

Canadian Governments and Laws Fail to Protect the Fraser River Estuary

The image below shows Canada's plan to dredge and fill 445 acres of the Fraser River estuary in British Columbia to build an island for a container terminal. The plan ignores scientific evidence that the Roberts Bank Container Terminal 2 Project (RBT2) will harm critical habitat for endangered southern resident killer whales; world-famous salmon runs; and Canada's highest concentration of migratory birds that travel between three continents.

Ignoring scientific evidence from government and independent experts, the Governments of Canada and British Columbia approved RBT2 based, not on science, but on "justification" for the public good.



No one is protecting this globally-important, unique estuary

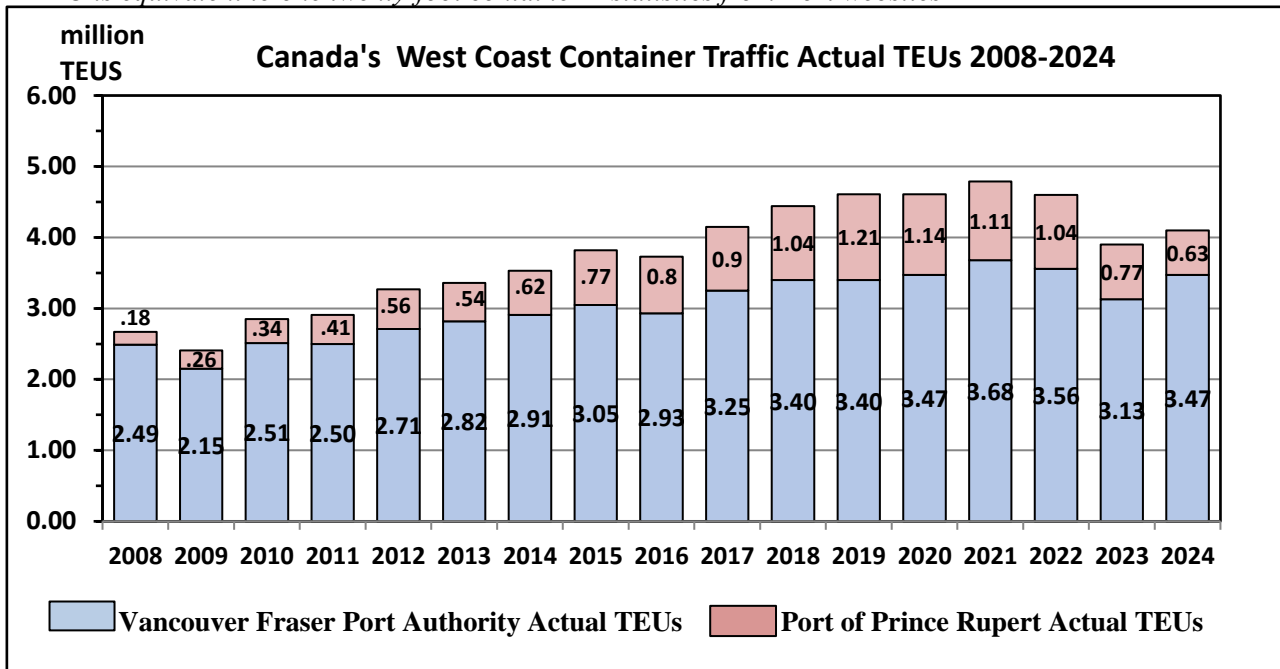
Environmental groups challenged the approval in court. In January, 2025, the [Federal Court ruled](#) in support of the approval stating government agencies will ensure protection through the process of conditions and permits. These agencies do not have the funding, time, legal authority, or expertise to ensure the protection of the interactive, interdependent processes that create unique, healthy estuarine ecosystems. Such expertise doesn't exist. Follow-up investigations of projects show that government agencies provide patchwork, rubber-stamp approvals with negligible enforcement.

There is no business case for building an island for containers in the Fraser estuary

Governments ignored an internal Advisor Report by transport experts that advised developing container capacity in Prince Rupert, B.C. before investing in expansions in the Vancouver area.¹ The approval for the Roberts Bank Container Terminal 2 (RBT2) in the Fraser River estuary was based on inflated, contrived business forecasts that are not being realized.

The Vancouver Fraser Port Authority (VFPA) commissioned seven Container Traffic Forecast Studies between 2003 and 2016. The lowest case forecasts in all seven studies have not even been close to being realized.² The Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of the Vancouver area container business is 0.44% over the past five years and 1.78% over the past 10 years.

A TEU is equivalent to one twenty-foot container – statistics from Port websites



With a business of around 3.5 million TEUs a year for Vancouver, and around a million TEUs for Prince Rupert, the current west coast capacity of 7 million TEUs is sufficient for several years. The Prince Rupert Port Authority has plans to provide another 5 million TEUs if the business grows.³

Vancouver Fraser Port Authority (VFPA) using public assets without appropriate accountability

There is no credible oversight of the operations of the VFPA. Consequently, our ports are not operating in the best public interests. Vancouver area ports and railways are vital for bulk shipping operations which should not be squeezed out by containers, especially when about only 10% of the containers are for bound for the Vancouver area. The container business utilizes large areas of publicly-owned real estate, managed by the VFPA. It is very lucrative for the VFPA which earns around 45% of its operating revenue from the container business.⁴ It's more about real estate expansion than the important business of shipping.

Roberts Bank Container Terminal 2 (RBT2) is not needed. It will negatively impact internationally-significant wetlands, further degrading the Fraser River estuary and the watershed that covers about one quarter of B.C. Birdlife International ranks the Fraser River estuary and surrounding region as a top Important Bird Area (IBA):

“one of the richest and most important ecosystems for migrant and wintering waterbirds in Canada.”⁵

Due to ongoing degradation, Birdlife International warns: **“This is an IBA in Danger.”⁶**

The stated cost of RBT2 at \$3.5 billion was unrealistic five years ago; an updated and more realistic cost is likely in excess of \$6 billion, making it simply **not economically feasible**. How ironic that public assets and tax dollars will be required to support this uneconomic Project that is not needed and that will cause irreparable damage in the globally-significant Fraser River Estuary.

Learn about impacts of the Roberts Bank Container Terminal 2 on [western sandpipers](#), and [southern resident killer whales](#).

References

¹ “...that policy makers develop container capacity in Prince Rupert before making investments in Vancouver” and further that: “...a systematic approach be taken to achieve an understanding of port capacity before a conclusion is reached that a particular port must necessarily be physically larger.”

(*Strategic Advisors Report, Asia Pacific Gateway and Corridor Initiative Report and Recommendations, 2008*; Burghardt, DeFehr and Turner

https://www.againstportexpansion.org/downloads/strategic_advisor_report.pdf

² OSC – Ocean Shipping Consultants

Year	2003 Study Deltaport CSR Low Case p.37	2005 G.V. Short-Sea Shipping p.83	Worley Parsons 2011 Low Case p.8	OSC 2012 Low Case page 159	OSC 2013 Low Case page 15	OSC 2014 Low Case page 23	OSC 2016 Low Case page 219	Actual Total TEUs
	million TEUs	million TEUs	million TEUs	million TEUs	million TEUs	million TEUs	million TEUs	
2006								2.30
2007								2.49
2008								2.49
2009								2.15
2010	2.80	4.3						2.51
2011			2.66					2.50
2012			2.81					2.71
2013			2.97	2.80	2.90			2.82
2014			3.14	2.93	3.06	2.97		2.91
2015	3.60		3.32	3.06	3.23	3.10		3.05
2016			3.47	3.21	3.38	3.24	3.16	2.93
2017			3.63	3.36	3.54	3.36	3.32	3.25
2018			3.80	3.51	3.70	3.49	3.48	3.40
2019			3.97	3.65	3.86	3.62	3.64	3.40
2020	4.70	5.8	4.15	3.79	4.00	3.75	3.81	3.47
2021				3.94	4.16	3.88	3.97	3.68
2022				4.09	4.32	4.00	4.13	3.56
2023				4.23	4.48	4.13	4.24	3.13
2024				4.38	4.64	4.27	4.34	3.47
2025			4.92	4.53	4.80	4.40	4.45	
2030			5.53	5.08	5.38	4.92	4.90	

³“The Prince Rupert Port Authority (PRPA) announced today the completion of a container terminal master plan that outlines the potential of future container terminal capacity and sequencing of development at the Port of Prince Rupert. The planning work identifies the long-term potential to develop 6 – 7 million TEUs of capacity through the development of multiple terminals at the Port of Prince Rupert.”

Page 6, *BCMEA The Bulletin, Newsletter May 16, 2019* [Bulletin 16 05 2019.pdf](#)

⁴ Vancouver Fraser Port Authority, [Financial Report, 2018](#), page 21/58

⁵ <https://www.ibacanada.com/site.jsp?siteID=BC017>

⁶ Birdlife International, Boundary Bay-Roberts Bank-Sturgeon Bank (Fraser River Estuary) CA057 [Boundary Bay - Roberts Bank - Sturgeon Bank \(Fraser River Estuary\) \(Canada\) IBA | Summary | BirdLife International](#)