



Policy Statement on the Proposed Lifting of the Offshore Oil and Gas Moratoria

The federal government is currently considering a proposal to study the lifting of the offshore oil and gas moratorium on the BC coast. The Canadian Nature Federation believes *it is essential that the federal and provincial governments and First Nations put in place a network of marine protected areas designed to protect representative and distinctive habitats before any assessment of the feasibility of oil and gas development.*

The Pacific marine environment is home to a vast diversity of wildlife - The area of proposed oil and gas development is one of the most biologically rich and diverse marine ecosystems on the BC coast, with high concentrations of whales, seabird nesting areas, and marine nursery areas, and is host to some of British Columbia's most sustainable and valuable commercial fisheries.

Marine protected areas must be a precursor to sustainable resource use - A defensible and well-planned network of representative and unique protected areas must be established in British Columbia in order to protect the biological diversity and abundance of these marine ecosystems. Lifting the moratoria in advance of completing coastal zone planning processes would foreclose opportunities to plan and implement a network of marine protected areas on the West Coast.

The federal and BC governments are not effectively protecting the marine coast - After ten years of negotiations, the Canadian and BC governments have yet to finalize their joint marine protected areas strategy. Many key, long-identified marine areas still await protection, including the proposed Gwaii Haanas, Bowie Seamount, the Southern Strait of Georgia, Gabriola Passage, the Hecate Strait Sponge Reefs, and Scott Islands. The three federal government departments responsible for the establishment and management of marine protected areas lack the staff and resources to be able to effectively do their job.

There is a need for jurisdictional certainty over BC's offshore waters - Presently there is no regulatory framework for the management of BC's offshore waters and resources, nor have First Nations land claims in the area been resolved. The Haida and Tsimshian First Nations have claimed jurisdiction over much of this area. There is a need for clarification of jurisdictions.

In our view, the proposed federal strategic environmental assessment will not move Canada any closer to fulfilling its promises to develop a network of marine protected areas. We recommend that effective action be taken to ensure these areas are effectively safeguarded in advance of any study aimed at lifting the moratorium.