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Opposition to artificial reef —Patrick Brown

The Islands Trust has written to provincial Environment Minister Terry Lake objecting to the possible sinking of the decommissioned Canadian navy destroyer *Annapolis* in Gambier Island's Halkett Bay. The proposal was unexpectedly approved by provincial Environment Minister Murray Coell on March 8 this year. Less than a week later Coell was replaced by Lake.

Coell's letter accepted the donation of the wreck for sinking, provided that all other required government approvals 'under any applicable statute, bylaw, or other enactment' were obtained. This appears to pass on the responsibility for environmental review and assessing public input to other governments and departments.

Coell's decision came as a surprise, because a November 4, 2010 letter from the same provincial ministry had firmly rejected the proposal from the Artificial Reef Society of BC.

The letter noted that the proposed sinking would require significant revisions to the park master plan, with public consultation. The ministry suggested Saltery Bay Park, at the mouth of Jervis Inlet and about 100km from Vancouver, as an alternative site.

Islands Trust Issues

In a June 3 letter to Minister Lake, Islands Trust Chair Sheila Malcolmson stated the Trust's opposition to the sinking. The Islands Trust Policy Statement is clear: 'artificial reefs should not be developed in the Trust Area'.

Malcolmson's letter also noted objections by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) concerning fish habitat, expressed concern about the lack of public consultation, and questioned whether the ship could be sunk with sufficient precision to ensure it was within park boundaries and thus met zoning requirements.

Potentially, Closest 'Artificial Reef' To Vancouver

The proposed sinking, by the Artificial Reef Society of BC (ARSBC), would make the hulk available as a dive site in the bay. Halkett Bay is the most easterly of all the bays on Gambier Island in Howe Sound, immediately north of Vancouver.

Its marine park is a popular weekend anchorage and recreational destination for Vancouver boaters. If the wreck of the *Annapolis* were to be sunk in the bay, it would become the closest 'artificial reef' dive site to Vancouver.

All the proposed sites for the sinking are located at the mouth of the bay. The bay itself is the most sheltered anchorage on Gambier Island, and is only about 800 metres long and 500 metres wide.

The ship is 112 metres long and 13 metres wide. Concern has been expressed that a substantial 'exclusion zone' will be required to keep boaters away from the wreck.

The Bottom Of The Bay

ARSBC says that the bottom of Halkett Bay has 'suffered from years of log booming, and the resulting log detritus has severely impacted marine life on the sea floor'. But, according to the reef.org database, the nearby 'Halkett Wall' offers significant fish densities, more than some of BC's artificial reefs.

In a December 8, 2009 letter to ARSBC, DFO said that the wreck would disrupt fish habitat, noting that the sandy bottom on which the wreck would rest is 'relatively uncommon' in Howe Sound. It was planned that the ship would rest upright in about 30 metres of water, covering some 1470 square metres of seabed. Several alternative

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locations in the bay for the sunken wreck have been suggested; at least one of them lies on an estimated 32-degree slope.

DFO also suggested that the proposal would 'trigger' screening under the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act* before DFO could issue any authorization under the *Fisheries Act*.

Access From The Shore

Halkett Bay is also the site of Camp Fircom, operated since 1923 by the United Church of Canada as a summer camp for families and children. Since 2008, the Camp Fircom property has extended northwards up the west shore of the bay to a point opposite the proposed site of the sinking.

The United Church is now concerned about its potential liability should its waterfront and immediately adjacent portion of the bay be used for public access to the

wreck, and has requested that the water area be withdrawn from the park. (A clause in the 1987 purchase agreement under which the 'water park' was established provides for this eventuality.)

For & Against

From the start, the Save Halkett Bay group has fought the proposal, citing impact on fish and estuary habitat in the bay. A petition against the sinking has attracted 650 signatures. Many commented upon the proposal as a further example of the commercialization of BC's parks.

The ARSBC cites support from the dive industry, the Squamish First Nation (the site is in their claimed territory), and Captain Robert Peers, *HMCS Annapolis*' first Commanding Officer. ARSBC offers a wide variety of the ship's memorabilia for sale to finance its work. 