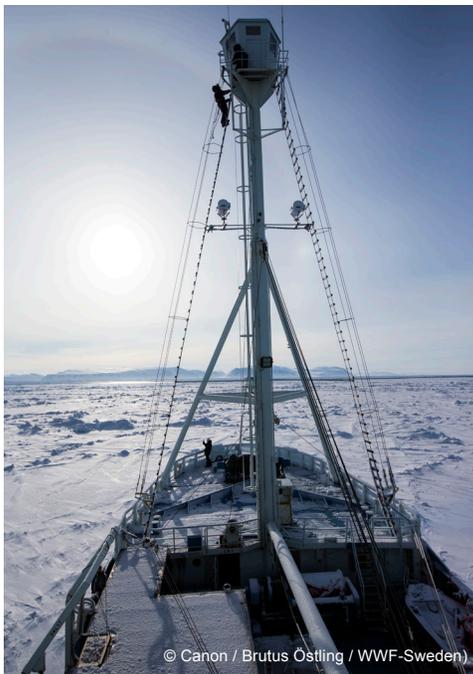




ICE HABITATS

Why are ice habitats important?

Sea ice in the Canadian Arctic provides important habitat for many species, including marine mammals, fish and marine birds. These animals breed, forage, hunt and even give birth on sea ice. Many Indigenous communities also rely on sea ice for transportation and hunting.



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How does shipping impact ice habitats?

- **Shipping through sea ice (known as icebreaking) can cause animals to flee the area** because of increased noise. Some animals may avoid an area for several days after fleeing.
- **Icebreaking can form channels** if the ice does not refreeze quickly, and some seals may use these channels to give birth along the edges. If other ships use the same channel, adult seals and pups become vulnerable to ship strikes.
- **Icebreaking can destroy or fragment important ice habitat.** This has the largest impact on seals, especially seal pups that may become displaced from their birth site or separated from their mothers.
- **Marine mammals can confuse channels from icebreaking for the sea edge.** If the channel refreezes, these mammals become trapped under the sea ice and, in severe cases, can lead to death.

What needs to be done?

- **Use a pre-existing route through sea ice**, where possible
- **Limit travel during important times**, including caribou migrations over sea ice
- **Limit travel in important areas**, including polar bear denning and seal pupping areas
- **Limit travel during sea ice formation** to decrease the likelihood of introducing cracks into the new ice sheet
- **Support further scientific research** on the impacts of icebreaking, including improving access to ships for sampling by government and research groups

Why address this now?

As a result of climate change, the shipping season in Canada's Arctic is becoming longer. Shipping activity in this region is also increasing, leading to more pressure on ice habitats. If the impacts of shipping are not addressed, the species and communities that depend on these ice habitats will be greatly impacted.

For more information, contact:

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