

# If You Find a Shipwreck

The word “shipwreck” makes me think of swashbuckling sailors, adventure, and childhood games, but in reality a shipwreck is only bad news. Boats that sink or run aground bring many problems: environmental damage from leaking oil, escaped debris and habitat destruction; danger to other boats, people and marine life; concerns about liability; and all the work and expense involved in remedying the situation.

In November, two boats ran into trouble on Denman: one boat sank at the Denman public dock, another ran aground on the east side of the island.

The Islands Trust has no jurisdiction or formal role in responding to sunken, grounded or derelict vessels. However, as a federation of local governments, there are two things the Trust offers: we can provide information, and we can advocate to higher levels of government to provide better policies and support to prevent and respond to marine accidents.

## Information on Dealing with a Shipwreck

The go-to place to help you respond to an abandoned or wrecked boat is the Transport Canada website at [www.tc.gc.ca/eng/marinesafety/abandoned-boats-wrecks-4454.html](http://www.tc.gc.ca/eng/marinesafety/abandoned-boats-wrecks-4454.html). Scroll down and you’ll see a handy flow-chart titled “I Found an Abandoned Boat or Wreck.”

Here’s a summary:

- If the boat or wreck poses an immediate threat to public safety (because of fire, explosion or suspicious activity), call 911 or the local police.
- If there appears to be a potential or actual threat to the environment, call the BC Coast Guard at 1-800-889-8852.
- If there is a potential or actual threat to safe navigation, call Transport Canada’s Navigation Protection Program at 604-775-8867.

Also, try to locate and contact the owner. Owners are responsible for their property. The site above has a link to tips for locating owners.

**If the owner can't be located**, you should contact Transport Canada, which has the authority to act as “Receiver of Wreck.” Any person or group wanting to take on salvaging a wreck is legally obliged to report the wreck to Transport Canada, and the whole process is governed by complex regulations. More info here: [www.tc.gc.ca/eng/programs-629.html](http://www.tc.gc.ca/eng/programs-629.html)

Things can get complicated when the owner can’t be found or is unable to remedy the situation. **Dealing with problem vessels can be highly complex** due to the mix of provincial ownership of land, federal jurisdiction over navigation and shipping, and sometimes conflicting federal and provincial laws.

For years, coastal communities have been wrestling with how to respond to cases of derelict vessels, and have increasingly been putting pressure on government to take action. Who is allowed to do what? Who is required to do what? Who should take the lead? And who will pay?

## **Islands Trust Advocacy**

Since 2010, the Islands Trust Council has been a local government leader in advocating to the provincial and federal governments for lasting solutions to this problem and for funding for vessel removal.

This work is part of **the Trust's advocacy program**, which is directed by Trust Council (made up of 26 elected representatives from across the Islands Trust Area) and is carried out primarily by senior staff and the Trust Council Chair. The advocacy program is one way the Trust enables island communities in the Salish Sea to combine resources and speak with a united voice.

**Derelict vessel advocacy** has included letter writing; meetings with ministers and government staff; convening and sitting on working groups and round tables; finding allies and making resolutions at municipal government conferences such as the Union of BC Municipalities; and organizing workshops and presentations.

Although this kind of advocacy can feel like a thankless task, it does yield results. In October of this year, Parliament passed a private member's motion endorsing a comprehensive plan for prevention and removal of problem vessels. The Islands Trust was mentioned as one of the key agencies influencing progress on this topic. Following that motion, the federal government announced an Ocean Protection Plan that includes measures on derelict vessels. The Islands Trust is pleased to know we were part of the concerted and ongoing push to make this happen.

You can **find more details** of the Islands Trust's derelict vessels advocacy here: [www.islandstrust.bc.ca/trust-council/advocacy/marine-environment/abandoned-and-derelict-vessels-advocacy/](http://www.islandstrust.bc.ca/trust-council/advocacy/marine-environment/abandoned-and-derelict-vessels-advocacy/). While you're on the website, you might also want to look up "oil spill and shipping advocacy" and "anchorages" to learn more about other Islands Trust marine issues advocacy.

I'll end this by saying a big THANK YOU to everyone involved in responding to last month's incidents, and everyone who works to promote marine safety on Denman.