

Critical Habitat in the Marine Realm

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“Critical” habitat is a term that to date has often been used synonymously with “important” habitat, but in the context of the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA), it means “that habitat that is necessary for the survival or recovery of a listed wildlife species and that is identified as the species’ critical habitat in the recovery strategy or in an action plan for the species” (Sec. 2). Much of the conceptual thinking around this topic has been done for terrestrial species, and there are considerable uncertainties as to how best determine critical habitat for aquatic and marine species. whales (large and small), salmon, sturgeon, freshwater spp., sea turtles, abalone, etc. Relationships between abundance and habitat use vary, depending on mobility of species, shrinking distribution ranges, and source-sink population features. There is a need to evaluate how to assess habitat requirements under fluctuating population conditions (e.g., is more habitat needed under poor population conditions?), and there are then community and multi-species issues. What are the tradeoffs implications between co-occurring listed species, such as salmon vs. sturgeon, and sea otters vs. northern abalone? Alternatively, can critical habitat protection for one species help others? These issues will be summarized, along with efforts to date to address them in a practical manner.