

CANADA'S OCEANS

Experience and Practices

INTRODUCTION

Canadian shores border on three vast and magnificent oceans in which our nation has vital interests: the Arctic, the Pacific, and the Atlantic. These oceans offer important economic, socio-cultural, and recreational opportunities that have shaped the nation's history and identity. Of equal significance are the internal waters of Canada with large marine components, such as the St. Lawrence River, the Gulf of St. Lawrence, Hudson Bay, and James Bay.

The richness and biodiversity of Canada's oceans provide them with enormous potential to continue to benefit both present and future generations. Our continental shelf, covering 3.7 million square kilometres, is the second largest in the world, and its marine ecosystems are host to a remarkable diversity of species, including commercial and noncommercial fish, marine mammals, invertebrates, seabirds, and plants. Canada's oceans provide numerous opportunities for commercial, recreational, and Aboriginal fisheries; tourism; transportation; mineral production; education; and biological and technical research. Almost one-quarter of Canada's total population lives in coastal areas.

In Canada, the federal government has principal authority over oceans and their resources. Generally, provincial governments have some authority over shorelines to the low water mark, over some marine areas, and over many land-based activities. In some regions, Aboriginal people are becoming more involved in resource management decision making.

In recent years, growth in Canada's oceans sector has resulted in increased pressures on the ocean environment. In many areas, the biodiversity and ecological integrity of marine ecosystems are being threatened. There is a need to proactively conserve, restore, and protect marine ecosystem functions, species, and habitats for future generations.

Canada's shores front on three oceans, extend over 40 degrees of latitude, and cover a wide range of oceanographic environments and geologic regions.

Canada has the world's longest coastline. Stretched out as a single continuous line, it would circle the earth more than six times!