



September 16, 2022

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Mr. Adam Taylor  
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Ms. Sheila Byers  
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Ms. Lora Tryon  
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Dear Mr. Dennison, Ms. Byers, Mr. Taylor, and Ms. Tryon:

Thank you for your correspondence of May 23 and June 10, 2022, regarding glass sponge reef marine refuges and the enforcement of fishing regulations.

I appreciate your kind invitation to discuss these matters in person. I hope that we can meet in the future, when scheduling allows.

Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) recognizes the importance of protecting healthy cold-water coral and sponge communities to support a healthy marine ecosystem. Canada's marine refuges provide long-term conservation benefits. They are enabled using regulatory tools under the *Fisheries Act*, which allows DFO to establish protection measures in a timely manner. With the collaboration of DFO, Natural Resources Canada, and local conservation organizations, including the Marine Life Sanctuaries Society (MLSS), a number of glass sponge reefs have been identified and mapped over the past 17 years in the Strait of Georgia and Howe Sound. Since 2016, DFO has established 17 marine refuges for glass sponge reefs through the [Strait of Georgia and Howe Sound Glass Sponge Reef Conservation Initiative](#). These refuges have full closures to bottom-contact fishing activities.

In 2020, the ecological and biological significance of five additional live reefs in Howe Sound was confirmed in a [Canadian Science Advisory Secretariat report](#). Since that time, DFO has been engaging and consulting with Indigenous groups, stakeholders, and interest groups on proposed restrictions to commercial, recreational, and Indigenous bottom-contact fishing. The use of downrigger gear in the recreational salmon troll in the five glass sponge reef sites in Howe Sound was also discussed. Closures to bottom-contact commercial and recreational fishing within these five new sites came into effect on January 17, 2022. Downrigger gear restrictions on recreational salmon trolling at these five sites, as well as at one existing sponge reef marine refuge (Queen Charlotte Channel), also came into effect on April 1, 2022. Consultations with Indigenous groups will continue this year to mitigate risks posed to glass sponge reefs from bottom-contact fishing for food, social, and ceremonial purposes.

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The Department is committed to the conservation and protection of marine resources. DFO's Conservation and Protection (C&P) Branch is responsible for enforcing the [Fisheries Act](#), the [Oceans Act](#), and [other mandated legislation and regulations](#), including bottom-contact fishing closures. Enforcement and compliance tools include: on-water education, such as clarity on fishing restrictions and context for closures; delivery of fines under the [Contraventions Act](#); seizure and forfeiture of equipment, vehicles, and vessels; licence prohibitions; seeking other court-directed prohibitions or restitutions for habitats and fisheries; and pursuit of significant court-appointed fines. In May 2022, a DFO C&P investigation resulted in prosecution under the *Fisheries Act* with a \$40,000 fine issued for illegal prawn fishing in a protected area of Howe Sound.

As part of [Budget 2021](#), C&P Pacific Region received additional funding to support marine conservation targets. The dedicated funding will support strategic C&P positions and resources and will provide further protections to the Howe Sound and Strait of Georgia marine refuges.

C&P is utilizing its fisheries aerial surveillance enforcement aircraft, mid-shore patrol vessels, and local detachment vessel platforms. With these resources, C&P fishery officers conduct patrols to monitor for compliance, and identify and remove unlawful gear within these protected areas. Wherever possible, C&P officers use innovative technologies, such as remote-operated vehicles, to identify potential violations and impacts to protected reef systems and support investigations.

C&P officers have been engaged with local Indigenous communities and stakeholders, collaborating on education and outreach efforts in the area, including developing signage to be placed throughout Howe Sound. Moreover, the Department is inviting proposals to support outreach, monitoring, and stewardship activities through DFO's Pacific Region marine conservation targets grants and contributions funding program.

Public reporting is integral to the identification of potential violations and helps C&P identify areas where there is a requirement for enforcement. "Observe, Record, Report" (ORR) can be reached 24 hours a day at 1-800-465-4336, at 604-607-4186 in Greater Vancouver, or at < [DFO.ORR-ONS.MPO@dfo-mpo.gc.ca](mailto:DFO.ORR-ONS.MPO@dfo-mpo.gc.ca) >. More information is available on DFO's [Report a fisheries violation](#) webpage.

I appreciate the time that the MLSS takes to report potential violations. These reports help to support enforcement action, assist in securing adequate resources, and contribute to the protection of the glass sponge reefs. I recognize the urgency of protecting these fragile and globally unique marine ecosystems.

Thank you for writing and providing me with your thoughts on this important matter.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'JM', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

The Honourable Joyce Murray, P.C., M.P.

c.c.: The Honourable Jonathan Wilkinson, P.C., M.P.  
Minister of Natural Resources  
The Honourable Steven Guilbeault, P.C., M.P.  
Minister of Environment and Climate Change  
Mr. Ken Hardie, M.P.  
Fleetwood–Port Kells  
Mr. Patrick Weiler, M.P.  
West Vancouver–Sunshine Coast–Sea to Sky Country