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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **West Coast Environmental Law urges legal protection for Great Bear Sea at IMCC4**

**St. John's, NL** – A new initiative by West Coast Environmental Law proposes strong new laws for ocean protection to permanently safeguard one of Canada's ocean wonders – the Great Bear Sea.

At the 2016 International Marine Conservation Congress (IMCC4) in St. John's this week, WCEL Staff Counsel Linda Nowlan will present how lasting protection for this spectacular ocean region can be put in place through provincial, Canadian, Indigenous, and international law.

"The Great Bear Sea has immense value – from its amazing biodiversity to its spiritual importance and its role in the maritime economy. But without legal teeth for new marine plans, this incredible marine area is vulnerable and exposed to risks from inappropriately sited projects, some damaging shipping and fishing practices, pollution and other human activities," said Nowlan.

One way to give the new plans legal teeth is to create more marine protected areas (MPAs) in the region. Canada's federal government has made public commitments to expand the country's MPA coverage, with a goal of protecting 5 per cent of Canada's ocean and coastal area by 2017 and 10 per cent by 2020.

"We were very pleased with the government's commitment to ramp up ocean protection," Nowlan said.

"We see this as a great opportunity to introduce new legal approaches through Indigenous and Canadian law to protect this special place forever."

In 2015, 17 First Nations and the BC government approved marine plans for the vast ocean region known as the Great Bear Sea through the [Marine Planning Partnership \(MaPP\)](#). The Government of Canada is now working with the Government of BC and First Nations to create a network of marine protected areas in the region.

Canada has designated five areas for protection on three coasts by 2020. The Great Bear Sea represents the one network set aside for protection on the Pacific Coast.

"Canada's commitment to increasing our amount of marine protected areas shows that our government understands how deeply Canadians care about our oceans. WCEL believes we can go beyond designating areas for protection and give Canada's oceans lasting legal protection to ensure vibrant coastal ecosystems, communities and cultures for future generations," said Nowlan.

The Great Bear Sea spans 102,000 square kilometres of British Columbia's north Pacific Coast. Likened to Australia's Great Barrier Reef, this spectacular region is teeming with whales, dolphins, sea otters, Pacific salmon, white Spirit bears and giant kelp forests. First Nations and coastal communities depend on a healthy Great Bear Sea for their culture, food security and livelihoods.

Nowlan's presentation at IMCC4, entitled *Getting legal traction for British Columbia's new science-based marine spatial plans*, will take place on Sunday, July 31<sup>st</sup> at 4:00 p.m. in Salon F.

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[IMCC4 Program Information](#) – Section C30, Marine Policy 1 (Sunday, July 31, 2016)