



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

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February 19, 2021

The Honourable Jonathan Wilkinson  
Minister of Environment and Climate Change  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, ON  
K1A 0A6

Dear Minister Wilkinson,

I am writing to you in your capacity as the Minister responsible for Parks Canada regarding the proposed National Marine Conservation Area (NMCA) of the southern Strait of Georgia and the continued use of freighter anchorages in those waters.

The southern Strait of Georgia, part of the Salish Sea which my riding of Cowichan-Malahat-Langford borders on, is home to a variety of fish, marine mammals, and bird species, including endangered or potentially threatened marine species such as southern resident killer whales, abalone, harbour porpoises, and gray whales. These waters are among the most diverse in the world's temperate waters and offer fantastic recreation opportunities, including scuba diving, whale-watching, sea kayaking and coastal cruising. They have supported vibrant first nations coastal communities and continue to do so today. Unfortunately, the natural beauty of this place is under threat from the presence of large freighters, which are using the same waters as the proposed NMCA as an overflow industrial parking lot for the Port of Vancouver.

Through consultations with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada, it has been confirmed that, while anchored, these vessels routinely perform maintenance duties, including the pumping of ballast tanks and bilges, and paint and rust removal. Furthermore, continuous ambient noise from generators, power washers, and anchor dragging add further pressure on the already-threatened, delicate marine ecosystems of the southern Strait of Georgia. The powerful lights on the ships are also causing negative effects for residents and marine life alike.

Over the past several years, community groups and local First Nations have made repeated calls to Transport Canada to protect these waters from the environmental impact of anchored shipping vessels as they await, sometimes for several weeks on end, processing at the Port of Vancouver. Moreover, my office has received an innumerable amount of correspondence from constituents, asking for my attention to the ongoing negative, and potentially catastrophic, environmental effects of these vessels. Unfortunately, the voluntary protocol measures installed by Transport Canada in 2018 have been largely ignored and not enforced. Southern Vancouver Island and Gulf Island residents have hoped for, and deserve, more decisive action from their federal government.

Additionally, multiple First Nations who have claim to these waters as part of their traditional territory have also expressed deep concern for their livelihoods and traditional customs. To add to their frustration, these anchorages were initially established without their free, prior, and informed consent. For your reference, I have attached a joint letter from local First Nations in my riding that highlights their concerns.

Severe storms in the Southern Gulf Islands region are not uncommon, and the potential for a severe environmental catastrophe exists. This was demonstrated in the recently released Transportation Safety Board investigation report M20P0092, which detailed a 2020 anchor-dragging collision incident involving two freighters in Plumper Sound, BC. Fortunately, in this instance, the damage to the freighters happened above the waterline and an environmental catastrophe was avoided. However, the threat of a major spill is real, and it bears mentioning that such an incident would be devastating to not only the surrounding beaches but the entire southern gulf.

As you may be aware, I recently introduced Private Member's Bill C-250 which aims to prescribe a specific area prohibiting the anchoring of freighter vessels in and among the southern Gulf Islands based on coordinates established by Parks Canada as a part of its process in establishing a NMCA. Clearly, the federal government sees value in protecting these waters. I will note that Bill C-250 is widely supported among local stakeholders including First Nations, local government, and community activist groups.

Minister, we can both agree that the waters of the southern Strait of Georgia are home to one of the most productive marine ecosystems in the world. If the federal government and Parks Canada value these waters enough to establish a National Marine Conservation Area, then they also deserve protection from being used as an overflow industrial parking lot for the Port of Vancouver. As such, I humbly ask for you to support Bill C-250, and I look forward to working with your office on resolving the anchorages issue in the southern Strait of Georgia before it's too late.

I thank you for your time and appreciate your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Alistair MacGregor  
Member of Parliament  
Cowichan-Malahat-Langford

Cc: Constituents

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