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IMPAC5 Highlights: Friday, 3 February 2023

The 5th International Marine Protected Areas Congress (IMPAC5), a global forum bringing together Ocean conservation professionals, Indigenous Peoples, Youth, high-level officials and other stakeholders to address issues related to marine protected areas (MPAs), convened on the traditional and unceded territory of the Squamish Nation Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh Úxwumixw, Musqueam x̓m̓əθk̓w̓əy̓əm and Tsleil-Waututh səlilwətał Nations.

The meeting opened with a musical prelude of the Naden Band of the Royal Canadian Navy followed by: traditional song and dance of the Squamish nation reminiscing of paddle song beats to the rhythm of ancestors arriving in canoes; and warrior song rallying troops for battle; Tsleil-Waututh nation dances: Takaya slolem, their wolf song and clan dance; and Musqueam Nation battle and welcome songs and dances.

The official IMPAC5 opening video, created by National Geographic Pristine Seas, focused on the services the Ocean provides as well as the need for global efforts, including the leadership and wisdom of Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

Towards the end of the opening ceremony, a musical performance by the Yves Lambert Quartet was followed by Lynda Brown and Alianai Niviatsiak performance of traditional songs from Nunavut and Nunavik.



Joyce Murray, Minister of Fisheries, Oceans, and the Canadian Coast Guard

Opening of the meeting

Representatives from the host First Nations expressed warm welcomes to participants, especially Indigenous leaders travelling far and wide. On behalf of the Musqueam Nation, elected chief yəx̓wəy̓ələq Wayne Sparrow reminded participants that his is a fishing Nation, and highlighted the importance of marine protection for the very survival of his people. Extending a special thanks to the singers and dancers, he stressed the crucial continued collaboration amongst First Nations peoples.

Syexwáliya Ann Whonnock, elected councillor for the Squamish Nation, told participants how heartened and encouraged she felt by so many attending a conference for such important discussions.

Sxwíxwtn Wilson Williams, elected councillor for the Squamish Nation, recalled how his Nations people broke through barriers for survival, holding up each other for future generations. Stressing the importance of these gatherings, he said that “our times today will define what unity means, how we will come together.” He also highlighted the importance of shared Indigenous spaces, bringing families together for sharing stories, histories and languages.

Charlene Aleck, elected councillor for the Tsleil-Waututh Nation, recalled the responsibility of her people as caretakers of the waters and lands shared amongst the First Nations hosts.



Olivia Livingstone, IMPAC5 Young Professionals Committee Representative

Joyce Murray, Minister of Fisheries, Oceans, and the Canadian Coast Guard, emphasized the vital role of Oceans in people's lives, serving as a source of food, protection, transportation, renewable energy, and solace, as well as acting as a natural carbon sink in the fight against climate change. She highlighted Canada's efforts in creating MPAs and working towards preserving 30% of the "world's largest coastline" by 2030. Singer Andrea Menard of the Métis Nation shared her commitment to promoting the protection of water through her music, recognizing the responsibility she has as a woman and lifegiver to sing "giveaway songs" that others can use to help protect water.

Olivia Livingstone, representing the Young Professionals Committee of IMPAC5, welcomed the growing number of young participants and urged support from Ocean advocates, elders, scientists, and politicians to reach the goal of protecting 30% of the oceans by 2030, ensuring the inclusion of all stakeholders in decision-making processes.

Amandeep Singh, British Columbia Parliamentary Secretary for Environment, highlighted the deep tie of the people of his province to the Ocean, integrated into the culture and economy. He noted that MPAs are an important tool to support conservation and stated the need to reduce Ocean threats, stressing the work with First Nations in protecting the Ocean and preventing marine debris and plastic pollution.

Vladimir Ryabinin, Executive Secretary of Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC), UNESCO, stated in a video that IMPAC5 is an official activity of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development and highlighted the role of this Congress in fostering the implementation of the recently adopted Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. He stressed the need to continue protecting the Ocean with the active participation of Indigenous Peoples and local communities and using tools such as marine spatial planning, noting that the future Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) treaty will set ground rules for Ocean conservation.

Sandra Schwartz, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS), highlighted the need for faster action and

better protection for Ocean, underscoring that "we are only 8 years away" from reaching the 30% protection of the Ocean goal. Madhu Rao, IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA), stressed that the Ocean is facing unprecedented challenges due to overfishing, plastic pollution, and climate change, and that MPAs can be the critical piece to address those challenges while drawing on traditional knowledge to advance solutions. She noted that this Congress is an important opportunity to support the recovery of the Ocean.

Mary Simon, Canada's first Indigenous Governor General, closed the session by describing the Inuit's relationship to the Ocean. She reminisced how water sustained her as she grew up in Nunavik, and emphasized the importance of protecting the Ocean to ensure survival of coastal Indigenous Peoples and local communities. She noted that Tuvalu is building a digital repository of its heritage as climate change threatens its very existence, and the same risks await many of the coastal Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities. She concluded that the "Ocean is a transformative power" and invited everyone to work on "healing the waters".

In the Corridors

The first day of the IMPAC5 meeting was marked by cultural and musical performances and ceremonies that brought joy and introspection to participants. The presentations will hopefully set the tone for the coming days of the meeting, providing a welcoming, supporting, and positive atmosphere for knowledge sharing and celebration of Ocean conservation efforts globally.

A common thread woven throughout the day was the commemoration and signaling of the important presence of Indigenous and First Nations people at the conference. From a designated Indigenous Caucus session for knowledge exchange between the conference's Indigenous participants, to the dances, songs, and speeches from First Nations representatives during the Opening Ceremony, the significance of Indigenous stewardship, intergenerational learning and handover of traditions, and survival rang loud and clear in the Vancouver Convention Centre.



Lynda Brown and **Alianai Niviatsiak** perform a traditional song from Nunavut