Aquaculture Coastal Classification System (CCS): Purpose, Use and Key Facts

This document outlines the purpose, structure, and intended use of the CCS, along with responses to common questions and themes raised during project planning and engagement.

⌄ General Overview

1. What is the Coastal Classification System?

» The Aquaculture Coastal Classification System (CCS) is an interactive, science-based mapping tool that helps show where coastal conditions may present more or fewer challenges for marine aquaculture development in Nova Scotia. It supports early planning and public awareness by providing access to consistent province-wide environmental, general human use considerations and regulatory data.

The CCS does not make decisions about aquaculture. It does not approve or reject aquaculture applications. All applications must still undergo full site-specific regulatory review.

2. Will the CCS be used to approve or reject aquaculture applications?

» No. The CCS is not a decision-making tool and carries no legal or regulatory weight. It does not approve, reject, or determine the outcome of an aquaculture application. All applications must still undergo full site-specific regulatory review.

3. Is the CCS part of marine spatial planning?

» No. The CCS is not a marine spatial planning (MSP) exercise. It does not involve zoning, co-governance, or negotiated outcomes. It is a provincially led effort to support transparency in the aquaculture sector.

⌄ Use and Limitations

4. Who can use the CCS?

» The CCS is intended for a broad range of users, including the public, communities, prospective aquaculture operators, planners, and anyone interested in coastal data or development.

5. Does the CCS replace Consultation with the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia?

» No. The CCS is separate from the aquaculture licence and lease regulatory process. Duty to Consult on individual aquaculture projects, will continue to be assessed on a lease-by-lease basis under the existing aquaculture licencing and leasing processes.

6. What does a good classification mean?

» This classification means that, based on available data, a location may present fewer risks or challenges compared to other areas. It does not mean the site is ideal, risk free, pre-approved or guaranteed to be feasible. All aquaculture applications must still undergo full site-specific regulatory review.

7. What does a limited classification mean?

» This classification does not mean aquaculture is prohibited. It reflects that certain conditions in the area may pose greater challenges or require further investigation. All aquaculture applications must still undergo full site-specific regulatory review.

8. Can the CCS be used to identify the best site for aquaculture?

» No. The CCS is not designed to identify the best or most optimal site for aquaculture. It provides regional-level context only. Determining whether a specific site is suitable requires on-the-ground assessments, consultation, and full regulatory review. As part of the licencing and leasing process, applicants are responsible for demonstrating site-level feasibility.

9. Can proponents use CCS outputs in their applications?

» Proponents may reference the CCS for early context, but it is not part of the regulatory decision-making process and does not approve, reject, or determine the outcome of an aquaculture application.

10. Will there be future opportunities to influence the tool or its use?

» The government will regularly review the CCS and how it is used. Feedback from the public and stakeholders may help guide future updates to the tool's purpose, design, or use.

11. Will there be training or education materials on how to use the CCS?

» Yes. Public-facing materials, such as how-to guides and support resources, are being developed in conjunction with the tool.

⌄ Criteria, Data, and Methodology

12. Who developed the CCS?

» The CCS was developed by the Province in partnership with the Centre for Marine Applied Research (CMAR), a division of Perennia Food and Agriculture Corp.

13. What kind of information does the CCS include?

» The CCS includes mapped data related to biophysical conditions (e.g., water depth, temperature), regulatory considerations (e.g., proximity to protected areas), and general human use considerations (e.g., distance from navigation routes). All data included must be available province- wide and suitable for public display.

14. How were criteria selected for the CCS?

» Criteria were selected using a structured science-based approach. To be included, each criterion had to relate to aquaculture suitability and had to meet eight specific requirements:

1. **Relevance:** Science is clear that it influences suitability for aquaculture development.
2. **Rateability:** Science is clear on how it influences suitability.
3. **Clarity:** Its influence is easy to understand and explain.
4. **Scale:** It can be assessed on a broad scale.
5. **Data Accessibility:** The required data can be collected within project timelines.
6. **Coastal Coverage:** Province-wide data is available for all coastal waters within 3 km of Nova Scotia's shoreline.
7. **Measurement Reliability:** It can be accurately measured within project timelines.
8. **Redundancy:** It is different information and not already covered by other criteria.

15. How are criteria applied - are they scored, weighted, or used as restrictions?

>> Criteria are incorporated into the CCS in three ways:

1. **Factors:** These can increase or decrease potential suitability. They are scored and combined to generate the overall suitability ratings.
2. **Restrictions:** These indicate areas where aquaculture development is prohibited (e.g., "no-go" areas).
3. **Informational Layers:** These reflect important contextual considerations that are not scored due to the broad nature of the tool or limitations in the available data. These are viewable on the map but do not affect suitability ratings.

The final suitability classifications are based on a combination of factors and restrictions, while informational layers provide additional planning context.

16. Will the CCS, or its data be updated over time?

>> The CCS may be updated as new, validated information becomes available or as existing datasets are improved. All data is reviewed to ensure accuracy, consistency, and broad provincial relevance. All updates, whether to data or the tool, will go through a review process before being included.

17. What is the scale of the CCS?

>> The CCS uses a 100m x 100m grid to present generalized suitability based on regional data. It is not appropriate for evaluating individual site feasibility.

18. How does the CCS address climate change?

» Climate change is not directly assessed in this version of the CCS, but long-term conditions may inform future updates as more information become available.

19. Why isn't water current speed or direction included as a criterion?

» While water current is an important factor in aquaculture siting, reliable, province-wide water current data at sufficient resolution is not currently available. Including patchy or inconsistent data would undermine the tool's fairness and clarity. Site-specific water current assessments remain part of the licencing and lease application process.

20. Why does the CCS use province-wide data, and what are the limitations of that approach?

» The CCS uses data that is available consistently across all coastal regions of Nova Scotia. This ensures that the same criteria are applied fairly across the province. However, this approach has limitations. Because it only includes province-wide datasets, the CCS does not capture detailed local information, such as fine-scale current speeds or specific seafloor conditions. This means the tool cannot be used to assess site-level feasibility or replace fieldwork.

⤓ Social and Cultural Considerations

21. Does the CCS include Indigenous values or cultural sites?

» No. The CCS does not include Indigenous cultural sites or values. These are deeply important, but may need protected handling of information, consent-based sharing, and site-specific consideration. The CCS is designed to provide consistent, province-wide environmental, general human use considerations and regulatory data, and is not intended to represent cultural or social values. These matters are more appropriately considered through the formal Consultation process on individual aquaculture licence and leasing applications, where nuance and context can be fully considered in the provincial decision-making process.

22. What if my area or concern isn't represented?

» Some values or issues are not suitable for province-wide mapping. Feedback is recorded and may inform future work or be addressed at the site-level through engagement or regulatory processes.

23. Why aren't social licence or aesthetic values included?

» The Coastal Classification System focuses on environmental, general human use considerations, and regulatory factors that can be consistently measured at a province-wide level. While social licence and aesthetic values have been raised as concerns, there is no standardized or province-wide data available to include them in this type of mapping tool.

Additional Context

24. Are aquatic invasive species included?

⟫ No. Regional distribution maps for key aquatic invasive species, such as green crab and tunicates, but were not included in the CCS. The available data is limited in both quality and coverage, making it difficult to show these species accurately or consistently at the scale of the tool. As a result, they were excluded to avoid misinterpretation.

25. Is the CCS applicable to land-based aquaculture?

⟫ No. The CCS is specific to marine aquaculture and does not assess land-based systems.

26. How does the CCS relate to other spatial planning or mapping efforts?

⟫ The CCS is a standalone tool developed specifically to support early-stage exploration of aquaculture potential. While it may complement other planning or mapping resources, it is not part of a broader spatial planning framework and does not define land or water access, tenure, or regulatory boundaries. Its sole purpose is to present relevant data in a consistent, accessible format to support transparency in the aquaculture sector.

Updates and Contact Information

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