

NORTH ATLANTIC RIGHT WHALES

A ROAD TO RECOVERY

The Problem

A species on the verge of extinction



Decline over the last decade: now ~330 whales remaining.



2017 an Unusual Mortality Event declared.



34 right whales killed since 2017, 21 deaths in Canadian waters.



At least 16 have significant injuries they are not expected to recover from.



Only 70 breeding females remain.

Major Threats

- Vessel strikes
- Entanglements in fishing gear



Photo Credit: FWC

Habitat

- Busy shipping routes and fishing grounds in the Gulf of St. Lawrence south to the coasts of Florida.



Photo Credit: Peter Duley



Protecting North Atlantic right whales is a long-term challenge that requires long-term solutions if the species is to recover. The current approach of treating it as an annual emergency, for which only annual measures are needed, will not work.

The Solution

The federal government needs to transition to a **permanent, transparent, predictable and adaptable** North Atlantic Right Whale Protection Program made up of:

Regulatory measures under the *Canada Shipping Act*, the *Fisheries Act* and the *Species at Risk Act (SARA)*

- Fully enforceable ship slowdown zones to be in place when whales are present.
- Closing areas to all fishing activities that could cause entanglements when whales are present.
- Implementing SARA action plans, requiring ministers to establish monitoring programs and facilitating new funding mechanisms.

Modern Governance Arrangements

- Formalized information and data sharing arrangements allowing access by all partners and stakeholders.
- Continued use of multi-stakeholder advisory committees to develop, improve and refine measures.

Research and Monitoring

- Long-term funding for North Atlantic right whale protection programs including:
 - Continued expansion of aerial surveillance and enforcement.
 - Ongoing development and deployment of new technologies to support long-term acoustic monitoring throughout the Gulf of St. Lawrence.
 - Ongoing funding and incentives to support ropeless gear initiatives.
 - Dedicated financial support for whale monitoring networks and academic research.

What is at Stake for Canada

Market Access and Certainty for Industry

- Under its *Marine Mammal Protection Act*, the U.S., Canada's largest seafood export market, worth over \$4 billion CAD, requires that all imported fish be harvested without causing harm to marine mammals.
- The shipping industry would benefit from regulatory certainty and predictable navigation rules for route planning and operations.
- The Port of Montreal is heavily dependent on traffic through North Atlantic right whale habitat and vessel traffic is only expected to increase in number and size of vessels in coming years.

Domestic and International Conservation Credibility

- Canadians support government action to protect right whales. According to recent Abacus Data polling, commissioned by Oceana Canada in April 2021, 90 per cent of Canadians feel that it's important for the government to protect right whales.
- Canada's international conservation leadership is vulnerable if right whales continue to die in Canadian waters.

Measures Are Proving Effective

- Dynamic, mandatory season-long vessel slowdowns in parts of the Gulf of St. Lawrence when right whales are present.
- Dynamic, mandatory season-long fishing closures when right whales are present.
- Expansion of visual and acoustic monitoring.
- Ongoing research to understand right whale distribution.
- No recorded right whale deaths due to ship strikes in Canadian waters in 2018, 2020 or 2021.
- No right whales found dead from entanglements in Canadian waters in 2018, 2020 or 2021 (although entanglements in Canadian fishing gear are still occurring).

Collaborative Actions Will Engage

- Indigenous communities and organizations.
- International, national and regional shipping, fishing and whale-watching industry organizations.
- National and regional environmental organizations.
- Provinces, municipalities, ports and pilotage authorities.
- University and other science and technical bodies in Canada and the United States.



"North Atlantic right whales are on the brink of extinction. Every year whales face serious threats from collisions with vessels and entanglements in fishing gear. But there is hope to protect these animals if we act now before it's too late."

— Sam Waterston, Chair, Oceana Board of Directors.



"The Canadian government has made oceans a priority. It is important to act on this commitment by developing a long-term plan to protect critically endangered right whales."

— Alexandra Cousteau, Senior Advisor to Oceana, National Geographic Emerging Explorer and Granddaughter of Jacques Cousteau.



"Fisheries and Oceans Canada and Transport Canada must do everything possible to save this fragile population of only about 330 right whales from extinction. It is time to create a more permanent management regime that is transparent to all stakeholders with a commitment to long-term funding for science, monitoring and enforcement. We can and must change the fate of these whales."

— Kim Elmslie, Campaign Director, Oceana Canada.

About Oceana Canada

Oceana Canada was established as an independent charity in 2015 and is part of the largest international advocacy group dedicated solely to ocean conservation. Oceana Canada has successfully campaigned to end the shark fin trade, make rebuilding depleted fish populations the law, improve the way fisheries are managed and protect marine habitat. We work with civil society, academics, fishers, Indigenous Peoples and the federal government to return Canada's formerly vibrant oceans to health and abundance. By restoring Canada's oceans, we can strengthen our communities, reap greater economic and nutritional benefits and protect our future. [Oceana.ca](https://oceana.ca)



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Snow Cone: A Resilient Mother

Snow Cone is one of about 330 critically endangered North Atlantic right whales left in the world — and one of only 70 or so breeding females. In March of 2021, 16-year-old Snow Cone was seen off the coast of Massachusetts entangled in fishing gear. The Center for Coastal Studies staged an intervention and were able to remove much of the gear, allowing Snow Cone to swim north to the food-rich waters of the Gulf of St. Lawrence. In May of 2021 and again in July, the Campobello Whale Rescue Team attempted to cut her free from the remaining fishing gear. They were unable to remove all of the rope.

Remarkably, Snow Cone was pregnant the whole time. On December 2, 2021, she was spotted off the coast of Georgia with a tiny calf swimming in and out of the five-metre-long ropes still wrapped in Snow Cone's baleen as her baby nursed.

Snow Cone's first calf was born in the 2019-2020 calving season, but lived a short and tragic life. That winter, he delighted whale lovers as he swam with his mother in the Gulf of Mexico off the coast of Pensacola, Florida. But on June 25, 2020, the seven-month-old calf's body was found floating off the coast of New Jersey. He had been struck by ships at least two separate times during his short life.

The survival of the North Atlantic right whale depends on the health of mothers like Snow Cone and her new calf — and the protections they receive in our waters.



Snow Cone entangled with calf
Credit: Georgia DNR under NOAA permit 20556

