

## New AHOI project focuses on one of the world's most valuable ecosystems and the threats it's facing in the Gros Morne region

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**Norris Point, NL.** - Atlantic Healthy Oceans Initiative (AHOI) is setting crab traps, deploying aerial and underwater drones, and suiting up in kayaks, snorkels and GoPro cameras to conduct research on one of the world's most diverse and productive ecosystems. AHOI is partnering with [Ecology Action Centre](#) (EAC) and [Memorial University - Grenfell Campus](#) to assess and monitor the health of eelgrass beds in the Gros Morne region over the next three years.

The aquatic vegetation plays a vital role in habitat health, species richness, and fighting climate change. Eelgrass beds serve as nurseries for aquatic species, protect coastlines from erosion, and are the third most effective marine ecosystem for capturing and storing carbon. Unfortunately, eelgrass meadows are declining globally and in North America, they are being depleted by the European Green Crab, an Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS).

“The first reported sighting of green crab in Bonne Bay was in 2009, but there isn't enough available data to give a clear picture of what's been happening with eelgrass in our region over time and in relation to invasive species,” explains Sydney Sullivan, AHOI's Plastics and Marine Conservation Coordinator. “We need to understand the baseline ecosystem health and associated biodiversity of eelgrass beds, the damage from green crabs and other impacts, and develop a plan to mitigate the damage to these areas.”

The project is funded by Environment and Climate Change Canada's Environmental Damages Fund and entails reviewing previous research, conducting fieldwork, exploring and recording marine habitats and species, and creating a final report. The data collected will also feed into the [community-led marine plan for the Gros Morne region that AHOI worked on with EAC earlier this year.](#)

“We are thrilled to see AHOI investigating eelgrass meadows in the Gros Morne area and looking forward to helping out however we can,” says Simon Ryder-Burbidge, Marine Coordinator with the Ecology Action Centre. “The more we understand about these special places, the more we can do to protect the health of our marine ecosystems.”

Working with researchers, experts, fish harvesters, and other interested groups will build a detailed understanding of eelgrass meadows in the Gros Morne region that includes science as well as local and traditional ecological knowledge. The Bonne Bay Aquarium and Research Station have significantly contributed to marine research in the area since the 1960s, so AHOI is working with the project partners to incorporate relevant research into baseline data collection.

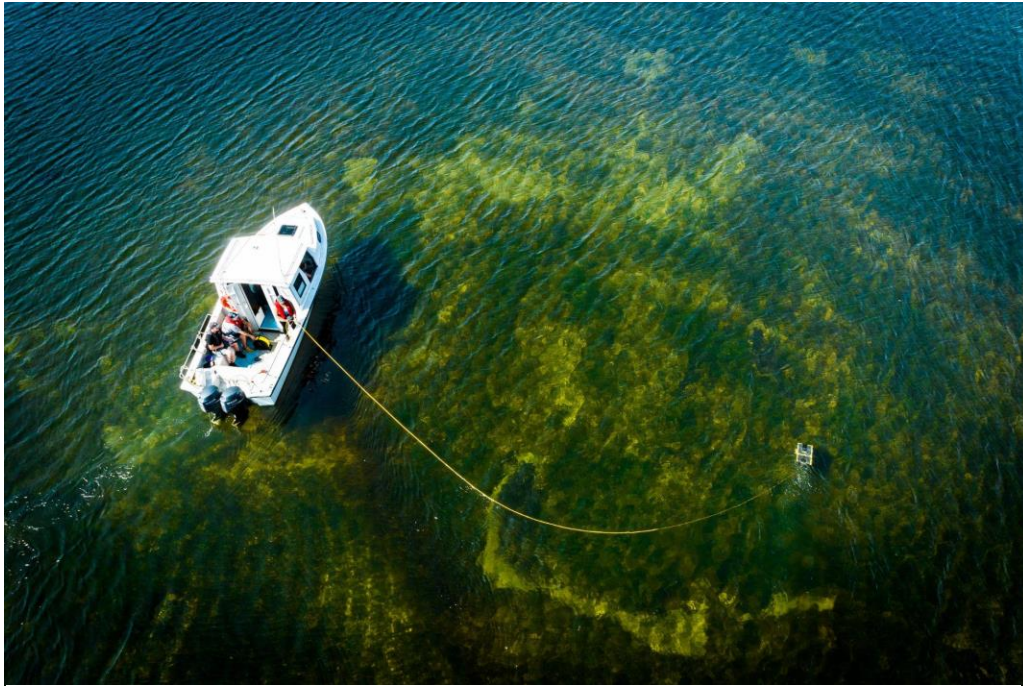
The research being conducted will shed light on many aspects of the marine environment such as the presence of other aquatic invasive species, species at risk, rare or important habitat and species, environmental damage, climate change and waste. A final report will outline best-fit areas for increased marine conservation and protection, as well as measures needed to restore any habitats damaged by green crabs or other unknown impacts that may be observed during the research phase.

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Aerial photo of the AHOI and EAC team completing an ROV transect in an eelgrass meadow in Deer Arm, Bonne Bay, NL. Photo credit: Tom Cochrane.

## BACKGROUND

[Atlantic Healthy Oceans Initiative](#) is a registered non-profit organization in the Gros Morne region of N.L. Its mission is to build awareness of our changing ocean and facilitate actions to protect it and those who depend on it most. Looking after both the marine biodiversity of our ocean and the coastal communities' way of life is essential to protecting our environment, building successful stewardship and a sustainable blue economy for generations to come. AHOI's programs focus on marine conservation and protection, as well as circular economy and sustainable communities. It has been leading the way towards these goals for the Gros Morne region since 2019. AHOI prioritizes working with local stakeholders and has formed many partnerships that include local businesses, municipalities, fish harvesters, other NGOs, Grenfell Campus - Memorial University, Gros Morne Cooperating Association, Gros Morne National Park, and Ecology Action Centre.

[The Ecology Action Centre](#) is a member-based environmental charity in Mi'kma'ki (Nova Scotia) taking leadership on critical issues ranging from biodiversity protection to climate change to environmental justice. EAC strives to catalyze change through policy advocacy, community development and acts as a watch-dog for the environment. It takes a holistic approach to the environment and our economy to create a just and sustainable society.