

Wrecked, Abandoned and Problem Vessels

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What is happening?

Wrecked, abandoned and problem vessels (for definitions see Glossary) continue to be an issue in the waters and shorelines of Átl'ka7tsem/Txwnéwu7ts/Howe Sound. Every winter, storms leave wrecked boats on shorelines and submerged in the waters around Átl'ka7tsem/Txwnéwu7ts/Howe Sound. In addition, debris from boats and other structures (e.g., docks) create environmental issues due to pollution and habitat destruction, and/or navigational hazards.



Wrecked vessel off the north west side of Chá7elkwnech/Gambier Island, 2019. (Credit: Ian Winn)

What is the current status?

Since 2016, considerable efforts have been made to address problem vessels. Of particular note was the passage on February 28, 2019, of the Government of Canada's [Bill C-64](#), the *Wrecked, Abandoned or Hazardous Vessels Act*, which came into effect on July 31, 2019.¹ Bill C-64 increases owner responsibility and liability for vessels, addresses irresponsible vessel management, and enables the Government of Canada to remove problem vessels. Not complying with the *Act* can result in penalties of up to \$50,000 for individuals and \$250,000 for companies or corporations, while regulatory offence prosecution could result in a maximum fine of \$1 million for individuals and \$6 million for companies or corporations. This Bill puts the responsibility and liability for abandoned vessels back on vessel owners.

The Bill has been long awaited and is enthusiastically received by Átl'ka7tsem/Txwnéwu7ts/Howe Sound

communities, who now have at least some options to address vessels of concern as they arise. Along with improvements to vessel owner identification and creating an inventory of problem vessels and assessing their risks, communities are now able to establish a polluter pays approach for vessel cleanup.

However, existing problems may not fall under the new regulations (for example, prohibitive up-front costs for dealing with a vessel; a 25% funding requirement from local governments or community organizations that may be prohibitive for small communities; abandoned or derelict vessels on land not being included). In many cases, all identification markings have been removed from the vessel and ownership is unable to be determined.

Quite often the problem can quickly evolve from an abandoned, wrecked or problem vessel issue, where



Sailboat washed ashore at Schenk/Grantham's Landing, Fall 2015. This vessel threatened the waterfront properties and involved huge community effort and expense to correctly dispose of. (Credit: Ian Winn)

authorization for removal may lie with Transport Canada's Receiver of Wrecks (responsibility for actual removal may lie elsewhere – see [Problem Vessels](#), Ocean Watch Howe Sound Edition [OWHS] 2017), to a waste management issue, with responsibility lying with local and provincial governments. This is an example of how complex the situation is when First Nations, federal, provincial, and/or municipal laws are applied depending on where in the coastal environment a vessel or debris is located.²

In the spring of 2019, Sheila Malcolmson, MLA for Nanaimo, was appointed as special advisor on marine debris protection to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change.³ MLA Malcolmson's engagement mandate over the summer of 2019 took her to coastal communities to discuss provincial support mechanisms around marine debris and the consideration of end-use infrastructure ideas (i.e., fibre-glass reprocessing, plastics reprocessing).⁴ Increased collaboration between all levels of government, along with non-profit groups and individual vessel owners, needs to continue, to solve the issues around problem vessels. Her report and recommendations will be presented at the end of 2019.

Thus, the Government of Canada also moved forward with other programs within the [Oceans Protection Plan](#) to provide funding for assessment and removal of existing problem vessels where the owner cannot be identified. Within the Átl'ka7tsem/Txwnéwu7ts/Howe Sound region, Caulfeild in West Vancouver received \$10,000 in May 2018 for the removal of one vessel, and in February 2019, Nexwlélexwem/Bowen Island Municipality received \$11,330 for the removal of two vessels. The local government of Skwxwú7mesh/Squamish applied for funding under these new

programs for the assessment and removal of wrecked vessels; however, at the date of writing (mid-October 2019), Skwxwú7mesh/Squamish had not received any funds.

Since April 2019, Marine Reference Guide (MRG) staff have been working to identify and inventory abandoned vessels and debris along the coastline of Átl'ka7tsem/Txwnéwu7ts/Howe Sound.⁵ Because problem vessels and debris are ever-changing, it is difficult to quantify precisely the number of abandoned or wrecked vessels in the Sound. However, as of mid November 2019, approximately 25 vessels (ranging from a steel barge to a boat house) and a much greater number of large debris (more than 300), such as creosote pilings, rope and Styrofoam, etc., had been identified.

Removal of abandoned or wrecked vessels must be undertaken in an environmentally conscious manner to deal with the often-hazardous materials on board (e.g., fuel, diesel, sewage), making it extremely costly. The Dead Boat Disposal Society is a non-profit organization working to clean up problem vessels from B.C. waters, including Átl'ka7tsem/Txwnéwu7ts/Howe Sound.⁶ The process to inventory and assess the severity of each wreck is only the first step required. Subsequent disposal is the most time-consuming and costly step, and is dependent on various factors, for example, size and type of vessel; the presence and type of hazardous materials; whether the vessel is submerged and at what depth.



Derelict vessel washed ashore near K'ik'élxn/Port Mellon, Átl'ka7tsem/Txwnéwu7ts/Howe Sound, 2019. (Credit: Ian Winn)

What are the potential impacts of climate change on problem vessels?

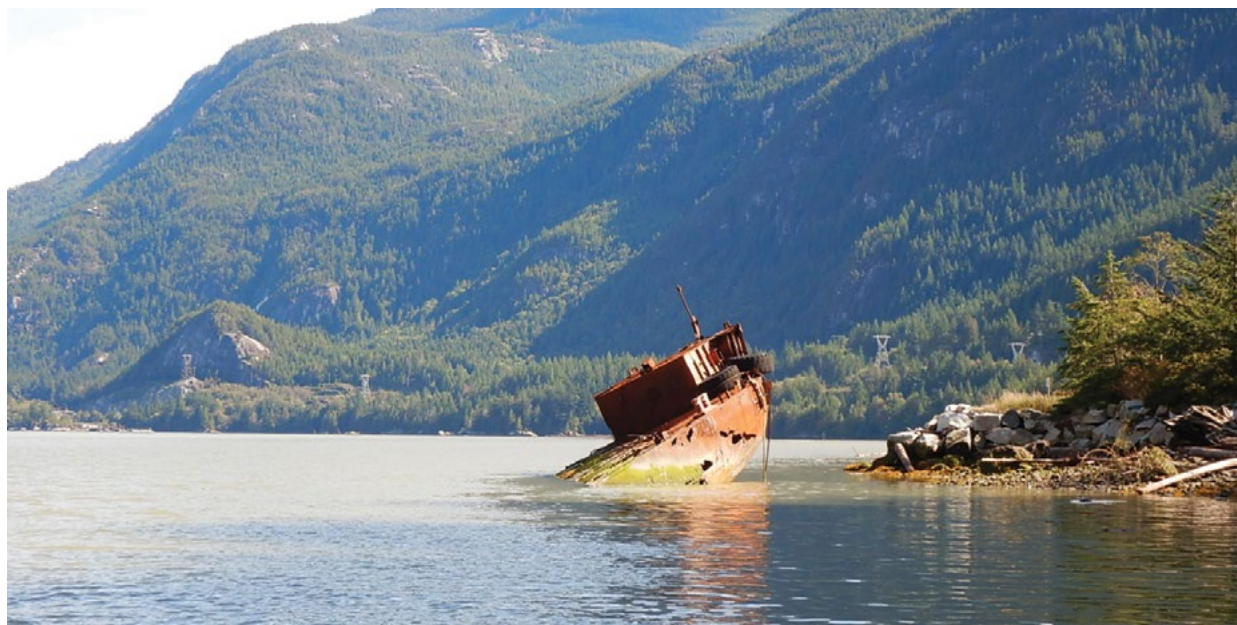
Over the last few years, climate change has resulted in increased intensity and frequency of storms. When combined with king tides and sea level rise, the result is damage and destruction of dock structures, and an increase in the number of vessels sunk or washed ashore and abandoned. In the winter of 2019, many Átl'ka7tsem/Txwnéwu7ts/Howe Sound communities,

such as Scheñk, /Grantham's Landing and Lions Bay, experienced severe damage to community docks and shorelines.⁷ In addition to various-sized vessels set adrift, other debris, such as pressure-treated lumber and polystyrene, presented hazards to navigation and washed up on the shores of Átl'ka7tsem/Txwnéwu7ts/Howe Sound.

What has been done since 2017?

The table below reports on progress made on recommended actions from the previous 2017 article, where identified. Many of these require ongoing action.

2017 ACTION	ACTION TAKEN
INDIVIDUAL AND ORGANIZATION ACTIONS	
<p>A group of citizens and government representatives could assemble to collectively share data and develop integrated solutions to reduce ecological, social and economic impacts associated with wrecked, abandoned and problem vessels in Átl'ka7tsem/Txwnéwu7ts/Howe Sound.</p>	<p>Since April 2019, the MRG has been working on identifying and inventorying problem vessels and debris throughout Átl'ka7tsem/Txwnéwu7ts/Howe Sound. You can view the inventory at www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?hl=en&mid=10PK3Rz2FdceZm8dBDUtmIvCkFjG5U-wd&ll=49.563475717914244,%2C-123.39813229876165&z=9.</p>
GOVERNMENT ACTIONS AND POLICY	
<p>Implement owner pay policies.</p>	<p>The introduction of Bill C-64 on July 31, 2019, increases owner responsibility and liability for vessels, and puts the responsibility and liability for abandoned vessels back on vessel owners.</p>



Rusty, submerged vessel near Watts Point, Murrin Provincial Park, 2019. (Credit: Fiona Beaty)

What can you do?

A detailed overview of recommended actions relating to climate change is included in *The path to zero carbon municipalities* (OWHS 2020). In some cases, no progress was identified on previous recommended actions; these remain listed below. Additional actions marked as **NEW** also follow.



Individual and Organization Actions:

- Avoid the incineration of organic matter and plastics to prevent the release of dioxins into the air and coastal environment.
- **NEW** If you see a potentially abandoned, wrecked or problem vessel, photograph it and take note of as many of the following details as you can: the vessel name; boat registration; who the owner may be; contact details for the owner; the date you spotted the vessel/how long it has been there; information on what it contains and what it is made from; type of vessel (e.g., dinghy, sailboat). Report these findings to howesoundguide@gmail.com.
- **NEW** Send tips, solutions or success stories to marinespecialadvisor@gov.bc.ca.



Government Actions and Policy:

- Keep vessel inventories.
- Enforce local and municipal bylaws with respect to live-aboards.
- Develop educational material to increase awareness of environmental risks associated with problem vessels.
- Develop policies to close the gaps in jurisdiction over problem vessels.

Methods

Information provided through the Office of Pamela Goldsmith-Jones, MP, Sunshine Coast – Sea to Sky Country; via John Roe of the Dead Boats Disposal So-

ciety; and Fiona Beaty, Project Director of the Marine Reference Guide.

References

¹ Transport Canada. Government of Canada marks the passage of Bill C-64: the *Wrecked, Abandoned or Hazardous Vessels Act* to address vessel abandonment and ensure owner accountability. 2019.

² West Coast Environmental Law Association. Infographic: Jurisdiction in Coastal B.C. 2016.

³ ChekNews. Premier Horgan appoints Nanaimo MLA Sheila Malcolmson as special advisor on marine debris protection. 2019;

⁴ Coast Reporter. Special advisor on abandoned vessels to visit Coast. 2019;

⁵ Howe Sound CleanUp Data. Work conducted by Marine Reference Guide staff (<https://howesoundguide.ca/>). 2019.

⁶ Woodrooffe S. Dead Boat Disposal Society pitches SCRD. Coast Reporter. 2019;

⁷ Simons R. Ocean Watch: Átl'ka7tsem/Howe Sound workshop. In: Winter storms 2018/2019. Vancouver Aquarim; 2019.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Telephone interview with John Roe, Dead Boats Disposal Society