

**NAWPA COMMITTEE  
MARINE WILDERNESS & PROTECTED AREAS WORKING GROUP**

**CASE STUDY OF MPA ESTABLISHMENT – Gwaii Haanas National Marine Conservation Area Reserve and Haida Heritage Site; Parks Canada Agency, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Council of the Haida Nation  
(Haida Gwaii, British Columbia, Canada)**



**KEY MESSAGE**

*Canada and the Haida Nation are working together to protect the Gwaii Haanas marine area. Together, they are safeguarding this outstanding example of Canada's marine biodiversity and demonstrating how a collaborative approach to marine protected area establishment and management can succeed.*

**BENEFITS**

- The marine conservation area protects an outstanding example of Pacific Ocean biodiversity and an area that is fundamentally important traditionally and today to the Haida way of life.
- It provides the basis for Parks Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, the Council of the Haida Nation and the fishing industry to work together to ensure sustainable use of the fishery resources in the Gwaii Haanas area, based on ecosystem management principles.
- Many tourism providers are locally based, bringing economic benefits to local communities.
- Because it is adjacent to Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve, the two protected areas in combination protect from mountain tops to the abyss of the Pacific Ocean immediately offshore the west coast, the only place in the world where protection of a land-sea continuum of this kind exists.

**CRITICAL STEPS**

- Establishment steps extended from 1988 (signature of federal-provincial agreement to work toward MPA establishment) to 2010 (signature of a Canada-Haida agreement, followed by legislation).
- Support for establishment of the marine conservation was strong among Haida and non-Haida residents of Haida Gwaii, environmental organizations and British Columbians generally.
- The primary area of controversy was concern among many in the fishery industry that establishment of the NMCA would lead to significant loss of access for the industry. On an interim basis 3% of the area has been zoned no-take. The Government of Canada and the Haida are currently working with the commercial sector to develop a longer-term management plan that will refine the interim zoning plan while embracing principles of ecosystem-based management to foster sustainable fisheries.
- Stakeholders involved included tourism providers, the fishing industry, local communities and NGOs.

**LESSONS LEARNED**

Despite opposition from many stakeholders in the commercial fishery, establishment of the NMCA succeeded because it was supported by the majority of local Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents and because adequate time required for consultations was provided. It was particularly important to meet repeatedly with commercial

fishing sectors to establish an understanding of the objectives of the NMCA and develop trust that they will be involved extensively in developing longer-term management approaches.

**FACT SHEET**  
**GWAII HAANAS NATIONAL MARINE CONSERVATION AREA RESERVE**  
**BRITISH COLUMBIA, CANADA**

**Name:** Gwaii Haanas National Marine Conservation Area Reserve and Haida Heritage Site

**Location:** Waters adjacent to Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve and Haida Heritage Site, in Haida Gwaii (formerly the Queen Charlotte Islands), British Columbia

**Size:** 3,500 sq km (1,351 sq mi)

**Year Established:** 2010

**Purpose:** To protect and conserve for all time a representative area in the Hecate Strait and Queen Charlotte Shelf marine regions for the benefit, education and enjoyment of the people of Haida Gwaii, Canada and the world

**Status:** Legislatively protected under the *Canada National Marine Conservation Areas Act*

**History:**

- 1985 - Haida Nation declared the land and waters of Gwaii Haanas a Haida Heritage Site for the protection of the environment and the Haida way of life.
- 1988 - An agreement signed by Canada and British Columbia established the terrestrial Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve and Haida Heritage Site and committed the two governments to work toward the future establishment of an adjacent marine protected area.
- 1993 – Canada and the Haida Nation signed the Gwaii Haanas Agreement, establishing a cooperative Parks Canada/Haida Archipelago Management Board for the national park reserve.
- 2001 – British Columbia transferred unencumbered administration and control of the seabed to Canada following voluntary relinquishment of existing petroleum rights by industry.
- 2006 - Council of the Haida Nation agreed that consultations and other work related to establishing a marine conservation area reserve should resume.
- 2010 – Canada and the Haida Nation signed the Gwaii Haanas Marine Agreement, which among other measures expanded the Archipelago Management Board to include Fisheries and Oceans Canada. Formal designation under the *Canada National Marine Conservation Areas Act* followed in June 2010.
- The Gwaii Haanas Marine Agreement commits Canada and the Haida Nation to protect and conserve the marine ecosystems of Gwaii Haanas, maintain the continuity of Haida culture, including traditional resource harvesting, and to provide for continued ecologically sustainable use of marine resources (fishing and marine tourism primarily).

- The interim management plan that was required as one component of achieving legislated designation in 2010 set aside 3% of the NMCA as no-take reserve. It is anticipated that work coordinated by the Archipelago Management Board toward a comprehensive management plan by 2015 will expand on this.