



# Public Opinion Research Study: Oceans Protection Plan – Canadians’ Confidence in Marine Safety 2022

## *Summary*

Prepared for Transport Canada

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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 2,791 Canadians in February 2022. Twenty-five 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 2022.

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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 2,791 completed cases using a random probability sample with a margin of error of up to +/-1.9 %, including 2,224 with the general public (with an associated margin of error of up to +/- 2.1%) and 600 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 interviewers between late January and late February 2022. Findings are reported separately for the general public and Indigenous peoples of Canada, and results are compared with a 2018 baseline survey of 3,407 (2,168 general public and 1,239 Indigenous peoples) and 2020 survey of 2,702 (2,141 with the general public and 561 with Indigenous peoples).

In a second phase, qualitative one-on-one interviews were conducted by telephone with 25 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 late January and early March 2022.

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 ten members of the general public rated themselves as aware and two in three said they are unaware, which is a drop from 14% and 17% in 2020 and 2018. Awareness is higher among Indigenous peoples (17% and 22%) and even higher among residents of coastal communities. Most Canadians (70% to 82%), however, feel that marine safety and protecting the marine environment are important. The same level of importance is also found among Indigenous peoples although it is considerably higher among those living in coastal communities (81% to 90%) and on par with previous years.

Public confidence in Canada's marine safety system is modest with roughly one in four members of the general public and coastal communities responding that they are confident. In comparison, four in ten members of the general public and coastal communities indicate moderate confidence. Confidence is lower with Indigenous peoples (18%). The results for the general public are slightly lower than in 2020 and 2018 in terms of confidence, and a slight decrease from 32% to 25% 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 (56%), what is witnessed in the community (25%), or what people say on social media (14%), which is similar to the sources reported by those who are confident.

Results suggest that Canadians have a higher level of confidence in the Oceans Protection Plan than marine safety in Canada overall. Among members of the general public, 65% said they are confident or moderately confident that the Oceans Protection Plan will improve marine safety and responsible shipping along Canada's waterways. The same proportion is confident or moderately confident that the program will protect Canada's marine environment. Over 70% of Indigenous peoples surveyed are confident or moderately confident that the program will offer new possibilities for Indigenous communities.

### *Awareness and Perceived Importance of Government Programs*

Awareness of marine programs, regulations, or activities operated by the Government of Canada is quite high. Three in four are aware the government has a program to respond to accidents, such as oil spills contributing to marine pollution. Another six in ten think there is a

program to prevent accidents or monitor marine pollution, and just under half think that the Government of Canada works closely with Indigenous peoples and coastal communities to protect Canada's coasts and waterways. Awareness of a Government of Canada program is slightly higher in coastal communities, and on par with previous results. The pattern is very similar among Indigenous peoples.

One in six in the Canadian public said that they have heard or seen something about the Government of Canada's Oceans Protection Plan (one in four among Indigenous peoples), with marginally higher awareness in coastal communities. Prompted awareness following a description of the program is substantially higher at 32% among the general public and 36% among Indigenous peoples. Key sources of awareness of the program are traditional media (television, newspapers and radio), as well as the Internet, followed by social media and word of mouth. Social media, word of mouth and community newspapers are more prominent sources among Indigenous peoples. 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 roughly similar to 2020 results and 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, which was also seen in 2020 and 2018. 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 half to three-quarters of 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;
- Bringing more Canadians and Indigenous peoples into the marine safety system; and,
- Removing wrecked and abandoned vessels.

### ***Perceived Impact of Programs***

The perceived impact of the Oceans Protection Plan (OPP) is generally high. About six in ten members of the general public believe that the Plan will have a positive impact on the health of marine animals and plants, including the protection of endangered whales, and the health of Canada's coasts and waterways. Half feel that the plan will have a positive impact on the safety of the shipping industry and on the health of people living in Indigenous and other coastal communities, and on local economies near Canada's coasts and waterways.

These results are echoed among Indigenous peoples, although slightly stronger with respect to the health of people living in Indigenous and coastal communities and on the health of marine life. Related to the program's three primary objectives, three in ten 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 higher, however, among Indigenous peoples in Canada (30% to 36%), but lower than found in 2020 and 2018.

Public confidence in the Oil Spill Response System is similarly modest, with three 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 five feel confident the system can ensure that industrial polluters will be made to pay and affected communities will be compensated. Confidence is lower among members of the general public relative to previous years, however, among Indigenous peoples this is only the case for making polluters pay.

### ***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. Just under half would like their local or regional government to play a significant role. Results are similar to previous years. Indigenous respondents are less supportive of a federal role (69%) or provincial role (56%), and more strongly advocate for local government involvement (56%). In each case results are lower than found among Indigenous peoples in 2020, although there is less of a difference when compared with 2018.

Public perceptions of the role taken thus far, however, are considerably weaker. Fewer than four in ten members of the general public believe that the federal government has played a lead role. One in six think the same about their provincial government and one in eight believe



their local government has played a strong part. Results among Indigenous peoples are similar and the pattern among both groups reflects results in previous years, particularly since 2020.

Seven in ten members of the public, and more than eight in ten Indigenous respondents, believe it is important that Indigenous peoples and coastal communities work closely with the federal government. Just over four in ten members of the public and 58% of Indigenous respondents feel it is important for citizens to provide input into these decisions. The importance of personal input is lower than in previous years among the general public and among Indigenous peoples. In terms of the need for a close working relationship between the Government of Canada and Indigenous and coastal communities, results are similar to previous years among the general public. A higher proportion of Indigenous peoples, however, argue for a close working relationship (83%).

One in five members of the public and four in ten 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. The incidence of looking for information has increased among Indigenous peoples relative to 2020. Use of social media, family and friends, as well as someone working in marine transportation and safety or shipping are more likely sources among Indigenous peoples than they are among the general public. Very few members of the general public feel that more detailed involvement, through participation in engagement sessions is necessary (4%). It is only marginally higher (9%) among Indigenous peoples.

According to three in four members of the general public and eight in ten Indigenous peoples, 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 (83% to 90% of both the general public and Indigenous peoples), as well as implementation of new regulations to safeguard shipping practices, are seen as good performance indicators (71% the general public and 80% of Indigenous peoples). Another two in three members of the public and three in four 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 ocean and waterways continue to be a fundamental element of culture, nourishment, transportation, and economy, according to most key informants. The waterways allow for Indigenous and coastal communities to connect with other communities, expand hunting and fishing regions, and receive supplies. Marine shipping has affected many of the communities.

Most key informants noted increased shipping traffic, shoreline erosion, and safety concerns, limiting the ability to access the water and marine harvesting.

According to most key informants, the Government of Canada should have a lead role in developing marine safety initiatives, including safe shipping and improving the prevention of and response to marine pollution incidents. Most key informants noted that only the federal government has the ability to create and enforce regulations and legislation to protect Canada's coasts, along with the funding to support activities, including training and equipment. 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, and provided examples of these activities.

Most key informants initially heard about the OPP through announcements by the Government of Canada in late 2016. In contrast to previous studies in 2018 and 2020 where an awareness of OPP was moderate or forming, most key informants interviewed state that they are knowledgeable about the goals and activities of the OPP. Most key informants said they endeavoured to learn more about OPP, perceiving it would be of benefit to their community. 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.

Most key informants identified areas that are working well with regards to the OPP. General capacity building of communities in order to participate in activities to protect Canada's coasts was mentioned by many key informants, achieved through training and funding to hire staff and obtain equipment. The perception of a more open approach by the Government of Canada, and notably by Transport Canada employees, was identified by most key informants as contributing positively to OPP implementation.

The creation of partnerships between the Government of Canada and Indigenous communities is critical, according to all key informants. They also note that the federal government must be open to changing the structure of how they interact with Indigenous communities to allow them to participate in a partnership on marine safety. For a partnership to be effective, there needs to be an opportunity for equal input "at the table" in terms of identifying needs and solutions. OPP has been an effective tool for building meaningful partnerships, according to many key informants. Partnerships between the government of Canada and Indigenous

communities has helped to identify needs of the community and opportunities to engage in activities related to marine safety.

## **D. NOTE TO READERS**


Detailed findings are presented in the sections that follow. Overall results for the 2022 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 2020 and 2018 survey findings, where relevant. Results of these two previous surveys are also presented in charts and tables in columns under the heading “2020” and “2018”. Where there are significant differences between the general public and Indigenous populations, as well as between coastal and non-coastal community residents, these differences are also described in the main paragraph. Results may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Bulleted text is 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 significant<sup>1</sup> in their variation from the overall result or that the difference was deemed to be substantively too small to be noteworthy.

## **E. 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 Policy on Communications and Federal Identity and the Directive on the Management of Communications. 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:

  
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Susan Galley (Vice President)

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