



Fisheries and Oceans Canada

GSR-RCA PROJECT

Presented by **Rhona Govender & Danielle Derrick**



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Introduction

Marine Conservation Targets Team in Fisheries Management (MCT-FM)

Our team provides Fisheries Management related inputs to help meet the Government of Canada's Marine Conservation Target commitment goals of protecting 25% of Canadian marine waters by 2025 and working towards 30% by 2030. Protection of sensitive benthic habitats, such as corals and glass sponge reefs support this commitment.

Working towards those commitments means our team's work spans areas such as:

- Support our Oceans colleagues with the establishment of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs);
- Establish Marine Refuges and Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs);
- Support fisheries management input into initiatives led by other federal agencies/departments and other levels of government;
- Provide fisheries input into Marine Spatial Planning;
- Summary and briefing of potential benefits and impacts of any proposals led by our team;
- Indigenous reconciliation;
- Spatial analyses to support all aspects of this work.

RCA Review

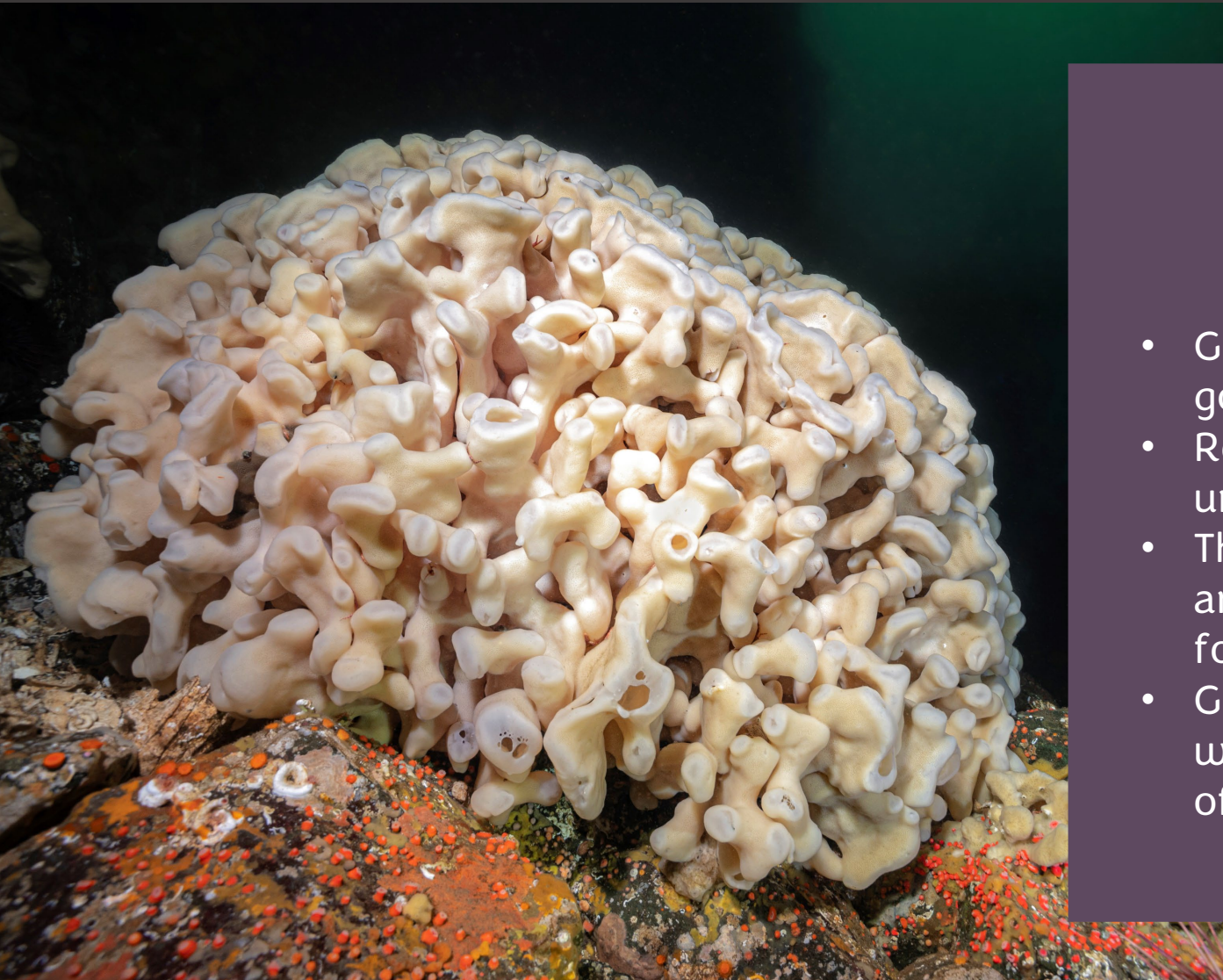
- Inshore Rockfish gravitate towards and tend to stay in complex habitats like rocky bottoms and glass sponge reefs;
- Rockfish are susceptible to overfishing;
- Rockfish Conservation Area (RCA) Strategy was developed in 2002;
- Beginning in 2003, 164 (now 162) RCAs were established in Canadian Pacific Waters;
- RCAs are a long-term conservation measure aimed to:
 - Alleviate further Rockfish decline;
 - Protect rockfish from fisheries-related mortality.



RCA Review

- Recent science advice recommended that RCAs be reviewed to determine whether they are adequately protecting Rockfish and to update geographic boundaries and management measures where necessary to better protect Rockfish and their habitat;
- A coastwide review began in 2019 to:
 - Look at how RCAs can better protect Rockfish and their habitat;
 - Determine if some of the RCAs can satisfy OECM criteria to become marine refuges.





GSR Initiative

- Glass Sponge Reefs (GSRs) were thought to have gone extinct over 40 million years ago;
- Rediscovered in 1987, they were found to be unique to the Northeast Pacific;
- They support over 120 species including Rockfish, and species richness is 3 times greater within reef footprints than outside reef footprints;
- GSRs can also filter more than 17 billion liters of water per day, and they can remove vast amounts of organic carbon from the water (>436kg/day).

GSR Initiative

Phase I - 2015

Nine glass sponge reefs in the Strait of Georgia and Howe Sound were closed to all commercial and recreational bottom-contact fishing in 2015. Indigenous Food, Social and Ceremonial (FSC) bottom-contact fishing was restricted a year later.

All areas meet OECM criteria and became marine refuges in 2016.

Area protected = 29.04km²

Phase II - 2019

Eight glass sponge reefs in Howe Sound were closed to all commercial, recreational, and Indigenous FSC bottom-contact fishing in 2019.

All areas meet OECM criteria and become marine refuges in 2019.

Area protected = 3.5km²

Phase III - 2022

Five glass sponge reefs in Howe Sound were closed to all commercial and recreational bottom-contact fishing in 2022.

The Department is currently working towards establishing the sites as marine refuges.

Area protected = 5.24km²

Background

- There are 11 RCAs, 10 GSR marine refuges and 5 proposed GSR marine refuges in Howe Sound;
- There are another 9 RCAs in Jervis Inlet and Indian Arm;
- Recent Science advice that recommends RCAs be reviewed for their effectiveness and suitability for OECM status has led to the GSR-RCA review process in Howe Sound;
- Several GSRs are already established OECMs;
- Management measures between GSRs and RCAs are different and many GSRs and RCAs are overlapping within Howe Sound;
- There are increased issues pertaining to compliance and enforcement in areas where various closure types overlap.

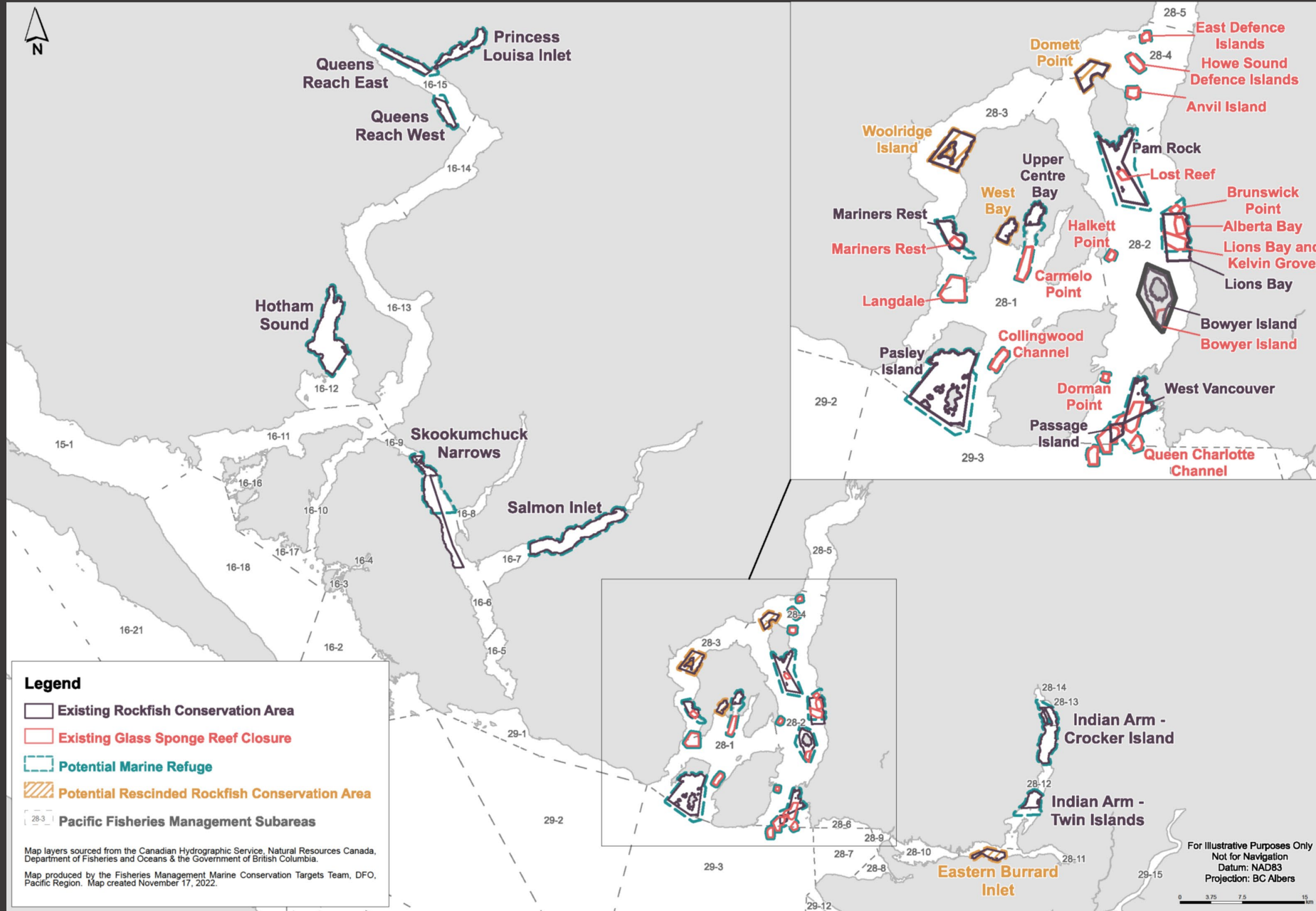
GSR-RCA Project

GSR-RCA Project

- Review effectiveness of RCAs in Howe Sound, Jervis Inlet, and Indian Arm and explore avenues to improve RCAs where needed;
- Through the RCA review, there is an opportunity to explore the potential to adjust the geographic boundaries and management measures of GSRs and RCAs where they overlap to help:
 - Increase their effectiveness;
 - Increase compliance and enforcement; and
 - Reduce public confusion on the water;
- Looking at the two initiatives together can strengthen conservation, help reduce consultation fatigue, and makes the process more efficient;
- At this time, DFO is in the exploratory stage and no decisions have been made.

Overview Map:

Howe Sound, Jervis Inlet & Indian Arm



Objectives

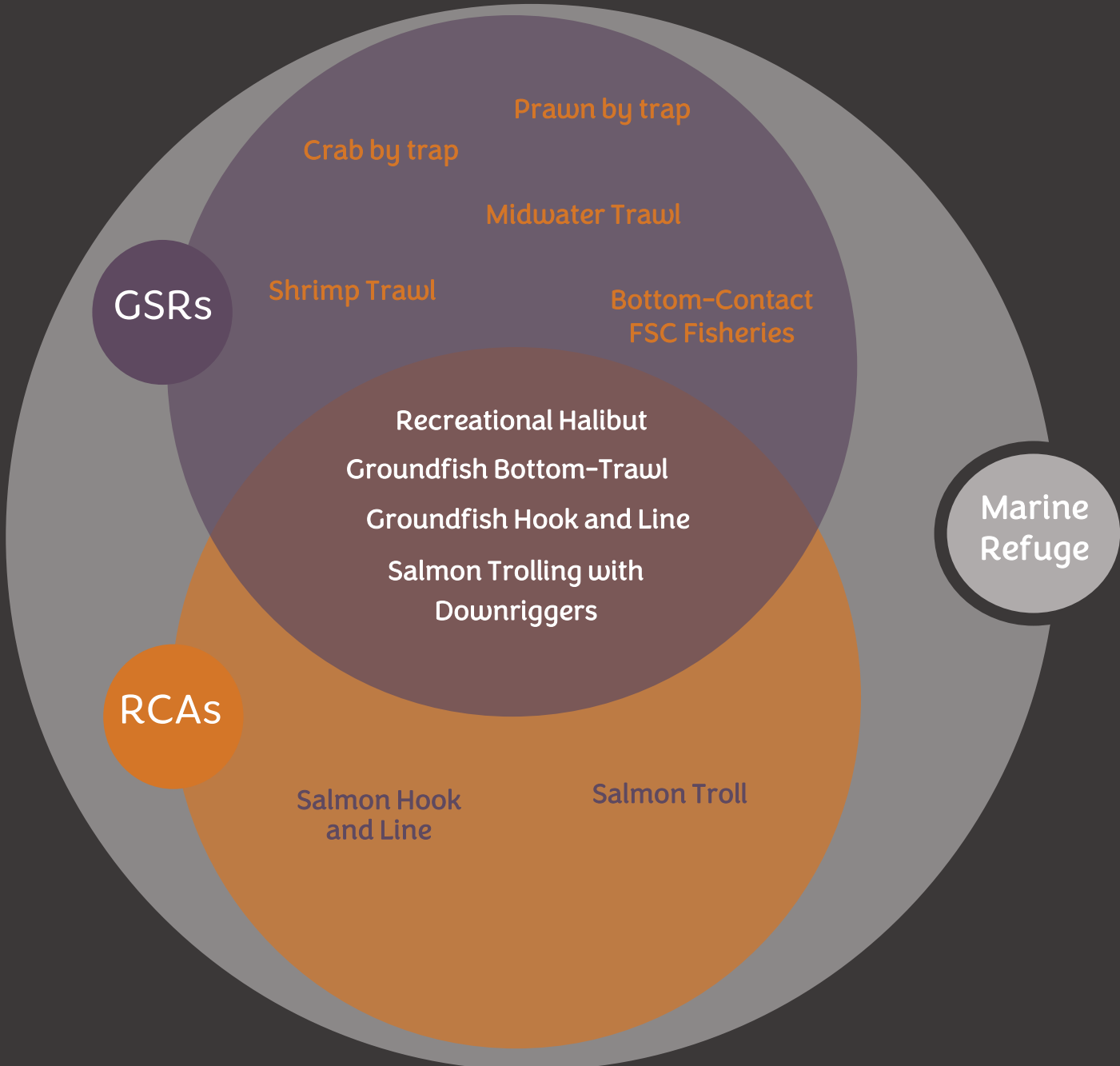
Objective 1

Review current RCAs to determine their effectiveness and consider modifications to RCAs where needed to support adequate protection of Rockfish and their habitat (e.g., rescind, modify geographic boundaries and management measures, no changes, etc.).

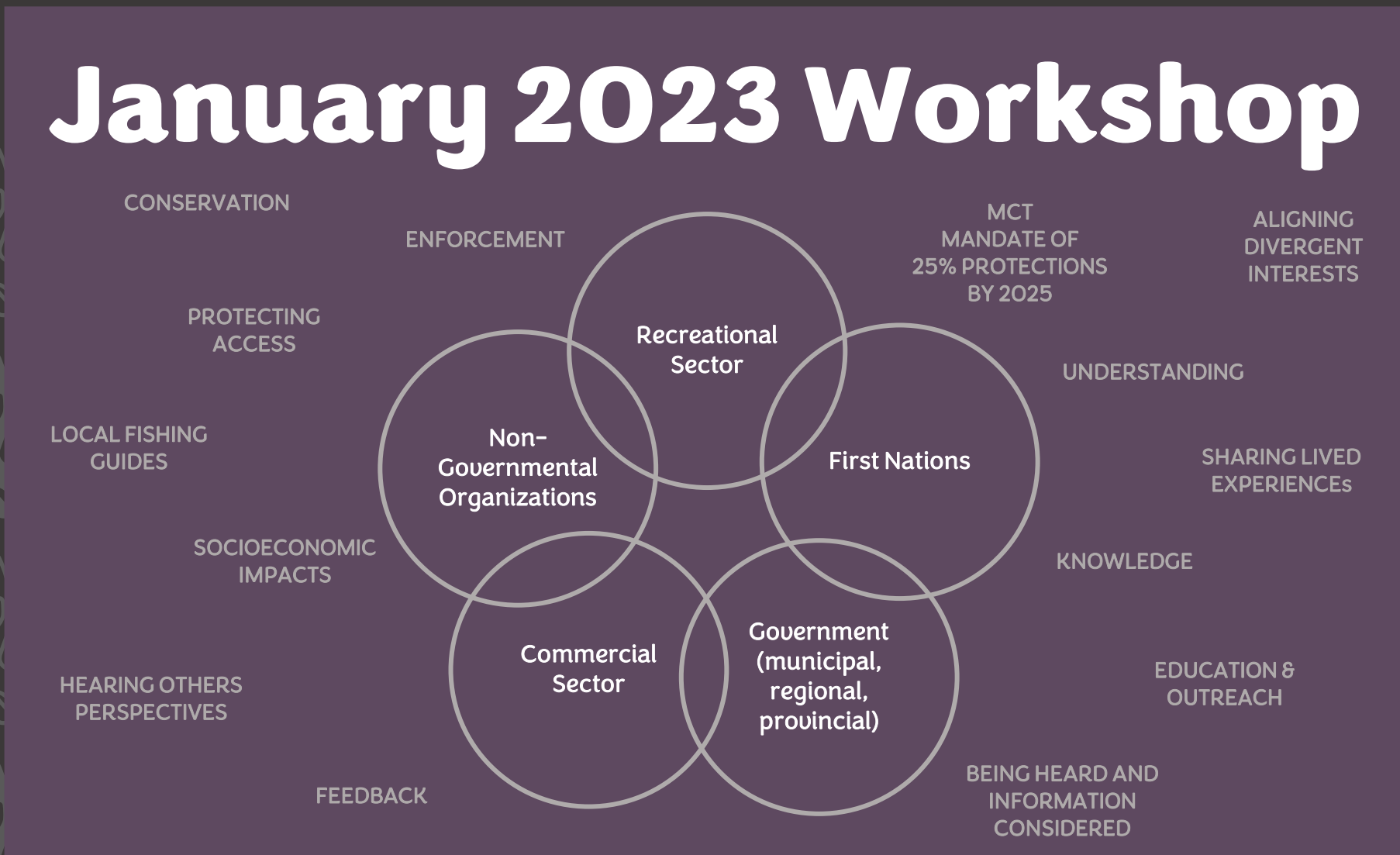
Objective 2

Consider modifications to geographic boundaries and management measures where GSRs and RCAs overlap to increase the conservation value of the areas, improve compliance and enforcement and reduce confusion on the water.





January 2023 Workshop



Workshop

WHAT WE HEARD

General

- Clarity on the rationale for the GSR-RCA projects needs to be articulated;
- British Columbia contributes a lot already towards the Government of Canada's MCT goals;
- A strong education and communication program will enable greater success and support for the project;
- Rebuild relationships with industry through greater dialogue and collaboration.

Conservation

- Ensure protected areas have connectivity;
- GSR buffers could be reviewed to address fishing pressure;
- Performance reports on RCAs are critical to determining if they are working;
- Monitoring and enforcement efforts are needed at the sites as part of ongoing management;
- Publicizing enforcement outcomes can help motivate citizens to report infractions;
- Develop a penalty structure that financially supports habitat restoration programs;
- How we measure success is important.

Workshop

WHAT WE HEARD

Fisheries

- Current existing closures are clear and easy to adhere to;
- Any proposed changes should have a clear link to a conservation need;
- Other factors, such as climate change and increased carbon emissions due to displacement causing fishers to travel further should be factored into the analysis.

Socio-Economic

- Consider cumulative costs of the closures (existing and any proposed)
- Socio-economic impacts need to be fully considered into decision-making processes;
- Consider how this work links to the broader fisheries management decisions for a given fishery.

Engagement

Meetings

DFO has had meetings from January to March with those who have requested time to meet and discuss the project, its potential impacts, and to seek feedback that was not already shared/gathered from the January 2023 workshop.

Next Steps

DFO will re-run certain analyses based on scientific information and feedback and information received during the engagement phase. We will create a proposal that should be available later this year.

Timeline



January 2023

**STEP
01**

**ENGAGEMENT &
INFORMATION GATHERING**
Continue to engage and gather further information from all sectors on proposed project



January - August 2023

**STEP
03**

CONSULTATION
Consult externally on formal proposal for the GSRs and RCAs in the Howe Sound, Indian Arm, and Jervis Inlet regions



2024

**STEP
05**

January - April 2023



INTERNAL ANALYSES
Incorporate information and feedback gathered into proposed project



Fall 2023

**STEP
04**

IMPLEMENTATION
Implement changes in 2024

WORKSHOP 01
Engage rightsholders, stakeholders, government, and commercial and public sectors on project and gather feedback and information on region and potential impacts

Please note the above timelines are our best estimate and are subject to change





Fisheries and Oceans Canada

THANK YOU

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