



## SHIPPING FACT SHEET

# MARINE BIRDS



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## What are marine birds and why are they important?

Marine birds have special physical features like waterproof feathers and salt glands that allow them to live predominantly at sea. Most marine birds breed in colonies on land, which reduces the risk of predation and makes it easier to mate and pass on information about foraging. As top predators, marine birds are ecologically important in marine ecosystems as nutrient recyclers. They help transfer energy in the food web, from the oceans to their colonies on land. Canada is home to millions of marine birds, many species of which are globally or domestically at risk.

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## How does shipping impact marine birds?

- **Oil spills and operational leaks** can lead to bird feathers becoming coated in oil. This may poison birds, impact their foraging and reproductive successes, impact their ability to fly and stay warm, and make them more vulnerable to predators.
- **The presence of ship traffic** can disturb marine birds and cause them to fly away (known as flushing), resulting in reduced foraging and resting.
- **Light from passing ships** may attract marine birds and/or disorient them, which can impact their navigation to important habitats.
- **Underwater noise** from ship traffic may impact their ability to find prey underwater and communicate with other birds. The effects of underwater noise are largely unknown.

## How does Canada protect marine birds from shipping?

Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and National Wildlife Areas (NWAs) are types of protected areas that may limit shipping activity and provide refuge for marine birds from the harmful impacts of shipping. But marine birds are highly mobile. This makes it a challenge for MPAs and NWAs to provide continuous protection throughout their lifespans. Many of these protected areas are also not designed with a focus on marine birds.

Canada's Species at Risk Act (SARA) is intended to protect at-risk species, including marine birds. Measures under the Act can enable sanctions for offences under SARA. Other legal instruments to protect marine birds also exist, but they are largely terrestrially-focused and/or have limited applicability to shipping.

## What needs to be done?

- **Improve oil spill response** in areas important to marine bird foraging and nesting
- **Eliminate use of** hard-to-clean fuels like heavy fuel oil
- **Implement best practices** for oily water separation and management
- **Implement routing** or other spatial measures to decrease at-sea disturbance of marine birds by ships, including in MPAs
- **Support further research** around the impacts of ship-marine bird interactions, as well as effective management measures to reduce these impacts

## Why address this now?

Globally, many marine birds are experiencing increased pressure from human activity. Shipping has clear detrimental impacts on marine birds – and these are only amplified by our climate crisis. In Canada, protected areas are not designed specifically for marine birds and therefore do not effectively protect them from shipping impacts like oil spills. This requires immediate action, particularly for at-risk marine bird species.