

Petition to protect the Sunshine Coast's Rare and Unique Glass Sponge Reefs through fishing closures

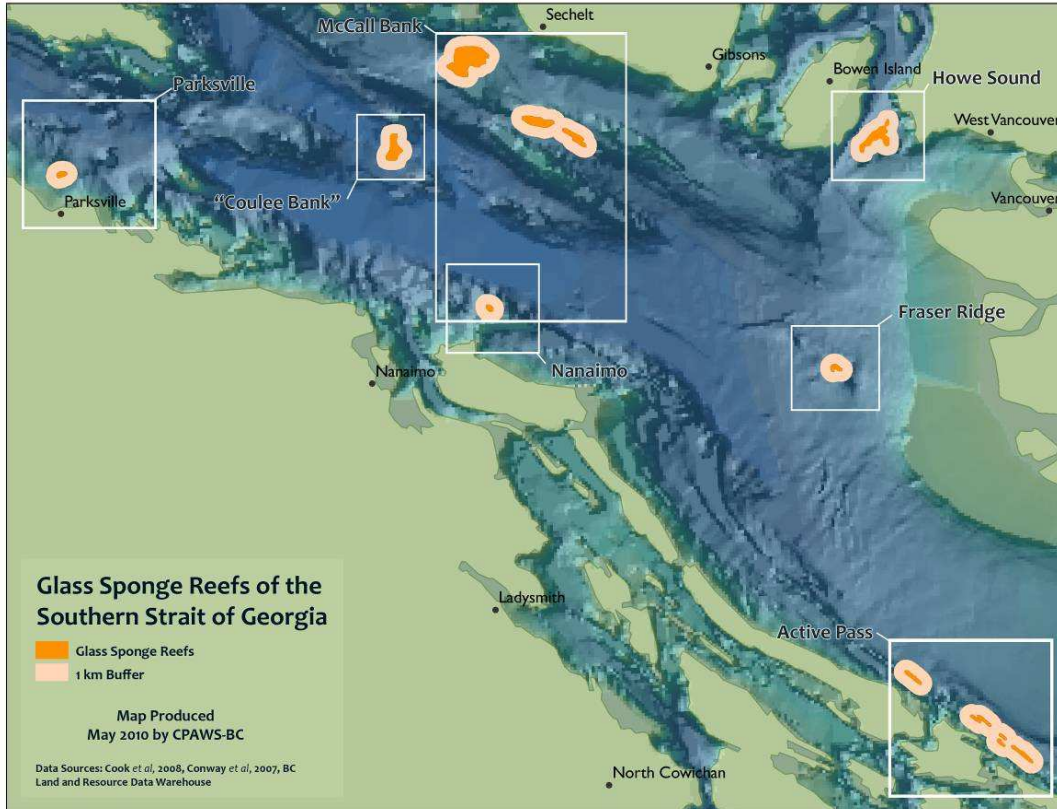


Figure 1- Map of the southern Glass Sponge Reef distributions. These reefs are found close to many coastal communities in the Southern Strait of Georgia.



Figure 2- The Finger Goblet Sponge at left is one of three reef-building species. At right, juvenile rockfish use Glass Sponge Reefs as habitat and hiding places from predators. Photos: Natural Resources Canada and Dr. Manfred Krautter.

Petition to protect the Glass Sponge Reefs of the Sunshine Coast

- **Glass sponge reefs** are found only in Canada in two geographically separate groupings- the northern Hecate Strait reefs and the Southern Strait of Georgia reefs. The former reef complex is temporarily protected through fishing closures, and Fisheries and Oceans Canada recently announced them as an Area of Interest for Marine Protected Area designation. The southern reef complexes are unprotected (Fig. 1).

- Glass sponge reefs are made of silica and are extremely delicate. They are under threat from physical disturbance, such as trawling, trapping and anchoring. Trawling poses the greatest threat, as huge fishing nets are dragged across the seabed which crush and destroy the sponges. Trawling also creates large plumes of sediment, which can smother the sponge reefs.

- **These reefs were thought to have gone extinct 30 million years ago until researchers discovered them in 1987 during mapping of the seafloor. The only living glass sponge reefs in the world are in B.C.**

- These glass sponge reefs perform valuable ecosystem services- their structures form natural habitat for creatures such as prawns and rockfish to feed, hide from predators and breed (Fig 2).

- Glass sponge reefs are extremely slow-growing and long-lived. They have been growing on the seafloor for over 9,000 years.

- Over half of the northern glass sponge reefs were destroyed before fishing closures were put in place by Fisheries and Oceans Canada in 2002. While information is limited, the southern glass sponge reefs have sustained some damage. They may take hundreds if not thousands of years to recover.

- The areal extent of the Southern sponge reefs are small and there is not a large overlap with current fishing activities, so the impact on trawl and trap fisheries would likely be minimal.

- Without protection, the southern sponge reefs may become so damaged they will be unlikely to survive.

Therefore, we the undersigned call upon Fisheries and Oceans Canada to put trawl and trap fishing closures in the areas of the southern Glass Sponge Reefs. As a further precautionary measure, these areas should be sizeable enough to provide an adequate buffer zone around the reefs to prevent damage from human activities.

SIGNATURE	NAME (print)	ADDRESS (Incl. City & Postal Code)	EMAIL

