



## Birds Canada November 27, 2020 Submission to Delta Port 4 Impact Assessment Process

Birds Canada recommends that all major projects on the Fraser Delta currently within a federal or provincial impact assessment process be paused until a regional impact assessment for the Fraser Delta can be completed. We therefore recommend this Impact Assessment be paused and Delta Port 4 send a request to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Canada to utilize the powers under section 91(3) of the *Impact Assessment Act* to initiate a regional impact assessment for the Fraser Delta.

The current Delta Port 4 project is directly adjacent to the proposed Roberts Bank Terminal 2 project (RBT2), and many of the findings that have arisen from that assessment are relevant to the current Delta Port 4 impact assessment. The RBT2 panel found that “Based on the numerous submissions provided to the Panel throughout the review, it is evident that the marine ecosystem of the Fraser River estuary is increasingly being threatened by the cumulative effects of development and human activities.”<sup>1</sup> The federal review panel recommended that “the Government of Canada undertake two regional environmental assessments for the Fraser River estuary and the Salish Sea to establish an environmental baseline, identify environmental and cumulative effects of the areas, and mitigation and follow up requirements. The regional assessment should be used to develop and implement Intergovernmental Management Programs of the Fraser River estuary and the Salish Sea.”<sup>2</sup> The panel further recommended that these Intergovernmental Management Programs be developed and implemented “for the improvement and long-term environmental management of the Fraser River estuary and the Salish Sea.”<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, during the Roberts Bank Terminal 2 Environmental Assessment, the Port of Vancouver “offered to participate in a regional baseline study or a regional cumulative effects study with the Government of Canada or the Government of British Columbia.”<sup>4</sup> To the knowledge of Birds Canada, these steps have not yet been taken. However, the recommendations remain relevant if the Delta Port 4 process wishes to avoid repeating the mistakes that have led to strong community resistance to the proposed Roberts Bank Terminal 2 project.

It is therefore Birds Canada’s view that prior to Delta Port 4 proceeding any further into their respective Impact Assessments that the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Canada should exercise the powers granted in section 93(1) of the *Impact Assessment Act* and initiate a Regional Impact Assessment

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<sup>1</sup> Federal Review Panel Report for the Roberts Bank Terminal 2 Project Prepared by: the Review Panel for the Roberts Bank Terminal 2 Project March 27, 2020 Cat. No. : En106-229/2020E-PDF ISBN: 978-0-660-33786-9 Canadian Impact Assessment Registry Reference No. 80054 Published by: Impact Assessment Agency of Canada. Online at: <https://iaac-aeic.gc.ca/050/documents/p80054/134506E.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.



for the Lower Fraser. Once the Regional Impact Assessment is completed, Birds Canada further recommends that a management plan for the Fraser Delta be developed that outlines how the ecological and social resilience of the delta will be restored. Only once these two steps have been taken will the First Nations, Federal and Provincial governments have the information required to determine whether to proceed with shipping-related development of the Fraser Estuary.

### Specific issues within the Initial Project Description

The Initial Project Description (IPD) provided by Global Container Terminals omits a number of potential effect pathways that may affect migratory birds and migratory bird habitat. In Table 13, only three potential impact pathways are identified:

Terminal construction and railyard expansion, dredging and infilling, leading to physical disturbance, noise and light, change in habitat or mortality due to collisions.

Disturbance due to increased noise and light during operations.

Disturbance or mortality risk from increased traffic (road, rail, and shipping).

Missing from this list are a number of possible direct and indirect effects of this project. These missing impact pathways largely stem from the omission of habitat degradation in the list of impacts associated with terminal operations and increased traffic.

Firstly, the IPD does not include the indirect effects of an overall decline in the productivity of Fraser estuary on migratory birds. The level of development in the Fraser delta has the potential to undermine ecological process that maintain the productivity of the food chain found in the delta. The proposed Delta Port 4 project needs to include an energetics pathway of effect to consider this potential impact on birds.

The IPD also does not touch on the impact pathway associated with pollution. The increase in traffic along road and rail corridors into the terminal, at the terminal itself and along the shipping route all will result in increased pollutants entering the environment. These pollutants have the potential to either reduce food availability or reduce the health of the birds exposed to these pollutants. This impact pathway should be included in the assessment as well.

Climate related impacts need to be included as an impact pathway. The relationships between the project, birds and climate adaptation has the potential to result in negative impacts by increasing the occurrence of coastal squeeze. As sea levels rise, coastal salt marshes retreat landward, but when their retreat path is blocked by coastal areas hardened by shoreline structures, such as seawalls or rock revetments, we lose wetlands in what is known as “the coastal squeeze.” The more critical infrastructure we put on the delta, the more likely we are to use hardened shoreline structures and the

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less opportunity there will be for climate adaptation by our coastal species. It is time individual projects report on the climate adaptation implications for species in the area as an impact pathway.

The IPD fails to address the impacts on habitat connectivity on species such as Barn Owl from increased traffic. Similarly, the IPD does not identify mortality from powerlines as another potential impact pathway. Both of these issues have been identified in previous environmental assessments in the region and will likely be an issue for this proposed project as well.

On page 38 in Table 9, in referring to Proximity to Parks and Protected Areas, it has been correctly identified that the Fraser Estuary is a Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network Site.<sup>5</sup> However, the proximity has been listed as 9 km when in fact the proposed terminal overlaps the WHSRN site and therefore should be listed as 0.

Also in table 9 on page 38, the site has correctly been identified as an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area.<sup>6</sup> More recently, the site has been identified as a Key Biodiversity Area as well. In this case the identification of the Fraser Estuary as a KBA was done by the Canadian KBA Coalition.<sup>7</sup> The KBA program is an international effort to identify key areas for the conservation of nature and is managed by the KBA Partnership.<sup>8</sup>

On page 60, where Table 21 lists potential effects on human health and well-being, there is no inclusion of impacts on the local economy.<sup>9</sup> We know from the Roberts Bank Terminal 2 project that expanded traffic is having an impact on the local agriculture industry.<sup>10</sup> Given the co-benefits provided by that industry to migratory birds, this has the potential to have an indirect effect on migratory birds as well.

We also note that while impacts on tourism are mentioned in Table 23, which refers to potential impacts on Indigenous communities, no mention of tourism occurs in Table 21.<sup>11</sup> The tourism sector is beginning to realize the potential of bird watching as a revenue-generating activity and has recently launched the BC Bird Trail which includes a focus on the Fraser Delta.<sup>12</sup> We believe further

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.kbacanada.org/>

<sup>8</sup> [KBA Partnership \(keybiodiversityareas.org\)](https://www.keybiodiversityareas.org/)

<sup>9</sup> Federal Review Panel Report for the Roberts Bank Terminal 2 Project Prepared by: the Review Panel for the Roberts Bank Terminal 2 Project March 27, 2020 Cat. No. : En106-229/2020E-PDF ISBN: 978-0-660-33786-9 Canadian Impact Assessment Registry Reference No. 80054 Published by: Impact Assessment Agency of Canada. Online at: <https://iaac-aeic.gc.ca/050/documents/p80054/134506E.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> BC Bird Trail, [Home - The BC Bird Trail - Look Up, Stay Grounded](https://www.bcbirdtrail.ca/) <https://www.bcbirdtrail.ca/>

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industrialization of the delta puts both agriculture and bird-focused tourism at risk, and needs to be assessed.

## Additional concerns

The IPD has identified the importance of obtaining baseline information through programs such as the Coastal Environmental Baseline Program (CEBP). The CEBP is undertaking essential field work that will contribute a lot to understanding the potential impacts of a range projects around the Salish Sea.<sup>13</sup> Birds Canada has highlighted the importance of understanding the baseline condition of coastal birds in and around the terminal, but it is important that the relative abundance along the shipping route also be understood. Based on 20 years of monitoring data, there are a number of coastal birds that have demonstrated a declining abundance in the Salish Sea.<sup>14</sup> Dunlin, 6 species of benthivores, and 3 piscivores are all in decline in the Salish Sea, and all of these species use the Roberts Bank area.<sup>15</sup> One of the challenges for decision makers is determining whether this is a population decline or a displacement to other, less disturbed locations. This is an important issue to address for the researchers assessing the impacts of Delta Port 4.

The current approach to managing development in the Fraser Delta is failing to maintain a healthy environment for those that rely on the Fraser Delta. A study released this November found that “under a business as usual scenario, two-thirds of species within the Fraser River estuary are predicted to have less than a 50% probability of persistence over the next 25 years.”<sup>16</sup> As with the Roberts Bank Terminal 2 Environmental Assessment, the study goes on to highlight the necessity of a Fraser Estuary management plan.<sup>17</sup> The local government of the region also shared this concern as demonstrated by their plans to send a request through the Metro Vancouver board to senior levels of government that a Fraser River

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<sup>14</sup>Ethier, D.M., P. Davidson, G. Sorenson, K.L. Barry, K. Devitt, C.B. Jardine, D. Lepage, and D.W. Bradley (in press). 2020. Twenty years of coastal waterbird trends suggest regional patterns of environmental pressure in British Columbia, Canada. *Avian Conservation and Ecology*.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Laura J. Kehoe, Jessie Lund, Lia Chalifour, Yeganeh Asadian, Eric Balke, Sean Boyd, Deborah Carlson, James M. Casey, Brendan Connors, Nicolai Cryer, Mark C. Drever, Scott Hinch, Colin Levings, Misty MacDuffee, Heidi McGregor, John Richardson, David C. Scott, Daniel Stewart, Ross G. Vennesland, Chad E. Wilkinson, Pamela Zevit, Julia K. Baum, Tara G. Martin, (2020) “Conservation in heavily urbanized biodiverse regions requires urgent management action and attention to governance.” *Conservation Science and Practice*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/csp2.310>

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.



Estuary Management Plan be re-established.<sup>18</sup> The Impact Assessment for Delta Port 4 and other similar projects should not proceed until the baseline information is in place and management plan for the estuary has been developed, or we risk the collapse of this precious ecosystem.

The Fraser River Estuary is among most important coastal habitats found in western Canada. The bar for sustainable development in this area is extremely high and is a bar that no port proposal is likely to meet. Birds Canada has identified concerns with carrying out an Impact Assessment without adequate baseline information and we have also identified some specific concerns with the Initial Project Description. Ultimately, Birds Canada does not believe the Fraser Estuary is the right place to be developing an industrial port and therefore call on the Canadian government to lead the development of an estuary management plan that protects the outstanding ecological values provided by the Fraser estuary.

Sincerely,

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Birds Canada

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<sup>18</sup> [GVS&DD Board Meeting Agenda Package - November 27, 2020 \(metrovancover.org\)](#)

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