

SUBMISSION TO THE UN SECRETARY GENERAL ON THE ACTIONS
TO ADDRESS THE IMPACTS OF DEEP SEA FISHING ON
VULNERABLE MARINE ECOSYSTEMS (VMES)
MARCH 15, 2022

Diversity (CBD). By the end of 2021, Canada conserved almost 14 % of its marine territory. and is committed to conserve 25% of lands & oceans by 2025 and 30% by 2030. Working towards the adoption of the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework and, Canada strongly supports setting a global target to conserve 30% of oceans by 2030, thus ensuring that areas which require protection are conserved through effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and well-connected systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs).

A Responsible Fishing Nation

Canada is a coastal fishing nation and does not operate a significant distant water fleet.

Canadianexclusive economic zone occurs almost exclusively in RFMO/As regulatory waters. All high seas fishing in regulated or unregulated domestic licensing requirements, which require compliance with Canadian domestic laws in all areas of the high seas areas, including areas where no RFMO exists, creating additional obligations for Canadian fishers outside Canadian Fishery Waters

Supporting Policies and Tools

Sustainable Fisheries Framework (SSF) and the Precautionary Approach

Since its last report in 2016, Canada has continued to implement its Sustainable Fisheries Framework in the fisheries it manages and has published new national policies under the Framework. The Sustainable Fisheries Framework and associated policies provide the sheries are conducted in a manner that supports conservation and sustainable use. While applying the policies and tools of the Sustainable Fisheries Framework into the decision-making process for each fishery, Canada ensures that the biological and socio-economic consequences of all proposed management measures are considered. The policies and tools are also linked to broader integrated

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boundaries of Marine Protected Areas, all while improving ability to implement the precautionary principle when designating new MPAs under the Act. This means that a lack of scientific certainty regarding the risks posed by activities would not be used as a reason to postpone the decision regarding the designation of an MPA. The amendments to the Act also strengthen its enforcement prov compliance orders; offences and punishment (e.g., fines); proceedings against ships; and, increasing the limitation period to five years.

To complement the proposed amendments to the Oceans Act, Canada also updated its Petroleum Resources Act prohibiting oil and gas activities, mining, dumping, and bottom trawling for all newly established federal MPAs. The only exceptions to these prescribed standards are the use of bottom trawling for Indigenous food, social, and ceremonial purposes, as well as for scientific research purposes, where the activities within the MPA do not pose a significant risk to the conservation objectives of the MPA. Through the prohibition of bottom trawling in newly established MPAs corals, sponges, hydrothermal vents, and other sensitive benthic features are protected.

The role of science in decision-making

Canada funds and supports scientific research and international collaboration to inform policy and decision-making functions, as well as deliver on UN commitments to manage fisheries in a sustainable manner and to protect VMEs and biodiversity in the high seas International Governance Strategy (IGS) seeks to enable greater international consensus and capacity building (e.g., improved knowledge, management, standards, and agreements) in order to advance the implementation of sustainable practices worldwide, which includes the VME commitments found in Resolutions 61/105, 64/72 and 66/68. Areas of focus include:

Identification, characterization and mapping of VMEs;
Assessment of significant adverse impacts and recoverability;
support the establishment and management of protected areas; and
Research and advice for the development of science-based encounter protocols.

Identification of VMEs

In 2011, Canada participated in a review of over 500 invertebrate taxa caught in research vessel surveys in the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO) Regulatory Area against the FAO Guidelines for identifying VMEs. In addition to the coral and sponge taxa that were previously recognized, three new groups emerged as potential indicators of VMEs: crinoids, erect bryozoans and large sea squirts. In addition, seamounts, canyon heads, spawning areas and knolls which are listed in the FAO Guidelines and are included as VME elements were identified. In particular, the SE Shoal on Grand Bank was identified as a VME element containing unique spawning grounds for capelin, marine mammal feeding grounds, and long-lived and relict bivalve populations in sandy shoal habitats. Similarly, Beothuk Knoll was highlighted as having large gorgonian corals and an area where very large sponge catches (> 1000 kg) have been reported. All of the new VME indicators and elements were mapped, and Canada produced a new identification guide

that updated the previous guide for identification of corals and sponges and added the newly identified VME indicator species. The new guide was produced to improve reporting relating to the implementation of the ecosystem approach in support of resolution 61/105. NAFO is preparing for a review of its bottom fisheries, including its management measures for VMEs, to be presented at its annual meeting this September.

Canada has undertaken annual stock surveys in the NAFO area and contributed to the stock assessments underpinning the science advice to the Fisheries Commission. Canada

the implementation of a growing network of seamount and VME closures in areas where these species are known or predicted to form significant concentrations.

In support of UNGA resolution 66/68 article 182, Canada has promoted continued marine research into the identification and protection of VMEs in the NAFO Regulatory Area, which is being advanced through two working groups: 1) the Working Group on Ecosystems Science Assessment (WG-ESA) conducts assessments of VME habitats and the significant adverse impacts of bottom fishing in the NAFO Regulatory Area; and, 2) the Working Group on the Ecosystem Approach Framework to Fisheries Management (WG-EAFFM), a joint management science group to review the advice of the Scientific Council (based on WG-

Council conducted a reassessment of NAFO bottom fisheries in 2021 and will continue to do so in five year intervals.

Canada has played a leading role and has worked with other Contracting Parties in NAFO to identify and close bottom fishing in areas where fishing activities would cause significant adverse impacts on VMEs. In 2022, based on a joint Canadian/US proposal, NAFO has expanded and refined the boundaries of its existing seamount area closures, added six new seamount closures, and extended the duration of the all seamount closures for another five years. As a result, all seamount areas in the NAFO Regulatory Area at fishable depth (i.e. shallower than 4000 metres) are now closed to bottom contacting fishing gears until December 2026.

basis of new analysis by the Scientific Council. As a result, in 2022 all of the existing closures were extended for another five years, and five of these closed areas were increased in size. A further four new VME closures were established for an interim period of two years pending further analysis by the Scientific Council. In all, the areas closed to bottom fishing total 372,201 km², representing 14 per cent of the NAFO Regulatory Area. The expansion and extension of the area closures on seamounts and VMEs were based on the Significant Adverse Impact (SAI) analysis, to which Canada made significant contributions.

Thresholds for significant encounters have also been established, on the basis of scientific assessments inside the fishing footprint and on adjacent continental slopes, at 7 kg for sea pens, 60 kg for other live coral and 3du

its intention was to provide a forum to facilitate the sharing of information and best practices amongst MCS practitioners. Article 54 of the 2009 FAO International Guidelines for the Management of Deep-Sea Fisheries in the High Seas encourages states to participate in the IMCS Network.