



**Ocean and  
Marine Health  
Awareness  
Sheet**



Ocean and marine health is essential to the well-being of Vancouver Island's communities, ecosystem, and economy. Here are the five ways that local organizations and businesses are leading the way to a more sustainable ocean environment.

### ① Plastic Waste Reduction

The environmental impact of ocean plastics is estimated at \$US 1.5 trillion of economic losses<sup>1</sup>. Optimistic estimates of annual microplastic release at between 800,000 and 2,500,000 tons per year<sup>2</sup>. During just one year the Ocean Conservancy clean up organization collected more than 3 million straws and stirrers, 3 million food wrappers and 1.5 million plastic bottles in 2019<sup>3</sup>.

For this reason, it is critical that plastic waste is removed, recycled, diverted, and collected from entering waterways. On Vancouver Island, effective waste management infrastructure is being introduced by regional organizations such as Ocean Legacy, Surfrider PacificRim, and 4VI. One of our most recent initiatives developed Marine Plastic Recycling Depots in the communities of [Ucluelet](#) and [Cumberland](#), creating a much needed space for residents to recycle their ocean plastic.

### ② Removal of Ghost Fishing Gear

Reports in 2019 estimate that 640,000 tonnes of discarded fishing equipment, such as old fishing nets, are left in the ocean each year<sup>4</sup>. Dumped fishing waste accounts for around 10% of total ocean plastic pollution and is the largest contributor of macroplastic pollution.

During the pandemic, an initiative by tourism operators through the [Small Ship Tourism Operators Association of America](#) and Wilderness Tourism Association removed ghost fishing gear and other plastic pollution for the region's water. At the end of the two year initiative 337 tons of waste had been collected. Other organizations such as the Rugged Coast Research Society and Coastal Restoration Society carry on this important work today.

### ③ Local Ocean Conservation Education

Studies indicate that when tourists learn about marine wildlife it can help shape pro-environmental attitudes, result in on-sight behavioral changes, and increase donations that benefit marine ecosystems<sup>5</sup>.

There are a number of fantastic tourism attractions and experiences on Vancouver Island that offer visitors the opportunity to learn about marine environments and conservation. The [Ucluelet Aquarium Society](#) encourages education of

Vancouver Island marine ecosystems and supports initiative on removal of microplastic and marine debris. Together with [The Shaw Centre for the Salish Sea](#) in Sidney, these educational centers enrich locals and tourists with ocean literacy.

### ④ Sustainably Sourced Seafood

More than 90% of the world's fish stocks are fully exploited, overexploited, or collapsed<sup>6</sup>, potentially leading to the end of commercial fishing, as it is known today, in the middle of this century<sup>7</sup>.

As a consumer, this challenge is addressed by introducing sustainability labels, making it possible to identify certified seafood at a glance. Seafood labels and seafood guides are designed to make sustainable seafood consumption more consumer-friendly by pre-classifying seafood according to sustainability criteria.

The global conservation organization, Ocean Wise, educates businesses on how to bring sustainable seafood products to the table. There are over [100 restaurants on Vancouver Island](#) that are accepted by Ocean Wise for their sustainably sourced products.

### ⑤ Low Emissions Travel

Climate change is a major threat to oceans globally and has resulted in greater acidification, temperature rise, and sea level increase. Unfortunately, tourism is a major contributor to the creation of greenhouse gas emissions. Between 2009 and 2013, tourism's global carbon footprint has increased from 3.9 to 4.5 GtCO<sub>2</sub>e, four times more than previously estimated, accounting for about 8% of global greenhouse gas emissions<sup>8</sup>.

Travelers to Vancouver Island can help support the reduction of tourism's carbon footprint by supporting tourism operators that have invested in low impact operations and clean energy. One example of a tourism operator making a big difference is PNW Transportation. Based out of Victoria PNW is currently working on their fleet renewal with zero emission coaches. This transformation would help reduce air pollution, reduce their carbon footprint and also work towards quiet transportation along with quality green jobs in conversion & maintenance.



### References

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