

Rising Tide

Fall 2025



Photo credit: Sandy Buckley

Southern Resident Killer Whales and nation-building projects

As the federal government doubles down on major infrastructure projects, the stark conflict between perceived economic imperatives and the law is going to play out either for, or against, Southern Resident Killer Whale survival.

The *Species at Risk Act* (SARA) demands that the government take action to rebuild their numbers. The government

pledged to take such action before the Trans Mountain Pipeline Expansion went into service—and failed. Today, government officials claim to be ‘doing the best they can’, but it’s not good enough: the whales remain poised for extinction. Nor is it all that could be done, even in today’s context of constrained budgets and massive capital project spending.

Since the SRKW were listed under SARA in 2003, the threats to their survival have increased dramatically.

The Port of Vancouver has seen a 133% increase in cargo shipments and Westridge Terminal is now shipping 365% more oil than it did prior to the Trans Mountain Expansion. With these increases in shipping come several threats: more noise, more chance of ship strikes and more toxic pollution. The use of exhaust gas scrubbers to clean the air

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Clear the Coast 2025



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Living Oceans is working to ensure the long-term health of the ocean and coastal communities of Canada. We believe that people are part of the environment and that we can build sustainable communities by protecting coastal ecosystems today.

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Our annual marine debris expedition headed to the North Coast Trail in Cape Scott Provincial Park. An exceptionally rugged stretch of the Park's trails, we had never visited the portions east of Laura Creek. Hikers in years past often mentioned to us that the trail was heavily impacted along there, although the condition of a beach can be altered dramatically by a single storm—for better or for worse.

We were able to send out three teams, to Laura Creek, Shuttleworth Bight and Nahwitti River. It is a testament to the dedication of our volunteers that we now have sufficient numbers of highly skilled workers that we can deploy multiple teams at the same time, making the most efficient use possible of expensive assets like helicopters, tugs and barges. There were 18 of us in the field this year.

We found this section of the trail to be moderately impacted by plastics, with fewer items to be found the further west we worked. This makes perfect sense when the prevailing currents and sheltering points are taken into consideration. Still, we recovered nearly 2 tonnes of debris (by volume, about 36 cubic metres) from about 14 kilometres of foreshore. Most of the debris by far was fishing and aquaculture gear, but every foreshore along this stretch also yielded items from the two cargo ship spills, the Zim Kingston (2021) and ONE Apus (2020).

The expedition was funded through the generosity of Blue Friday subscribers. These are businesses with a commitment to sustainability and who have come together to turn 'Black Friday' on its head: rather than profit, they invest a portion of their Blue Friday sales in ocean protection. The BC Parks Protection and Enhancement Fund also provided a contribution.

To date, our Clear the Coast program has removed over 133 metric tonnes of debris from the north Island region. We think we're making a difference in the region in that beaches we've cleaned multiple times are showing progressively less debris.

Sadly, international efforts to stem the flow of plastics into the ocean have not been as successful as we have been! Five negotiating sessions in, the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee has yet to agree to text for a binding treaty. The treaty is intended to take a comprehensive, full life-cycle approach, addressing plastic from design and production to disposal and waste management. One of the major sticking points is a proposed cap on virgin plastic production, which is staunchly resisted by oil and gas producing nations and, of course, the plastics industry itself. Although another session is anticipated, it is not clear how the lofty intent of the treaty can be achieved.



Seafood Progress report highlights the need for Corporate Accountability laws

This year SeaChoice conducted the first of its kind in-depth review of major grocer sustainable seafood policies. Our [Seafood Progress report](#) asked the hard questions, such as: Are grocer seafood policies ambitious enough to keep overfished species or illegally caught fish off the shelves? Do policies cover all or only some products sold with seafood – from fish fingers to canned pet food to the squalene (i.e., shark) in beauty creams? Do grocers have rigorous processes to keep forced labor and other human rights harms off their shelves? A resounding ‘no’ was often the answer.

The report exposed the many gaps in grocer policies that allow potential human rights and environmental harms common with seafood supply chains to end up in the baskets and carts of unsuspecting shoppers. For example, even the most robust sustainable seafood policies are narrowly applied – often covering only about half of the products on store shelves. In some cases, policies are not extended across all retail branch stores operated by the same company. For example, T&T Supermarket

is excluded from Loblaw’s policy; Sobeys and Pattison Food Group also exclude numerous chain stores from their policies.

It was also found that grocers’ human rights policies are often not embedded into operational practices, and no Canadian grocer verifies whether third-party brands adhere to the company’s stated policies. This is particularly problematic given the global fishing sector is also considered a high-risk industry for human rights abuses such as forced labor, slavery, abuse, dangerous and poor working conditions, bondage and exploitation as evidenced in recent exposés by the Outlaw Ocean Project and others.

While it should be acknowledged that Canadian grocers have made some progress over the last couple of decades on improving the sustainability of categories such as fresh and frozen seafood, the results reinforce that growing concern that voluntary measures – corporate sourcing policies, certifications and audits – simply don’t work for preventing human rights abuses and environmental destruction in seafood supply chains.

True progress will only come when the government holds companies accountable.

An increasing number of jurisdictions are mandating human rights and environmental due diligence or ‘responsible business conduct laws’. In

2022, the adoption of effective responsible business conduct laws was recommended by the 52 Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) states, including Canada. Moreover, in July 2025 the International Court of Justice advisory opinion affirmed the duty of states to ensure corporations implement environmental and human rights due diligence.

Countries that have passed responsible business conduct laws to date include France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, the UK and Switzerland; the EU and countries such as South Korea, Thailand and others have also introduced or are moving towards such laws. Yet Canada remains a laggard.

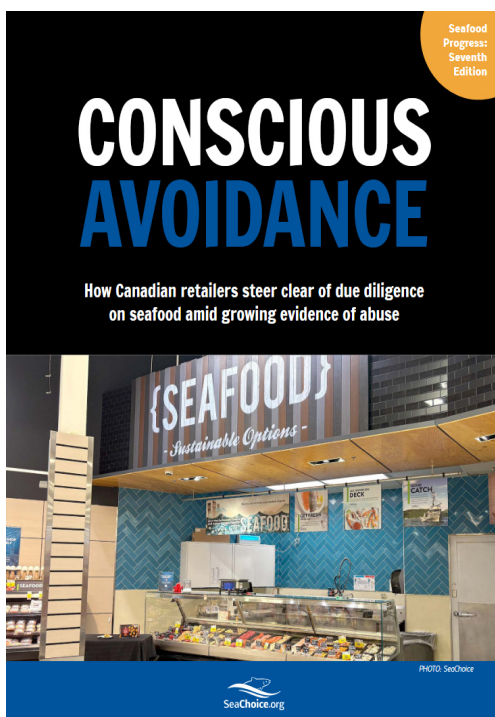
Our Seafood Progress report shows Canada cannot afford to be a laggard behind its peers.

Living Oceans, as members of SeaChoice and the Canadian Network on Corporate Accountability, will continue to advocate for Canada to adopt responsible business conduct laws.

Take Action

Tell your grocer to clean up their supply chains, visit seachoice.org/groceries

Tell the Canadian Government to adopt responsible business conduct laws: cnca-rcrce.ca/take-action



emissions from vessels has only translated that pollution into a deadly, corrosive acid that is discharged directly into SRKW habitat.

The abundance of large Chinook salmon, the mainstay of the SRKW diet, has declined precipitously, with many populations of those fish also listed under SARA. Decreased abundance in a noisier sea makes it much more difficult for the whales to echolocate their prey, with the result that many whales are underweight. This may, in turn, contribute to reduced reproductive success.

Living Oceans and colleague organizations worked with Ecojustice lawyers to present the government with a petition for an Emergency Order under SARA, asking that immediate and concrete measures be undertaken to recover the SRKW.

Take Action

Give the Southern Resident Killer Whales a lifeline.

Tell the government to protect SRKW.

Government scientists agreed that the whales face “imminent threats” and the relevant Ministers recommended an Emergency Order to Cabinet. Cabinet refused in early March, saying that after considering “social, economic, policy and other factors, and the broader public interest” it would instead pursue “incremental measures” under other legislation.

To be straight about what the law requires: the government is obliged to take measures to recover the endangered population. It is not obliged to do so by means of Emergency Orders. But it remains the government’s obligation to

take meaningful steps that result in real improvements for the whales’ health and survival.

The good news is that steps can be taken immediately, without impinging on those “social, economic, policy and other factors” and without enormous expense.

For example, Canada could extend the minimum distance for approaching the SRKW from 400 to 1000 metres, bringing our guidance into line with Washington State. This would reduce risks from noise and strikes and make it easier for the whales to find food. This would not entail any additional expense, presuming that the current guidance is being monitored and enforced.

Another possible measure, to increase the availability of Chinook salmon, would be to curtail recreational fishing for them in SRKW critical habitat during the most critical periods for the whales. Again, a no-cost measure with only modest impact on recreational fishing, limited in time and space.

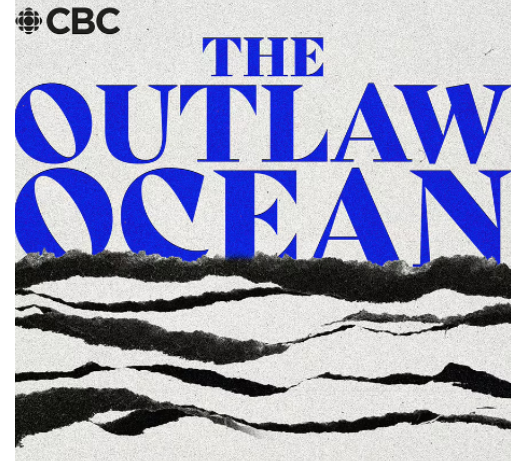
Banning the use of exhaust gas scrubbers or heavy fuel oil would make an important start addressing the load of toxic chemicals polluting SRKW habitat.

There is much more that needs to be done before the SRKW will begin to thrive again, but these measures could be implemented more or less immediately and without interfering with the government’s budget priorities.

Living Oceans and colleagues continue to try to convince them to move forward with recovery measures before adding yet more threats through new projects with increased shipping.

You can view the full PDF document of the “Petition for an Emergency Order for the Southern Resident Killer Whales under s. 80 of the Species at Risk Act” at: ecojustice.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/2024-06-07-Petition-for-SRKW-Emergency-Order-corrected.pdf.

Podcast Spotlight: The Outlaw Ocean



If you’re looking for a powerful listen this month, check out The Outlaw Ocean, the CBC podcast based on journalist Ian Urbina’s groundbreaking investigation into crime and exploitation at sea.

The series pulls back the curtain on a world largely hidden from public view — where illegal fishing, oil dumping, forced labour, and human rights abuses unfold in international waters with almost no oversight. Urbina’s reporting takes listeners aboard rogue fishing vessels, into secret prisons, and inside the global seafood supply chain to reveal the human and environmental costs behind what ends up on our plates.

Each episode blends gripping storytelling with urgent questions about ocean governance, justice, and the true price of exploitation on the high seas.

If you care about marine conservation, climate justice, or workers’ rights, this podcast is essential listening.

Listen on CBC Podcasts:
cbc.ca/listen/cbc-podcasts/1068-the-outlaw-ocean

Exposing greenwash:

more important than ever in the face of government roll-backs

Recent greenwashing amendments to Canada's Competition Act are facing the chopping block under the federal government's 2025 budget. The amendments were heavily criticized by fossil fuel companies and lobby groups. On the flip side, conservation groups, including Living Oceans, fought for stronger rules that didn't simply defer to certifications.

While it remains to be seen if some or all the amendments will be scrapped, it appears the criticism on both sides shared a surprisingly common theme: ambiguity giving rise to uncertainty about what the rules required.

In our SeaChoice submission, we highlighted that the ambiguity in the proposed guidelines was problematic. In particular, the Competition Bureau's guidelines for environmental claims provide an extraordinary amount of leeway regarding what may qualify as an "adequate and proper test" and an "internationally recognized methodology". Such ambiguity and leeway opens the door for certifications to evade scrutiny by the Bureau and could result in greenwashing associated with certification claims to continue unmitigated in the Canadian marketplace. Meanwhile, industry argued the ambiguity would result in companies not disclosing information on their environmental practices (which they ironically termed 'greenhushing').

Regardless of the amendment roll-back,

it is clear that certifications will need to continue to be held accountable for their claims and promises of sustainability.

Living Oceans' relentless watchdogging of farmed salmon certifications included calling out the Aquaculture Stewardship Council's new farm standard along with several other conservation groups in major salmon farming regions. This follows criticisms of the Best Aquaculture Practices revised Salmon Farm Standard by more than 70 global groups. We also supported our Save the Skate shareholder campaign allies in a greenwashing submission that detailed misleading claims of farmed salmon certifications and grocery store eco-labels.

Earlier this year we welcomed Seafood Watch removing their misleading endorsement of BC open-net pen salmon when ASC certified. This means open-net pen BC farmed salmon remains "not recommended" by Ocean Wise and on the Seafood Watch red-list (Avoid).

On the wild fisheries side, we have continued to support the Make

Stewardship Count coalition's work to hold the Marine Stewardship Council to account.

Following the release of the MSC revised Fisheries Standard, it was clear that the MSC label would continue to award fisheries with high bycatch levels, habitat degradation, and overfished species. The coalition has since been advocating for improving the FAO Guidelines for the eco-labelling of fish and fishery products, which MSC claims adherence with, and have not been updated since 2009.

Living Oceans and SeaChoice have also highlighted mounting concerns that MSC is failing to take responsibility for its role in certifying fish potentially produced under exploitative labor conditions. For example, MSC doesn't screen vessels or companies against published lists of labor abuses, meaning vessels found connected to egregious human rights abuses are able to benefit from the use of the world's most recognizable eco-label for sustainable seafood.



Ocean Exposures 2025 winners revealed

View all the submissions by visiting
flic.kr/s/aHBqjCvX1F



Photo credit: *Work and Play on the Ocean* - first place - Bronwyn Harvey

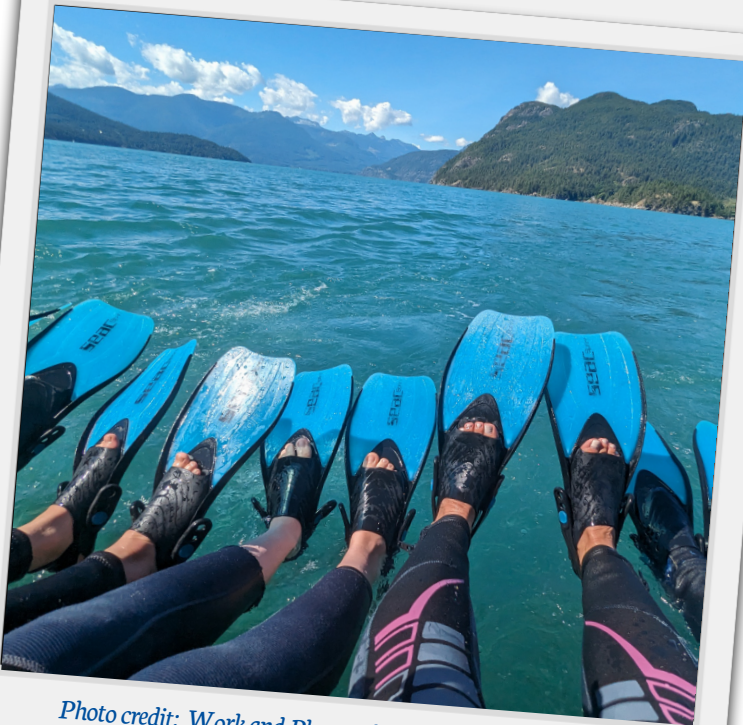


Photo credit: *Work and Play on the Ocean* - second place - Mary Richards



Photo credit: *Work and Play on the Ocean* - third place - Tammy Tait



Photo credit: *Below the Surface* - first place - Carmen Pavlov



Photo credit: *Coastal Wildlife* - first place - Ken Szeto



Photo credit: *Below the Surface* - second place - Eduardo Baena

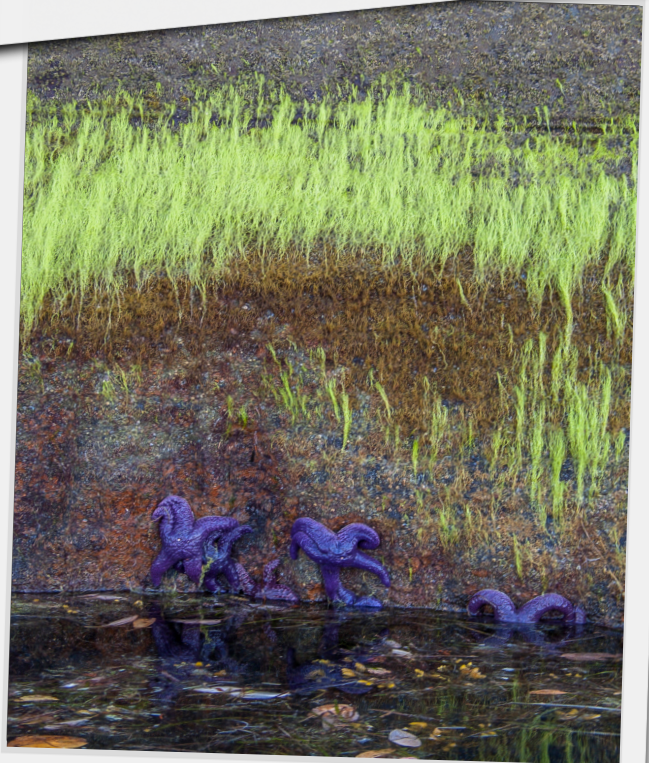


Photo credit: *Coastal Wildlife* - second place - Sam Lightman



Photo credit: *Below the Surface* - third place - Sara Ellison



Photo credit: *Coastal Wildlife* - third place - Roberto Formisano



Photo credit: Sea Huggers' Choice Award - Yasmine Mohammad



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Shareholders skate to another historic vote

The ground-breaking ‘Save the Maugean Skate’ shareholder campaign continues to make historic waves in Australia and around the world.

The campaign targets everything that Living Oceans is expert at: major grocer seafood policies, farmed salmon, and certifications. We provided our expertise through meetings with institutional investors.

The result? For the second consecutive year, Woolworths copped the highest global vote for a nature-based shareholder resolution this year. The 34% vote at the Woolworths Annual General Meeting eclipsed this year’s previous high nature vote of 17% at American company PepsiCo.

According to UN Principles of Responsible Investment, it is expected that companies respond to a vote of 20% or higher against the board; as such a vote demonstrates strong investor sentiment on an issue. Woolworths’ 34% vote includes numerous pension funds from around the world representing millions of members to a value of approximately \$11.3 billion (AUD). Now the pressure is on Woolworths to respond meaningfully.

To date, the shareholder campaign has resulted in some significant wins. Another major grocer, Coles has conducted an assessment on their farmed seafood for impacts to endangered species, disclosed the results, reduced their sourcing and removed sustainability claims from their farmed salmon, and

have established a nature-risk road map across their own-brand supply chain. All significant steps thanks to shareholders!



Canada needs to stand as a champion for the high seas

The High Seas Treaty has reached a global milestone! On September 19, 2025, the High Seas Treaty reached its crucial benchmark: 60 state ratifications. This achievement triggered a 120-day countdown to the Treaty’s entry into force, paving the way for a legally binding agreement that will strengthen global ocean protection, support climate resilience, and safeguard the livelihoods of billions.

Canada signed the Treaty on March 4, 2024—an important step toward protecting biodiversity in international waters—but it has yet to ratify. Full ratification is required for countries to help implement the Treaty’s new tools for conserving marine life beyond national borders. Until it does, the Treaty will not be law in Canada, and Canada will not be able to take the actions needed to protect the high seas – including identifying areas for protection in the high seas adjacent to

Canadian waters, or managing industrial activities proposed in neighbouring international waters through environmental impact assessment.

Canada has made its commitment clear. Now it needs to finish the job. You can urge Canada to ratify the High Seas Treaty today. wcel.org/blog/tell-canada-its-time-ratify-high-seas-treaty#take-action



Global problems require global solutions

The WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies is a game-changer for ocean protection. Adopted in June 2022 and entering into force in September 2025, it sets binding rules to curb harmful government subsidies that fuel overfishing, illegal fishing and marine ecosystem collapse. With around 35 % of global fish stocks already overfished, and governments spending US\$22 billion annually on subsidies that promote unsustainable practices, this treaty marks a milestone for sustainability. It also unlocks support for developing countries and strengthens transparency across fisheries governance.

Learn more about how international trade policy is now backing ocean health. wto.org/english/tratop_e/rulesneg_e/fish_e/fish_factsheet_e.pdf

The state of salmon, 2025

We had much to celebrate this year, watching the sockeye test fishery results come in, blowing the socks off of the forecasts. This year's returning sockeye went to sea after nearly all the salmon farms on their migration route had closed. As juveniles, they'd had 90 per cent fewer sea lice on them as they migrated out. As adults, they were fat and abundant—more abundant, in fact, than they'd been since 1997. When all the numbers were in, 9,275,000 sockeye returned, against a forecast of only 2,473,000. Specific populations within that overall number remain at risk, but even they showed improvement.

In the Broughton, where farms were gradually removed between 2019 and 2023, pink salmon were also making a spectacular comeback—along with herring and all the rich marine life that depends on the fish. Fishermen remarked on their size and on how few lice they carried. Everyone who spends time on the water agrees: the Broughton is surging back to life!

This is not to say that the crisis is over, or the work can stop: over 60 per cent of the farms are still operating, and they are still causing concern for local stocks. There is still a massive amount of work to do to restore wild salmon. Two years of improved returns does not prove that salmon farms were the cause of the precipitous declines we've seen—it's just really good evidence consistent with the hypothesis that salmon farms have been killing wild salmon.

The government's promise to remove open-net pen salmon farms by 2029 still stands, but progress on the long-awaited Transition Plan stalled over the federal election. It remains unclear when DFO will get on with the job of revising the regulations governing salmon farming to rule out the use of open-net pens. It appears as if the Aquaculture

Management Directorate intends to redefine 'closed containment aquaculture' to include open-net pens with removable tarps around them—they have actually included such a definition in the current Conditions of Licence.

We've worked throughout the year with Members of Parliament to ensure that they know that the commercially available 'technologies' for use in the ocean won't solve the problem. While technologies may reduce sea lice, none of them treat liquid waste and that's where the bacteria and viruses live.



Of course, DFO's aquaculture science hasn't quite caught up with their Genomics Lab's science, so we still have to deal with denial that the bacteria and viruses impact wild salmon; and attempts to keep the industry operating in the ocean.

Meanwhile, among the shovel-ready projects that the government could opt to fund, Canadian Aquafarms is trying to get two land-based projects underway on Vancouver Island. One in Gold River could offer employment to communities impacted by farm removal. It's based on an old mill site. A second, in Fanny Bay, is on a former aquaculture site. Canadian Aquafarms would grow steelhead/rainbow trout, which are well suited to closed containment and quicker to raise

to market size than Atlantic salmon. They also plan, at Fanny Bay, to include a greenhouse operation that will utilize the nutrients in the farm's effluent. For both developments, Canadian Aquafarms has reached out to local First Nations to offer participation in the projects.

The open-net pen industry here in BC is deeply invested in ocean-based tenures in every country in which they operate. They may have dipped a toe in the land-based industry, but by and large, that industry is operated by different companies with deeply specialized expertise like Canadian Aquafarms. It's completely unrealistic to expect that the open-net pen industry will suddenly take

up land-based farming at the same production volume they have today. This is why the Transition Plan is critically important: if we're going to solve the problem of salmon aquaculture's impact on wild salmon, those farms have to come out of the water and impacted communities need some support thereafter.

We will continue to work with First Nations, government and industry to create solutions. We will offer alternatives and help impacted communities find which solutions work for them. Most importantly, we will hold the federal government to account for the promise made to British Columbians that the farms will be gone by 2029.

Why it's time to take open-net pen farmed salmon Off the Table



Does your favourite restaurant still serve farmed salmon? We're engaged in a cross-Canada campaign to reach out to chefs and restaurants to explain to them why they should take ocean-farmed salmon Off the Table! Here's how you can help in three easy steps:

1 Download [the flyer](#) that explains the campaign and carry it with you when you dine out. While you're on the website, you can also download social tiles and share the campaign with your network.

2 Always ask what species of salmon is being served and where it came from. If it's Atlantic salmon, it's farmed. The odds are it was farmed in an open-net pen, where it impacted wild salmon, shrimp, crab or lobster. (Don't let them get away with telling you it's "fresh" salmon—that may be true, but it's also the way some restaurants try to get around answering the real question).

3 If it's farmed salmon, tell the server you won't eat it and you think it should be removed from the menu. Ask to speak with the manager and give them the flyer.

Did you know that restaurants are the largest market for farmed salmon? That's often because it's available fresh year-round and arrives at a predictable weight and size, making it easier for chefs to portion and cost. The fresh market gives industry its best margins, but check out

the smoked salmon, too—if the fish is too badly wounded by sea lice or disease to be sold as fresh, it's often smoked.

At a recent brunch, Executive Director Karen Wristen spotted smoked Atlantic being passed off as wild fish. On questioning, the server consulted the chef who confirmed the species and origin. The hostess then tried on the "fresh salmon" line, which was of course nonsense because the fish was smoked! Finally, the manager swore he'd gone fishing with the supplier and KNEW it was wild. As Karen patiently explained that all Atlantic salmon is farmed, he actually telephoned the supplier who confirmed it was farmed. End of that day, that chain restaurant may not have removed farmed salmon from their menus (yet) but they stopped trying to pass it off as wild and offered an apology and a complementary brunch!

No-one can do everything, but everyone can do something. Colleagues around the world are working on this campaign and eventually, it will begin to erode the market for farmed salmon. [Offthetable.ca](#)

BC Coastal Marine Strategy

Living Oceans was thrilled to see the publication of BC's coastal marine strategy last year and has been following developments with it ever since. So far, that effort has been less than thrilling. It's quite remarkable how quickly good intentions can be abandoned in the face of a clear economic threat, but that seems to be exactly what's happened.

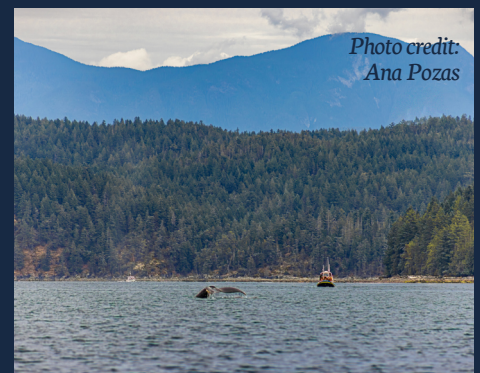
Although the strategy is committed to habitat restoration, the province did not renew funding to the Clean Coast, Clean Waters Initiative Fund. That fund was supporting the removal of plastic marine debris and derelict vessels.

Although we have repeatedly urged the government to enshrine the strategy into law, no legislation has been tabled in the Legislature. Without a legal framework, the strategy could gather quite a bit of dust before there is any movement toward its objectives.

Although the strategy is committed to climate solutions, BC's nation-leading carbon tax was eliminated this year, along with the EV subsidy and the rebate for converting fossil-fuel-heated homes to heat pumps.

We all understand that our economy has received a truly unprecedented shock and expect that this will be the number one focus of government.

However, it was correctly observed during the creation of the coastal marine strategy that there would be economic returns on every dollar spent. Increased employment, investment and tourism were all anticipated. It remains the case that the economy is a subset of the environment. This strategy was supposed to embody that principle. So far, nothing. .



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