework

Findings

35. We found that the 2005 federal strategy and the 2011 national framework reflected the qualitative elements to meet Canada's 2030 target. However, the organizations lacked an updated collaborative federal or national network approach to align and coordinate their marine conservation work to achieve these elements. The 2011 national framework committed to developing a national network by 2012 composed of individual bioregional network plans. However, this work had not been completed. Fisheries and Oceans Canada completed 2 bioregional network plans but did not have plans to complete bioregional planning elsewhere. As was reported in our 2025 Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development [Report 3—Integrated Oceans Management](#), marine network plans were only in place in the Scotian Shelf-Bay of Fundy Bioregion and the Great Bear Sea

(Northern Shelf Bioregion). Without complete bioregional planning, the department lacked the framework needed to support the realization of clear and measurable bioregional objectives.

36. In addition, the 2005 federal strategy and the 2011 national framework had not been updated to realize the 30% by 2030 target, or to reflect the federal protection standard for marine protected areas, which are important aspects of the needed planning.

37. We also found that the 2002 Canada's Oceans Strategy, led by Fisheries and Oceans Canada, the 2023 Environment and Climate Change Canada strategic program plan, and the 1995 Parks Canada system plan did consider the following 2 qualitative elements:

- of importance to biodiversity
- of importance for ecosystem functions and services

However, the plans had not been updated to reflect the qualitative element of marine and coastal areas being well-connected. In addition, only the Parks Canada system plan included the selection of ecologically representative marine and coastal areas. Parks Canada has a goal to establish at least 1 national marine conservation area that is ecologically representative in each of its marine regions. However, it had not set a timeline to achieve this goal. While Parks Canada had guidance to consider representativity during site selection, it did not have a specific percentage threshold for sites to be considered ecologically representative. At the time of our audit, the agency had marine protected areas in only 4 out of 24 of its ocean marine regions.

38. We found that the 1 marine protected area established, and 80% of the marine refuges, recognized by Fisheries and Oceans Canada during the audit period were designed for cooperative management with Indigenous governments and organizations. In addition, all 4 feasibility studies led by Parks Canada during the audit period incorporated cooperative management considerations. We also found that Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Parks Canada, and Environment and Climate Change Canada's recent policies and guidelines increasingly supported the formal incorporation of Indigenous Knowledge in the processes for establishing marine protected areas and recognizing other effective area-based conservation measures. They emphasized collaborating with Indigenous governments and organizations, supporting Indigenous-led conservation, and requiring respect for Indigenous and treaty rights. In some regions, long-term

partnership agreements were signed to support Indigenous peoples in co-developing marine conservation areas. For instance, key agreements such as the SINAA Agreement; the Tallurutiup Imanga National Marine Conservation Area Inuit Impact and Benefit Agreement; and the Great Bear Sea Project Finance for Permanence initiative illustrate this new approach.

39. We also found that Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Parks Canada, and Environment and Climate Change Canada had interdepartmental marine conservation committees with mandates for collaboration and coordination. The decision-making processes of the organizations were also based on considerations such as individual policies, guidance and scientific considerations that include ecologically and biologically significant areas, key biodiversity areas, sensitive benthic areas, ecological representation, and risk assessments as well as input from Indigenous governments and organizations and interested parties. The 3 audited organizations, along with other key partners such as First Nations and the Government of British Columbia, did collaborate in conservation tool selection when developing the network plan for the Great Bear Sea (Northern Shelf Bioregion). However, by the end of our audit period, there was no shared policy among the 3 organizations to guide the selection of marine conservation tools to consistently inform decisions and to facilitate public sharing of information to help build trust when deciding on the most appropriate tool.

Recommendation

40. To meet the target to conserve 30% of marine and coastal areas by 2030, including the qualitative elements of the target, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, in collaboration with Parks Canada and Environment and Climate Change Canada, should update and implement the federal collaborative framework so that Canada's network of marine protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures is well protected and conserved.

The department's response. Agreed.

See [Recommendations and Responses](#) at the end of this report for detailed responses.

Guidance to provide consistency and clarity on prohibitions on harmful activities in federal marine protected areas had not been developed

Findings

41. We found that, although the scope of activities to be prohibited under the Federal Marine Protected Areas Protection Standard was clarified in 2023, guidance for its implementation had not been developed. This lack of guidance created a risk of insufficient support for decision making on the standard's prohibitions and inconsistent application across regions and sites.

42. The standard is to be applied to federal marine protected areas established after April 25, 2019. Fisheries and Oceans Canada applied the protection standard when it established the Laurentian Channel (2019) and the Tang.ᑭwan — ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ — Tsigis (2024) marine protected areas. Together, these sites contributed towards the 2025 target, representing about 2.5% of Canada's marine and coastal areas.

43. Oceans Act marine protected areas designated by ministerial order provide protection by temporarily freezing the footprint of existing human activities for up to 5 years. As such, the Federal Marine Protected Areas Protection Standard does not apply to this legal tool. Therefore, the protection standard was not applied to the Tuvaijuttuq Marine Protected Area. This site has counted towards Canada's marine conservation target since 2019, representing about 5.6% of Canada's marine and coastal areas, allowing ongoing human activities until a decision is made by July 2029 on whether to continue with protections.

44. For marine protected areas established before April 25, 2019, the implementation of the Federal Marine Protected Areas Protection Standard varied by activity ([Exhibit 8](#)). For instance, the prohibition on bottom trawling is being applied gradually, where needed, through site management cycles to align with conservation objectives, and in consultation with partners and interested parties, while the other prohibitions follow different implementation paths. This means that there is no specific target date to fully implement the standard.

Exhibit 8—The implementation of the Federal Marine Protected Areas Protection Standard varied by activity

	Oil and gas exploration, development, and production	Mineral exploration and exploitation	Disposal at sea of waste and other matter, dumping of fill, deposit of deleterious drugs and pesticides, and restrictions on vessel discharges*	Bottom trawling
Marine protected areas established after April 25, 2019	To be prohibited	To be prohibited	To be prohibited (disposal at sea of waste and other matter, dumping of fill, deposits of deleterious drugs and pesticides), with some exceptions	To be prohibited, with exceptions for the exercise of Indigenous and treaty rights or for authorized scientific research
Marine protected areas established before April 25, 2019	Existing licences to be reviewed and voluntary relinquishment sought. If not relinquished, licence areas will stop counting towards conservation targets	Non-applicable. Not occurring in existing marine protected areas	Permits will not be issued for disposal at sea of waste and other matter, dumping of fill, deposit of deleterious drugs and pesticides.	To be reviewed, in consultation with partners and interested parties, and prohibited if incompatible with conservation objectives

* For restrictions on certain vessel discharges that occur within marine protected areas, Transport Canada will enhance them where possible, noting that standard technical and operational exceptions will vary. Such enhanced restrictions would apply to areas established after April 25, 2019, and may apply to those established before this date.

Source: Based on information from Fisheries and Oceans Canada

Recommendation

45. Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Parks Canada, and Environment and Climate Change Canada should develop guidance to provide greater clarity on how the Federal Marine Protected Areas Protection Standard is to be applied to Canada’s federal marine protected areas considering differing requirements across the 3 federal organizations.

Response of each organization. Agreed.

See [Recommendations and Responses](#) at the end of this report for detailed responses.

The information publicly reported on the marine conservation initiative did not provide clear indications on the levels of protections and progress

Findings

46. We found that Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Parks Canada, and Environment and Climate Change Canada did not maximize the functionalities of the Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database, Canada's official repository for protected and conserved areas information, which supports marine and terrestrial national and international reporting. While the database contained fields that could be used as indicators of the level or quality of biodiversity protection, they were not all mandatory fields, and the organizations did not consistently report on them. As a result, the data was not useful to provide clear information on the levels of protections. This was the case for data in several aspects:

- presence and size of no-take zones in sites, where all extractive activities, such as fishing, mining, and drilling are prohibited, although it has been recommended internationally that marine protected areas include no-take zones
- extent to which rights to use or extract resources under the seabed or rights to access the area for tourism or fishing are restricted in sites, which is a key factor that affects the level of biodiversity protection in protected areas
- the sites' classification using the International Union for Conservation of Nature Protected Area Management Categories, which is an international standard for reporting on the level of biodiversity protection

47. In addition, Parks Canada and Environment and Climate Change Canada did not report in ways that reflected actual incremental progress on the targets since the start of the horizontal initiative. For example:

- For 2022–23 and 2023–24, since Parks Canada had not set a baseline for its target, it reported being nearly halfway to its target of representing 45% of marine regions in its national marine conservation area system, despite not having established a new national marine conservation area since 2019.
- For 2022–23 and 2023–24, Environment and Climate Change Canada reported on the expansion of its network using the total area of habitat protected and did not reflect that the department had not expanded its marine network since 2018.

48. We also found that the public information intended to facilitate understanding of protections was limited and inconsistent across sites. For instance, what is allowed and not allowed under each marine protected area and how protection levels vary across zones within a site did not include the same level of detail across all sites. In our view, this approach can hinder public understanding of protection levels within marine protected areas.

Recommendation

49. Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Parks Canada, and Environment and Climate Change Canada should generate better public information and reporting on the protection and conservation of Canada's marine and coastal areas to reflect Canada's progress towards qualitative elements under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework by providing greater consistency in the publicly available information on each site.

Response of each organization. Agreed.

See [Recommendations and Responses](#) at the end of this report for detailed responses.

Conclusion

50. We concluded that Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Parks Canada, and Environment and Climate Change Canada were not on track to establish protected and conserved areas covering 25% of marine and coastal ecosystems by 2025. We also concluded that the 3 organizations had not planned for protected and conserved areas covering 30% of marine and coastal areas by 2030 that are ecologically representative and of significance to biodiversity and ecosystem functions.

About the Audit

This independent assurance report was prepared by the Office of the Auditor General of Canada on marine protected and conserved areas. Our responsibility was to provide objective information, advice, and assurance to assist Parliament in its scrutiny of the government's management of resources and programs and to conclude on whether Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Parks Canada, and Environment and Climate Change Canada complied in all significant respects with the applicable criteria.

All work in this audit was performed to a reasonable level of assurance in accordance with the Canadian Standard on Assurance Engagements (CSAE) 3001—Direct Engagements, set out by the Chartered Professional Accountants of Canada (CPA Canada) in the CPA Canada Handbook—Assurance.

The Office of the Auditor General of Canada applies the Canadian Standard on Quality Management 1—Quality Management for Firms That Perform Audits or Reviews of Financial Statements, or Other Assurance or Related Services Engagements. This standard requires our office to design, implement, and operate a system of quality management, including policies or procedures regarding compliance with ethical requirements, professional standards, and applicable legal and regulatory requirements.

In conducting the audit work, we complied with the independence and other ethical requirements of the relevant rules of professional conduct applicable to the practice of public accounting in Canada, which are founded on fundamental principles of integrity, objectivity, professional competence and due care, confidentiality, and professional behaviour.

In accordance with our regular audit process, we obtained the following from entity management:

- confirmation of management's responsibility for the subject under audit
- acknowledgement of the suitability of the criteria used in the audit
- confirmation that all known information that has been requested, or that could affect the findings or audit conclusion, has been provided
- confirmation that the audit report is factually accurate

Audit objective

The objective of this audit was to determine whether Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Parks Canada, and Environment and Climate Change Canada were on track to establish protected and conserved areas covering 25% of marine and coastal ecosystems by 2025, planning for 30% by 2030 that is ecologically representative and of significance to biodiversity and ecosystem functions.

Scope and approach

This audit examined Fisheries and Oceans Canada's, Parks Canada's, and Environment and Climate Change Canada's progress to protect and conserve marine and coastal areas using marine protected areas and area-based measures, recognized as other effective area-based conservation measures. We also examined the number, size, and percentages of Canada's marine protected and conserved areas and whether the federal organizations were on track to meet the 2025 target and were planning for the 2030 target. This included the area-based data (quantitative element) and qualitative information to depict the progress achieved so far.

We examined evidence gathered through document review, such as departmental documents and correspondence and records of consultation with Indigenous governments and organizations and interested parties. We also examined evidence gathered through interviews with federal officials and external experts.

We undertook data analysis of Environment and Climate Change Canada's 2024 Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database, which we obtained on May 7, 2025. The database contains the most up-to-date spatial and descriptive data on marine and terrestrial protected and conserved areas. It includes 20,430 entries, including 19,512 for "terrestrial / freshwater" and 918 for "marine." The team confirmed the accuracy of the database using a representative sampling of 23 protected and conserved areas in the database sufficient for a confidence level of at least 90% that the margin of error was no greater than +10%.

We used geographical data analysis on the data for all area-based calculations in this report. This allowed us to compute the reported values of the number of square kilometres covered by marine protected and conserved areas. Our analyses accounted for potential overlaps across areas so that there is no area that is double counted.

The audit also used a case study for detailed examination of specific matters within each of the following establishment and recognition processes:

- marine protected area
- marine other effective area-based conservation measures

Our report [Establishing Terrestrial Protected Areas](#) was the subject of a separate audit released alongside this one.

We did not examine the management of protected and conserved areas. More specifically, we did not examine activities taking place in and around protected and conserved areas, development and implementation of management plans, enforcement, or measuring and monitoring biodiversity impacts.

We did not examine integrated oceans management. More specifically, we did not examine the development and implementation of integrated oceans management for the conservation of ecosystems, sustainable use of marine resources, and shared use of ocean spaces. This was the topic of the 2025 Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development [Report 3—Integrated Oceans Management](#).

Criteria

We used the following criteria to conclude against our audit objective:

Criteria	Sources
<p>Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Parks Canada, and Environment and Climate Change Canada plan and establish marine protected and conserved areas to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • meet Canada’s target to conserve 25% of marine and coastal ecosystems by 2025 • contribute to Canada’s target to conserve 30% of marine and coastal ecosystems by 2030 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, Convention on Biological Diversity, United Nations, 2022 • 2024–25 Departmental Plan, Horizontal Initiatives, Funding to Implement Canada’s New Marine Conservation Target, Fisheries and Oceans Canada • Minister of Fisheries and Oceans Mandate Letter, 2021 • Minister of Environment and Climate Change Canada Mandate Letter, 2021 • Framework for the Management of Risk, Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, 2010 • Guide to Departments on the Management and Reporting of Horizontal Initiatives, Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, 2018 • Supplementary information tables, Horizontal Initiatives, Funding to Implement Canada’s New Marine Conservation Targets, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, 2024 • Policy on Results, Treasury Board, 2016 • Directive on Results, Treasury Board, 2016

Criteria	Sources
<p>Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Parks Canada, and Environment and Climate Change Canada plan and establish marine protected and conserved areas that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • protect and conserve areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions • are ecologically representative • recognize and respect the rights of Indigenous peoples through collaboration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act • Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, Convention on Biological Diversity, United Nations, 2022 • Final Report of the National Advisory Panel on Marine Protected Area Standards, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, 2018 • National Framework for Canada's Network of Marine Protected Areas, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, 2011 • Canada's 2030 Nature Strategy: Halting and Reversing Biodiversity Loss in Canada, Environment and Climate Change Canada, 2024 • Guide to Departments on the Management and Reporting of Horizontal Initiatives, Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, 2018 • Supplementary information tables, Horizontal Initiatives, Funding to Implement Canada's New Marine Conservation Targets, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, 2024 • Canada's Federal Marine Protected Areas Strategy, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, 2005 • Oceans Act • Federal Marine Protected Areas Protection Standard, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, 2023 • Fisheries Act • Canada National Marine Conservation Areas Act • Canada Wildlife Act • Migratory Birds Convention Act, 1994

Period covered by the audit

The audit covered the period from April 1, 2021, to March 31, 2025. This is the period to which the audit conclusion applies. However, to gain a more complete understanding of the subject matter of the audit, we also examined certain matters that preceded the start date of this period.

Date of the report

We obtained sufficient and appropriate audit evidence on which to base our conclusion on September 5, 2025, in Ottawa, Canada.

Audit team

This audit was completed by a multidisciplinary team from across the Office of the Auditor General of Canada led by Susan Gomez, Principal. The principal has overall responsibility for audit quality, including conducting the audit in accordance with professional standards, applicable legal and regulatory requirements, and the office's policies and system of quality management.

Recommendations and Responses

Responses appear as they were received by the Office of the Auditor General of Canada.

In the following table, the paragraph number preceding the recommendation indicates the location of the recommendation in the report.

Recommendation	Response
<p>40. To meet the target to conserve 30% of marine and coastal areas by 2030, including the qualitative elements of the target, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, in collaboration with Parks Canada and Environment and Climate Change Canada, should update and implement the federal collaborative framework so that Canada’s network of marine protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures is well protected and conserved.</p>	<p>Fisheries and Oceans Canada’s response. Agreed. Fisheries and Oceans Canada will work in close collaboration with Parks Canada and Environment and Climate Change Canada to update a collaborative approach to marine conservation, including qualitative elements of Target 3 of the Global Biodiversity Framework, and implement it in collaboration with Indigenous Peoples and coastal communities.</p>
<p>45. Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Parks Canada, and Environment and Climate Change Canada should develop guidance to provide greater clarity on how the Federal Marine Protected Areas Protection Standard is to be applied to Canada’s federal marine protected areas considering differing requirements across the 3 federal organizations.</p>	<p>Fisheries and Oceans Canada’s response. Agreed. Although policy-level guidance has been developed to clarify the prohibitions on certain activities in federal marine protected areas through the MPA Protection Standard, there remains a need for implementation-level guidance to support increased consistency and effective application, noting that MPA tools are established under differing pieces of legislation and regulations and this may result in some variability in implementation.</p> <p>Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Parks Canada and Environment and Climate Change Canada will work with other implicated departments as required to develop implementation guidance by March 31, 2027, to support an appropriate degree of consistency in interpretation and application of the Protection Standard across regions and departments, while providing sufficient flexibility to reflect differing mandates and jurisdictions. The Protection Standard may then be implemented in a way that provides clarity while also respecting ministerial decision making and the need to be consistent with legal authorities and constitutional rights, including fulfillment of departmental obligations to consult on any proposed new restrictions for sites.</p>

Recommendation	Response
<p>49. Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Parks Canada, and Environment and Climate Change Canada should generate better public information and reporting on the protection and conservation of Canada's marine and coastal areas to reflect Canada's progress towards qualitative elements under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework by providing greater consistency in the publicly available information on each site.</p>	<p>Parks Canada's response. Agreed. Parks Canada will work with Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Environment and Climate Change Canada, and other federal departments as required to develop implementation-level guidance to support effective application of the Federal Marine Protected Areas Protection Standard.</p> <p>Environment and Climate Change Canada's response. Agreed. Environment and Climate Change Canada will work with Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Parks Canada and other federal departments as required to develop implementation-level guidance for the application of the federal marine protection standard by March 31, 2027.</p> <p>Fisheries and Oceans Canada's response. Agreed. Fisheries and Oceans Canada recognizes the importance of providing transparent, accessible and high-quality public information on Canada's protected and conserved areas.</p> <p>Marine conservation delivers important qualitative benefits, supporting healthy ecosystems, resilient coastal and Indigenous communities, and Canada's overall quality of life. To strengthen how these benefits are captured and communicated, Fisheries and Oceans Canada will work collaboratively with Parks Canada and Environment and Climate Change Canada to review current practices, including how to report on quality of life benefits of marine protected areas and how to improve the quality of public information on Canada's progress towards Global Biodiversity Framework's Target 3, including qualitative elements by March 31, 2027.</p> <p>Parks Canada's response. Agreed. Parks Canada recognizes the importance of providing timely, accessible and high-quality public information on the protection and conservation of Canada's marine and coastal areas, in a way that is coordinated and consistent across the federal family.</p> <p>Parks Canada will work in close coordination with Environment and Climate Change Canada, the lead for Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database (CPCAD), as well as Fisheries and Oceans Canada to both assess and improve current practices for presenting information on protected and conserved areas.</p>

Recommendation	Response
	<p>Environment and Climate Change Canada's response. Agreed. Environment and Climate Change Canada values the importance of high-quality public information and reporting on Canada's protected and conserved areas.</p> <p>Environment and Climate Change Canada will work collaboratively with Fisheries and Oceans Canada and Parks Canada to determine how best to enhance the quality of public information about Canada's progress towards qualitative elements of Target 3 of the Global Biodiversity Framework by March 31, 2027.</p>

Appendix—Text Descriptions of Exhibits

Here are the text descriptions of the exhibits.

Exhibit 3—The 3 organizations were not on track to meet the 2025 target of establishing marine and coastal protected and conserved areas

This chart shows the progress in the percentage of marine protected and conserved areas in Canada compared with 3 targets. The targets are:

- 10% established by 2020, set by the 2010 Aichi Biodiversity Targets
- 25% established by 2025, set by the 2019 Speech from the Throne
- 30% established by 2025, set by the 2022 Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework

The progress was as follows:

- 2000: established 0.4%
- 2005: established 0.5%
- 2010: established 0.9%
- 2015: established 0.9%
- 2017: established 4.6%
- 2020: established 12.5%
- 2023: established 13.2%
- 2024: established 15.5%

Source: Based on information from the Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database, Environment and Climate Change Canada, 2024

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Exhibit 5—Fisheries and Oceans Canada had not completed all steps of the marine protected area establishment process for most of the sites it had identified

This table shows Fisheries and Oceans Canada's 5-step process for establishing marine protected areas:

- Step 1: Preplanning for selection of area of interest
- Step 2: Feasibility assessment of area of interest
- Step 3: Development of consultation on regulatory intent
- Step 4: Development of regulation or designation of marine protected area
- Step 5: Ongoing management of marine protected area

The table shows what step each of the following marine protected areas had reached by the end of the audit period and whether or not each one had advanced in the process as planned during that period. The table also shows the approximate percentage the area would contribute to protecting 25% of Canada's marine and coastal areas by 2025 and 30% by 2030, and it shows in which Fisheries and Oceans Canada's bioregion each marine protected area is situated.

- Northern Gulf of St. Lawrence / Estuary and Gulf of St. Lawrence: completed Step 1; did not advance as planned. Approximate percentage 0.1%.
- Kitkatla Inlet / Northern Shelf: completed Step 2; did not advance as planned. Approximate percentage less than 0.05%.
- Offshore Haida Gwaii / Northern Shelf: completed Step 2; did not advance as planned. Approximate percentage 0.1%.
- Southampton Island / Hudson Bay Complex: completed Step 2; did not advance as planned. Approximate percentage 1.6%.
- North Coast Fjords / Northern Shelf: completed Step 2; proceeded as planned. Approximate percentage less than 0.05%.
- Eastern Shore Islands / Scotian Shelf: completed Step 2; did not advance as planned. Approximate percentage less than 0.05%.
- Fundian Channel-Browns Bank / Scotian Shelf: completed Step 3; did not advance as planned. Approximate percentage 0.1%.
- Sarvarjuaq / Arctic Archipelago: completed Step 3; proceeded as planned. Approximate percentage 1.3%.
- Qikiqtait / Hudson Bay Complex: completed Step 3; proceeded as planned. Approximate percentage 0.7%.
- Tuvaijuittuq / Arctic Basin and Arctic Archipelago: completed Step 4; proceeded as planned. Approximate percentage 5.6%.
- Tang.gwan — ᕈᓕᕐᕐᕐᕐᕐᕐ — Tsigis / Offshore Pacific: completed Step 5; proceeded as planned. Approximate percentage 2.3%.

Source: Based on information from Fisheries and Oceans Canada

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Exhibit 6— Some of Parks Canada’s efforts to establish marine protected areas advanced as planned

This table shows Parks Canada’s 5-step process for establishing marine protected areas:

- Step 1: Identify representative marine areas
- Step 2: Select candidate marine area
- Step 3: Assess feasibility of a marine area
- Step 4: Negotiate establishment agreement(s)
- Step 5: Develop proposals to be designated pursuant to the act

The table shows what step each of the following marine protected areas had reached by the end of the audit period and whether or not each one had advanced in the process as planned during that period. The table also shows the approximate percentage the area would contribute to protecting 25% of Canada’s marine and coastal areas by 2025 and 30% by 2030, and it shows in which Parks Canada’s marine region each marine protected area is situated.

- Coastal Waters (Eastern James Bay - Phase 2) / Eeyou (James Bay): completed Step 2; proceeded as planned. Approximate percentage 0.5%.
- Îles de la Madeleine Marine Park / Magdalen Shallows: completed Step 2 but deemed not feasible in February 2025. Approximate percentage 0.3%.

- Pemsik / Scotian Shelf: completed Step 2; did not advance as planned. Approximate percentage 0.1%.
- Western Hudson Bay / Hudson Bay: completed Step 2; did not advance as planned. Approximate percentage 1.1%.
- Anticosti-Mingan / North Gulf Shelf: completed Step 3; proceeded as planned. Approximate percentage 0.3%.
- Pacific Rim / Vancouver Island Shelf: completed Step 3; proceeded as planned. Approximate percentage 0.3%.
- Southern Strait of Georgia / Strait of Georgia: completed Step 3; did not advance as planned. Approximate percentage less than 0.1%.
- South Coast Fjords / Laurentian Channel: completed Step 3; proceeded as planned. Approximate percentage 0.2%.
- Torngat / Labrador Shelf: completed Step 4; proceeded as planned. Approximate percentage 0.3%.
- Western Weenebeg and Southwestern Washaybeyoh / Hudson Bay and Eeyou (James Bay): completed Step 4; did not advance as planned. Approximate percentage 1.5%.
- Central Coast / Queen Charlotte Sound: completed Step 4; proceeded as planned. Approximate percentage 0.1%.
- Wiinipaakw (Eastern James Bay - Phase 1) / Eeyou (James Bay): completed Step 4; proceeded as planned. Approximate percentage 0.5%.

Source: Based on information from Parks Canada

[**Back to Exhibit 6**](#)



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