

An open letter to Minister Mélanie Joly, Minister Steven Guilbeault, and Minister Diane Lebouthillier from more than 30 conservation groups on requesting Canada to be a leader in protecting the High Seas

November 7, 2023

The Honourable Steven Guilbeault, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Environment and Climate Change Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON

Honourable Mélanie Joly, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Foreign Affairs
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON

Honourable Diane Lebouthillier, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON

RE: Canada should be a world leader in protecting the High Seas

Dear Honourable Ministers,

The future of Canada's oceans relies on more than what occurs within our jurisdictional boundaries alone. Because of this, we as a country must be willing to work with countries around the world on the common goal of protecting and conserving ocean ecosystems. Our connection to international waters was never clearer than the global celebration that followed the completion of the landmark Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction Treaty (BBNJ). This treaty will change global ocean governance, and provides states with a real opportunity to halt and reverse biodiversity loss.

We are thus asking the Government of Canada to continue the leadership demonstrated during the negotiation process of the BBNJ Treaty, or the High Seas Treaty, by:

- Signing the treaty as soon as possible;
- Committing to ratifying the treaty by 2025
- Leading the implementation of the Treaty through the championing of Marine Protected Areas, a strong Environmental Impact Assessment Regime, and robust commitment to capacity building and technology transfer.

We were very impressed by the leadership Canada showed in the creation of the BBNJ Treaty. As the high seas comprises nearly two thirds of the global ocean, and is home to some of the world's vitally important species and ecosystems, it is an area that requires great attention and protection. However, as it currently stands, less than 1% of this essential global resource is protected, leaving the area critically threatened.

The Treaty opened for signatures on September 20, 2023. As of today, over 80 countries have signed, demonstrating their support for the treaty and willingness to proceed with ratification.

We are urging you to sign the treaty as soon as possible, and follow this commitment up with a plan to ratify the treaty by 2025 - a timeline shared by other High Ambition Coalition states. This timeline is essential if states truly intend to begin implementing the treaty in a meaningful way. There are many species and ecosystems in dire need of protection, for which the BBNJ Treaty is essential. Canada could lead in establishing Marine Protected Areas for the Emperor Seamounts, the Sargasso Sea, and New England Seamounts. Canada could also play an integral role in establishing the Environmental Impact Assessment regime for BBNJ, considering our own extensive EIA legislation and experience.

By taking these steps, the Government of Canada will show the rest of the world their support for ocean protection and desire to contribute as ambitious allies to global ocean conservation goals, including the goal to protect 30% of the world's land and ocean by 2030, the goal to halt and reverse biodiversity loss, the commitment to uphold the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and Canada's recent support for a moratorium on deep sea mining in international waters.

Thank you again for the commitments you have made to protect Canadians and our living systems from the threat of climate change and biodiversity loss. We look forward to working with you to ensure that Canada takes the next important step in protecting and conserving our precious invaluable ocean environments.



SIGNATORIES



Clayoquot Action



SIGNATORIES

Atlantic Salmon Federation	Mind Your Plastic
Birds Canada - National	Nature Newfoundland and Labrador
Blue Marine Foundation	Oceancare
Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS)	Pacific Wild
Canadian Ocean Literacy Coalition	Project Seahorse
Clayoquot Action	SeaBlue Canada
Conservation International	SkeenaWild Conservation Trust
David Suzuki Foundation	Surfrider Foundation Canada
Delta Naturalist Society	The Ocean and Us
Ecology Action Centre	Toronto Zoo
False Creek Watershed Society	West Coast Environmental Law
Friends of False Creek	Wilderness Committee
Georgia Strait Alliance	World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)
Global Choices	Yukon Conservation Society
Global Ocean Trust	
Greenpeace	
High Seas Alliance	
International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW)	
Living Oceans	