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Public Opinion Research Study: Oceans Protection Plan – Canadians Confidence in Marine Safety 2020

Summary

Prepared for Transport Canada

Supplier: EKOS RESEARCH ASSOCIATES INC.

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Ce rapport est aussi disponible en français

Canada 

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Summary

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Date: February 28, 2020

This public opinion research report presents the results of an online survey conducted by EKOS Research Associates Inc. on behalf of Transport Canada. The research study was conducted with 2,702 Canadians in February 2020. Nineteen one-on-one interviews with Indigenous participants were also conducted during the same time.

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français sous le titre : Recherche sur l'opinion publique : Plan de protection des océans – la confiance des Canadiens à l'égard de la sécurité maritime 2020.

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Transport Canada
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Ottawa, ON K1A 0N5

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A. BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

The Oceans Protection Plan is the largest investment ever made to protect Canada's coasts and waterways. It was launched in late 2016 to establish a world-leading marine safety system that provides economic opportunities for Canadians today, while protecting our coastlines for generations to come.

Transport Canada identified a need for public opinion research to measure Canadians' and Indigenous Peoples' confidence in Canada's marine safety system, and their awareness of the Oceans Protection Plan. This research will inform communications planning, outreach, and engagement, as well as serve to measure improvement in relationships with Indigenous Peoples in marine safety.

B. METHODOLOGY

The survey is comprised of 2,702 completed cases using a random probability sample with a margin of error of up to +/-1.9 %, including 2,141 with the general public (with an associated margin of error of up to +/- 2.1%) and 561 with Indigenous Peoples in Canada (with an associated margin of error of up to +/- 4.1%). The survey relied on a mix of panel and random public sources, with collection taking place online and through a team of trained, bilingual interviews between late January and mid-February 2020. Findings are reported separately for the general public and Indigenous Peoples of Canada, and results are compared with a baseline survey of 3,407 (2,168 general public and 1,239 Indigenous Peoples).

In a second phase, qualitative one-on-one interviews were conducted by telephone with 19 individuals from Indigenous coastal communities. This includes five interviews conducted in the Pacific Region, one in the Arctic Region, six in Quebec, one in Ontario, and four in the Atlantic Region. Two more were also conducted with national Indigenous organizations. Interviews were conducted between early February and early March 2020.

The process for collection is described separately in Appendix A (Survey) and Appendix B (Indigenous one-on-one interviews). Appendix C presents the survey questionnaire and Appendix D presents the interview guide for Indigenous one-on-one interviews.

C. KEY FINDINGS

Public Awareness, Perceived Importance and Confidence

There is limited awareness in the Canadian public regarding marine safety, including safe shipping practices in Canada and marine environment protection. Fewer than one in five respondents in the survey rated themselves as aware and roughly half said they are unaware. Awareness is marginally higher among Indigenous Peoples and residents of coastal communities. Most Canadians (76% to 84%) however, feel that marine safety and protecting the marine environment are important. The same level of importance is also found among Indigenous Peoples and those living in coastal communities.

Public confidence in Canada's marine safety system is modest with three in ten members of the general public and coastal communities. In comparison, four in ten members of the general public and coastal communities indicate moderate confidence. Confidence is lower with Indigenous Peoples (22%), particularly those in coastal communities (17%).

The results for the general public are largely on par with 2018 results in terms of confidence, although there is a very slight increase from 29% to 32% amongst people living in coastal communities. In both the general public and Indigenous samples, confidence is considerably higher among those most aware. Key sources of weaker confidence stem from stories people have heard or read in the news (66%), what is witnessed in the community (28%), or what people say on social media (15%).

Awareness and Perceived Importance of Government Programs

Awareness of marine programs, regulations, or activities operated by the Government of Canada in these areas is quite high. Eight in ten are aware the government has a program to respond to accidents, such as oil spills contributing to marine pollution. Another two-thirds think there is a program to prevent accidents or monitor marine pollution, and half think that the Government of Canada works closely with Indigenous Peoples and coastal communities to protect Canada's coasts and waterways. Awareness (or faith in the Government of Canada) is marginally lower among Indigenous Peoples and in coastal communities.

One in five said that they have heard or seen something about the Government of Canada's Oceans Protection Plan in the Canadian public (one in four among Indigenous Peoples), with marginally higher awareness in coastal communities. While prompted awareness following a description of the program is substantially higher, self-reported recall is relatively low (just one

in five have heard of the program). Key sources of awareness of the program are traditional media (television, newspapers and radio), as well as the Internet, followed at a distance by social media. The most prominent messages recalled relate to government efforts to prevent and respond to marine pollution and accidents, updating of regulatory and legislative regimes, and preserving and restoring the marine ecosystem. Recall of these specific elements of the Plan is higher than in 2018. Recall of government collaboration with Indigenous Peoples and coastal communities is marginally lower among Indigenous respondents.

There is limited distinction regarding the importance of most key elements of the Oceans Protection Program. Top elements considered important by more than eight in 10 members of the general public and of Indigenous Peoples are:

- Strengthening polluter-pay principles to ensure companies take responsibility for spills;
- Making marine pollution response stronger, better and faster;
- Protecting and restoring coastal ecosystems; and,
- Protecting Canada's endangered whale species.

Other areas seen as important among 6 to 8 members of the general public and Indigenous Peoples in Canada are:

- Investing in scientific research to support decisions about marine safety;
- Boosting marine safety in the Arctic; and,
- Bringing more Canadians and Indigenous peoples into the marine safety system.

Perceived Impact of Programs

The perceived impact of the Oceans Protection Plan is generally high. About two-thirds of the general public believe that the Plan will have a positive impact on the health of marine animals and plants and the health of Canada's coasts and waterways. Slightly fewer feel that the plan will have a positive impact on the safety of the shipping industry. Half think there will be a positive impact on the health of people living in Indigenous and other coastal communities or on local economies near Canada's coasts and waterways.

These results are echoed, although marginally less strongly among Indigenous. Perceived impact is also not as strong in coastal communities. Related to the program's three primary objectives, just over one in three Canadians feel confident the Oceans Protection Plan will improve marine safety and responsible shipping practices and protect Canada's marine environment, and slightly fewer are confident it will offer new possibilities for Indigenous and coastal communities.

Confidence is marginally lower, however, among Indigenous Peoples in Canada (26% to 31%) and considerably lower than found in 2018. Public confidence in the Oil Spill Response System is similarly modest, with just under four in ten indicating confidence in the system's ability to clean up an oil spill and/or provide a timely response to a spill. Only one in four feel confident the system can ensure that industrial polluters will be made to pay and affected communities will be compensated.

Roles in Developing Marine Safety

Results highlight a strong public preference for having all three levels of government play a significant role in developing marine safety. Eight in ten members of the public believe the federal government should play a strong role, and two in three say their provincial government should be similarly tasked. Half would like their local or regional government to play a significant role. Indigenous respondents are marginally less supportive of a federal role, and more strongly advocate for local government involvement (63%).

Public perceptions of the role taken thus far, however, are weaker. Four in ten members of the general public believe that the federal government has played a lead role. Fewer than one in five feel the same about their provincial government and one in seven believe their local government has played a strong part. Results are weaker in terms of perceived role of the Government of Canada (34%) and marginally stronger with respect to Indigenous governments among Indigenous Peoples.

Seven in ten members of the public, and three in four Indigenous respondents, believe it is important that Indigenous Peoples and coastal communities work closely with the federal government. Half of the public and 62% of Indigenous respondents feel it is important for citizens to provide input into these decisions.

One in four members of the public and one in three Indigenous Peoples have looked for information about marine safety, largely looking to the Internet, Transport Canada or other Government of Canada websites, and news from traditional media as sources. More detailed involvement, through participation in engagement sessions, is very low at three percent in the general public, although it is higher (11%) among Indigenous Peoples.

According to eight in ten respondents, there is strong value perceived in the Government of Canada's reporting to Canadians about its performance in improving marine safety. Incidence and record of clean up related to spills, as well as implementation of new regulations to safeguard shipping practices, are seen as good performance indicators (88% to 90% of both the

general public and Indigenous Peoples. Another two in three members of the public and eight in ten Indigenous Peoples also feel it is a good idea to report on training activities for Indigenous and coastal community residents.

Highlights of Indigenous Participant Interview Findings

The oceans and waterways have been a critical part of food security, transportation, recreation and economic prosperity for community members for generations, according to most key informants. The identity and spirituality of these communities is interconnected with the ocean, and teachings and stories of creation are connected to the water, inlets and shores. Marine shipping has affected many of the communities. Most key informants noted increased shipping traffic, shoreline erosion, and safety concerns with the ability to access the water and to marine harvesting limited.

According to most key informants, the Government of Canada has the necessary role to establish policy, issue permits, enforce regulations that can be implemented to all jurisdictions to protect oceans and coastal waterways. Most key informants noted that only the federal government has the capacity to provide funding to increase the science and activities that can help address ocean and shoreline issues. However, most key informants believe that it is important for Indigenous and coastal communities to have the opportunity to identify needs and priorities in their regions, incorporate traditional knowledge in the development of activities and solutions, and have a larger role in protecting Canada's coast. Key informants support the idea of the Government of Canada continuing to provide Indigenous communities with training, equipment and expertise to help protect Canada's coasts

Most key informants described the OPP as a comprehensive and wide-ranging plan, with the strength that it provides needed support and equipment to communities. Many stated that given the broad goals of the OPP, and the many initiatives, it is difficult to form a thorough understanding of the OPP or discern why the initiatives were chosen or how they comprise a coordinated plan. Many key informants indicated that although Indigenous communities were consulted and engaged through OPP, decisions about marine safety had already been made by the government prior to the consultations.

Many key informants felt that OPP has been an effective tool for creating meaningful partnerships. Most stated that partnerships between the Government of Canada and Indigenous communities can be created through a foundation of mutual respect and require equitable voices in the partnership. Some key informants believe that the relationship between the Government of Canada and Indigenous peoples has generally improved over the last

decade and that OPP activities have contributed to the improved relationship in recent years though engagement and partnerships.

D. NOTE TO READERS

Detailed findings are presented in the sections that follow. Overall results for the 2020 survey are presented in the main portion of the narrative and are typically supported by graphic or tabular presentation of results. Results are also compared in the text with the 2018 baseline survey findings, where relevant. Results of the 2018 survey are also presented in charts and tables in a column under the heading “2018”.

Bulleted text is also used to point out any statistically and substantively significant differences between sub-groups of general public and Indigenous respondents. If differences are not noted in the report, it can be assumed that they are either not statistically significant¹ in their variation from the overall result or that the difference was deemed to be substantively too small to be noteworthy. Where there are significant differences between the general public and Indigenous populations, as well as between coastal and non-coastal community residents, and between 2020 and 2018 baseline results, these differences are described in the main paragraph or in the bulleted text.

E. CONTRACT VALUE

The contract value for the POR project is \$ \$150,820.46 (including HST).

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To obtain more information on this study, please e-mail TC.PublicOpinion-OpinionPublique.TC@tc.gc.ca

¹ Chi-square and standard t-tests were applied as applicable. Differences noted were significant at the 95 % level.

F. POLITICAL NEUTRALITY CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify as Senior Officer of EKOS Research Associates Inc. that the deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the Communications Policy of the Government of Canada and Procedures for Planning and Contracting Public Opinion Research. Specifically, the deliverables do not include information on electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, standings with the electorate, or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leaders.

Signed by:



Susan Galley (Vice President)