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The Honourable Jonathan Wilkinson
Minister of Energy and Natural Resources
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

Re: BILL C-49: An Act to amend the Canada–Newfoundland and Labrador Atlantic Accord Implementation Act and the Canada–Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Resources Accord Implementation Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts

Dear Minister Wilkinson:

SeaBlue Canada¹ is a joint initiative of seven of Canada's most well-known and respected environmental non-government organisations. Together we work to ensure strong and equitable protection of Canada's marine environment. With our colleagues at East Coast Environmental Law, we are writing to express our overarching support for the passage and implementation of Bill C-49.

The focus of SeaBlue is largely on achieving strong and effective protection of 30 percent of our ocean by 2030. As you know, Canada has committed to ensuring our protected areas are effectively conserved by establishing the minimum protection standard for all new federal marine protected areas (MPAs). Oil and gas exploration and exploitation are prohibited under this standard. SeaBlue also supported related changes to the *Canada Petroleum Resources Act* in 2019.

Bill C-49 will fill a critical gap in allowing:

"The Federal Minister and the Provincial Minister [to] jointly cancel the interest in respect of all or any portion of the offshore area that is subject to the interest and that is located in an area that is or, in the opinion of the

¹ SeaBlue Canada is a joint initiative of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, the David Suzuki Foundation, the Ecology Action Centre, Nature Canada, Oceans North, West Coast Environmental Law and WWF-Canada. This letter has been composed and endorsed by East Coast Environmental Law.

Governor in Council, may be identified under an Act of Parliament as an area for environmental or wildlife conservation or protection.”

The proposed amendments will allow Canada to ensure that oil and gas exploration and discovery is eliminated from all existing and future marine protected areas and marine protected area networks, as well as other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMS), such as marine refuges.

Studies have proven that strongly protected MPAs yield the highest positive impacts for communities, nature, climate resilience and species abundance. In a letter dated May 24, 2023, our coalition advocated for the exclusion of offshore renewables from protected areas. Bill C-49 will play a role in facilitating the development of offshore renewables without harming marine areas intended for conservation. For example, offshore wind - currently the subject of two regional assessments - will have project-level and cumulative impacts that may interact adversely with MPAs and marine conservation objectives, for instance through noise, increased ship traffic, seabed anchoring, construction and seabed transmission lines.

Many of our organizations will be engaging in the Parliamentary Committee process related to the passage of Bill C-49, providing our views on where the Bill can be further improved and support for passages of interest, including addressing the cancellation of oil and gas interests.

We would like to highlight that the passing of this legislation will allow the Government of Canada and provincial governments to demonstrate strong commitment to marine protection to the general public. Once in force, immediate implementation of this Act is needed to take action, in particular on rescinding existing significant discovery licences in the Gully Marine Protected Area in time for the 20th anniversary celebration in June 2024. This would ensure full implementation of the minimum protection standard in time for this celebration and allow Canada's first protected area under the *Oceans Act* to be considered for a [Blue Park designation](#).

We appreciate your decision to pause the recent bid for a single oil and gas lease off Nova Scotia in the latest call for bids. SeaBlue member organisations consider ourselves stakeholders in the offshore oil and gas industry and will continue to engage on any new leases in Atlantic Canada. It is vital that we move away from oil and gas and enable new energy sources, as Bill C-49 is intended to do.

We ask for the timely completion of these proposed amendments and look forward to seeing this legislation in action as soon as possible. We also intend to work with provincial counterparts to advocate for the passage of necessary companion legislation. We would also like to respectfully request for our signing organizations to appear as witnesses at the "Standing Committee on Natural Resources" regarding Bill C-49.

Respectfully,



Shannon Arnold, Associate Director, Marine Programs, Ecology Action Centre



Alexandra Barron, National Director Ocean Program, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society



Susanna Fuller, VP Conservation and Projects, Oceans North



Stephanie Hewson, Staff Lawyer, West Coast Environmental Law



Erin Keenan, Senior Manager, Arctic Marine Conservation, WWF-Canada



Mike Kofahl, Staff Lawyer, East Coast Environmental Law



Akaash Maharaj, Director of Policy, Nature Canada



Kilian Stehfest, Marine Conservation Specialist, David Suzuki Foundation

cc: Minister Tory Rushton, Natural Resources and Renewables, Nova Scotia; Minister Andrew Parsons, Minister of Industry, Energy, and Technology, Newfoundland & Labrador