

News Release

For Immediate Release

The Government of Canada and the Haida Nation announce Voluntary Protection Zone trial on west coast of Haida Gwaii

Sept 04, 2020

Haida Gwaii and Vancouver, BC

Haida Gwaii is home to a wide variety of marine life and Haida citizens who have lived there for more than 13,000 years, and is one of the most pristine ecological environments in British Columbia. In the southern portion of the archipelago, one can find Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve, National Marine Conservation Area and Haida Heritage Site, which includes SGang Gwaay, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

In the spirit of reconciliation and in an effort to protect this area, the Government of Canada and the Council of the Haida Nation have launched a 14-month trial Voluntary Protection Zone for Shipping, effective September 1, 2020. The Voluntary Protection Zone is part of the Proactive Vessel Management initiative under Canada's Oceans Protection Plan.

The trial is the result of a partnership between the Government of Canada and the Haida Nation, and in significant collaboration with Canadian and US shipping industry associations. All parties have agreed that vessels of 500 gross tonnage (or greater) transiting along the west coast of Haida Gwaii will observe a minimum distance of 50 nautical miles (nm) from shore, with the following exceptions:

- Cruise vessels, who are asked to observe a minimum 12 nm distance from shore;
- Vessels transiting between Pacific Northwest ports (Washington, British Columbia, and Alaska), who are asked to observe a minimum 25 nm distance from shore;
- Tugs and barges (includes pushing and towing alongside) and fishing vessels are fully exempt.

Observing these minimum distances will reduce the risk of accidents should a vessel lose propulsion or break down, as it will increase the amount of time available for repair and for responders to assist before any environmental damage occurs. Traffic patterns will continue to be monitored during and after the trial period in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the measures.

The Voluntary Protection Zone trial will only apply when it does not jeopardize the safety of the vessel, persons aboard or cargo.

Quotes

“Through the actions of Canada’s Oceans Protection Plan, we are protecting our coasts and waterways more than ever before. This Voluntary Protection Zone for shipping trial is an innovative, industry-supported initiative that will help safeguard the ecologically important area around Haida Gwaii. This partnership with the Haida Nation is a concrete example of the collaborative work the Government of Canada is doing to advance reconciliation.”

Marc Garneau

Minister of Transport

“The Council of the Haida Nation has advocated for a Safe Distance Offshore since the Russian cargo vessel, Simushir, lost power during a storm event in 2014 and came dangerously close to grounding on the west coast of Haida Gwaii. The vessel traffic analysis we undertook shows that 50 nm would allow adequate response time to prevent accidents with the presence of two dedicated emergency tow vessels. The increased vessel traffic around Haida Gwaii is a concern for the Haida Nation. We have worked collaboratively with Canada for over four decades on Haida Gwaii and we’re committed to continue this work with Transport Canada to prevent current and future shipping impacts. The voluntary measures are a step in the right direction, yet we have much work to do together to protect the coastlines of Haida Gwaii to the highest standards”

Gaagwiis Jason Alsop

President, Council of the Haida Nation

Quick Facts

- Canada’s \$1.5 billion Oceans Protection Plan is the largest investment ever made to protect Canada’s coasts and waterways. Since the Oceans Protection Plan started in November 2016, over 50 initiatives have been announced in the areas of marine safety, research and ecosystem protection that span coast-to-coast-to-coast.
- The Voluntary Protection Zone is part of the Proactive Vessel Management initiative under Canada’s Oceans Protection Plan. The Proactive Vessel Management initiative reduces conflicts between local waterway users and protects environmentally and culturally sensitive areas.
- In June 2018, the Council of the Haida Nation and Government of Canada committed to work together on the issue of vessel drift on the west coast of Haida Gwaii through the Reconciliation Framework Agreement for Bioregional Oceans Management and Protection.
- This Voluntary Protection Zone supports realization of commitments made by Canada and the Council of Haida Nation in the Gwaii Haanas Gina ‘Waadluxan KilGuhlGa Land-Sea-People Management Plan.

Associated links

- [Reconciliation Framework Agreement for Bioregional Oceans Management and Protection](#)
- [Gwaii Haanas Gina 'Waadluxan KilGulGa Land-Sea-People Management Plan 2018](#)
- [Oceans Protection Plan Report to Canadians](#)

- 30 -

Contacts

<p>Livia Belcea Press Secretary Office of the Honourable Marc Garneau Minister of Transport, Ottawa livia-marina.belcea@tc.gc.ca</p>	<p>Valine Brown Communications Director Council of the Haida Nation (250) 559-4468 valine.brown@haidanation.com</p>
<p>Media Relations Transport Canada, Ottawa 613-993-0055 media@tc.gc.ca</p>	

The Haida Nation is online at www.haidanation.ca. Stay connected through [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [YouTube](#) and [CHN Instagram](#).

Transport Canada is online at www.tc.gc.ca. Subscribe to [e-news](#) or stay connected through [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [YouTube](#) and [Instagram](#) to keep up to date on the latest from Transport Canada.

This news release may be made available in alternative formats for persons living with visual disabilities.