

## **NEWS RELEASE**

**June 8, 2010**

### **Canada moves to protect B.C.'s precious Glass Sponge Reefs: Fragile, prehistoric reefs considered a submerged "Jurassic Park"**

OTTAWA – CPAWS celebrates the long-awaited announcement today that B.C.'s extremely fragile Glass Sponge Reefs are headed for permanent protection. Gail Shea, Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, has declared an "Area of Interest" for a future Marine Protected Area around the reefs, considered one of the great wonders in Canada's oceans.

"These are the only living glass sponge reefs known in the world and are precious beyond words. We are so glad that they are finally on a firm road to permanent protection," says Sabine Jessen, CPAWS national oceans program manager. Thought to have gone extinct 30 million years ago, the 1987 discovery of these reefs in Hecate Strait stunned the scientific community.

"According to the world's foremost expert on these sponges, it was like finding a herd of dinosaurs still alive on land," says Jessen. She is referring to the words of Dr. Manfred Krautter of Leibniz University. "Although world oceans have plenty of individual glass sponges, B.C. has the only reefs and they're huge – eight stories high in some places. They're also ancient, dating back 9,000 years," adds Jessen.

"These reefs are entirely suitable for UNESCO World Heritage Site status – they're that precious on a global scale," says Jessen. "When Canada takes the next step in the process and formally creates an MPA for B.C.'s reefs, CPAWS will once again urge Canada to apply for their designation."

Today's announcement means that the ban on bottom trawling – an activity that instantly destroys these fragile glass sponge reefs – will remain in perpetuity, instead of one-year renewals.

"We hope Canada also moves to protect the smaller glass sponge reefs closer to Vancouver and Victoria. While not nearly as large, they are still considered wonders of the deep and need protection," adds Jessen.

CPAWS is calling on the federal government to accelerate action to create a network of marine protected areas on all of Canada's coasts. The network can be planned in the context of marine spatial planning processes currently underway. Our vision is that Canada will protect at least half of our public land and water. Less than one percent of Canada's oceans are currently protected.

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For more information on B.C.'s Glass Sponge Reefs, visit:

<http://www.cpawsbc.org/campaigns/marine/glassspongereefs.php>

About CPAWS, visit [www.cpaws.org](http://www.cpaws.org)