

Shell surrenders Canada Arctic rights to marine park plan

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Shell Canada said Wednesday it has surrendered its offshore oil exploration licenses in the Canadian Arctic, paving the way for the creation of a protected marine park for whales, walrus and seals.

The Anglo-Dutch group, which had already withdrawn from exploration in Alaska and Norway, handed over its rights to drill in the area east of Lancaster Sound to the Nature Conservancy of Canada.

In turn, the environmental group gave them back to the government of Canada to facilitate the creation of the park.

Ottawa is considering a proposal for a 44,500 square kilometer (17,182 square mile) marine conservation area in Lancaster Sound, near the entrance of the famed Northwest Passage.

Shell's contribution would allow for the creation of a larger park, adding 8,625 square kilometers.

Environmental groups estimate that up to 75 percent of the world's narwhals spend summers in the area, which also attracts large populations of beluga and bowhead whales, polar bears, seabirds, seals, and walruses.

John Lounds, president and chief executive of the Nature Conservancy of Canada, said they were grateful for the contribution from Shell, which has been in the crosshairs of environmental groups for its [oil](#) activities in sensitive Arctic regions.

"Together we are supporting the conservation of an area of uncommon beauty, incredible biodiversity and rich ecological importance for the benefit of Canadians and future generations," said Lounds.

On Tuesday, Shell announced it could exit up to 10 countries as it divests up to 10 percent of its oil and gas assets, amid a slump in oil prices.

The environmental group Greenpeace meanwhile warned that the Canadian Arctic is still under threat from other oil company activities.

It pointed to plans for seismic tests in the waters of Baffin Bay, next to the land Shell just gave up, "despite the dangers it poses to wildlife and strong opposition from Inuit."

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