

# Study by Clear Seas Offers Insight into Commercial Shipping Traffic on Canada's Pacific Coast

*Clear Seas study closes knowledge gap on the ships and tugboats that ply Canada's Pacific Coast and provides valuable data to assess the oil pollution risks.*

VANCOUVER , BC, CANADA, March 2, 2021 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A study of marine shipping

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*Paul Blomerus, Executive Director, Clear Seas*

traffic on Canada's Pacific Coast by Clear Seas closes a knowledge gap about the 6,000 commercial ships and tugboats that ply these waters annually and provides valuable data to assess the oil pollution risks they represent. The report released today makes available to the public the most current and comprehensive commercial vessel traffic analysis of Canada's Pacific region.

“The study provides a comprehensive picture of marine trade and traffic in the region,” says Paul Blomerus, Executive Director of Clear Seas. “It is fascinating to be able to visualize the interconnections between ports and the

seasonal fluctuations in traffic patterns – it almost looks like the circulatory system of a living organism,” he says.

Not unexpectedly, the study found that bulk commodity exports like grain and coal were the dominant international traffic in the region, which together with shipping containers, make up more than 70% of oceangoing ships calling on ports up and down Canada's Pacific coast. The report also provides new insights into how traffic patterns are shaped by economics and environmental protection – sometimes with unexpected consequences – like the extra greenhouse gas emissions caused by ships taking a longer route to avoid zones that restrict sulphur dioxide pollution.

But it's not all about the large ports like Vancouver or Prince Rupert and their international trade. Ports like Nanaimo, Chemainus, Port Mellon, Squamish, Port Alberni, Port McNeil, Kitimat, Stewart, Port Alice and Gold River play a big role too. The study found that a surprising amount of traffic on the coast is made up of tugboats towing barges to and from these smaller ports.

Common on the Pacific Coast, this practice transports essential goods to remote coastal communities and delivers raw materials and finished goods to support key sectors of the local economy such as sawmills and pulp mills. In the case of Nanaimo, Chemainus, Port Mellon and Squamish, tugboats make up ten times more traffic than cargo ships.

Ships and tugboats bring economic opportunity to communities large and small along the coast, but they also bring the potential for environmental damage. Top of mind is oil spills. Oil spill risk assessments often focus on oil tankers, but this latest report from Clear Seas highlights the fact that oil carried as a ship fuel is also a pollution threat. The research team was able to plot maps of where the most oil is carried as both cargo and fuel – with some surprising conclusions.

Although oil tankers bound for Burrard Inlet to collect oil from the Trans Mountain Pipeline are most often the focus of public attention, the study found that the largest sources of persistent oil – the most damaging, sticky, long-lasting kind of oil – in the Salish Sea are tankers bound for the U.S. followed closely by cargo ship fuel. Clear Seas' analysis also found a high quantity of persistent oil carried by ships travelling the narrow waterways of the Inside Passage – the sheltered navigable waterway passing east of Vancouver Island and up to Prince Rupert and beyond to Alaska. In an average year, the equivalent of 332 Olympic swimming pools of persistent oil passed through Queen Charlotte Strait in ship fuel tanks.

This study forms part of Clear Seas' Marine Transportation Corridors initiative for the Pacific region that is intended to determine and describe risks related to commercial marine shipping activities and to assist in marine spatial planning in Canada. When combined with the results of the other reports in the series that assess the sensitivity of coastal areas to oil spills and the emergency response capabilities that would prevent a ship running aground, this report will inform and enable improved decision making about how to plan and manage the risks presented by marine shipping.

In the foreword to the Clear Seas report, Chief Harley Chappell of the Semiahmoo First Nation says, "Since colonization we have seen the increase of development and growth of industry all around our communities. The increase in vessel traffic has a direct effect on our community, and other communities who live along the coast [...] As a leader I want to work with partners to create a plan to not only sustain our traditional resources for our future generations but to leave it a better place for them [...] This work is important to plan for our future for our communities."

The full report and findings are [available here](#).

Clear Seas is hosting a webinar to introduce the study's results today at 10 AM (PST)/1 PM (EST)/2 PM (AST). More details can be [found here](#).

#### ABOUT CLEAR SEAS

Clear Seas is a not-for-profit independent research centre funded by Canada's provincial and

federal governments as well as industry. It provides impartial information on marine shipping in Canada to policy makers and the public. Its mandate is to initiate and interpret research, analyze policies, identify best practices, share information and facilitate dialogue. The organization's research agenda is defined internally in response to current issues, reviewed by a research advisory committee, and approved by a board of directors. All reports are available at [clearseas.org](http://clearseas.org).

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