

## ENVIRONMENT

# Groups call for more coastal protection

Important marine areas left vulnerable, Western Canada Wilderness Committee says

BY JUDITH LAVOIE

VICTORIA — Decades of overfishing and habitat destruction are threatening entire ocean ecosystems off the British Columbia coast and it's time governments lived up to their promises to create a network of marine protected areas, says the Western Canada Wilderness Committee, which is spearheading a campaign for better ocean protection.

WCWC campaigner Tara Sawatzky said the provincial and federal governments should work together toward much wider protection by 2012.

The network of protected areas should include large swaths of no-fishing zones, Sawatzky said.

"We are asking for a planned, scientific network of marine protected areas by 2012. We are asking for 30 per cent of the entire marine habitat to be no-take zones," she said.

"We are not saying no fishing, but there should be some areas which are off limits to protect ecosystems and biodiversity. There is so much we don't know."



VANCOUVER SUN FILES

## Research shows a growing 'dead zone' in Saanich Inlet.

Less than 0.01 per cent of the coastal marine environment is protected from all activities, including fishing, Sawatzky said.

Other environmental groups, such as the Living Oceans Society, the David Suzuki Foundation and the Sierra Club of B.C., are also urging more vigorous protection of Canada's oceans and say Canada is not meeting international obligations to protect biodiversity.

Recent research shows a growing dead zone in Vancouver Island's

Saanich Inlet, and there are concerns about a potential dead zone in the Strait of Georgia because of reduced oxygen and increased acidity.

Mel Kotyk, department of fisheries and oceans oceans program manager, said work is already underway on a network of marine protected areas.

Off the coast of B.C., the Endeavour Hydrothermal Vents and Bowie Seamount areas are already protected and work on Race Rocks is underway, with a recommendation likely to go to the fisheries minister in March, Kotyk said.

Also, Parks Canada is working on national marine conservation areas in Gwaii Haanas National Park and the southern Strait of Georgia, and Environment Canada is looking at the Scott Islands, he said. In addition, there are 176 provincial protected areas.

A ban on fishing depends on what you are trying to protect, Kotyk said. In areas where the aim is to protect sponge reefs on the bottom of the ocean, it does not harm them to have fishing on the surface.

"In some other areas, the fishing is more restricted. The key point is to look at the conservation goal before you pick a number and say fishing or no fishing," he said.

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