



SAGUENAY-ST. LAWRENCE  
**MARINE PARK**

# Saguenay–St. Lawrence Marine Park expansion project

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Public Consultations  
Report



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Legal deposit - Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec, 2025  
ISBN 978-2-555-00309-5 (PDF)

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Cette publication est également disponible en français.



**Prepared by:**

Saguenay–St. Lawrence Marine Park  
expansion project team

Nathaël Bergeron (Parks Canada)

Chloé Bonnette (Sépaq)

Marie-Pier Denis (MELCCFP)

Yana Desautels (Parks Canada)

Martin Desrosiers (Parks Canada)

Laurence Pagé (Parks Canada)

Mathieu St-Onge (MELCCFP)

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# 1

## Context

In March 2023, the governments of Quebec and Canada announced their intention to begin work to expand the Saguenay–St. Lawrence Marine Park. From Fall 2023 to Summer 2024, the expansion project was presented to representatives of some 230 organizations in the context of targeted consultations. These exchanges resulted in a territorial proposal that was submitted to the public as part of the public consultations held from October 21 to December 13, 2024. Conducted in parallel with First Nations consultations, the public consultations provided concerned citizens and organizations an opportunity to express their views on the project, especially with regard to the area covered by the proposed expansion, the objectives identified as well as associated challenges and opportunities. This report aims to summarize the results of these consultations.

**The Marine Park** is a 1,245 km<sup>2</sup> marine protected area that was created in 1998 with the adoption of federal and provincial (Quebec) laws establishing joint protection. Its mandate is to strengthen the protection of ecosystems of a representative portion of the Saguenay Fjord and the St. Lawrence Estuary while at the same time promoting educational, recreational and scientific activities. It is co-managed by Parks Canada, the Ministère de l'Environnement, de la Lutte contre les changements climatiques, de la Faune et des Parcs (MELCCFP), and the Société des établissements de plein air du Québec (Sépaq).

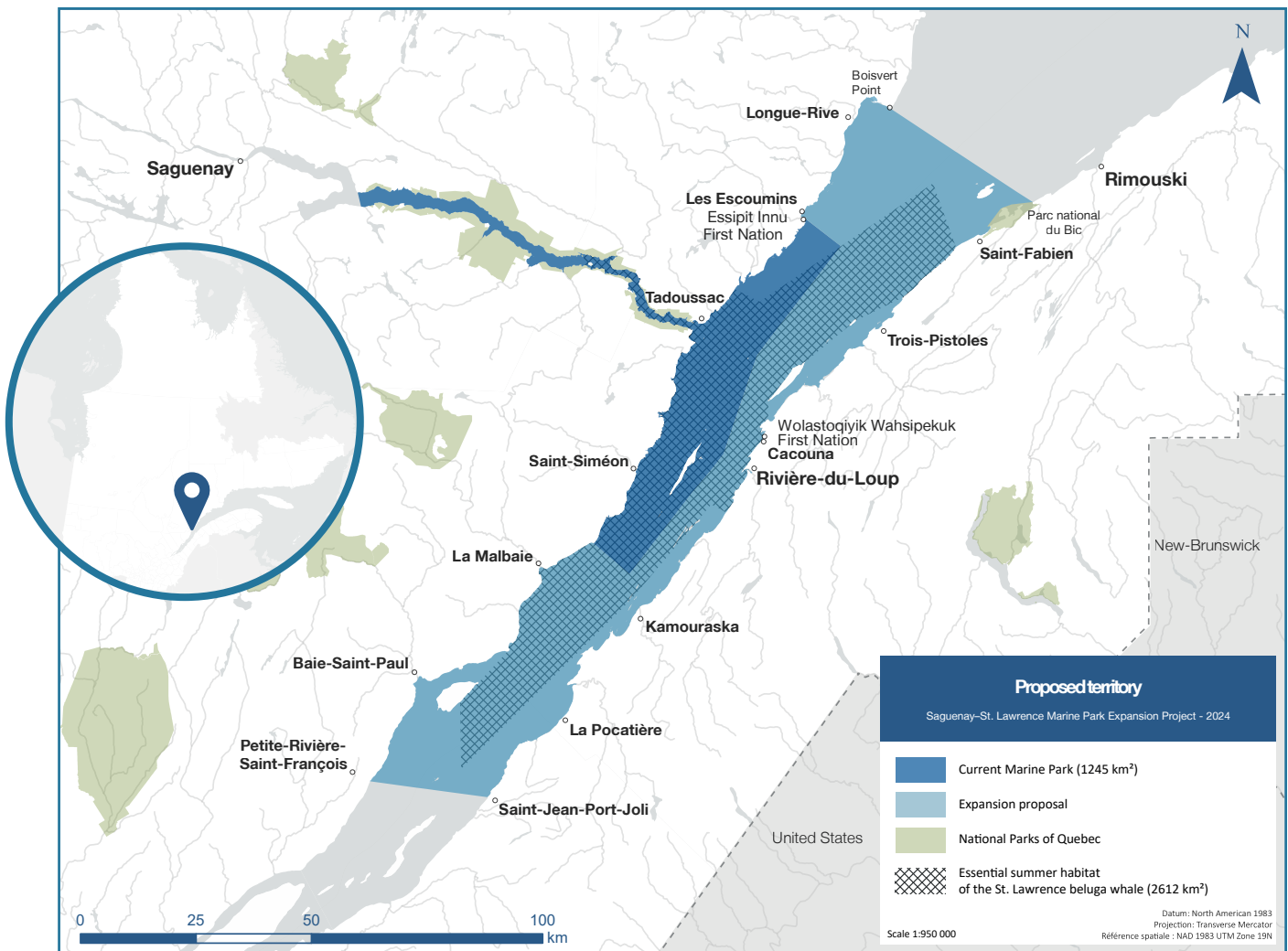


© J.-C. Lemay | Flight of white geese

# 2

## About the Expansion Project

The project consists of expanding the current Marine Park in an effort to protect a greater portion of the St. Lawrence Estuary. Some 400 km long and up to 350 m deep, this estuary is one of the largest and deepest in the world. The proposed expansion area measures 3,242 km<sup>2</sup>, which would bring the Marine Park's total surface area to 4,487 km<sup>2</sup>, or 3.6 times its current size. The proposed territory would extend to the south shore of the St. Lawrence, from the municipality of Saint-Jean-Port-Joli to Parc national du Bic. On the north shore of the St. Lawrence, the Marine Park would stretch from the municipality of Petite-Rivière-Saint-François to Boisvert Point in the municipality of Longue-Rive.



Map 1. Proposed expansion area

The expansion project involves 4 administrative regions, 8 RCMs and 27 coastal municipalities. The Wolastoqiyik Wampanoag First Nation community would border the enlarged Marine Park, much in the same way that the Essipit Innu First Nation does under the park's current boundaries. When combined with the existing Marine Park, the expansion would concern 37 municipalities and 2 riverside Indigenous communities. The number of citizens residing in a municipality bordering the Marine Park would rise from 19,000 to over 125,500<sup>1</sup>.

As is the case for the current Marine Park, the planned expansion includes the water column and the seabeds. It extends to the normal high-water marks, i.e. the maritime boundary delimitation of Quebec public lands. Islands, private property and maritime infrastructure (ports and marinas) are excluded from the proposal. For maritime facilities that do not have a submerged shore lot, a 25 m buffer around infrastructure is planned.

The proposed area is ecologically rich and contains a patchwork of habitats that support a wide array of fauna and flora. The project would help boost the protection of belugas, orcas and coastal herbaceous areas, notably by including the beluga's entire critical habitat. It would also be an opportunity to promote discovery and educational activities related to the St. Lawrence River, in addition to supporting the maintenance and development of a sustainable tourism offering for the region.

**For further details on the project:**  
[parcmarin.qc.ca/consultations](http://parcmarin.qc.ca/consultations)

<sup>1</sup> MINISTÈRE DES AFFAIRES MUNICIPALES ET DE L'HABITATION DU QUÉBEC (2024). *Cartes du découpage administratif du Québec*. [Consulted online on 2024-08-05]. Quebec City, Canada.



© R. Pintiaux | Mother beluga whale and her calf



© J.-C. Lemay | Saint-André-de-Kamouraska marshes



© J.-L. Provencher | Blue whale

# 3

## Consultation Process

### 3.1 Ways to Learn About the Project and Express One's Opinion

The public consultations for the Marine Park expansion project were open to any and all parties interested in participating. Several means were used to promote the public consultations and make it easy for participants to educate themselves and express their views on the project.

#### Online Consultations

The website [parcmarin.qc.ca/consultations](http://parcmarin.qc.ca/consultations) went online as soon as the public consultations were announced. For 8 weeks (October 21 to December 13, 2024), individuals wishing to express their opinion on the project could complete an online survey consisting of five questions or submit a brief. Organizations were encouraged to express their position by means of a brief. Survey responses were treated anonymously, whereas briefs were published on the website following consultations.

#### Consultation Events

Between November 4 and 13, five consultation events took place in municipalities adjacent to the expansion area (Table 1). Each event began in the late afternoon with booths staffed by the Marine Park team. From 4 to 7 p.m., participants were able to visit these booths at their own leisure and discuss various aspects of the project according to their own areas of interest. An information session then took place at 7 p.m. The presentation of the project was followed by a period of exchange during which participants could voice their opinion and address their questions to any of the Marine Park's contact persons. Leaflets summarizing the project were also handed out to participants of the events.



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Table 1. Details of consultation events

Municipality	Date	Location
Rimouski (Le Bic)	November 4	Théâtre du Bic
Rivière-du-Loup	November 6	Hôtel Lévesque
Kamouraska	November 7	Community hall
Saint-Irénée	November 12	Domaine Forget
Les Escoumins	November 13	Multipurpose centre



## 3.2 Communication Activities

A number of actions took place between October 21 and December 13 to promote the public consultations and encourage both online and in-person participation.

### Media Actions

The communication actions initiated by the Marine Park team generated considerable media interest, both regionally and provincially. A press release was published on October 21 announcing the start of public consultations. An invitation was sent to regional media outlets in the Bas-Saint-Laurent, Charlevoix and Côte-Nord regions prior to the consultation events. These media actions gave rise to a total of 34 articles, TV news reports and radio broadcasts.

### Facebook

The **8** messages posted on the Marine Park's Facebook page relating to the public consultations were viewed nearly **22,000** times and shared **153** times.

The **5** Facebook events organized to publicize the participatory events in local communities were viewed 194,366 times and shared 62 times.

### Poster Advertising

In order to promote the consultation events, **400** posters were distributed at various locations around the communities concerned by the project.

### Personal Invitations

Stakeholders who participated in targeted consultations between Fall 2023 and Summer 2024 received a personalized email to inform them of the start of public consultations and invite them to participate. Roughly one hundred of these organizations received a promotional kit including texts and images to share information about the public consultations through their communication channels.

### Publicity

A two-pronged publicity campaign was carried out to promote the public consultations.

**1** **From October 21 to November 13**, the first part of the campaign targeted the regions in which the consultation events were scheduled. The main objective was to encourage participation from communities located near the project. Announcements were made through traditional media, such as regional newspapers, local radio broadcasts and mailouts, as well as on digital platforms.

**2** **From November 14 to December 13**, the second part of the campaign encouraged citizens to express their opinions online. Compared to the first part of the campaign, the target region was expanded in an attempt to reach a wider audience of individuals interested in the project. This part of the campaign took place entirely on digital platforms.



### 3.3 Who Participated

By the end of the 8-week public consultations period, 776 surveys had been completed and 45 briefs submitted.

#### 3.3.1 Survey

##### Place of Residence of Respondents

Nearly all survey respondents, i.e. approximately 96%, were from Quebec. Just under half of all respondents reside in one of the RCMs concerned by the expansion project (Table 2). The 3 RCMs on the north shore of the estuary account for 14% of respondents, while the 5 RCMs on the south shore of the estuary account for 28%. The largest number of survey participants came from Kamouraska RCM.

**Table 2. Place of residence of respondents**

Place of residence		Number of respondents
Elsewhere in Canada		19
Elsewhere in Quebec		413
North shore of estuary	Charlevoix RCM	
	Charlevoix-Est RCM	34
	La Haute-Côte-Nord RCM	40
South shore of estuary	L'Islet RCM	10
	Kamouraska RCM	102
	Rimouski-Neigette RCM	51
	Rivière-du-Loup RCM	34
	Les Basques RCM	22
Prefers not to answer		13
<b>Total</b>		<b>776</b>

##### Age of Respondents

Figure 1 presents the age of survey respondents as a relative percentage. Roughly 80% of respondents are between 31 and 70 years of age.

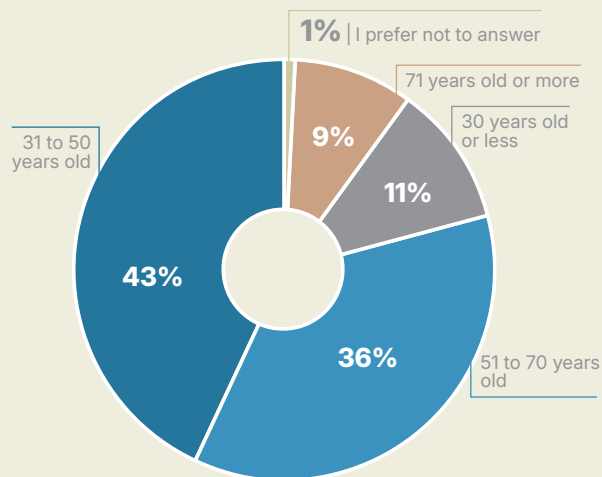


Figure 1. Age of respondents

##### Visiting Frequency of Proposed Expansion Area

Figure 2 shows that just over 90% of survey respondents occasionally or regularly frequent the area proposed for the Marine Park expansion.

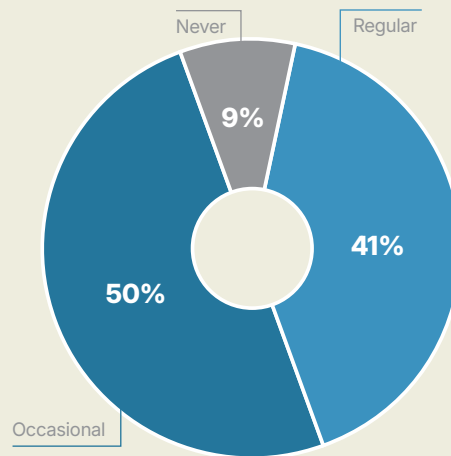


Figure 2. Visiting frequency of proposed expansion area

### 3.3.2 Briefs

Of the 45 briefs received expressing their authors' positions on the project, 13 were submitted by individuals and 32 were sent by various types of organizations (Figure 3). The list is presented in Appendix 1 of this report.

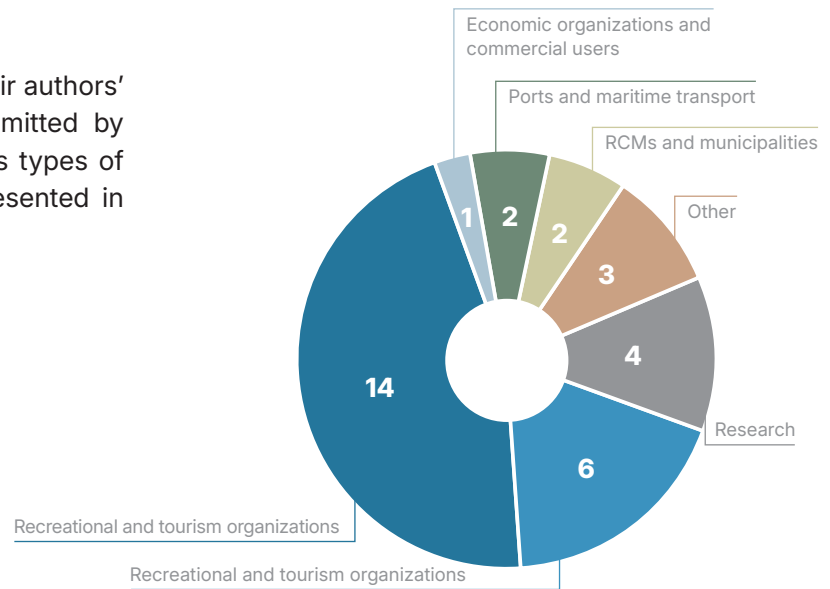


Figure 3. Source of briefs

### 3.3.3 Consultation Events

The booths at the five consultation events allowed 346 people to learn more about the current Marine Park and the expansion project. The information sessions that followed the booths were attended by 229 people (Table 3). Throughout the sessions, 120 questions and comments were addressed to the Marine Park staff.

**Table 3. Event participation**

Municipality	Number of persons (booths)	Number of persons (sessions)	Number of interventions (sessions)
Rimouski (Le Bic)	75	55	28
Rivière-du-Loup	52	28	21
Kamouraska	81	48	31
Saint-Irénée	65	44	15
Les Escoumins	73	54	25
<b>Total</b>	<b>346</b>	<b>229</b>	<b>120</b>



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# 4

## What we Heard

This section summarizes the opinions expressed in the surveys and briefs as well as those heard during the five information sessions. Since participation in the public consultations was voluntary, the results were analyzed using a primarily qualitative approach.

### 4.1 Protection of the St. Lawrence Estuary

The opinions expressed demonstrate very strong support for the idea of better protecting the St. Lawrence Estuary (Figure 4). Qualifiers such as “essential,” “priority,” “crucial,” “urgent,” and “important” were frequently used by participants. Many respondents view the expansion project as a legacy for future generations, and many comments reflect a sense of pride and attachment to the St. Lawrence. Some argued that this river is part of the Quebec and Canadian identity, while others were more focused on the unique character of the area.

Many participants are in favour of the idea of further protecting the estuary for its rich biodiversity as well as for the beauty of its landscapes. Frequently mentioned is the privilege of seeing marine mammals, particularly belugas. Some emphasize the importance of coastal environments. Several participants mentioned the fragile nature of the estuary to justify the need for enhanced protection, in addition to emphasizing the pressures it faces.

Many comments referred to climate change and its effects (rising water temperatures, oxygen depletion, loss of biodiversity, etc.). The irreversible nature of the loss of species was also mentioned on a few occasions. Some respondents deplored the direct effects of human activities on ecosystems such as industrial development and maritime traffic. Protecting a larger portion of the estuary would ensure that certain projects would be

completed while taking the principles of sustainable development into greater account. Lastly, some participants emphasized that protecting a greater portion of the estuary would help the government achieve its conservation objectives that pertain to marine environments.

Survey participants were asked the following question: **“In your view, how important is it to protect a greater portion of the St. Lawrence Estuary?”**

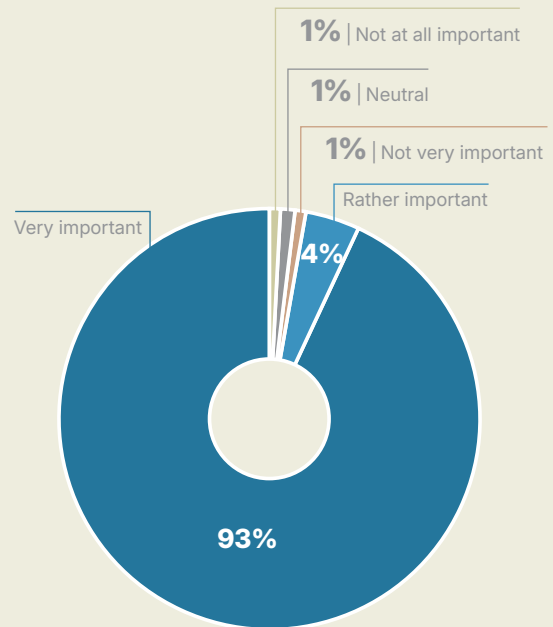


Figure 4. Importance placed on protecting the St. Lawrence Estuary by the 776 survey respondents

## 4.2 Proposed Expansion Area

The public consultations revealed very strong support for the proposed expansion area (Figure 5). The vast majority of participants approved of the proposal. Many indicated that they were pleased that the proposed area would finally connect both shores of the estuary. The fact that the proposal covers the beluga's entire critical habitat was favourably received by participants. One testimony underscored the relevance of including the south channel of Île Verte.

While several comments suggested a larger territory than the one being proposed, others, albeit fewer in number, requested that certain sectors be removed.

### Requests to Further Enlarge the Proposed Expansion Area

Some participants, especially environmental organizations based on the south shore of the estuary, suggested that the proposed area be extended farther downstream as far as Pointe-au-Père. The most frequently cited arguments refer to the environmental attributes of the coastline (presence of eelgrass beds, important bird areas [IBAs], national wildlife reserves, endangered species, etc.) and the pressures to which coastal environments are exposed. Rimouski was also highlighted as a hub for marine science technologies.

Also in the downstream sector but on the north shore of the estuary, some participants suggested that the expansion be extended to Portneuf-sur-Mer to include the mouth of the river of the same name and the Portneuf Bank, particularly because of the diverse and abundant birdlife found there. For one organization, the presence of an IBA served as an argument to propose expanding the Marine Park to Forestville.

Survey participants were asked the following question: **“How enthusiastic are you about the area being proposed for the expansion of the Saguenay–St. Lawrence Marine Park?”**

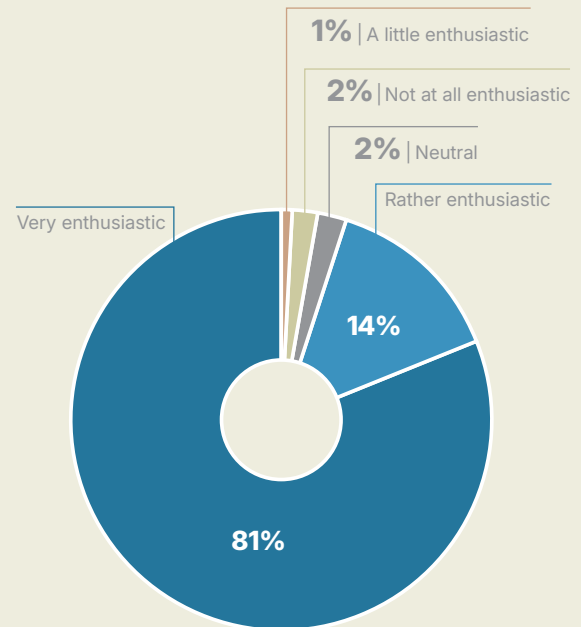


Figure 5. Enthusiasm of survey respondents with regard to proposed Marine Park expansion area

Upstream, on the south shore of the estuary, it was suggested that the expansion be extended to the municipality of L'Islet in order to include the entire coastline of the RCM of the same name. The presence of bulrush marshes and the Musée maritime du Québec were cited to justify this addition.

Environmental organizations would like the expansion to include not only “critical” beluga habitat but “important” beluga habitat as well. Failing this, one of these organizations is calling for a plan to be tabled to further expand the Marine Park in the near term. Another organization insisted that important beluga habitat that would not be covered by the expansion be able to benefit from suitable legal measures for its conservation.

There were a few suggestions to include the upper reaches of the Saguenay Fjord in the expansion. Notably, the presence of prey for belugas and industrial development were mentioned. Comments suggested including the entire marine environment of the Charlevoix region as well as the marine portion of Parc national du Bic. Some participants proposed including Île aux Grues, Île d'Orléans or the Boucherville Islands. Others would extend the Marine Park to Pessamit, Anticosti-Mingan, Métis-sur-Mer, or even include all territorial reserves for protected area purposes (TRPAP). Amongst other suggestions, a few participants indicated that the entire St. Lawrence should be protected. Some participants requested that ports, marinas and private properties be included in the project.

### Requests to Scale Back the Proposed Expansion Area

On the Kamouraska side, a few participants requested the exclusion of a strip of shallow water along the south shore of the estuary in order to maintain recreational uses such as personal watercraft, drones and towed water sports. The absence of belugas in this part of the territory was mentioned. Additionally, participants requested that certain specific elements be excluded from the expansion, including shipyards, Île aux Pommes and aboiteaux. One issue was raised regarding the

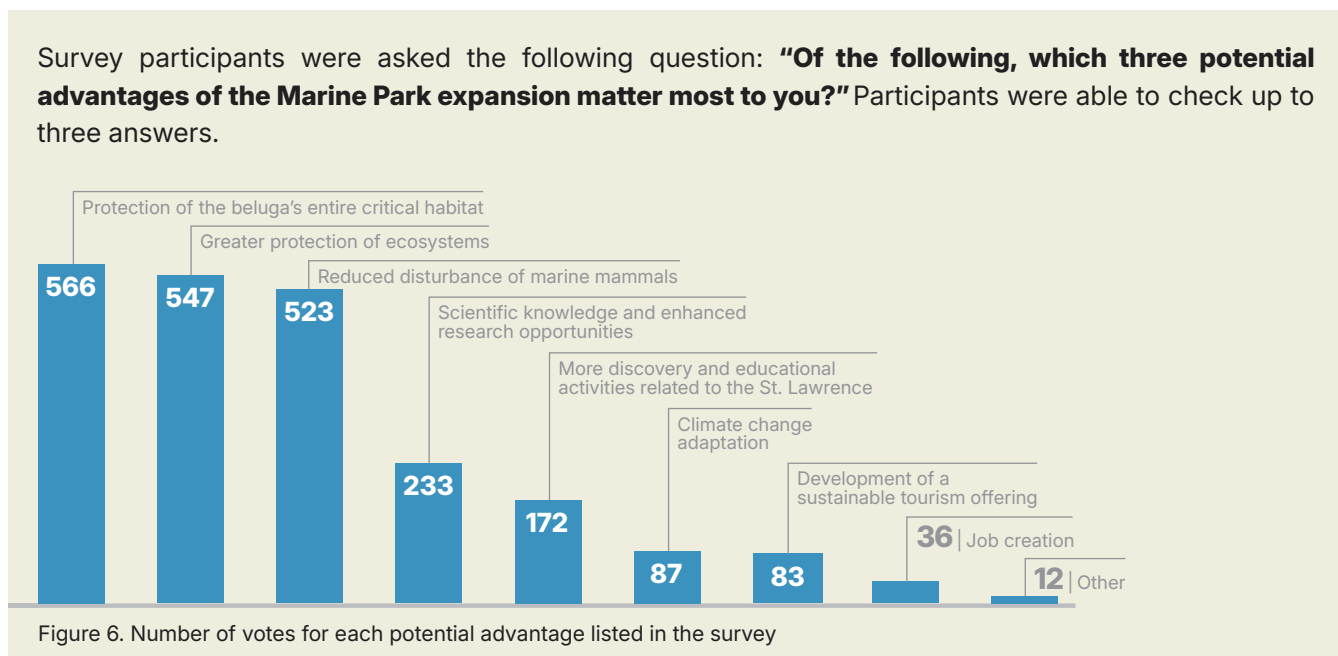
delineation of the high-water mark in Saint-André-de-Kamouraska. Lastly, one comment suggested that the Marine Park not be expanded upstream of Cap à l'Aigle.

### 4.3 Anticipated Benefits

For participants, the Marine Park expansion project was generally synonymous with a wide range of advantages (Figure 6). When asked about this topic in the survey, participants mostly pointed to the following three expected benefits as the most important:

1. Protection of the beluga's entire critical habitat;
2. Greater protection of ecosystems;
3. Reduced disturbance of marine mammals.

Many survey respondents noted that all of the answer choices were relevant. A few respondents felt that the project would not generate any significant benefits.



## 4.4 Commitments of Marine Park Managers

As part of the Marine Park expansion project, park managers made five commitments that are consistent with the way the marine protected area is currently managed. The opinions received on these topics have been grouped together in this section.

### 4.4.1 Better Understand to Better Protect

The project is seen as an opportunity not only to enhance scientific knowledge and research potential, but also to support research that is already being carried out in the Saguenay Fjord and the St. Lawrence Estuary. It was mentioned that this environment should be protected using the best available scientific data and that research should focus on all marine ecosystems and the species they contain. Organizations that conduct research in the current Marine Park would like to continue their efforts to fill knowledge gaps, especially in the Saguenay Fjord. One individual would like the research methods used to be non-lethal and compassionate.

Many suggestions were made regarding knowledge that might be acquired on the proposed territory:

- Belugas (biology, ecology, habitat, threats, response to climate change);
- Birds (monitoring of abundance, distribution patterns);
- Climate change;
- Underwater ecosystems;
- Water quality in the estuary and at the mouths of tributary rivers;
- Prey cycle (quality and quantity);
- Exotic invasive species;
- Coastal ecosystems (coastal squeeze, erosion monitoring, site conservation and restoration);

- Coastal plant harvesting (status and impacts);
- Harmful algae;
- Underwater relics;
- Sediment dynamics in ports and their entrances.

Participants felt that some of these suggestions should be integrated into the Marine Park monitoring program as indicators. As a bio-indicator, it was also mentioned that the minke whale should be part of this program. It is suggested that more at-risk species be considered in Marine Park monitoring. Some individuals would also like to see monitoring of socioeconomic and cultural indicators, as well as social sustainability, to improve understanding of this type of benefit generated by the Marine Park.

When survey respondents were asked to rank the proposed commitments in order of importance, “better understand to better protect” was identified as the most important one by 77% of respondents, with a further 12% ranking it second.

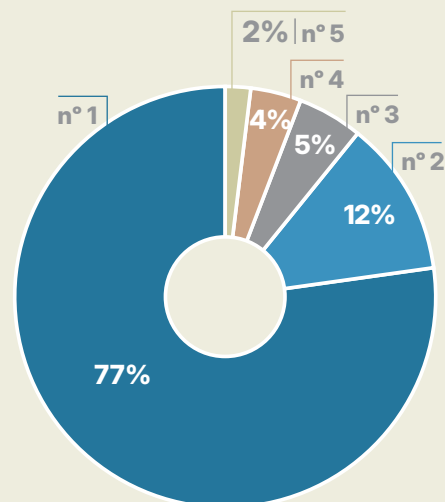


Figure 7. Survey ranking of the “better understand to better protect” commitment

Many participants believe that while it is essential to establish partnerships and collaborate with other stakeholders to acquire knowledge, it is equally important to make the most of existing data. These partnerships would improve the understanding of regionally specific issues and would make it possible to better identify the conservation actions to be implemented. These same participants believe that Marine Park management should work closely with regional partners to adopt best practices for preserving marine habitats while ensuring a balance between the long-term ecological viability of the Marine Park and public access to it. It was mentioned that it will be important to analyze the scientific and outreach work already being carried out in the expansion area in order to avoid duplicating actions, optimize resources and avoid over-soliciting users. It was also suggested that citizen science be promoted to allow visitors and community members to participate in biodiversity monitoring.

Lastly, several participants expressed the desire that data collected by Marine Park managers and their partners, including those concerning social impacts, be made available and accessible to the public, particularly on the Marine Park's website or through a partner. In their view, such greater transparency would be a good way to learn about and assess the effectiveness of conservation measures, in addition to promoting ongoing projects.

#### 4.4.2 Act in Consultation

Many participants believe that the more stakeholders Marine Park management reaches out to, the more promising the results of the consultation will be. Suggestions were made concerning groups or organizations with which the managers should work. In their opinion, coordination should take place with all levels of government, particularly those departments and organizations that have jurisdiction over the territory, since important issues such as fishing, maritime transport and wastewater fall under the responsibility of departments and organizations other than those involved in managing the Marine Park.

Expectations concerning the spinoffs of this concertation include a broader mobilization, better sharing of responsibilities between players, maximized positive impacts for the project, harmonization of messages to the different categories of users as well as stronger links between conservation and economic development while meeting the needs of local populations. One participant, however, doubted that striving for consensus is the most effective way to better protect the St. Lawrence.

Organizations expressed interest in participating in some of the future stages of the project, such as establishing a zoning plan, revising the master plan, developing new voluntary measures and protecting sensitive environments. Several individuals stressed the importance of including local residents in discussions, particularly with regard to access to the river.

When survey respondents were asked to rank the proposed commitments in order of importance, "act in consultation" was ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> by 45% of them.

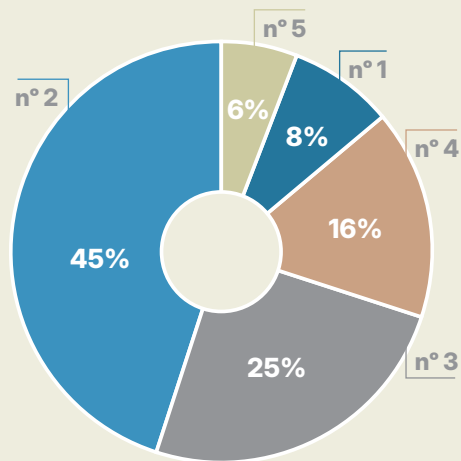


Figure 8. Survey ranking of the "act in consultation" commitment



### 4.4.3 Promote Partnerships

Participants would like the Marine Park's current approach to partnerships to continue and believe that the expansion should be used to develop new ones. Numerous organizations were suggested to act as partners of the Marine Park, whether as part of the Discovery Network or for another form of partnership. The suggested partners work in various fields ranging from scientific research to tourism, including interpretation of natural and cultural environments, conservation and public awareness. Some participants mentioned the importance of working in tandem with First Nations communities. It was also suggested that partnerships be forged with schools to help youngsters learn more about the estuary's ecosystems.

Amongst the organizations that wish to be partners, examples of ways they would like to contribute include:

- Promoting citizen involvement in the protection of the estuary and its coastline through citizen science programs;
- Offering local businesses support and funding for adapting and aligning their activities with the objectives of the Marine Park and so that they can join the Discovery Network;
- Providing locations or infrastructure for Marine Park staff or visitors to the park;
- Installing and maintaining research and conservation infrastructure;
- Acting as a point of contact with the local population for consultations on the Marine Park;
- Organizing conferences, workshops, training or networking activities for local stakeholders.

Participants consider that forging partnerships offers a number of benefits for Marine Park management. Establishing a robust presence in local communities would allow park managers to be actively involved, thereby boosting support for the project and contributing to its successful implementation. Additionally, the varied areas of activity of potential partners would attract a diverse audience. In exchange, some of these organizations hope that partnering with the Marine Park will allow them to increase their visibility, optimize their human and financial resources, continue to practise their activities for years to come and strengthen some of their initiatives, for example by organizing joint activities or events.

When survey respondents were asked to rank the proposed commitments in order of importance, "promote partnerships" was ranked third by 32% of them. It was also frequently ranked 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup>.

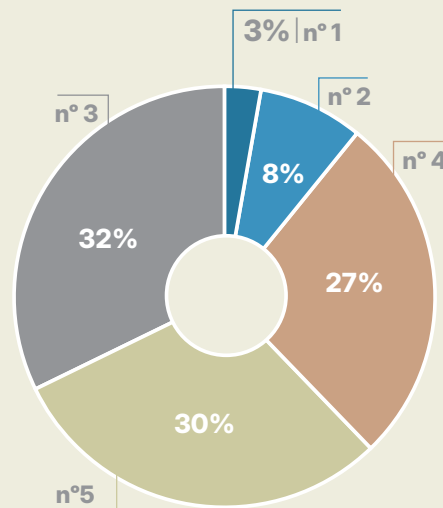


Figure 9. Survey ranking of the "promote partnerships" commitment

#### 4.4.4 Liaising with Local Communities

The Marine Park team's presence in coastal communities is considered an essential part of an effective education and communication strategy. This includes a physical presence on the south shore of the estuary. In this regard, L'Escale maritime de Trois-Pistoles suggests hosting the future Marine Park team on its premises.

It is hoped that activities in the expanded Marine Park will be developed in partnership with adjacent communities in order to build on existing local and regional initiatives. One individual pointed out that the Marine Park should contribute to the physical and mental health of these communities. A suggestion was made that Marine Park management create a commitment charter for the municipalities adjacent to the expanded park.

Participants recommend continuing to involve adjacent communities in activities related to the Marine Park. They also want them to be informed, particularly on the state of the Marine Park ecosystems and the effectiveness of conservation measures. Participants believe that data collected by the Marine Park and the tools it develops should be used to support the needs of communities.

Lastly, one individual pointed out that these communities are valuable allies in that they are well positioned to report conduct that is harmful to the environment or the peace and quiet of local residents in proximity to the Marine Park.

When survey respondents were asked to rank the proposed commitments in order of importance, "liaising with local communities" was ranked fourth by 37% of them. This commitment was also ranked 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> by a considerable number of voters.

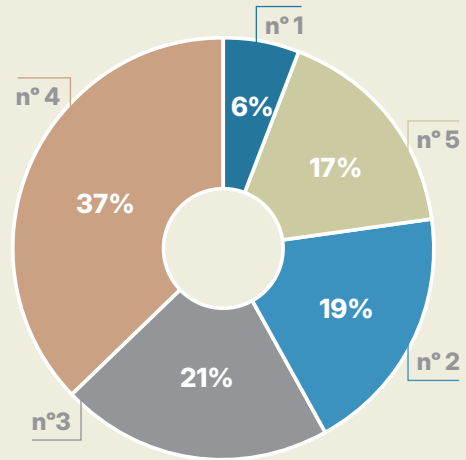
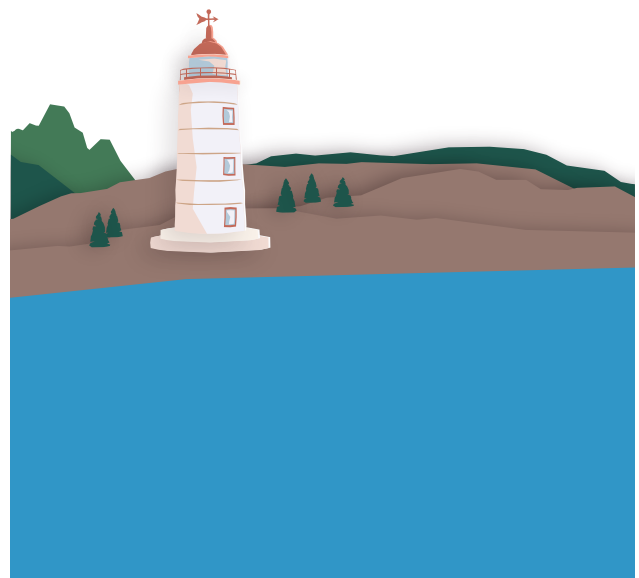


Figure 10. Survey ranking of the "liaising with local communities" commitment



#### 4.4.5 Involve More Representatives in Governance

Many stakeholders believe that the Marine Park's approach to governance is unique and should be maintained. They also emphasize the essential role of the coordination committee in involving regional stakeholders in management activities. Regarding Marine Park managers, one person hopes that they can reduce administrative formalities in order to make the soundest decisions to prioritize the park's ecological integrity.

The majority of comments received concern the composition of the coordination committee and the fact that it should be adapted to reflect the expansion area. This would help bolster local communities' sense of belonging and their commitment to the park's mission, while at the same time maintaining an effective structure. The importance of involving stakeholders with diverse missions in this committee is emphasized, as is the importance of taking into account existing consultation initiatives in order to avoid duplication.

Based on the suggestions received, the following sectors and groups should be represented in Marine Park governance (e.g. by sitting on the coordinating committee):

- First Nations;
- Commercial fishing sector;
- Port sector;
- Users of the territory;
- Local residents;
- Environmental groups and conservation organizations;
- Community organizations;
- Organizations that own and manage islands in the estuary;
- Social sciences sector;
- Private and independent scientists;
- Youth.

It was also suggested that the departments and organizations that exercise responsibilities over the territory be invited to certain coordinating committee meetings to discuss topics that concern them.

Lastly, some participants requested greater transparency regarding management of the Marine Park and would like the discussions of the various committees and the ensuing measures to be more widely disseminated.

When survey respondents were asked to rank the proposed commitments in order of importance, "involve more representatives in governance" was ranked 5<sup>th</sup> by 44% of them. Most of the remaining votes were split roughly equally between 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> positions.

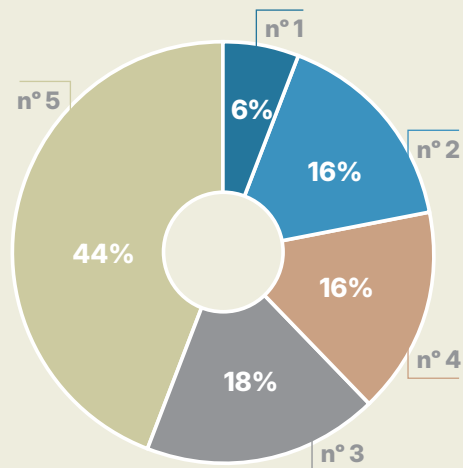


Figure 11. Survey ranking of "involve more representatives in governance" commitment

## 4.5 Natural and Cultural Environments

The attachment felt by participants to the proposed expansion area is palpable in the opinions received concerning the natural and cultural environments. The project is viewed as a means of protecting wildlife, coastal environments and the cultural elements valued by the participants. The latter have numerous concerns regarding the natural environment, and equally plentiful suggestions for strengthening the protection of ecosystems and their components in an expanded Marine Park.

### 4.5.1 Conservation

For a number of participants, the project is an opportunity to protect both rich ecosystems and specific species. The expansion would make it possible to implement conservation measures across a territory that more closely corresponds with the life cycle of the species the estuary shelters. It was suggested that the Marine Park not only focus on the marine environment or the protection of specific species, but rather on the ecological and cultural value of the entire territory.

Many participants mentioned the importance of adapting to climate change and taking it into account when developing conservation measures. One organization pointed out that it is essential that the Marine Park monitor the effectiveness of these measures in order to achieve its conservation objectives.

A few organizations advocated for integrated coastal zone management, mentioning the importance of ecological connectivity and the need to align conservation approaches between the Marine Park and terrestrial ecosystems. These organizations would like the Marine Park to take coastal systems and island environments into account when implementing actions, in addition to teaming up with partners to develop a network of protected land areas along its shores. In this regard, one organization believes that the project could have a ripple effect to stimulate the conservation of privately-owned natural environments in proximity to the expanded park. In order to limit coastal development, it is also suggested that riparian protection strips be added.



© J. Praud | Haute-Côte-Nord

According to one opinion received, Marine Park managers should also support other actions aimed at protecting the St. Lawrence such as the future update of the St. Lawrence Action Plan and other maritime spatial planning initiatives.

### 4.5.2 Water Quality

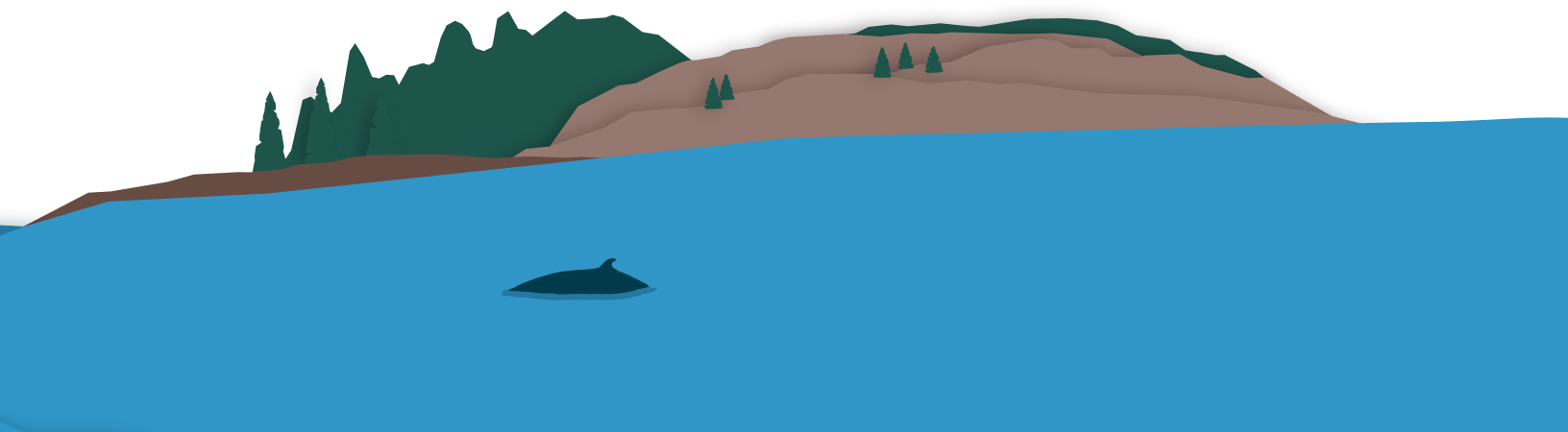
Many concerns were expressed regarding water quality in the proposed expansion area. These concerns are mainly related to wastewater discharge, the presence of microplastics and macroplastics, and inputs from farmland. Some participants would like to see these elements be more strictly regulated in order to mitigate pollution in the St. Lawrence. Others would like Marine Park managers to contribute directly, for example by developing an action plan to clean up plastic pollution or by helping to improve municipal wastewater treatment.

Some participants called on governments to provide better protection for the estuary by taking action in the Great Lakes and in the industries and large cities that lie upstream of the estuary. One comment emphasized that, rather than imposing restrictions on boaters, there should be greater focus on the most important sources of pollution.

### 4.5.3 Marine Mammals

Many participants expressed their attachment to the marine mammals of the St. Lawrence and wanted the expansion to protect them by mitigating the increasing levels of disturbance they face. In addition to their intrinsic value, the contribution of marine mammals to the ecosystem was cited as a further reason to protect them. One individual explained that they saw this project as an opportunity to rectify historical errors that had placed enormous pressure on the beluga population. Another person expressed hope that the Marine Park would become a global example to encourage other countries to protect their marine mammals.

For many, the current state of the beluga population and marine mammals in general calls for protection at all stages of the animals' respective life cycles. The primary threats identified are disturbance, noise pollution, collisions, climate change, pollution and industrial activities (dredging and construction of commercial ports). One individual believes that it is more important to reduce disturbance of marine mammals than to promote the marine tourism industry and that protection takes precedence over customer experience. According to one comment received, measures aimed at protecting belugas may constitute an obstacle to land enhancement.



Some participants shared their observations about how the use of certain sectors by belugas and other marine mammals has changed over time. For example, cetaceans are said to be increasingly making incursions into the estuary, while more and more seals are said to be present on the islands between Saint-André-de-Kamouraska and Rivière-Ouelle.

#### 4.5.4 Fish, Birds and Invertebrates

Several participants welcomed the fact that the expansion, even if its main focus is the protection of marine mammals, will generate benefits for a host of other species that are essential to ecosystem health such as prey for marine mammals, seabirds and benthic species. The interconnection between species and the importance of each one's role are mentioned several times. More specifically, the project would protect the habitat of at-risk fish species, prey species such as capelin or Atlantic

herring, and anadromous or catadromous species (salmon, American eel, etc.).

Several individuals and organizations called attention to the fact that the expansion would protect areas that are critical for birds, including certain species whose status is precarious. They favourably view the fact that the project would encompass several IBAs, which do not currently have legal status.

#### 4.5.5 Coastal Environments

Several participants mentioned the importance of coastal herbaceous areas for adapting to climate change, particularly as shelter or feeding grounds for certain species or on account of the multiple ecosystem services they provide. They noted the considerable plant diversity of these areas, their sensitivity and the main threats they



© T. Cadilhac | Semipalmated sandpiper

face, including erosion, exotic invasive species, all-terrain vehicles, plant harvesting, as well as industrial, tourist and residential development. Many comments emphasized the importance of protecting these environments and therefore supported the expansion project, which has the potential to contribute to maintaining coastal ecosystems by raising public awareness and driving research investment.

Others would like the Marine Park to contribute to their restoration in addition to protecting them. One comment emphasized that Kamouraska's coastal environments are already protected by citizens who understand their importance, including farmers, fishers, residents and users. One person wondered about the efforts that might be made to combat shoreline pollution in the expanded Marine Park. Another participant felt that the Marine Park would face significant challenges in urban coastal areas, suggesting that choices would sometimes have to be made between conservation and municipal priorities.

#### **4.5.6 Cultural Environment**

A few participants wanted the expansion to be an opportunity to showcase the cultural richness of the territory, the history of the humans who have inhabited it and the remains left by their activities. It was also suggested that Indigenous place names be integrated into the expanded Marine Park. Promotion of the region's maritime heritage was also desired, in partnership with organizations that are already pursuing this mission. Suggestions for elements to promote included the saltwater hay industry, aboiteaux for agriculture, eider down harvesting and weir fishing. As for the latter, the expansion is seen as a unique opportunity to protect weir fishing and showcase it as a tourist and cultural attraction as well as a source of local identity.

One organization mentions the strong potential for discovering underwater relics given that a number of shipwrecks are known to be present in the proposed expansion area. It recommends that measures be implemented to identify, protect and promote these elements.

Lastly, one individual would like the Marine Park's mandate to include the use of the territory for cultural purposes, in addition to the educational, recreational and scientific purposes that have already been identified.

## **4.6 Use of the Territory**

The St. Lawrence Estuary is enjoyed by many categories of users, whether it be for recreational, tourist, commercial or industrial activities. During public consultations, these users expressed their expectations, wishes and concerns regarding the project.

### **4.6.1 River Access**

Several participants considered it important to democratize and facilitate access to the river for all types of users. One person also wished to see Marine Park managers commit to making the St. Lawrence River and the Saguenay Fjord more accessible to citizens, particularly youth, senior citizens and disadvantaged individuals. Some participants considered that maintaining existing public access is all the more important since a large part of the coastline is private and free access to certain sites is threatened by recreational tourism development. Others would like to see new public places developed for observation and hiking. One individual suggested buying back private properties that require protection and relocating their owners. Another person mentioned that access to the St. Lawrence is a privilege and not a right.

One participant would like it to be possible to access the islands of the estuary for short periods outside the nesting season, on the condition that visitors leave no trace of their presence.

## 4.6.2 Recreational Activities

Generally speaking, participants would like to see that the recreational activities that currently take place on the territory be maintained in an enlarged park, though in their view it appears necessary, in certain cases, to develop guidelines to properly safeguard ecosystems.

### Recreational Boating and Paddle Sports

Some participants believe that motorized pleasure craft should be banned in the Marine Park, while others argue that it is pointless to regulate pleasure craft, since their impact on the environment pales in comparison to that of the shipping industry. As for non-motorized water activities, the overwhelming majority of participants would like them to be maintained throughout the Marine Park. However, some point out that, even in the absence of a motor, these activities can still be disturbing to wildlife. They suggest that certification be required to operate any type of watercraft in the park, or at the very least that pleasure craft users undergo training and awareness courses. It was also suggested that kayak companies be involved so that they do not promote beluga observation.

One participant was concerned about maintaining the marinas on the river's south shore, which provide access to the estuary but are prone to silting and require constant maintenance. Another individual felt that Marine Park managers should hold a veto over construction projects in marinas across their territory.

It was also noted that Marine Park management should support the creation of launch sites for small boats, which provide opportunities for educating and raising awareness amongst users and cause less shoreline degradation compared to unofficial put-in sites.

### Harvesting Activities

In keeping with the current situation, the majority of participants wish to see recreational harvesting activities continue in the proposed expansion area. However, a few individuals feel that recreational fishing and hunting should be prohibited in the enlarged Marine Park. Conversely, some participants believe that these activities should not only be authorized but encouraged. At the same time, some participants fear that expansion of the Marine Park will sooner or later lead to restrictions on their hunting, fishing or shellfish harvesting activities.

As for the harvesting of coastal plants, some citizens are concerned about the increase in this activity and the impact it may have on coastal ecosystems. To ensure the long-term viability of this resource, it is recommended that harvesting be regulated or that a certification or code of ethics be established for harvesters. One organization recommends identifying the sites that are most disturbed and developing awareness-raising tools and approaches. It was also suggested that coastline restoration efforts incorporate edible plants to create a sort of "garden by the sea."



### 4.6.3 Commercial Tourism Activities

Many participants expressed concerns about the impact of guided excursions on marine mammals. Several individuals felt that they should be banned, pointing out that there are many land-based sites where these animals can be observed from shore. Without seeking so much as to ban them, others believe that the rules governing guided excursions should be tightened and surveillance increased. It was also suggested that the vessels used for guided excursions be more environmentally friendly. In order to ensure that excursions have an educational component, one person believes that Parks Canada should be responsible for them.

International cruises are also a subject of much criticism. Participants expressed concern about their growing popularity, the pollution they generate, the disturbance they cause and the risk of collisions with whales. According to these participants, Marine Park managers should have the right to limit cruise ships within the park.

### 4.6.4 Commercial Fisheries

Two main trends emerge from the opinions received and heard. On one hand, several participants, including fishermen, are concerned about the economic and social repercussions that the project might have on commercial fishing. One individual explained their concern for the populations whose

livelihoods depend on fishing and requested that the project support them if protection of the estuary affects their commercial activities.

On the other hand, many participants are concerned about overfishing in the St. Lawrence. They propose the following measures: 1) banning the most environmentally harmful practices, including trawling; 2) reducing commercial fishing, for example by closing certain sectors that are more heavily frequented by marine mammals; or; 3) banning this activity in the Marine Park. With this in mind, one person suggested that federal and provincial regulatory bodies join forces to buy out the commercial fisheries currently operating in the Marine Park and prohibit the establishment of any new fisheries. Another participant suggests providing financial assistance to develop whale-friendly fishing gear to prevent entanglements. Also requested was a report illustrating the various advances in exemplary fishing practices.

Regarding weir fishing, the opinions received were unanimous on the fact that it should be maintained or even further developed.

### 4.6.5 Maritime Transport Activities

For maritime transport in general, many participants called for tighter control of the seaway and a reduction in the number of boats passing through.



© P.-P. Nadeau | Charlevoix coast seen from Île aux Coudres

## Shipping

Several participants stress the logistical and economic importance of the shipping sector and believe that maritime transport is necessary to decarbonize the economy and combat climate change. They want to avoid shipping from being replaced by more polluting means of moving goods. Participants draw a correlation between society's consumption and the growth in maritime transport.

The main concerns relate to the high number of container ships, the pollution they generate and the impact of their noise and speed on marine mammals. Many participants want to see these aspects regulated in an expanded Marine Park. Mentioned repeatedly is the need to work in tandem with stakeholders to reduce noise, collisions and pollution, in addition to continuing to develop technologies. Lastly, one person suggested analyzing if wind energy projects planned on the south shore of the river will increase shipping traffic.

## Port Infrastructure

Several participants would like Marine Park managers to have a say in port projects. It was noted that, despite the justified exclusion of these infrastructures from the project, their management will have significant impacts on the ecosystems of the expanded Marine Park. Compliance with the Marine Park's conservation objectives should therefore be taken into account when analyzing the impacts of port projects.

A number of concerns were raised regarding dredging and the impact it has on marine mammals, mainly for the ports of Rivière-du-Loup and Cacouna. One individual was concerned about the contamination levels of dredged sediment that is released into the estuary. Another person suggested educating managers, developers and shipyard workers upstream of projects to help them reduce the impact of their activities on marine mammals, rather than relying on a purely coercive approach. Furthermore, in order to reduce road traffic, it was proposed to re-establish a coastal shipping service between ports operating on the south shore of the estuary.

## Ferry Crossings

Regarding the Baie-Sainte-Catherine–Tadoussac crossing, several participants would like the respective impacts of a bridge and a ferry service to be assessed and compared, and for ferry-generated noise levels to be mitigated. Other citizens clearly express their desire for a bridge to be built to reduce disturbance to marine mammals. A few individuals oppose relocating the southern terminal of the Rivière-du-Loup–Saint-Siméon ferry crossing to Cacouna on the grounds that it would disturb belugas.

## 4.7 Conservation Tools

Overall, participants are calling for concrete and effective measures to protect the territory. Some participants believe that the proposed conservation tools are reasonable and justified. Others indicated that these tools are insufficient to ensure the protection of the territory and would like to see further restrictions and harsher penalties for offenders. Some participants see the regulations



as constraints to practising certain activities, claiming they infringe on individual freedoms. One participant pointed out that if the regulations mean that people are no longer able to enjoy the Marine Park, the latter is failing to fulfil its mandate.

#### **4.7.1 Quebec Marine Park Law**

A few participants expressed support for the prohibitions prescribed by the Quebec *Saguenay–St. Lawrence Marine Park Act*, namely activities related to mining or energy production, as well as the installation of oil pipelines, gas pipelines or power transmission lines. It was mentioned that any type of industrial activity within the proposed territory or on the adjacent shores should be prohibited. One participant mentioned that the seabed would not be better protected in an enlarged park and called for more protective measures in this regard.

#### **4.7.2 Marine Activities in the Saguenay–St. Lawrence Marine Park Regulations**

Several opinions received concern elements of the *Marine Activities in the Saguenay–St. Lawrence Marine Park Regulations* (hereafter, “Regulations”) or more generally the manner in which these Regulations are applied or should be applied in the event the Marine Park is expanded. Some participants view the expansion project as an opportunity to modernize this regulation.

#### **Regulatory Enforcement**

The vast majority of comments made regarding regulatory enforcement converge on the need for the Marine Park team to be present in the region. Some participants are concerned about the ability of the Marine Park team to enforce regulations across such a vast territory, while a few individuals deplore the lack of monitoring in the current Marine Park. In order to support the Marine Park in its protection mandate, it was suggested that surveillance efforts be carried out or that Fisheries and Oceans Canada fisheries officers be designated so that they can also enforce the Regulations. It was also recommended

that a monitoring program be set up to validate the effectiveness of the Regulations.

Participants stated that whale-watching cruises do not comply with these regulations. Several individuals complained of violations that seem to go unpunished. It was suggested that mystery clients be on board all guided tour boats. Recreational boating was also the subject of similar comments, though to a lesser extent. One participant indicated the need for surveillance in the Kamouraska sector, where he has witnessed numerous cases of disturbance to belugas.

#### **Prohibitions**

The ban on personal watercraft was the one that generated the most comments. This issue is specific to the Kamouraska sector, where some participants voiced their opposition to the prohibition of personal watercraft. Alternatively, others proposed that a traffic lane be maintained along the southern shore. They indicated that shallow waters near the coast are not frequented by belugas and that this territory is not part of the species’ critical habitat. They also support their position by arguing that personal watercraft are less damaging to eelgrass beds in shallow waters than are propeller-driven motorboats. A petition with 189 signatures suggests giving citizens the right to choose their preferred watercraft type and applying the same regulations to personal watercraft as those in place for motorized craft.

Conversely, certain participants approve of the ban on personal watercraft, arguing that it offers residents, tourists and wildlife a calm environment, in addition to mitigating the risk of collision with belugas. One comment suggested that speedboats also be banned in the Marine Park.

One comment emphasized that towed water sports should be banned only within the beluga’s critical habitat. The activity is practised in the intertidal zone around the Kamouraska Islands. It is therefore believed to be safe for marine mammals. Similarly, it was suggested that drones be permitted outside of critical beluga habitat.

One participant pointed out that several airports are located near the proposed expansion area, that safety issues may encourage pilots to fly below 2,000 feet, and that this question falls under the jurisdiction of Transport Canada.

## Permits

In order to ensure the protection of species at risk, it is suggested that fewer permits be granted for activities requiring them and that the conditions attached to these permits be restrictive. In the same vein, one person believes that the Marine Park issues too many permits for whale-watching cruises. Conversely, one comment indicated that it is essential to add whale-watching cruise permits on the south shore of the river. In order to avoid an over-concentration of activity in certain areas, it is proposed that the Marine Park balance the distribution of this type of permit. One participant also noted that with the changing climate, marine mammals are altering their patterns and that it may be necessary to adapt by opening certain sectors to the tourism industry and closing others.

A suggestion was made to look into the possibility of creating a specific permit for independent artists and documentary filmmakers. According to one participant, drone permits issued in this context should authorize flights over an extended period.

Such permits might involve training or come with certain prerequisites.

One organization would also like the use of drones for research projects (or for filming a documentary on research projects) to be less restrictive, as drones are less invasive than repeated approaches by boat. However, one comment indicates that research drones can be disturbing to cetaceans. Regarding research permits, it was suggested that permit applicants be consulted in advance before special conditions are imposed.

Lastly, one participant foresees a significant spike in the Marine Park's workload related to permitting and fears that this will have a direct impact on research projects carried out in the park.

## Speed Limits

Several comments were made concerning speed limits and the need to lower them. In order to protect marine mammals, one participant proposed that the maximum speed be reduced from 25 to 18 knots for all boats, and to 10 knots for cargo ships. Conversely, one participant requested that no speed restrictions exist, while another proposed that such restrictions apply only in the beluga's critical habitat.



© P.-P. Nadeau | Cap-à-l'Aigle port of refuge

### 4.7.3 Other Conservation Tools

One participant wanted all uses to be regulated for the sake of consistency throughout the protected area. Another suggested that commercial activities be permitted only if they do not harm marine mammals. It was suggested that the shores of private properties, islands, marinas and ports also be regulated, while another participant suggested that islands in the region be off-limits to mining. One participant feared that the expansion might make construction or repair work on infrastructure near the park's boundaries more challenging.

There were several requests to make currently voluntary measures for cargo shipping mandatory or, at the very least, to broaden their scope, particularly between La Malbaie and Saint-Siméon. It was suggested that access to certain areas for merchant vessels be limited and that voluntary measures be established in less frequented but disturbed areas in order to reduce disturbance to belugas, particularly at the L'Isle-aux-Coudres–Saint-Joseph-de-la-Rive crossing. One participant would like to see mandatory training for St. Lawrence pilots who work in critical beluga habitat.

Other suggestions include a request that the Marine Park regulate engine noise and establish strict zoning on the south shore of the estuary to limit disturbance to certain species. It is also hoped that the park will promote sailing, paddle sports and electric motors over diesel engines, and that motorboats and kayaks will be prohibited in beluga-sensitive areas.

## 4.8 Education, Discovery and Tourism

Education, awareness raising, discovery activities and tourism were frequently addressed themes in both surveys and briefs as well as in the consultation events.

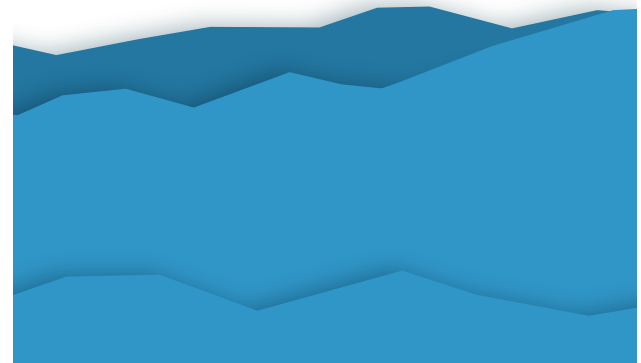
### 4.8.1 Education and Awareness

Education and awareness are two themes that come up frequently in the opinions. Several comments evoke the importance of educating and raising public awareness about protecting the marine environment. Some participants are concerned about the disrespectful behaviour of some visitors toward the environment, particularly on the coast where the latter occasionally fail to properly dispose of their trash. According to the participants, more awareness-raising activities should be carried out with various clienteles, such as visitors/users of the marine protected area, local residents and youth.

Approaches suggested to raise awareness and educate various target audiences including the following:

- Advertising campaigns;
- Training employees in the tourism sector;
- Developing mobile applications or digital platforms;
- Installing attractive road signage and information points;
- Developing school programs as well as an interpretation and education plan.

One organization believes that the potential influx of tourists is an opportunity to showcase the educational expertise of Parks Canada, Sépaq and their regional partners to promote the attractions of the estuary.



## 4.8.2 Discovery

Participants believe that expanding the Marine Park is an opportunity to further promote discovery activities related to the St. Lawrence. One organization suggested taking advantage of the project to rethink how the Marine Park is being promoted through its Discovery Network and to make the presence of the protected area more tangible on the south shore of the river.

Several participants mentioned activities that should be part of the expanded Marine Park's "discovery" offering, including shore-based marine mammal watching, museum exhibitions, scuba diving and hiking on the coasts. It was also suggested that access to land and marine habitats be enhanced through trails or observation platforms. Further, it was mentioned that it would be interesting to re-establish the Route Bleue in parallel to the Marine Park expansion. One organization recommended offering a range of cultural and outdoor activities year-round rather than just seasonally.

The following discovery-related themes are mentioned: marshes, Aboriginal presence, aboiteaux, monadnocks, fauna and flora, tides and the history of the islands. Specific sites are also mentioned as being of interest for discovery from the shore, such as the Kamouraska regional museum, Musée maritime du Québec, the Putep 't-awt observation site, Parc national du Bic, Pavillon du Saint-Laurent, Île aux Basques and the Kiskotuk coastal park.

## 4.8.3 Tourism

Many people believe that expanding the Marine Park is a way to improve the tourism offering along the St. Lawrence and that it is an opportunity to offer and promote responsible and sustainable tourism experiences. Some see the Marine Park as a good way to regulate recreational tourism activities, such as guided sea excursions, water sports, migratory bird hunting and recreational fishing in order to lower their impact on marine

fauna and flora, especially endangered species such as the beluga.

Ideas being floated for even more sustainable activities in the Marine Park include:

- Implementation of green technologies for motorboats;
- Responsible management of tourist volumes;
- Promotion of low-impact activities;
- Development of a certification for minimizing one's carbon footprint.

Concerns were raised regarding excessive tourist traffic to the detriment of local communities and the protection of the marine environment. Some participants believe that ecosystem conservation should take precedence over the development of tourist activities. Conversely, one individual believes that conservation is not an excuse to limit innovative and responsible tourism development in the region.

One organization suggested an effective marketing strategy with an emphasis on the digital component. Proposals include an increased presence on social networks, establishing collaborations with influencers specializing in sustainable tourism, and creating immersive visual content.

According to this same organization, emphasis should be placed on showcasing the unique natural and cultural assets of this territory, including its exceptional wildlife (whales, seals, seabirds), spectacular landscapes and maritime heritage. Another comment suggested taking advantage of the expansion to rethink the concept of promoting the Marine Park, which the individual believes is overfocused on marine mammals.

One organization sees opportunities to connect Saint-Irénée Bay, Charlevoix's Route Bleue and Route 362 (Route du Fleuve) to the expanded Marine Park and to attract sustainable tourism that promotes the natural and cultural heritage of local communities. Lastly, it was mentioned that the Marine Park is world renowned for whale watching and that this activity is a flagship economic activity and Quebec's third biggest international tourism export.

## 4.9 Funding and Economy

Adequate funding of Marine Park activities and financial support from partners were the subject of several questions and concerns from participants. They also expressed their views on the economic impacts of expanding the marine protected area.

### 4.9.1 Funding for Park Activities

Some participants are concerned that the presentation of the expansion project during the public consultations did not include a budget proposal. Given the scale of the proposed

territory and the challenges at hand, participants stressed the importance that Marine Park management receive significant and recurrent additional funding for activities in the expanded marine protected area. Participants believe that enlarging the Marine Park without adequate funding would lead to a lack of credibility. It is believed that the Marine Park could become a real model for others to follow provided that there are sufficient resources and means.

One organization recommended that both levels of government present a financial framework adapted to the new realities of the park so that managers can in turn present a work plan as soon as possible. It was mentioned that this funding should notably be used to ensure adequate monitoring of the park regarding the application of protection measures and scientific research. Participants also indicated that there should be sufficient human and financial resources to carry out more discovery, awareness, educational and promotional activities, as well as to ensure efficient administration of the park, including permitting.



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## 4.9.2 Anticipated Investments

Organizations from various sectors are interested in receiving financial assistance to support the Marine Park in its mandate, namely for scientific research, education, outreach, reception and interpretation activities. With the expansion of the Marine Park, it is anticipated that investments will be made in the surrounding communities. One organization suggests creating financial and technical partnerships to support municipalities. Investments are proposed for wharves, boat ramps, marinas, high-traffic public areas and wastewater treatment infrastructure.

Investments are expected to help give structure to the Discovery Network within the targeted expansion area. One organization suggested setting up a fund for this purpose. Investments in tourism promotion are also desired. In terms of conservation, several participants mentioned the importance of funding research projects and contributing to regional initiatives. The creation of a fund or grants for conservation actions is one idea that was mentioned. One organization sees the expansion as an opportunity to develop a lasting legacy of expertise in scientific diving. One participant suggested that businesses

receive funding to participate in training offered by the Marine Park.

## 4.9.3 Economic Repercussions

Participants emphasized the importance of maintaining economic activities related to the river and its banks and that ecosystem protection should be carried out in a way that respects this. Some participants are concerned that the project might bring further restrictions that would hamper economic development. One comment stated that the project is an economic sterilization of a swath of territory that is far too large. One individual was concerned that the project would put control of the area back into the hands of companies that exploit the river for their own profit.

Some considered that the protection of the river stemming from the project would bolster sustainable economic development. Participants believe that expanding the Marine Park would generate positive economic benefits such as job creation, the establishment and maintenance of recreational tourism infrastructure, and the promotion of local products and expertise related to the St. Lawrence.



© M.-I. Rochon | Sailboat



# 5

## Key Findings

Les consultations publiques sur le projet The public consultations on the Saguenay–St. Lawrence Marine Park expansion project brought to light participants' desire to protect more of the estuary. The beauty of the landscapes, the richness of the ecosystems and the threats they face were mentioned repeatedly. Attachment to the territory was evident in many of the comments, with many participants seeing the project as an important legacy for future generations. Expansion of the Marine Park is seen as an effective way to afford enhanced protection to marine ecosystems, particularly belugas, other marine mammals and coastal environments. The need to protect and promote cultural heritage was emphasized on several occasions.

The proposed territory enjoyed very strong support. Connecting the two shores of the estuary and including the beluga's entire critical habitat were well received. Most of the suggested changes were aimed at further enlarging the proposed expansion area, though a few participants wished to make it smaller.

The project is seen as a chance to hone scientific knowledge and foster research opportunities on the marine environment. Marine Park managers are expected to make the results of their monitoring more accessible. Consultation and partnerships should be maintained and strengthened in the expanded Marine Park. Whether it be in the fields of tourism, education or science, Marine Park managers are encouraged to collaborate with organizations that are currently active in the region. Many organizations have expressed an interest in partnering with the Marine Park. The need for the Marine Park team to be present with local communities, particularly on the south shore of the estuary, was also emphasized. In order to ensure equitable representation of the territory, it is considered necessary to add representatives from different backgrounds to Marine Park governance.

Maritime traffic was a considerable source of concern, with many participants deploring its intensity as well as the speed, noise levels and environmental impacts of operating vessels. This is particularly the case for whale-watching cruises and the shipping industry, which were the targets of several criticisms. Another strongly expressed concern is water quality in the estuary. Democratizing access to the river is also often mentioned.

In order to ensure the protection of the expanded Marine Park, concrete and effective measures are expected, as is a sustained presence in the region. While some participants consider existing conservation tools relevant, others would like to see stricter regulations, including speed limits. Some regulations are viewed as an infringement of individual freedoms, particularly the ban on personal watercraft in the Kamouraska sector.

The importance of significant and recurrent additional funding for managing activities in the expanded Marine Park was emphasized. Given the scale of the expansion, some participants indicated that the marine protected area risks losing its credibility if funding is insufficient. Additionally, investments are anticipated within local communities as well as by certain organizations that are likely to support the Marine Park in its mandate. Participants generally see positive economic benefits, though there is also concern that the project could hamper economic development. Some participants call for a balance between protecting ecosystems and economic activities associated with the river.

Lastly, several comments mentioned the importance of educating and raising public awareness about protecting the marine environment. The expansion of the Marine Park is seen as an opportunity to further promote discovery activities related to the St. Lawrence, in addition to encouraging sustainable tourism. Numerous proposals have been made to enhance the Discovery Network in the proposed expansion area.

# 6

## Next Steps

The public consultations report will allow the governments of Canada and Quebec to take a joint and well-informed decision regarding the expansion project in 2025. The Marine Park would be officially expanded following enactment of i) a decree issued by the Quebec Council of Ministers and ii) a decree issued by the Governor in Council for the Government of Canada. These decrees would be prepared upon recommendation of the relevant ministers.

A review of the management plan would be one of the first actions (and initiated as soon as possible) to establish the long-term vision of the expanded Marine Park as well as the most desirable management

strategies. The management plan serves as a basis for management decisions and activities of the marine protected area for a period of seven years. Based on the issues and prospects identified, strategies and objectives are defined within the Marine Park's areas of intervention. The management plan development process is also consultative in nature, meaning members of the public may express their ideas and vision for the future of the Marine Park.

Comments collected from participants during public consultations regarding how the expanded Marine Park should be managed were recorded and would be considered as part of the management plan revision exercise.

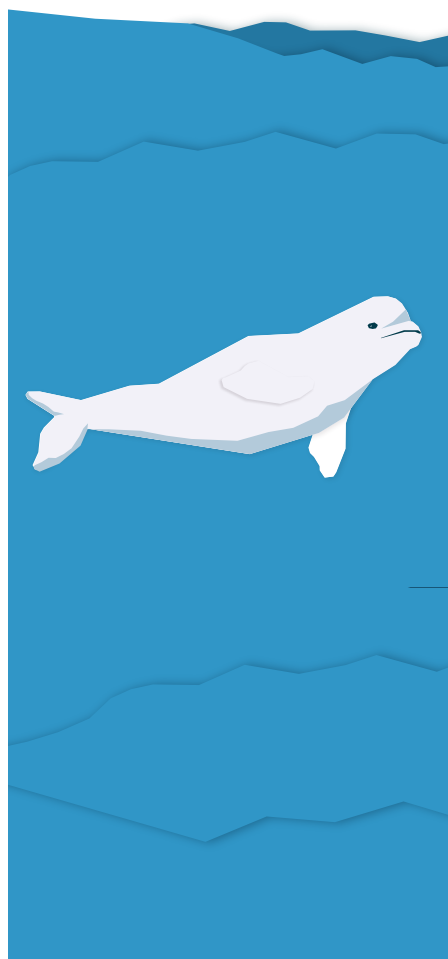


© J.-C. Lemay | Harbour seals

# Appendix 1 List of Briefs Received<sup>2</sup>

## Individuals

1. Audet, Sophie
2. Bissonnette, Roxanne; Conin, Lucie et Lamraouhi, Nawal
3. Caron-Michaud, Jason
4. Corrado, Nicole
5. Drapeau, Christian
6. Dubuc, Elise
7. Hébert, Alain
8. Laplante, Johanne
9. Lavigreur, Guy
10. Pippard, Leone
11. Savard, Guillaume
12. Roy, Sylvain
13. Thériault, Carl



**Briefs can be consulted here:**  
[parcmarin.qc.ca/consultations](http://parcmarin.qc.ca/consultations)

## Organizations

14. Administration portuaire du Saguenay
15. Canards Illimités Canada
16. Comité consultatif en protection de l'environnement de L'Islet
17. Comité touristique Cratères et marées
18. Conseil régional de l'environnement du Bas-Saint-Laurent, comité ZIP du Sud-de-l'Estuaire et Table de concertation régionale du sud de l'estuaire moyen
19. Conseil régional de l'environnement du Bas-Saint-Laurent, comité ZIP du Sud-de-l'Estuaire, Horizon-Nature Bas-Saint-Laurent, Observatoire des oiseaux de Rimouski, Organisme des bassins versants du Nord-Est du Bas-Saint-Laurent
20. Conseil régional de l'environnement et du développement durable du Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean
21. Conservation de la nature Canada
22. Croisières AML
23. Environnement Côte-Nord
24. Explos-Nature
25. Groupe de recherche et d'éducation sur les mammifères marins
26. Institut nordique de recherche en environnement et en santé au travail
27. Institut de recherche en histoire maritime et archéologie subaquatique
28. L'Escale maritime de Trois-Pistoles
29. Marina de Trois-Pistoles
30. Mériscope
31. Municipalité de Saint-André-de-Kamouraska
32. Musée régional de Kamouraska
33. Nature Québec
34. Organisme de bassin versant du Saguenay
35. Patrimoine maritime de Kamouraska
36. Région de la biosphère de Charlevoix
37. Réseau d'observation des mammifères marins
38. Société d'aide au développement des collectivités (SADC) du Kamouraska; SADC de la MRC de Rivière-du-Loup; SADC des Basques; SADC de la Neigette et Centre d'aide aux entreprises de Montmagny-L'Islet
39. Société de protection et d'aménagement de l'Île aux Pommés
40. Société Duvetnor Ltée
41. Société pour la nature et les parcs du Québec
42. Société Provancher d'histoire naturelle du Canada
43. Table de concertation régionale du sud de l'estuaire moyen
44. Tourisme Bas-Saint-Laurent
45. Tourisme Charlevoix, Tourisme Côte-Nord et Tourisme Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean

<sup>2</sup> Brief numbers were attributed in alphabetical order.