

News Release Communiqué

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Government of Canada presents boundary proposal for Lancaster Sound National Marine Conservation Area

Critical step forward in protecting the “Serengeti of the Arctic”

Ottawa, Ontario, December 6, 2010 – John Baird, Canada’s Environment Minister, John Duncan, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Christian Paradis, Minister of Natural Resources, and Leona Aglukkaq, Minister of Health, all today proudly announced the Government of Canada’s position on a potential future boundary for a national marine conservation area (NMCA) in Lancaster Sound, Nunavut. Today’s announcement represents a key step in Canada’s commitment to protect the marine waters and wildlife of Lancaster Sound, a globally-significant ecological treasure that has been referred to as the “Serengeti of the Arctic”. Ministers also announced that the government will immediately begin consultations to finalize the boundary.

“Today’s exciting announcement represents an important step forward in delivering on Canada’s commitment to work with the Government of Nunavut and the Qikiqtani Inuit Association towards protecting this incredibly important ecological area,” said Minister Baird. “This will allow us to set the stage for respectful, transparent consultations with our key partners and the public so that all views can be considered before any boundary is finalized.”

Because of its combination of oceanographic and biological characteristics, Lancaster Sound is an area of very high ecological significance. Lancaster Sound is located between Baffin and Ellesmere Islands, in Nunavut. It is an area of critical ecological importance to marine mammals, including seals, narwhal, beluga and bowhead whales, as well as walrus and polar bears, and it is bordered by some of the most important seabird breeding colonies in the Arctic, with populations in the hundreds of thousands.

“The next step will be to consult with Inuit organizations and communities, stakeholders and the public before a final decision is made,” said Minister Aglukkaq. “The formation of a steering committee composed of representatives of Parks Canada, the Nunavut government and Qikiqtani Inuit Association is critical to ensuring that northern interests are considered and will help guide work on the NMCA proposal.”

“While these consultations take place, no exploration or development of petroleum resources will occur within the proposed boundaries. Once approved as a designated National Marine Conservation Area, the region will remain protected from industrial development, regardless of the resource potential,” said Minister Paradis.

“Final decisions regarding a boundary will be informed by consultations and by a thorough assessment of the area’s energy resources and ecological values,” said Minister Duncan. “These important results will be made public once completed.”

“The Qikiqtani Inuit Association is eager to work with Inuit in the North Baffin, Parks Canada and the Government of Nunavut towards the creation of a National Marine Conservation Area,” said Okalik Eegeesiak, QIA President. “Lancaster Sound is more than a transportation corridor for Inuit - it is our backyard. Inuit seek balance and respect for the land, waters, animals and our

cultural history. We hope the feasibility study will help to strengthen the relationship between Inuit knowledge and conventional science for the betterment of Canada."

"We welcome this significant announcement and stress that the boundary consultation is the important next step in conserving this globally significant arctic marine ecosystem, which is facing unprecedented change," said Gerald Butts, President of WWF-Canada.

"We are thrilled that Canada is taking these important next steps towards protecting one of the richest northern marine ecosystems in the world," said Éric Hébert-Daly, National Executive Director of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS). "We look forward to working with Parks Canada, the Qikiqtani Inuit Association, and the Government of Nunavut through the public consultations and other steps required to establish this vast and critically important NMCA in Lancaster Sound."

"This past August 2010, in our government's *Statement On Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy*, we stated that we would create a national marine conservation area in Lancaster Sound," said Minister Baird. "Today's strong action by our government shows clearly to the world that Canada is acting responsibly to promote the economic potential of the north while protecting our environmental and other national interests."

The Parks Canada system has tremendous growth momentum. In the first hundred years of the system, Canada set aside about 277,000 square kilometres of land and water. In the past four years alone, the Government of Canada has taken steps that will add nearly 90,000 square kilometers, an area almost double the size of Nova Scotia, to the existing lands and waters administered by Parks Canada - a 30 percent increase. In recognition of this globally significant track record in creating protected areas and reintroducing endangered species, WWF Canada has nominated Parks Canada for the prestigious Gift to the Earth award, WWF's highest accolade.

As part of the 125th anniversary of national parks in Canada, the Government of Canada is proud to work in collaboration with Nunavut and the Qikiqtani Inuit Association towards the creation of a national marine conservation area in Lancaster Sound, an accomplishment that will leave a living legacy that present and future generations may benefit from, experience and enjoy.

Parks Canada works to ensure that Canada's historic and natural heritage is presented and protected for the enjoyment, education, appreciation and inspired discovery of all Canadians, today and in the future, and offers them the opportunity for real and inspiring discovery.

For additional information, please see the accompanying backgrounder at www.parkscanada.gc.ca under **Media Room**.

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Information:

Pascale Boulay
Press Secretary
Minister's Office, Environment Canada
819-997-1441

Media Relations
Parks Canada
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