



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

ACTING TOGETHER TO ADDRESS DERELICT AND ABANDONED VESSELS IN CANADA

**Report of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and
Oceans**

Patrick Weiler, Chair

**OCTOBER 2025
45th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION**

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**Patrick Weiler
Chair**

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NOTICE TO READER

Reports from committees presented to the House of Commons

Presenting a report to the House is the way a committee makes public its findings and recommendations on a particular topic. Substantive reports on a subject-matter study usually contain a synopsis of the testimony heard, the recommendations made by the committee, as well as the reasons for those recommendations.

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THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES AND OCEANS

has the honour to present its

SECOND REPORT

Pursuant to its mandate under Standing Order 108(2), the committee has studied derelict and abandoned vessels and has agreed to report the following:

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LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of their deliberations committees may make recommendations which they include in their reports for the consideration of the House of Commons or the Government. Recommendations related to this study are listed below.

Recommendation 1

That, within 12 months of the tabling of this report, the Government of Canada convene a meeting with provinces and territories, municipalities, Indigenous Nations and organizations, and stakeholders to develop solutions to address derelict vessels. That meeting should include addressing the following issues:

- **the adequacy of federal funding to address derelict vessels;**
- **the adequacy of the proposed fees to support the proposed Vessel Remediation Fund;**
- **ways to increase cooperation and partnership with provincial, territorial, and municipal governments; and Indigenous governing bodies on the implementation of measures to address derelict and abandoned vessels;**
- **ways to improve prompt vessel ownership identification;**
- **the appropriate renewal period for vessel registration, including associated fees;**
- **developing mooring plans for vessels, including enforcement, in collaboration with other jurisdictions;**
- **developing programs or processes for vessel turn-in;**
- **ways to incentivize vessel disposal and recycling, and to develop recycling programs for end-of-life vessels; and**

- removing barriers, including time delays, for individuals or organizations who wish to take ownership of a derelict or abandoned vessel to remove and dispose of it.

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Recommendation 2

That, within six months of convening the meeting with Indigenous Nations and organizations, provinces and territories, municipalities and stakeholders to develop solutions to address derelict vessels, the Government of Canada report its progress on the outcomes of the meeting to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans.

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Recommendation 3

That the Government of Canada:

- commit to improving vessel ownership identification by promptly finalizing the draft regulations amending the *Small Vessel Regulations* originally published in May 2023;
- review the appropriate renewal period for vessel registration, including associated fees;
- evaluate the adequacy of federal funding to address abandoned and derelict vessels;
- evaluate whether the proposed \$10 fee to be paid every five years when licensing or registering a pleasure craft or renewing a pleasure craft licence, publicized in August 2021, is sufficient to finance the proposed Vessel Remediation Fund;
- finalize and launch the Vessel Remediation Fund before the end of 2026;
- commit to taking measures to prevent the transfer of pleasure craft vessels to unfit owners as a way of circumventing disposal obligations, and enforce such measures;

- **commit to increasing cooperation and partnership with Indigenous governing bodies, and provincial and municipal governments on the implementation of measures to address derelict and abandoned vessels, including through long-term, sustainable, and predictable funding programs;**
- **commit to working with other jurisdictions to develop mooring plans, including enforcement;**
- **commit to removing barriers, including time delays, for individuals or organizations who wish to take ownership of a derelict or abandoned vessel to remove and dispose of it;**
- **commit to developing and funding programs and processes for vessel turn-in; and**
- **commit to incentivizing vessel disposal and recycling, and to develop recycling programs for end-of-life vessels.**

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Recommendation 4

That the Government of Canada implement the full enforcement measures available to them, instead of the graduated approach to enforcement to deter the abandonment of vessels.

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Recommendation 5

That the Government of Canada commit to long-term, sustainable funding for Indigenous Guardian programs and initiatives to ensure that sufficient funding is available to address derelict vessels.

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Recommendation 6

That the Canadian Coast Guard and Transport Canada seek opportunities for closer collaboration with Indigenous Guardians to monitor, assess, and remove derelict and abandoned vessels.

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Recommendation 7

That Fisheries and Oceans Canada immediately reinstate the Ghost Gear Fund.

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ACTING TOGETHER TO ADDRESS DERELICT AND ABANDONED VESSELS IN CANADA

INTRODUCTION

A variety of vessels have been abandoned in Canada, particularly on British Columbia's coast. While estimates vary, the evidence suggests there are two thousand or more. While some remain afloat, moored in various bays or harbours, others have sunk or are sinking. These vessels can pose serious and ongoing risks to the environment and local economies and compromise coastal First Nations communities' traditional ways of being. Having them removed is not always simple or straightforward. It is often difficult to find the owner, and even when the owner is found, removal costs can be too expensive for some owners.

On 8 February 2024, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans (the Committee) adopted the following motion:

That, pursuant to standing order 108(2), the committee undertake a study of not less than four meetings to examine the issue of derelict and abandoned vessels on Canada's West Coast, the impacts of such vessels on marine ecosystems and coastal communities, and the role of the federal government in relation to the issue; that this study take place immediately following the scheduled study on population sustainability of Pacific salmon stocks; that the committee call witnesses including senior Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) officials, [I]ndigenous governing bodies, provincial government representatives, organizations representing coastal residents, and industry representatives; that the committee report its findings with recommendations in a report to the House of Commons; and that, pursuant to standing order 109, the committee request that the government table a comprehensive response to the report.¹

On 27 February 2024, the Committee agreed to add two meetings to the study to include the Arctic and Atlantic coasts.² Over the course of all six meetings, the Committee heard from 28 witnesses, which included First Nations communities and an Indigenous organization, civil society organizations, a municipal government, business associations and officials from relevant federal departments. The Committee also received five briefs. The Committee thanks all witnesses for their participation and applauds the efforts of organizations and individuals who have not only shed light on some of these issues by

1 House of Commons, Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans (FOPO), *Minutes of Proceedings*, 8 February 2024.

2 House of Commons, FOPO, *Minutes of Proceedings*, 27 February 2024.



appearing before the Committee and proposing solutions, but have also been actively engaged in the removal and clean-up of these abandoned vessels.

Throughout this report, the term “derelict vessel” is used as a general term to describe the broader category of wrecked, abandoned or hazardous vessels. The terms used by witnesses are used in direct quotes.

BACKGROUND

Regulatory and Legal Framework

The Government of Canada introduced the Oceans Protection Plan (OPP) in 2016 with funding of \$1.5 billion over five years. As part of the OPP, the Government of Canada announced the *National Strategy to Address Canada’s Wrecked and Abandoned Vessels*. The strategy includes several measures:

- development of the *Wrecked, Abandoned or Hazardous Vessels Act*³ (WAHVA);
- inventory and assessments of derelict and abandoned vessels;
- improvements to vessel owner identification;
- long-term funding for the removal of wrecked and abandoned vessels;
- the Abandoned Boats Program; and
- the Small Craft Harbours Abandoned and Wrecked Vessels Removal Program.⁴

Since 2016, almost \$300 million has been invested in the national strategy.⁵

In 2022, the Government of Canada announced \$2 billion in funding over nine years to renew the OPP (OPP 2.0 or Renewed OPP). The announcement specified that OPP 2.0 “is a renewed and expanded plan based on OPP 1.0” that aims to:

3 [*Wrecked, Abandoned or Hazardous Vessels Act*](#), S.C. 2019, c. 1.

4 Government of Canada, [*National Strategy to address Canada’s wrecked and abandoned vessels*](#).

5 Kathy Nghiem, Director General, Response, Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO), [*Evidence*](#), 18 September 2024.

- enhance the protection and restoration of vulnerable marine ecosystems and wildlife;
- improve the efficiency, safety, and sustainability of Canada’s marine supply chains and mitigate their impacts on the environment, including by advancing research on marine pollution, ecosystems, and wildlife;
- better manage marine traffic navigation off our coasts and marine incidents of all types; and
- advance partnerships and training opportunities for Indigenous and coastal communities to incorporate their expertise and experiences in various aspects of marine safety and ecosystem protection.⁶

The Wrecked, Abandoned or Hazardous Vessels Act

The WAHVA received Royal Assent on 28 February 2019. Its main purpose is to

address irresponsible vessel management, which includes provisions that prohibit vessel abandonment and enhance federal powers to take proactive actions to address vessels of concern before they become a risk. The Act applies to Canadian and foreign registered vessels (from small pleasure crafts to commercial vessels) that are in Canadian waters.⁷

Under the WAHVA, it is illegal to:

- abandon one’s vessel;
- cause one’s vessel to become a wreck by failing to maintain it;
- purposely sink, strand, or ground one’s vessel;
- leave one’s vessel in poor condition, in the same area, for more than 60 consecutive days within a radius of 3 nautical miles without the authorization of the location owner;
- leave one’s vessel adrift for more than 48 hours without taking measures to secure it;

6 Government of Canada, [*Small Craft Harbours Abandoned and Wrecked Vessels Removal Program*](#).

7 Transport Canada (TC), [*About the Wrecked, Abandoned or Hazardous Vessels Act*](#).



- take possession of a wreck before reporting it to the Receiver of Wreck, unless:
 - the wreck is in danger, and taking possession is needed to secure or otherwise protect it; or
 - the Receiver of Wreck authorizes the taking of possession; or
- entering Canada with a wreck found outside of Canadian waters without reporting it to the Receiver of Wreck as early as possible.⁸

WAHVA provides for administrative monetary penalties (AMPs)⁹ of up to \$50,000 for individuals and up to \$250,000 for corporations. Prosecution of the regulatory offences included in the Act could result in a maximum fine of \$1 million for individuals and/or up to three years' imprisonment, and \$6 million for companies or corporations.

Officials from Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) and Transport Canada (TC) explained the federal framework for addressing the challenges posed by derelict vessels. The Canadian Coast Guard (CCG):

- receives all reports of vessels of concern;¹⁰
- assesses risks posed by those vessels, including environmental risk, economic considerations, and risks to public safety and human health;¹¹
- maintains a national inventory of problem vessels; and
- is responsible for hazardous vessels.

Non-hazardous abandoned vessels are the responsibility of TC, which is also responsible for "impacts to navigation [and] irresponsible vessel ownership."¹²

8 TC, [About the Wrecked, Abandoned or Hazardous Vessels Act](#).

9 An administrative monetary penalty (AMP) is a civil penalty that is part of a regulatory system designed to secure compliance with the Act. An imposition of an AMP does not lead to a criminal record.

10 Transport Canada indicates that vessels of concern include "wrecked, abandoned, hazardous, or worn-down (dilapidated) boats." Government of Canada, [About the Wrecked, Abandoned or Hazardous Vessels Act](#).

11 Robert Brooks, Director, Marine Environmental and Hazards Response, DFO, [Evidence](#), 18 September 2024.

12 Kathy Nghiem, Director General, Response, DFO, [Evidence](#), 18 September 2024.

DFO is responsible for implementing WAHVA in small craft harbours. The Small Craft Harbours Abandoned and Wrecked Vessels Removal Program received \$1.3 million over five years under the OPP.¹³ Under OPP 2.0, the Small Craft Harbours Abandoned and Wrecked Vessels Removal Program will receive \$2.2 million over nine years.¹⁴

If an authority or eligible recipient¹⁵ wishes to apply to the program, the wrecked or abandoned vessel must be in a small craft harbour listed in Schedule 1 of the *Fishing and Recreational Harbours Regulations*.¹⁶ The program covers up to 100% of eligible costs for gaining legal possession of a vessel and for assessing disposal costs, up to \$5,000 per vessel. The program also covers 75% of the costs of disposal activities, up to \$50,000 per vessel. As of 31 March 2022, 154 vessels had been removed under this program.¹⁷

Kathy Nghiem, Director General of Response at DFO, advised that “we work closely with other levels of government and [I]ndigenous and coastal communities, as some areas where problem vessels are found implicate other jurisdictions.”¹⁸

Joshua Charleson, Executive Director of the Coastal Restoration Society, shared an example of how the separate responsibilities held by different levels of government can be a factor that impedes addressing a derelict vessel quickly:

Because it's on the ocean, it's considered federal jurisdiction, but once it's on shore, it's considered provincial jurisdiction. Then there's always that in between, where it's still floating outside of our shore, so you have to talk to Coast Guard or you have to talk to Transport Canada until it's actually on shore, where it's provincial. It's hard to get the right answers on who to actually call when you have a vessel of concern. The Coast Guard probably does the best job out of all the different agencies that have jurisdiction for vessels, but they focus on the big ones.¹⁹ They don't focus on anything small. They focus on large vessels that have high potential for environmental damage.²⁰

13 TC, [National Strategy to address Canada's wrecked and abandoned vessels](#).

14 DFO, “[Abandoned, wrecked, derelict vessels](#),” *House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans (FOPO) Departmental Appearance on Supplementary Estimates (B)*.

15 Those eligible to apply for the Small Craft Harbours Abandoned and Wrecked Vessels Removal Program include provinces or certain provincial agencies, non-profit organizations, Indigenous groups and certain persons. See Government of Canada, [Small Craft Harbours Abandoned and Wrecked Vessels Removal Program](#).

16 [Fishing and Recreational Harbours Regulations](#) (SOR/78-767).

17 DFO, [2021–22 Departmental Results Report](#).

18 Kathy Nghiem, Director General, Response, DFO, [Evidence](#), 18 September 2024.

19 Joshua Charleson, Executive Director, Coastal Restoration Society, [Evidence](#), 6 November 2024.

20 Ibid.



The Committee heard that mooring buoys are an example of how complicated matters of jurisdiction can be. As Eric Dahli, Chair of the Cadboro Bay Dead Boats Society, explained

as far as I understand it is that the seabed is the jurisdiction of the province. The water between the seabed and the surface is the jurisdiction of Fisheries and Oceans, and the surface is the jurisdiction of the Coast Guard. Therefore, when you come in and drop a mooring buoy in a bay, you are, in fact, touching on three different jurisdictions[...].²¹

Kathy Nghiem explained that the CCG's compliance and enforcement program for wrecked and abandoned vessels was launched in 2023 "to ensure that owners of hazardous vessels are held accountable." At the same time, she indicated that the CCG's "priority will always be to work collaboratively with the vessel owner."²² Depending on the situation, the CCG may take a graduated approach to enforcement, which can include less strict measures such as requiring education about derelict vessels for boat owners.²³

As of 18 September 2024, TC had issued 95 warnings in relation to wrecked or abandoned vessels and was working with owners to have the vessels removed.²⁴ TC had also imposed two AMPs.²⁵

Proposed Vessel Remediation Fund

When the CCG incurs costs for handling wrecked or abandoned vessels, expenses can be recovered from the owner or the insurer.²⁶ Many witnesses noted the frequent challenge, however, of identifying the owner from whom costs could be recovered.²⁷

In budget 2023, the Government of Canada proposed amendments to the WAHVA to establish the Vessel Remediation Fund (VRF). These amendments will come into force on a date to be set by Order in Council.²⁸ The VRF will contribute to the goal of developing

21 Eric Dahli, Chair, Cadboro Bay Dead Boats Society, [Evidence](#), 28 October 2024.

22 Kathy Nghiem, Director General, Response, DFO, [Evidence](#), 18 September 2024.

23 Joanne Weiss-Reid, Director, Operations and Regulatory Development, TC, [Evidence](#), 18 September 2024.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 Kathy Nghiem, Director General, Response, DFO, [Evidence](#), 18 September 2024.

27 See for example Joshua Charleson, Executive Director, Coastal Restoration Society, [Evidence](#), 6 November 2024; Roberta Bowman, Executive Director, Ladysmith Chamber of Commerce, [Evidence](#), 18 November 2024; and Chloe Dubois, Executive Director, Ocean Legacy Foundation, [Evidence](#), 18 November 2024.

28 The amendments were contained in the [Budget Implementation Act, 2023, No. 1](#) (S.C. 2023, c. 26).

long-term funding for abandoned vessel removal, as set out in the *National Strategy to Address Canada's Wrecked and Abandoned Vessels*. A fee collected “would be credited to a proposed Vessel Remediation Fund that would be used to prevent, assess and address problem vessels (wrecked, abandoned or hazardous vessels) in Canadian waters.”²⁹ TC issued a proposal for a regulatory charge (or fee) to finance the VRF in August 2021.³⁰ TC proposed to introduce a fee paid every five years. This would be a flat fee of \$10 for pleasure craft, and fees ranging from \$250 to \$1,000 for commercial and non-recreational vessels, depending on the size of the vessel.

Colin Henein, Director of Marine Protection, Environmental Policy at TC, explained that the future VRF “will enable us to not be drawing on general taxpayer revenues to address the costs of remediation.”³¹ Annie Verville, Director of Compliance and Enforcement at DFO, told the Committee that the VRF “will come into force shortly.”³²

Chloe Dubois, Executive Director of the Ocean Legacy Foundation, and Roberta Bowman, Executive Director of the Ladysmith Chamber of Commerce, both supported the proposed VRF,³³ while Jacob Banting, Program Coordinator for Clean Marine BC, Georgia Strait Alliance, commented that a similar fee in Washington State is payable annually, rather than every five years.³⁴

SCOPE OF THE ISSUE

Amount of Derelict Vessels

At the time of her appearance, Kathy Nghiem advised the Committee that while 2,100 problem vessels had been listed in the national inventory since its inception, many had been addressed bringing the list down to 1,358 vessels (Figure 1).³⁵ However, according to Benjamin Boulton, Manager of the Derelict Vessel Program at the Rugged Coast

29 TC, “[1.0 Purpose](#),” *Regulatory Charge (Fee) Proposal for Vessel Remediation Fund*.

30 TC, [Regulatory Charge \(Fee\) Proposal for Vessel Remediation Fund](#).

31 Colin Henein, Director, Marine Protection, Environmental Policy, TC, [Evidence](#), 18 September 2024.

32 Annie Verville, Director, Compliance and Enforcement, DFO, [Evidence](#), 18 September 2024.

33 Chloe Dubois, Executive Director, Ocean Legacy Foundation, [Evidence](#), 18 November 2024, Roberta Bowman, Executive Director, Ladysmith Chamber of Commerce, [Evidence](#), 18 November 2024.

34 Jacob Banting, Program Coordinator, Clean Marine BC, Georgia Strait Alliance, [Evidence](#), 2 October 2024.

35 Kathy Nghiem, Director General, Response, DFO, [Evidence](#), 18 September 2024.



Research Society, this number “is grossly underestimated,”³⁶ and Chloe Dubois observed that “there are probably thousands of these vessels that have not been identified.”³⁷ Of those on the list, many are “legacy vessels” with no owner.³⁸ David Roberts, Manager of Terra Services Inc., indicated that more than 90% of abandoned vessels on the East Coast were fishing or fishing-related vessels.³⁹

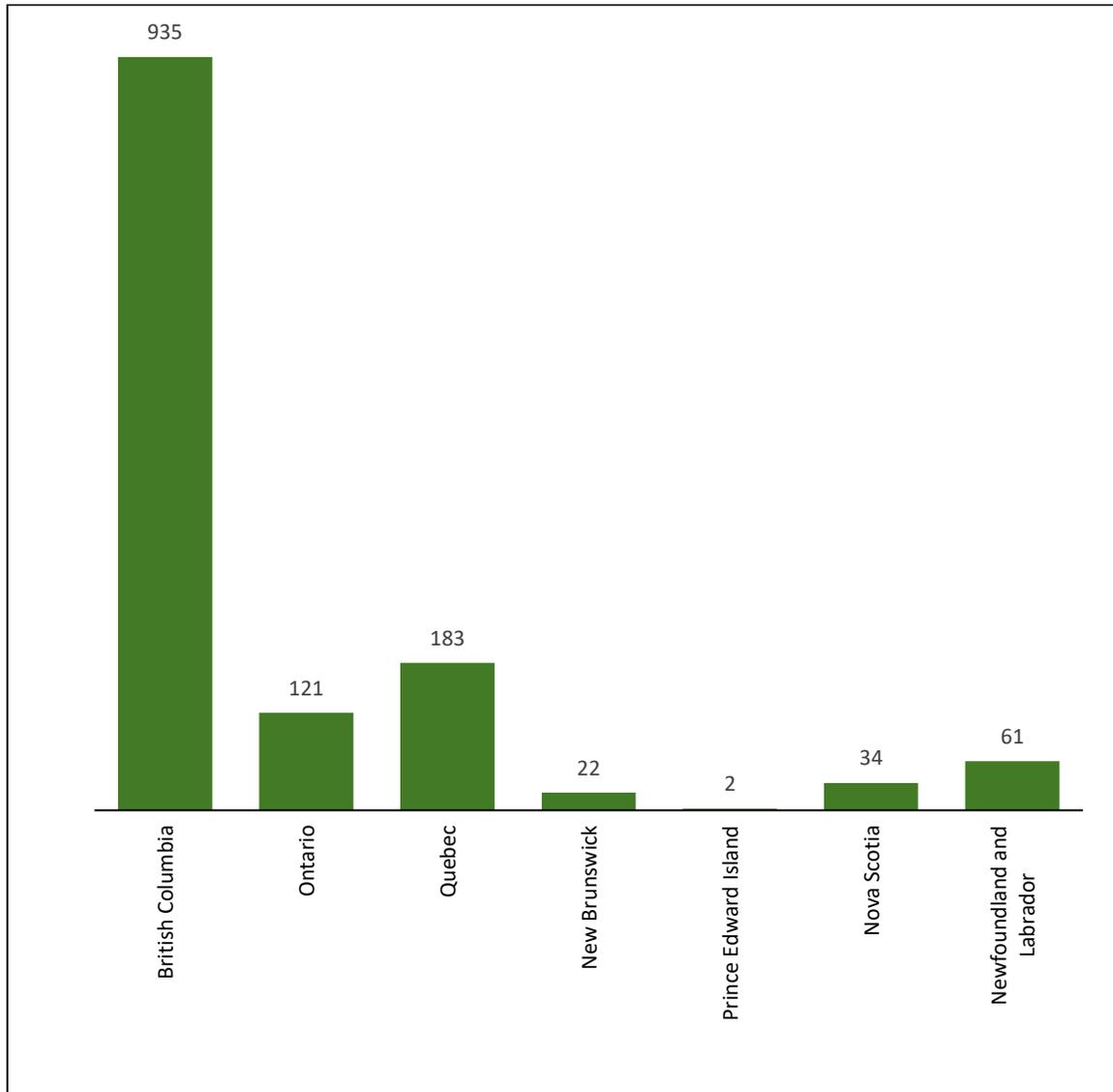
36 Benjamin Boulton, Manager, Derelict Vessel Program, Rugged Coast Research Society, [Evidence](#), 2 October 2024.

37 Chloe Dubois, Executive Director, Ocean Legacy Foundation, [Evidence](#), 18 November 2024.

38 Robert Brooks, Director, Marine Environmental and Hazards Response, DFO, [Evidence](#), 18 September 2024.

39 David Roberts, Manager, Terra Services Inc., [Evidence](#), 2 October 2024.

**Figure 1—Vessels appearing on the National Inventory of Wrecked,
Abandoned or Hazardous Vessels**



Note: No vessels are listed in the national inventory of wrecked, abandoned or hazardous vessels in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Yukon, Northwest Territories or Nunavut.

Source: Figure prepared by the Library of Parliament using data obtained from Government of Canada, [National inventory of wrecked, abandoned or hazardous vessels](#), consulted 3 September 2025.



The Committee heard that since 2016, 791 wrecked, abandoned or hazardous vessels had been removed,⁴⁰ with 117 vessels removed in the 2023 fiscal year.⁴¹

In addition to vessels on the shore, David Roberts explained that “there are in excess of thousands of vessels just in the marine service centres in Atlantic Canada that are still there,” with only one vessel removed in the past six years.⁴²

Leonard Lee, Board Chair and Director, Area A - Egmont and Pender Harbour from the Sunshine Coast Regional District, explained one of the reasons vessels become derelict:

Derelict and abandoned boats are a relatively new phenomenon and with many different causes. A main cause is that there's no longer anything called cheap moorage in our harbour. Increased regulations—including for limited dock size and construction standards—and the high cost of purchasing and owning waterfront property have pretty much eliminated any category called “cheap moorage”. Once you don't have cheap moorage, people can't afford to tie up the cheaper boats. The less affluent owners become guardians of those cheaper boats, and they resort to anchoring them in our protected bay. There are hundreds of them around the Sunshine Coast, the vast majority not insured or registered.⁴³

Impact of and Potential Risks Posed by Derelict Vessels

Kathy Nghiem explained that prioritizing vessels for response based on risk includes considering a vessel's location, condition, size, and construction material as well as the type and quantity of pollutants on board.⁴⁴ In the context of small pleasure craft, Bonny Brokenshire, an environmental professional who appeared as an individual, challenged the effectiveness of those risk evaluations, pointing to cumulative effects:

With respect to assessing for risk—that is, a boat that will potentially sink and for which the taxpayer will have to pay for removal and disposal—the risk is not determined to be great, yet there are many of them. As well, the areas in which they are moored are vital areas. They're very ecologically rich and protected areas, such as estuaries and those sorts of places.⁴⁵

40 Kathy Nghiem, Director General, Response, DFO, [Evidence](#), 18 September 2024.

41 Robert Brooks, Director, Marine Environmental and Hazards Response, DFO, [Evidence](#), 18 September 2024.

42 David Roberts, Manager, Terra Services Inc., [Evidence](#), 2 October 2024.

43 Leonard Lee, Board Chair and Director, Area A - Egmont and Pender Harbour, Sunshine Coast Regional District, [Evidence](#), 6 November 2024.

44 Kathy Nghiem, Director General, Response, DFO, [Evidence](#), 18 September 2024.

45 Bonny Brokenshire, Environmental Professional, As an individual, [Evidence](#), 28 October 2024.

Witnesses gave examples of derelict vessels that posed risks in their communities, both past and present, including:

- a steel vessel that sank and leaked oil for 30 years on the northeast coast of Newfoundland near Fogo and Twillingate;⁴⁶
- two HMCS vessels that were brought to a former federal wharf in Bridgewater, Nova Scotia that were left to rot for decades and contained fuel, oil and lubricants that posed a risk to the environment and deeply impacted community morale;⁴⁷
- an old ferry boat that was reportedly used for manufacturing illicit drugs sank in shíshálh territory;⁴⁸ and
- an individual who was reportedly paid to take possession of two large scows and a barge to dispose of them properly failed to do so in Andy's Bay on the west side of Gambier Island in Átl'ka7tsem or Howe Sound.⁴⁹

General Safety Risks

Roberta Bowman explained that the safety risks of abandoned vessels include blocking channels and creating hazards for boaters as well as posing challenges for anchoring and navigation.⁵⁰ In its brief, the Nanaimo Port authority flagged that these vessels “attract illegal scavenging and loitering, posing safety risks for marina staff and visitors.”⁵¹ (Figure 2)

46 David Roberts, Manager, Terra Services Inc., [Evidence](#), 2 October 2024.

47 David Mitchell, Mayor, Town of Bridgewater, [Evidence](#), 28 October 2024.

48 Chief Lenora Joe, shíshálh First Nation, [Evidence](#), 30 October 2024.

49 Ian Winn, Director, Atl'ka7tsem Howe Sound UNESCO Biosphere Region, [Evidence](#), 6 November 2024.

50 Roberta Bowman, Executive Director, Ladysmith Chamber of Commerce, [Evidence](#), 18 November 2024.

51 Nanaimo Port Authority, [Brief](#), 14 November 2024.



Figure 2—Derelict vessels on shoreline in British-Columbia



Source: Nanaimo Port Authority, *Brief*, 14 November 2024.

Chloe Dubois also flagged safety issues, including the health and safety of wildlife:

[O]nce vessels have sunk, ropes, nets and other debris become entangled with these structures, creating very dangerous environments for wildlife, which then becomes entangled. They often become hot spots for ghost gear, resulting in wildlife emaciation, drownings and vessel strikes. These submerged vessels often create a high risk for subsurface vessel strikes, creating dangerous navigable waters for vessels across the coast, which are then uncharted. Hitting a submerged vessel with a vessel not only risks injury to the persons on board but also poses the risk of adding another vessel to the list of derelicts.⁵²

Chloe Dubois explained that while there had been past federal support for removing ghost gear via funding for the Ghost Gear Program fund, those resources had been directed to Hurricane Fiona efforts. Asking for the Ghost Gear Fund to be reinstated, she observed that the fund “created an incredible opportunity for this country to continue its leadership in environmental stewardship and marine conservation.”⁵³

52 Chloe Dubois, Executive Director, Ocean Legacy Foundation, *Evidence*, 18 November 2024.

53 Ibid.

Environmental Impacts

Chloe Dubois also explained some of the environmental impacts of derelict vessels:

We have seen first-hand how destructive these vessels can be, leaking oils and fuel, resins, plastics, black waters, heavy metals from bottom paint and vessel construction, polystyrenes, asbestos insulation, chemicals and other anthropogenic debris into the water. If it doesn't sink or leach into the water, it will then concentrate and wash ashore. When these materials concentrate along shorelines, they then break up into millions of tiny fragments, entering the food chain and impacting the habitat, health and safety of all species.⁵⁴

Jacob Banting further described the impact on the food chain:

That chain of toxicity is making its way up the food chain to larger fish and to marine mammals and then up to whales and seabirds. The list goes on with the detrimental effects to ecosystems and communities, and the economic impacts that can be had. The risks associated with food contamination affect us all, but it's central to [I]ndigenous food sovereignty, marine governance and even reconciliation.⁵⁵

Specific examples of the environmental impact of derelict vessels raised by witnesses include the following:

- clam beds poisoned by ongoing environmental damage even after the boat has been removed, including from heavy metals from lead paint;⁵⁶
- damaged Pacific salmon stocks and damaged rearing habitat in one of British Columbia's largest estuaries, the Nanaimo River estuary;⁵⁷
- sinking vessels caused oil spills in Tseshaht First Nation territory;⁵⁸ and
- anchored live-aboard boats in closed harbours that lack holding tanks dumped sewage directly into the water.⁵⁹

54 Ibid.

55 Jacob Banting, Program Coordinator, Clean Marine BC, Georgia Strait Alliance, [Evidence](#), 2 October 2024.

56 Joshua Charleson, Executive Director, Coastal Restoration Society, [Evidence](#), 6 November 2024.

57 John White, Director, Marine Division, Snuneymuxw First Nation, [Evidence](#), 30 October 2024.

58 Ken Watts, Elected Chief Councillor, Tseshaht First Nation, [Evidence](#), 30 October 2024.

59 Leonard Lee, Board Chair and Director, Area A - Egmont and Pender Harbour, Sunshine Coast Regional District, [Evidence](#), 6 November 2024.



With respect to anchored live-aboard boats, Robert Brooks, Director of Marine Environmental and Hazards Response at DFO, told the Committee “we do see an increasing number of situations where vessels have become live-aboards for people who are facing a homelessness crisis in certain communities.”⁶⁰ The Committee heard that derelict vessels can end up as housing as boat owners sometimes give them away for free to avoid paying for proper disposal.⁶¹

While John White, Director, Marine Division, Snuneymuxw First Nation, acknowledged that work was being done at the federal level “to stop future derelict vessels from posing environmental risk to our coastlines,” he called for increased federal and provincial action.⁶² In its brief, the Cadboro Bay Dead Boats Society also called for increased federal action to address environmental risks, including that the CCG and TC need “a sound efficient basis and clear succinct criteria for evaluating and rating the safety and environmental risks of listed and reported pending derelict vessels.”⁶³ The Cadboro Bay Dead Boats Society also expressed concerns over “[t]he failure of TC to account for environmental suitability and impacts to the foreshore and seabed environment and for shoreside community concerns in its approvals of moorage applications.”⁶⁴

Cultural Impacts

First Nations individuals spoke of the impact that derelict vessels have on their communities. Chief Lenora Joe of shíshálh First Nation explained to the Committee:

The shíshálh people are known as the “salmon people”. Salmon and marine resources are integral to who we are. As [shíshálh] people, we are unique in our way of life. [...] The health of our marine environment has been affected in such a way that our resources have been impacted by many things, including derelict boats. For many years, we have sought to address derelict vessels in our *swiya*.⁶⁵ The irresponsibility of others is saddening to our community, which has the incredible responsibility of cleaning that up. It's massive.⁶⁶

60 Robert Brooks, Director, Marine Environmental and Hazards Response, DFO, [Evidence](#), 18 September 2024.

61 Leonard Lee, Board Chair and Director, Area A - Egmont and Pender Harbour, Sunshine Coast Regional District, [Evidence](#), 6 November 2024, Chloe Dubois, Executive Director, Ocean Legacy Foundation, [Evidence](#), 18 November 2024.

62 John White, Director, Marine Division, Snuneymuxw First Nation, [Evidence](#), 30 October 2024.

63 Cadboro Bay Dead Boats Society, [Brief](#), 28 October 2024.

64 Ibid.

65 Lands, birthplace and territory of the shíshálh Nation.

66 Chief Lenora Joe, shíshálh First Nation, [Evidence](#), 30 October 2024.

She explained that:

[o]ur land is who we are. The food we gather that feeds our people in our traditional ways is who we are. We're fighting to keep our traditions in place. Every day, we're losing something. We lose some part of us. Some part of us is getting lost in the big cloud, and we are fighting to sustain it.⁶⁷

John White also shared the impact of derelict vessels on the Snuneymuxw community:

Derelict vessels compromise Snuneymuxw peoples' food sovereignty and traditional way of life. Snuneymuxw holds stewardship of our waters and lands as our highest priority to ensure that our people and generations to follow can continue to live as our ancestors and elders have lived for thousands of generations before contact.⁶⁸

While there was also an economic importance to oyster and clam farming for his community, Gordon Edwards, Councillor, Snaw-naw-as First Nation, explained the broader role of harvested seafood and the importance of keeping oyster fields and clam farming free of contaminants:

In our community, when we have a naming, when we have a death or when there's a memorial, what's provided at those as meals is seafood: oysters, clams, Manila clams—geoducks in general. We go there, we gather that, and we feed people who come to our community to acknowledge a naming or to appear for a memorial.⁶⁹

Chief Joe stressed that future generations may be affected by seafood contaminated by derelict vessels: “How do I explain to my 10-year-old son that we can't gather food? We have to go to other places. [...] The risk is huge for us that our children and grandchildren and my great-grandchildren are not going to have that opportunity or know what that is.”⁷⁰

Like many witnesses, she spoke of the impact of limited resources to deal with derelict vessels: “We just don't have the resources to be able to go and clean them up, and we don't have the resources to restore the food in the waters so that our community members have access to it.”⁷¹ She told the Committee that her community has “expressed

67 Ibid.

68 John White, Director, Marine Division, Snuneymuxw First Nation, *Evidence*, 30 October 2024.

69 Gordon Edwards, Councillor, Snaw-naw-as First Nation, *Evidence*, 30 October 2024.

70 Chief Lenora Joe, shíshálh First Nation, *Evidence*, 30 October 2024.

71 Ibid.



our concerns, frustrations and how it's impacted our community, families and food security,” and been attempting to address it with different levels of government.⁷²

In addition to the cultural importance of gathering seafood, Chief Joe told the Committee that “[f]ood security is huge in our community. The fact that we are unable to collect food in the way our ancestors did is very concerning and serious.”⁷³

Economic Impacts

Roberta Bowman explained that:

[o]ur waterfront is a vital community asset, essential for residents and to attracting visitors; however, abandoned vessels create ongoing challenges, deterring tourists, boaters and recreational users and projecting an image of neglect that harms our local tourism industry.⁷⁴

In its brief, the Nanaimo Port authority referred to the burden placed on port authorities relating to ongoing maintenance or cleanup of abandoned vessels.⁷⁵

The Committee recognizes the serious safety, cultural, and economic impacts posed by derelict vessels.

BARRIERS TO ADDRESSING THE ISSUE OF DERELICT VESSELS

Licensing and Registration

While, among other things, WAHVA established prohibitions against abandoning a vessel, causing one’s vessel to become a wreck by failing to maintain it, or purposefully sinking, stranding or grounding one’s vessel, enforcing those prohibitions and administering penalties requires identifying the owner of a boat.

Witnesses pointed to challenges with the current system of licences and boat registration and how these contribute to problems identifying owners of derelict

72 Ibid.

73 Ibid.

74 Roberta Bowman, Executive Director, Ladysmith Chamber of Commerce, [Evidence](#), 18 November 2024.

75 Nanaimo Port Authority, [Brief](#), 14 November 2024.

vessels.⁷⁶ Sean Rogers, Executive Director of Legislative, Regulatory and International Affairs at TC, explained that, prior to 2010, pleasure craft licences (PCLs) were granted on a lifetime basis. While the owner was supposed to report changes of ownership or decommissioning of the vessel to the pleasure craft licence database, this did not always happen.⁷⁷ At the time of his appearance in September 2024, there were 2.7 million PCLs, including 1.5 million lifetime PCLs. He explained that a stronger licencing regime will “support the operation of wrecked, hazardous and abandoned vessels legislation by enabling the individuals in the [N]avigation [P]rotection [P]rogram or in the Canadian Coast Guard to more readily identify who the owner of a vessel is.”⁷⁸

Bob Peart, Chair of the Friends of Shoal Harbour Society, told the Committee that “Transport Canada has, for years, repeatedly stated that the owner registry will be modernized. We see little progress.”⁷⁹

The Committee heard that when boat registration does not help to identify an owner, other steps are taken, including by talking to the community where the vessel is found.⁸⁰ Joanne Weiss-Reid, Director of Operations and Regulatory Development at TC, explained that they also have the authority under the WAHVA to post a 30 day notice “to see if the owner will identify themselves before we take action on the vessel.”⁸¹

Witnesses stressed the importance of improving vessel owner identification to address derelict vessels, with some witnesses observing that Washington State has a strong registration model.⁸²

The current licencing period contained in the regulations is ten years. In May 2023, proposed amendments to the *Small Vessel Regulations* were published in the *Canada*

76 See for example Joshua Charleson, Executive Director, Coastal Restoration Society, [Evidence](#), 6 November 2024, Roberta Bowman, Executive Director, Ladysmith Chamber of Commerce, [Evidence](#), 18 November 2024, and Chloe Dubois, Executive Director, Ocean Legacy Foundation, [Evidence](#), 18 November 2024.

77 Sean Rogers, Executive Director, Legislative, Regulatory and International Affairs, TC, [Evidence](#), 18 September 2024.

78 Ibid.

79 Bob Peart, Chair, Friends of Shoal Harbour Society, [Evidence](#), 28 October 2024.

80 Robert Brooks, Director, Marine Environmental and Hazards Response, DFO, [Evidence](#), 18 September 2024.

81 Joanne Weiss-Reid, Director, Operations and Regulatory Development, TC, [Evidence](#), 18 September 2024.

82 See for example, Jacob Banting, Program Coordinator, Clean Marine BC, Georgia Strait Alliance, [Evidence](#), 2 October 2024, Bob Peart, Chair, Friends of Shoal Harbour Society, [Evidence](#), 28 October 2024, Eric Dahli, Chair, Cadboro Bay Dead Boats Society, [Evidence](#), 28 October 2024 and Bonny Brokenshire, Environmental Professional, As an individual, [Evidence](#), 28 October 2024.



*Gazette, Part I.*⁸³ Among other things, these propose to enhance vessel owner identification by introducing:

- a new five-year validity period for all PCLs; and
- expansion of the PCL requirements to apply to all wind-powered pleasure craft that are above six metres in length (except for human-powered vessels such as kayaks, canoes or dragon boats).

The proposed regulations would also require that PCLs be transferred with 30 days of a change in ownership, and permit TC to cancel a PCL for non-compliance.⁸⁴

An additional concern that was raised in the context of registration was that fees for both vessel registration and moorage did not always cover disposal costs, and that fees should reflect those costs.⁸⁵ The Committee also heard that “a good way to track the vessels is through the insurance.”⁸⁶

It is clear to the Committee that challenges in identifying boat owners is a significant barrier to addressing derelict vessels, including preventing vessels from being abandoned in the first place.

Mooring Buoys

Both Bob Peart and Bonnie Brokenshire explained that a key cause of derelict vessels relates to mooring buoys. In particular, “bays that are inundated with mooring buoys are often inundated with derelict and abandoned vessels.”⁸⁷ As Bob Peart explained,

[t]he core source of any vessel of concern is the virtually unlimited supply of private mooring buoys. In 2004, the responsibility for the private buoy regulations was transferred from the Coast Guard to Transport Canada. This was a mistake. Since then Transport Canada has largely failed to exercise its authority to enforce these regulations. As well, the federal government’s narrow definition of a mooring buoy as a

83 Canada Gazette, Part I, Volume 157, Number 19: [Regulations Amending the Small Vessel Regulations](#).

84 Sean Rogers, Executive Director, Legislative, Regulatory and International Affairs, TC, [Evidence](#), 18 September 2024.

85 Ladysmith Chamber of Commerce, [Brief](#).

86 Roberta Bowman, Executive Director, Ladysmith Chamber of Commerce, [Evidence](#), 18 November 2024.

87 Bonny Brokenshire, Environmental Professional, As an individual, [Evidence](#), 28 October 2024.

“minor work” and the narrow definitions of “abandoned” and “dilapidated” hamper our efforts to enforce.⁸⁸

He recommended that TC and CCG need to “empower local communities to manage their private mooring buoys” and “return the oversight, enforcement and compliance of the private buoy regulations to the Canadian Coast Guard.” He also recommended the federal government clarify the definition of a mooring buoy as a minor work.⁸⁹ While Bonny Brokenshire explained that there have been some positive steps at the federal level, including through the Oceans Protection Plan, she told the Committee that legislative amendments, including to the *Private Buoy Regulations*,⁹⁰ could make “room for augmentation with respect to mooring buoys.”⁹¹

Bonnie Brokenshire also explained how success was seen with a mooring buoy bylaw enacted in Mannion Bay by Bowen Island Municipality: “the owners of the vessels tied to the buoys have to register with the municipality, so there's a lack of anonymity now with those folks in the bay. We have no abandoned vessels, and the mooring buoy sweeps from Transport Canada have been invaluable.”⁹²

Removal and Disposal

In their respective briefs, the Nanaimo Port Authority and the Ladysmith Chamber of Commerce observed that the approval process for removing a derelict vessel is slow.⁹³

Some witnesses noted that jurisdictional issues caused some confusion when it comes to removal. For example, Ken Watts, Elected Chief Councillor, Tseshaht First Nation, told the Committee that “[f]or Tseshaht, we have the Port Alberni Port Authority, the provincial jurisdiction and foreshore responsibility in our territory. I think it often becomes muddied waters about responsibility.”⁹⁴ Similarly, Joshua Charleson told the Committee that:

Around authority, there's always confusion over who is going to take ownership of it, going to authorize a vessel of concern or going to actually give the green light for a

88 Bob Peart, Chair, Friends of Shoal Harbour Society, *Evidence*, 28 October 2024.

89 Ibid.

90 *Private Buoy Regulations*, SOR/99-335.

91 Bonny Brokenshire, Environmental Professional, As an individual, *Evidence*, 28 October 2024.

92 Ibid.

93 Nanaimo Port Authority, *Brief*, 14 November 2024; and Ladysmith Chamber of Commerce, *Brief*.

94 Ken Watts, Elected Chief Councillor, Tseshaht First Nation, *Evidence*, 30 October 2024.



vessel to be removed. That needs to be settled because there are CCG, DFO, Transport Canada and provincial requirements, as well as [F]irst [N]ations communities. You have to do the runaround to figure out who is actually going to do this.⁹⁵

As conveyed by Roberta Bowman, this frustration demonstrates the importance of improved cooperation among all levels of government: “[a]s a community, we cannot solve this problem alone. Stronger collaboration between local governments, provincial authorities and federal agencies is essential.”⁹⁶

Disposing of derelict vessels is complex, as highlighted by Chloe Dubois: “cleaning up these vessels can be very time-consuming and financially demanding due to the required permitting processes that are mandatory for removal, alongside the complex aquatic environments that we must then navigate once these vessels have sunk.”⁹⁷

Furthermore, Joshua Charleson told the Committee that the lack of infrastructure to deal with derelict vessels is problematic:

It's really important to have [a derelict vessel being dismantled] contained because there's so much that can go wrong. It's a very technical profession, breaking down a vessel. [...] Any number of things can go wrong.

There could be hydraulic fluid still in the hoses. If hydraulic fluid hits you in the hand, you're amputating your hand. Those kinds of things can go wrong quickly. I've seen it with fishermen when things like that have gone wrong. It's the same with oil, gas and combustibles. If they have a sewage system in them, there are all these different contaminants that can get out and damage the environment where you're breaking it down.

Having it controlled and contained in a place that can handle all of those different environmental contaminants would save us from having any kind of disaster. That's the importance of having that infrastructure dedicated to doing the job.⁹⁸

Costs

The cost of disposal is one of the barriers to individuals properly disposing of boats. Benjamin Boulton told the Committee that “[t]ypically, it's going to cost a few thousand dollars to remove it. If you are in an economically challenged area, with a lack of work or

95 Joshua Charleson, Executive Director, Coastal Restoration Society, *Evidence*, 6 November 2024.

96 Roberta Bowman, Executive Director, Ladysmith Chamber of Commerce, *Evidence*, 18 November 2024.

97 Chloe Dubois, Executive Director, Ocean Legacy Foundation, *Evidence*, 18 November 2024.

98 Joshua Charleson, Executive Director, Coastal Restoration Society, *Evidence*, 6 November 2024.

seasonal work, a couple of thousand dollars to dispose of a vessel is huge. What are you left to do?”⁹⁹

The Committee heard from Robert Brooks that there is a huge range in costs associated with disposal of derelict vessels:

[W]hen the Canadian Coast Guard intervenes to address these vessels that require our attention, we see a range that could be as little as \$5,000 to \$10,000, but when you get into the commercial vessels that deal with significant pollutants and large sizes, you could be in the range of \$25 million to \$35 million to remove the vessel and dismantle it.¹⁰⁰

Speaking to disposal costs, Joshua Charleson explained that costs included “training a crew, [...] insurance, accommodations, logistics, vessels, crew, equipment, waste transport, heavy equipment, barge, staff and landfill fees. There are just so many costs to actually getting rid of a derelict vessel.”¹⁰¹

Process

The Committee heard that while some parts of derelict vessels are recycled (for example, metal),¹⁰² much of it ends up in landfills.¹⁰³ Colin Henein acknowledged the challenges with recycling fibreglass vessels, noting that not many facilities accept them.¹⁰⁴ He added that the proposed VRF could contribute to research and development for fibreglass vessel recycling.¹⁰⁵ He also explained that vessel recycling involves multiple jurisdictions:

It's a co-operative effort between the federal government, for example, which has certain requirements relating to discharges into the water and environmental protection in that regard.... We also work very closely with our colleagues in the provinces and the municipalities, which are responsible for matters such as local land use planning, when the boats are removed from the water for recycling, labour standards and those kinds of situations. It's more of a co-operative approach.¹⁰⁶

99 Benjamin Boulton, Manager, Derelict Vessel Program, Rugged Coast Research Society, [Evidence](#), 2 October 2024.

100 Robert Brooks, Director, Marine Environmental and Hazards Response, DFO, [Evidence](#), 18 September 2024.

101 Joshua Charleson, Executive Director, Coastal Restoration Society, [Evidence](#), 6 November 2024.

102 David Roberts, Manager, Terra Services Inc., [Evidence](#), 2 October 2024.

103 Bonny Brokenshire, Environmental Professional, As an individual, [Evidence](#), 28 October 2024.

104 Colin Henein, Director, Marine Protection, Environmental Policy, TC, [Evidence](#), 18 September 2024.

105 Ibid.

106 Ibid.



In its brief, the Ladysmith Chamber of Commerce observed that “[f]ederal support for innovative recycling programs could make it easier for vessel owners to dispose of boats responsibly.”¹⁰⁷

Enforcement

Departmental officials shared some successes with the Committee, as did non-government witnesses. For example, when describing a challenging derelict vessel situation that his community faced 10 years ago, Ian Winn, Director, Atl'ka7tsem Howe Sound UNESCO Biosphere Region, told the Committee that “[t]hankfully much has been done at the federal government level to protect our marine environment with the introduction of the [O]ceans [P]rotection [P]lan, the subsequent WAHVA and now the [V]essel [R]emediation [F]und.” He noted, however, that gaps still exist.¹⁰⁸

Other witnesses raised concerns about enforcement and resources. For example, John White pointed to “a lack of capacity and timely response” for the CCG and TC.¹⁰⁹ As a result, “[F]irst [N]ations' response has become ever more relevant.”¹¹⁰ In its brief, the Cadboro Bay Dead Boats Society expressed concern over the “[a]bsence of meaningful effective enforcement of prevailing federal ‘rules’ applicable to a range of responsibilities.”¹¹¹ Joshua Charleson told the Committee that “[w]e don’t see enforcement out in B.C.”¹¹² In its brief, the Nanaimo Port Authority described the system through which vessels are reported and removed as “slow and inconsistent,” observing that “[e]ven when vessels are identified as a threat to public health, safety, or the environment, there is no immediate or streamlined system to take action without going through bureaucratic approval processes.”¹¹³

107 Ladysmith Chamber of Commerce, [Brief](#).

108 Ian Winn, Director, Atl'ka7tsem Howe Sound UNESCO Biosphere Region, [Evidence](#), 6 November 2024.

109 John White, Director, Marine Division, Snuneymuxw First Nation, [Evidence](#), 30 October 2024.

110 Ibid.

111 Cadboro Bay Dead Boats Society, [Brief](#), 28 October 2024.

112 Joshua Charleson, Executive Director, Coastal Restoration Society, [Evidence](#), 6 November 2024.

113 Nanaimo Port Authority, [Brief](#), 14 November 2024.

Funding

Chloe Dubois told the Committee that while the WAHVA “was a great start,” funding was inadequate to address the number of vessels.¹¹⁴ She pointed to the challenge of annual grants and advocated for “long-term, committed, annual funding.”¹¹⁵ In its brief, the Nanaimo Port authority also supported the need for more funding:

There is a consistent shortage of financial resources allocated for vessel removal. The limited funds available are often exhausted quickly, leaving local authorities and marinas to bear the disposal costs. For instance, the disposal of even a single vessel can cost upwards of several thousand dollars depending on size, material, and contaminants such as fiberglass, oil, and asbestos.¹¹⁶

Benjamin Boulton emphasized the need for funding for both removal and disposal, “with a focus on small communities.”¹¹⁷

Kathy Nghiem did note that when a vessel poses “a significant risk and immediate hazard,” additional federal funding can be accessed “to ensure the hazards presented by that vessel are addressed promptly and efficiently.”¹¹⁸

ADDITIONAL SOLUTIONS

Prevention

The importance of prevention was flagged by multiple witnesses. For example, Roberta Bowman told the Committee that “Canada needs a proactive, sustainable and comprehensive strategy that goes beyond addressing existing abandoned vessels and focuses on prevention and accountability.”¹¹⁹

John White also encouraged the federal government to focus on prevention:

[W]hat we see right now here in Port Alberni and in our territory is that an issue comes up with a boat, it's left there, they wait for the boat owner to deal with it and then the

114 Chloe Dubois, Executive Director, Ocean Legacy Foundation, [Evidence](#), 18 November 2024.

115 Ibid.

116 Nanaimo Port Authority, [Brief](#), 14 November 2024.

117 Benjamin Boulton, Manager, Derelict Vessel Program, Rugged Coast Research Society, [Evidence](#), 2 October 2024.

118 Kathy Nghiem, Director General, Response, DFO, [Evidence](#), 18 September 2024.

119 Roberta Bowman, Executive Director, Ladysmith Chamber of Commerce, [Evidence](#), 18 November 2024.



boat sinks. Meanwhile, there are other people who are standing on standby who could help clean up those boats before they become an issue.¹²⁰

He advocated for long-term sustainable funding for identification and prevention. Leonard Lee and Chloe Dubois both echoed the frustration of not being able to address a boat until it sinks.¹²¹ Chloe Dubois recommended that a mechanism be developed, “almost like a fast track” to remove boats before they sink,¹²² with the Nanaimo Port authority brief similarly proposing implementation of “a fast-track” process for vessels posing an imminent danger to navigation, irresponsible ownership, and environmental hazards.¹²³ Benjamin Boulton suggested that “a federally backed program where folks can sign their vessels over to certified contractors to remove the vessels before they become abandoned” would incentivize owners to not abandon their vessels.¹²⁴

A number of other suggestions aimed at prevention were proposed by witnesses, including:

- requiring a safety inspection before a vessel is insured and licensed (which could be done by voluntary groups as is the case in Washington state);¹²⁵
- working with experts to develop ways to monitor and assess docked vessels of concern before they become an issue;¹²⁶
- placing a moratorium on marina fees to reduce the number of boats being abandoned because individuals cannot afford to keep them there;¹²⁷ and

120 John White, Director, Marine Division, Snuneymuxw First Nation, [Evidence](#), 30 October 2024.

121 Leonard Lee, Board Chair and Director, Area A - Egmont and Pender Harbour, Sunshine Coast Regional District, [Evidence](#), 6 November 2024; and Chloe Dubois, Executive Director, Ocean Legacy Foundation, [Evidence](#), 18 November 2024.

122 Chloe Dubois, Executive Director, Ocean Legacy Foundation, [Evidence](#), 18 November 2024.

123 Nanaimo Port Authority, [Brief](#), 14 November 2024.

124 Benjamin Boulton, Manager, Derelict Vessel Program, Rugged Coast Research Society, [Evidence](#), 2 October 2024.

125 John Roe, Founding Director, Dead Boats Disposal Society, [Evidence](#), 2 October 2024.

126 Ken Watts, Elected Chief Councillor, Tseshaht First Nation, [Evidence](#), 30 October 2024.

127 Roberta Bowman, Executive Director, Ladysmith Chamber of Commerce, [Evidence](#), 18 November 2024.

- implementing a national vessel turn-in program.¹²⁸

Joshua Charleson advised the Committee that the Coastal Restoration Society was exploring the possibility of creating a derelict vessel depot:

We can make it economically viable by adding a shipyard that will subsidize our depot, and people can bring vessels in, bringing costs way down. Instead of dealing with a 45-foot fishing vessel that will cost us \$50,000 or \$60,000, we're hoping that having this infrastructure and building this depot will bring the cost down to \$10,000 or \$12,000.¹²⁹

Role of First Nations

A number of witnesses spoke about the importance of working with First Nations to address derelict vessels.¹³⁰ The Committee heard about a number of existing and potential partnerships and initiatives.

Paul Macedo, Communications Director for Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers (CANDO),¹³¹ explained that since 2020, CANDO has been supporting a pilot relating to derelict vessels through engagement with First Nations and relevant federal departments. He explained that:

The goal of the pilot is to increase opportunities for [I]ndigenous participation in the management of WAHV [wrecked, abandoned and hazardous vessels] along the coast by supporting community engagement and understanding capacity and by supporting communities to self-determine how to participate in the processes.

CANDO believes that it is essential to have communities involved as early as possible in the WAHV management process. This starts with ensuring that [I]ndigenous communities, administration and members have training, skills, tools and platforms to be active on the water. Also, by understanding the government decision-making processes and requirements, indigenous communities can start to co-manage the vessels in their territories.

[...]

128 Ladysmith Chamber of Commerce, [Brief](#).

129 Joshua Charleson, Executive Director, Coastal Restoration Society, [Evidence](#), 6 November 2024.

130 See for example Chloe Dubois, Executive Director, Ocean Legacy Foundation, [Evidence](#), 18 November 2024; and Marine Vision Consulting Ltd., [Brief](#).

131 “Cando (Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers) is a federally registered, non-profit society that is Indigenous controlled, community based, and membership driven.” Its mission is “[t]o build capacity for Economic Development Officers and communities by providing services, education, training and certification.” See [About Cando](#).



Establishing flexible monitoring and assessment contracts or programs for [F]irst [N]ations communities can enhance the effectiveness of local efforts while ensuring timely and accurate reporting of WAHV. It will reduce the cost of monitoring vessels and ultimately provide stronger partnerships and improve environmental stewardship. Communities can provide a layer of direct communication with vessel owners through notices placed on vessels that can have a dramatic effect on encouraging vessel owners to comply with the [WAHVA].¹³²

Robert Brooks from DFO also discussed the department's work with CANDO.¹³³

Reflecting that multiple jurisdictions can sometimes be involved, John White explained that "the nation works diligently with BC Parks, local ports, the Canadian Coast Guard, local residents and our Snuneymuxw community to observe and respond to the derelict vessel program."¹³⁴

Joshua Charleson told the Committee that while many First Nations have guardian programs, "they have no authority whatsoever to call [clearly abandoned vessels] vessels of concern and deem them ready to be removed." He continued:

That's where I think that, federally, we can do a better job of creating MOUs [memorandum of understanding] and an actual frame to give [F]irst [N]ations the green light to deem vessels in their own territories as abandoned or vessels of concern. It's obviously not going to be a blanket approach. You can't create just one framework. You have to do it with each individual nation.¹³⁵

Noting that not all First Nations have the capacity to deal with problem vessels, he explained that "First [N]ations are the best for coastal communities because of the connection to their lands and waters. We have a saying over in Nuu-chah-nulth, hishuk ish tsawalk, which means everything is one and everything is connected. First [N]ations people have values like that and a love for their home."¹³⁶

132 Paul Macedo, Communications Director, Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers, [Evidence](#), 30 October 2024.

133 Robert Brooks, Director, Marine Environmental and Hazards Response, DFO, [Evidence](#), 18 September 2024.

134 John White, Director, Marine Division, Snuneymuxw First Nation, [Evidence](#), 30 October 2024.

135 Joshua Charleson, Executive Director, Coastal Restoration Society, [Evidence](#), 6 November 2024.

136 Ibid.

Chief Lenora Joe explained that part of the solution lay with the Indigenous guardians¹³⁷: “the guardianship programs up in the north with Haida and other nations [are] very significant. I am so impressed with how they're working with DFO on their guardianship programs. We welcome the opportunity to be able to offer that same support.”¹³⁸ Ken Watts advocated for training for guardian programs relating to derelict vessels,¹³⁹ and Bob Peart emphasized that federal support must be provided for communities or guardian programs.¹⁴⁰

CONCLUSION

It is abundantly clear from witness testimony that derelict vessels in Canadian waters have far-reaching impacts, including that they are damaging the environment, compromising food security, and deeply affecting coastal First Nations communities' traditional ways of being. While the Committee recognizes the efforts being made by different levels of government, civil society organizations, and First Nations communities, the Committee urges the Government of Canada to prioritize acting on proposed initiatives and working collaboratively with those who have valuable and innovative ideas about how to address this issue.

The Committee heard repeatedly from First Nations individuals and groups as well as stakeholders that they hold many of the solutions to addressing derelict and abandoned

137 As explained in the *Evaluation of ECCC's Indigenous Guardians Initiative Final report*, August 2024:

“The Indigenous Guardians Initiative provides Indigenous Peoples, through grants & contributions (G&C), with more opportunities for stewardship of their traditional lands, waters, and ice. Funding is provided to support Indigenous rights and responsibilities in protecting and conserving ecosystems, developing, and maintaining sustainable economies, and continuing the profound connections between natural landscapes and Indigenous cultures.

Funding and decision-making are implemented jointly with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis using a distinctions-based approach that respects and recognizes the unique perspectives, rights, responsibilities, and needs of Indigenous Peoples. This takes the form of three different approaches and structures to support Indigenous Guardians.

Two other federal departments also administer Indigenous Guardians funding: Parks Canada (PC) and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO). These initiatives have different approaches and scopes. For example, Parks Canada works closely with Indigenous Guardians at PC-administered sites, while the DFO has linkages in its Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy.”

138 Chief Lenora Joe, shísháhl First Nation, *Evidence*, 30 October 2024.

139 Ken Watts, Elected Chief Councillor, Tseshaht First Nation, *Evidence*, 30 October 2024.

140 Bob Peart, Chair, Friends of Shoal Harbour Society, *Evidence*, 28 October 2024.



vessels, but that greater engagement with the Government of Canada is required to move forward. For that reason, the Committee recommends:

Recommendation 1

That, within 12 months of the tabling of this report, the Government of Canada convene a meeting with provinces and territories, municipalities, Indigenous Nations and organizations, and stakeholders to develop solutions to address derelict vessels. That meeting should include addressing the following issues:

- **the adequacy of federal funding to address derelict vessels;**
- **the adequacy of the proposed fees to support the proposed Vessel Remediation Fund;**
- **ways to increase cooperation and partnership with provincial, territorial, and municipal governments; and Indigenous governing bodies on the implementation of measures to address derelict and abandoned vessels;**
- **ways to improve prompt vessel ownership identification;**
- **the appropriate renewal period for vessel registration, including associated fees;**
- **developing mooring plans for vessels, including enforcement, in collaboration with other jurisdictions;**
- **developing programs or processes for vessel turn-in;**
- **ways to incentivize vessel disposal and recycling, and to develop recycling programs for end-of-life vessels; and**
- **removing barriers, including time delays, for individuals or organizations who wish to take ownership of a derelict or abandoned vessel to remove and dispose of it.**

Recommendation 2

That, within six months of convening the meeting with Indigenous Nations and organizations, provinces and territories, municipalities and stakeholders to develop solutions to address derelict vessels, the Government of Canada report its progress on

the outcomes of the meeting to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans.

Recommendation 3

That the Government of Canada:

- **commit to improving vessel ownership identification by promptly finalizing the draft regulations amending the *Small Vessel Regulations* originally published in May 2023;**
- **review the appropriate renewal period for vessel registration, including associated fees;**
- **evaluate the adequacy of federal funding to address abandoned and derelict vessels;**
- **evaluate whether the proposed \$10 fee to be paid every five years when licensing or registering a pleasure craft or renewing a pleasure craft licence, publicized in August 2021, is sufficient to finance the proposed Vessel Remediation Fund;**
- **finalize and launch the Vessel Remediation Fund before the end of 2026;**
- **commit to taking measures to prevent the transfer of pleasure craft vessels to unfit owners as a way of circumventing disposal obligations, and enforce such measures;**
- **commit to increasing cooperation and partnership with Indigenous governing bodies, and provincial and municipal governments on the implementation of measures to address derelict and abandoned vessels, including through long-term, sustainable, and predictable funding programs;**
- **commit to working with other jurisdictions to develop mooring plans, including enforcement;**
- **commit to removing barriers, including time delays, for individuals or organizations who wish to take ownership of a derelict or abandoned vessel to remove and dispose of it;**



- **commit to developing and funding programs and processes for vessel turn-in; and**
- **commit to incentivizing vessel disposal and recycling, and to develop recycling programs for end-of-life vessels.**

Recommendation 4

That the Government of Canada implement the full enforcement measures available to them, instead of the graduated approach to enforcement to deter the abandonment of vessels.

Recommendation 5

That the Government of Canada commit to long-term, sustainable funding for Indigenous Guardian programs and initiatives to ensure that sufficient funding is available to address derelict vessels.

Recommendation 6

That the Canadian Coast Guard and Transport Canada seek opportunities for closer collaboration with Indigenous Guardians to monitor, assess, and remove derelict and abandoned vessels.

Recommendation 7

That Fisheries and Oceans Canada immediately reinstate the Ghost Gear Fund.

It is in the interest of all Canadians to address derelict vessels. The Committee calls upon the Government of Canada to work collaboratively with Indigenous Nations and organizations, provinces and territories and stakeholders to prioritize this issue. Failing to do so will mean that the environmental, social and cultural impacts of derelict vessels will undoubtedly be felt by future generations.

APPENDIX A: LIST OF WITNESSES

The following table lists the witnesses who appeared before the committee at its meetings related to this report. Transcripts of all public meetings related to this report are available on the committee’s [webpage for this study](#).

44th Parliament—1st Session

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
Department of Fisheries and Oceans Robert Brooks, Director, Marine Environmental and Hazards Response Stephanie Hopper, Director General, Small Craft Harbours Program Kathy Nghiem, Director General, Response Annie Verville, Director, Compliance and Enforcement	2024/09/18	116
Department of Transport Colin Henein, Director, Marine Protection, Environmental Policy Sean Rogers, Executive Director, Legislative, Regulatory and International Affairs Joanne Weiss-Reid, Director, Operations and Regulatory Development	2024/09/18	116
Dead Boats Disposal Society John Roe, Founding Director	2024/10/02	119
Georgia Strait Alliance Jacob Banting, Program Coordinator, Clean Marine BC	2024/10/02	119
Rugged Coast Research Society Benjamin Boulton, Manager, Derelict Vessel Program	2024/10/02	119

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
Terra Services Inc. David Roberts, Manager	2024/10/02	119
As an individual Bonny Brokenshire, Environmental Professional	2024/10/28	124
Cadboro Bay Dead Boats Society Eric Dahli, Chair	2024/10/28	124
Friends of Shoal Harbour Society Bob Peart, Chair	2024/10/28	124
Town of Bridgewater David Mitchell, Mayor	2024/10/28	124
Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers Paul Macedo, Communications Director	2024/10/30	125
shíshálh First Nation Chief Lenora Joe	2024/10/30	125
Snaw-naw-as First Nation Gordon Edwards, Councillor	2024/10/30	125
Snuneymuxw First Nation John White, Director, Marine Division	2024/10/30	125
Tseshah First Nation Ken Watts, Elected Chief Councillor	2024/10/30	125
Atl'ka7tsem Howe Sound UNESCO Biosphere Region Ian Winn, Director	2024/11/06	127
Coastal Restoration Society Joshua Charleson, Executive Director	2024/11/06	127
Port of Bridgewater Incorporated Richard Welsford, President	2024/11/06	127
Québec Subaquatique Clément Drolet, Diving Instructor Marie-Christine Lessard, Executive Director	2024/11/06	127

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
Sunshine Coast Regional District Leonard Lee, Board Chair and Director, Area A - Egmont and Pender Harbour	2024/11/06	127
Ladysmith Chamber of Commerce Roberta Bowman, Executive Director	2024/11/18	128
Ocean Legacy Foundation Chloe Dubois, Executive Director	2024/11/18	128

APPENDIX B: LIST OF BRIEFS

The following is an alphabetical list of organizations and individuals who submitted briefs to the committee related to this report. For more information, please consult the committee's [webpage for this study](#).

44th Parliament—1st Session

Cadboro Bay Dead Boats Society

Ladysmith Chamber of Commerce

Nanaimo Port Authority

Québec Subaquatique

Vision Marine Consulting Ltd.

REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this Report.

A copy of the relevant *Minutes of Proceedings* ([Meetings Nos. 3 and 5](#)) from the 45th Parliament, 1st Session and ([Meetings Nos. 116, 119, 124, 125, 127 and 128](#)) from the 44th Parliament, 1st Session is tabled.

Respectfully submitted,

Patrick Weiler
Chair

Supplementary Report from Conservative Party of Canada- Derelict and Abandoned Vessels

Abandoned and derelict vessels (DAVs) pose acute threats to ecosystems, fisheries, aquatic habitats, waterways, and Canadians who depend on them, and Conservatives are very concerned that a decade of Liberal government policies have accomplished so little in dealing with these serious threats.

Since 2016, the Liberal government has spent over \$300 million through the Oceans Protection Plan (OPP), and yet only 791 vessels have been removed.¹ This average of \$379,266 per vessel removal does not represent value for public dollars, especially when an additional 1,355 DAVs remain on the Canadian Coast Guard's national inventory list of DAVs.² At this rate, Canadian taxpayers will be forced to payout another \$ 513,905,430 to clear the national inventory list.

Because Transport Canada's pleasure craft licensing data is dated, unverified and unreliable, it can not always be used to identify owners of DAVs and thus impedes the government's ability to hold vessels owners accountable. Conservatives believe that owners of DAVs, not taxpayers, are responsible for removal and disposal of their vessels, but the Liberal government has failed to establish systems required for holding vessels owners responsible because, as one witness testified, "you can't hold someone accountable if you don't know who they are."³ The inability of federal government entities to identify the owners of DAVs directly impedes vessel removals, and yet the Liberal government continues to fail to fix this system problem.

For instance, one proposed Liberal government regulatory amendment for the pleasure craft licensing database places the onus on the purchaser of a vessel to register the transfer of ownership. However, some purchasers avoid responsibilities of vessel ownership by not registering the transfer of ownership. Conservatives believe that the better approach is for the onus to register the sale and transfer of a vessel to be assigned to sellers as sellers have an

¹ Sean Rogers, Executive Director, Legislative, Regulatory and International Affairs, TC, [Evidence](#), 18 September 2024.

² CCG, [National inventory of wrecked, abandoned or hazardous vessels](#), viewed 17 October 2025.

³ John White, Director, Marine Division, Snuneymuxw First Nation, [Evidence](#), 30 October 2024.

inherent interest and natural motivation to sever themselves from future liabilities of the vessel they have sold.

Despite the introduction of federal legislation and regulations for preventing and removing DAVs, investigative and assessment processes that precede vessel removals continue to be slowed and burdened by red tape and dysfunctional systems within the federal departments.⁴ For instance, authorities for private buoy regulations were transferred to from the Canadian Coast Guard to Transport Canada who, according to testimony, have failed to fulfill their assigned mandate in this regard.⁵

Liberal government have also failed to establish coordination with provincial and local governments to establish clear roles, responsibilities, and cooperation.⁶ The result is that local governments are left feeling like their hands are tied as they have the motivation to act and remove DAVs but must defer to jurisdictions of federal and provincial governments.⁷

Conservatives are also very concerned about the growing trend of vessels, including DAVs, being used as dwellings because of the ongoing cost of living and housing crises. The Liberal government's failure to promote the construction of new homes for Canadians is resulting in Canadians desperately looking for anywhere to live, including on board DAVs and vessels that are not equipped to be used as dwellings. These scenarios raise additional concerns of whether garbage and sewage are being handled in legal and responsible ways. Chief Lenora Joe described how the ongoing illicit drug crisis spread to an old ferry in waters adjacent to her community and the ferry was used as a place for producing narcotics until it sank.

The persisting threats that DAVs pose to ecosystems, fisheries, aquatic habitats, waterways, and Canadians who depend on them must be mitigated and neutralized by a new approach by the federal government that:

⁴ Bob Peart, Chair, Friends of Shoal Harbour Society, [Evidence](#), 28 October 2024.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Roberta Bowman, Executive Director, Ladysmith Chamber of Commerce, [Evidence](#), 18 November 2024.

⁷ Ibid.

- clearly defines, coordinates, and streamlines federal government responsibilities, systems and process related to preventing and removing DAVs;
- prioritizes strengthening of the pleasure craft licensing system to assist all levels of government identify owners of vessels and hold them accountable; and
- identifies the most efficient and effective means for removing and disposing of DAVs and ensures federal resources are aligned accordingly for optimum returns for federal investments.

Recommendations

1. That the government of Canada amend federal pleasure craft licensing regulations to place the onus on the seller of a vessel to report a transfer of ownership to the Transport Canada database.
2. That the government of Canada immediately prioritize existing funding allocations for removal and disposal methods proven to be effective and efficient to reduce the average cost of removing and disposing of DAVs.

