



NEWS

Leaders, experts call on Canadians to take action on World Oceans Day

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Davis Legree
Reporter





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Looking for a fun fact to impress your friends at next week's trivia night? Canada has the longest coastline in the world. Perhaps most people know that, but did you know the Canadian coastline is nearly double the length

as the next longest coastline in the world?

Regardless, the point is clear — this country is surrounded by a lot of saltwater. As a result, World Oceans Day, which is observed on Thursday, is important to many across the country.

In fact, World Oceans Day, which the UN officially recognizes, was an initiative initially proposed by the Canadian government in 1992. In 2023, events to celebrate World Oceans Day are taking place in every continent (except Antarctica).

“On World Oceans Day, I invite Canadians from coast to coast to coast to reflect on the importance of our oceans, what they mean to our communities, climate, and country, and join with people all over the world to turn the tide toward a healthier marine environment across the planet,” said Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in a statement.

Other governmental and political institutions also released statements encouraging Canadians to spend Thursday to reflect on the importance of oceans.

“From sea to sea to sea, oceans, and the marine environments they shelter, are part of Canada’s identity,” said Governor General Mary Simon in a statement, adding that Canadians need to “get to work.”

“World Oceans Day is a time to reflect upon and celebrate the beauty and importance of our oceans,” read a press release from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO).

“Today, let’s recommit to working together for greater protections for Canadian coastlines and the world’s oceans,” NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh said in a statement.

But why should everyone care about oceans? Despite being one of a few countries that touches three different oceans (Atlantic, Pacific, and Arctic), recent government statistics show only 14 per cent of the country’s population live within 10 kilometres of the coast.

According to experts, the impact of oceans extends far beyond those who live in their immediate proximity.

“There are 30 million Canadians who live nowhere near the ocean and may not immediately connect with the ocean or see it as part of their day-to-day lives,” said Lisa “Diz” Glithero, the national lead of the Canadian Ocean Literacy Coalition.

“They need to understand that we’re all connected to the ocean.”

“Canadians should be interested in the health of the oceans,” added Bernard Vigneault, the director general of DFO’s ecosystems science directorate. “Healthy oceans are the major contributors of oxygen in the atmosphere, so they literally give us the air we breathe. It also provides a livelihood for many people and a source of food for us all.”

“We’re really lucky to have three oceans that contain very unique ecosystems and biodiversity,”

However, Vigneault said we need to stop taking these giant bodies of water for granted, as each of them faces unique challenges that are either caused or exacerbated by human activity.

“All three oceans are facing challenges related to human activities and climate change,” Vigneault told *iPolitics*. “In particular, the trends that are of most interest to the science sector...is the warming of the ocean, the acidification, the pollution, the loss of oxygen in certain areas, and invasive species – all of which are a significant threat to our oceans.”

While both Vigneault and Glithero said emphasized the amount of work that remains, both stated that Canada is on the right track.

Canada has set goals of protecting 25 per cent of its oceans by 2025 and 30 per cent by the end of the decade. Currently, Canada has protected 14 per cent of its oceans, but Environment Minister Steven Guilbeault recently announced that the provinces and territories have gotten behind the federal conservation targets.

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“We’re halfway there,” said Vigneault, adding that his team continues to identify areas on all coasts that face environmental stressors and may be good candidates for protective measures.

“A lot of good work is underway with marine protected areas (MPAs), national marine conservation areas, and Indigenous protected areas,” noted Glithero. “There’s a lot of collaboration across different scales of governments, communities, and NGOs, all working together to reach those targets.”

“There are signs that awareness amongst Canadians regarding the importance of conservation protection is increasing as well. That’s a positive indicator.”

However, the efficacy of federally protected MPAs have come into question in recent weeks, as Natural Resources Minister Jonathan Wilkinson did not explicitly deny that offshore wind development could occur in protected areas.

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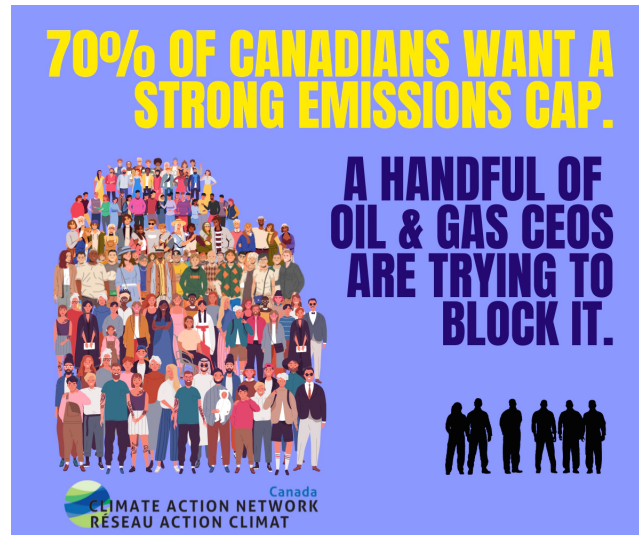
Fisheries and Oceans Minister Joyce Murray is confident that Canada will reach its goals in collaboration with Indigenous people across the country.

“We’re doing this hand in hand and sometimes led by Indigenous communities, who are so integral to the MPA targets that we have as a country,” she told *iPolitics*.

Murray also emphasized other actions the federal government has undertaken to improve marine conservation, like joining the High Level Ocean Panel, an international group that seeks to create “a sustainable blue economy,” and the Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing Action Alliance, of which Canada is also a member.

“Healthy oceans that are biodiverse and have healthy fish and plant populations are critical to have a healthy future,” said Murray. “However, they also are very important elements of the Canadian economy because there’s number of people and coastal economies that depend on oceans.”

The theme for this year’s World Oceans Day is “Planet Ocean: Tides are Changing.”



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