

**World Wildlife Fund - Canada**  
Testimony  
**Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development**  
**House of Commons, Canada**  
**29 September 2016**

Thank you Chair and members of the Committee for the invitation to contribute to your study on protected areas and conservation objectives. My name is David Miller, I'm the President and CEO of the World Wildlife Fund - Canada.

For half a century, WWF-Canada has worked to protect nature. We are Canada's largest international conservation organization, with offices in Vancouver, Prince Rupert, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, Halifax, St. John's, Iqaluit and Inuvik. We have the active support of more than 150,000 Canadians.

We work in places that are unique and ecologically important, so that nature, wildlife, habitat **and people** thrive together.

Working with communities, industry, academia and government, and drawing on science and innovation, we focus our efforts in Canada on increasing marine protection, habitat-friendly renewable energy, freshwater health, sustainable fisheries and wildlife **habitat** conservation.

Today we'll share bold recommendations whose time has come, especially considering the changing climate that is altering the Arctic environment faster than any other on the planet, putting species — including people — at risk.

Our vice-president Arctic, Mr. Paul Crowley, will tell you about the dated practice of insisting on Mineral and Energy Resource assessments before an area can be considered for protection.

You'll hear how the Canadian Petroleum Resources Act puts oil and gas ahead of all other concerns in the Canadian Arctic — and why it's time that's stopped. (Not to mention the practice of granting rights ahead of environmental assessment.)

And you'll learn about a respectful approach to marine protected areas that puts Inuit at the helm.

We offer you concrete suggestions for conservation and sustainable development in this iconic, but rapidly changing, Canadian environment.

And with that, I turn it over to Mr. Crowley. Paul:

Thank you Chair and members of the Committee. My name is Paul Crowley, I'm the Vice-President of WWF-Canada's Arctic Program.

A central goal of our program is to ensure the marine environment is healthy, allowing for sustainable use by local communities and providing a sustainable ecosystem for Arctic species, including iconic species such as polar bears, narwhal, walrus and seals. Our conservation success is directly related to our emphasis on understanding, respecting and supporting Inuit cultural and ecological priorities. WWF's longtime presence in Nunavut and the Northwest Territories enables us to work closely with communities. We understand that without their support, sustainable Arctic conservation would not be possible. We also understand that conservation efforts will not be sustainable in the long-term if they are surrounded by poverty. As such, we work to ensure that conservation efforts support community development in the North.

### **Canada's Commitment**

Protecting and conserving biodiversity in the Arctic marine environment is an important priority due to the role of Arctic waters in moderating the global climate, contributing to overall marine biodiversity, as well as providing food security, income and cultural identity for Arctic peoples and communities. The Canada-U.S. Joint Statement on Climate, Energy, and Arctic Leadership pledged to create a pan-Arctic marine protection area network, including at least 10 per cent of Arctic waters, and is committing to "substantially surpass these national goals in the coming years." We are extremely pleased our government has committed to these goals.

While finalizing current work, such as the establishment of the National Marine Conservation Area for Lancaster Sound, should be a top priority, the Canadian Arctic is a key region for new and streamlined processes to create MPAs. Part of the Canadian government's marine conservation plan is to establish these new MPAs in pristine offshore areas. Ecologically and Biologically Significant Areas, which have been broadly identified, mapped and described within Canada's Arctic marine environment, should be the starting point for new consultations with Northern communities for new MPAs.

In order to improve and streamline the process to create MPAs, which currently takes a minimum of seven years, we put forward these recommendations:

### **Identification of sites for protection**

First and foremost, identification of sites for protection should be led by community-driven processes, as Inuit are holders of invaluable traditional and local knowledge. Because almost all Arctic communities are coastal and depend on the bounty of the ocean for their wellbeing, the community-driven process must also be complemented to ensure that Ecologically and Biologically Significant Areas that are not immediately adjacent to communities, or that are outside of land claim areas, are also captured.

Since sea ice and the ice edge is critical habitat, WWF suggests that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans propose marine protection of a significant portion of the Last Ice Area – the area within and to the north of the Arctic Archipelago where summer sea ice is projected to remain the longest.

We also suggest that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans consider the Pikialasorsuaq region, also known as the North Water Polynya. This region of Baffin Bay is one of the most biologically productive in the Arctic and is shared by Nunavut and Greenland. Currently, the Inuit-led Pikialasorsuaq Commission is considering the future of this area, and is expected to report findings within months. Both of these areas fit the definition of Large Pristine Areas the Department of Fisheries and Oceans is considering for protection.

### **Inuit Impact and Benefit Agreements /Community Benefits**

For conservation to succeed in the long-term in a region where poverty is endemic, it must provide community benefits. The four Inuit land claims agreements vary considerably, including around requirements to negotiate Inuit Impact Benefit Agreements for the creation of MPAs. The creation of MPAs is an opportunity to secure much-needed community, economic and financial benefits. A moral case can be made for negotiating these agreements to the highest standard for all four regions. WWF recommends that the Government of Canada create an equitable and transparent financing formula, as well as high minimum standards for community management, for Impact Benefit Agreements across all four Inuit land claim regions. It's critical that negotiations on these agreements start immediately in parallel to the identification process.

### **Minimum Standards**

It's not enough to reach protection targets – we need to ensure that protection is meaningful. Minimum standards for all protected areas are key to developing co-operative management frameworks with Indigenous communities. Setting these standards before sites are selected can provide certainty to stakeholders and speed up the consultation process.

### **Mineral and Energy Resource Assessments**

A major impediment to the timely creation of MPAs is the application of the Mineral and Energy Resource Assessment policy, which asks government to assess mineral and energy potential ahead of a marine protection proposal. We submit that this discretionary policy be updated to better reflect current priorities and ensure its application does not unduly delay Canada achieving its marine protection objectives. A 2014 Parks Canada report also expressed desire to re-evaluate this policy.

### **Oil and Gas**

Marine Protected Areas should exclude all oil and gas development, including seismic activity. Officials in the Department of Fisheries and Oceans have stated they will not entertain MPAs where there may be existing oil and gas rights. WWF wants to challenge that approach -- particularly where those rights were granted in Ecologically and Biologically Significant Areas. The 30-year-old Canada Petroleum Resources Act gave petroleum priority over all other uses, and exploration rights were awarded without environmental assessment. We need a regime that

places other economic values and social priorities on an equal footing with petroleum. Furthermore, granting indefinite rights – as is currently the practice with significant discovery licenses under the CPRA – are completely indefensible.

### **Inuit Marine Protected Areas**

WWF is pleased there will soon be an opportunity to modernize the Oceans Act. In so doing, the Government of Canada should consider including a new approach to marine protection – Inuit Marine Protected Areas. When a clear expression of desire to protect a marine area is demonstrated by an Inuit community, a rapid process to deploy that protection should ensue, driven by the community itself, and assisted by the Government of Canada. Inuit conservation management, allowing for continued harvesting and community uses, would be paramount. Monitoring, research and enforcement would provide Inuit employment. The Pikialasorsuaq, which I mentioned earlier, could be a prime candidate for an IMPA.

### **Conclusion**

We recognize that a lot of work has been done and much more is yet to be done to reach the Government of Canada's goal of 10% protection of our marine environment by 2020. However, 10 per cent is only a waypoint toward effective ocean protection and governance. In a rapidly changing environment, even the more ambitious target of 30 per cent protection, called for by the 2014 World Parks Congress, may not be enough. Preserving the heritage of the Canadian Arctic is not only vital for the wellbeing of communities but also a singular Canadian responsibility to the planet.

We thank you for the opportunity to share our recommendations with you here today.