

## Japanese tsunami vessels arrive in B.C. waters

A bedraggled fleet &#8212; swamped, capsized, crawling with marine life and not a crewman in sight &#8212; continues to complete its journey across the North Pacific from the Japanese disaster

BY LARRY PYNN, VANCOUVER SUN JUNE 25, 2013



Denny Island resident Jean Marc Leguerrier stands next to a hard-rubber fender, used on ocean-going ships but found recently on the central coast and thought to have originated from the Japanese tsunami. Photo courtesy of Ian McAllister.

**Photograph by:** IAN McALLISTER, Ian McAllister

At least eight vessels suspected to be from the 2011 tsunami have now drifted into B.C. waters, everywhere from the northern tip of Haida Gwaii to Aristazabal Island and Klemtu, on the north and central coast, and to the west coast of Vancouver Island.

Large amounts of debris — not even officially being tracked by the province — are also making their way to the central coast to be converted into floats by local residents.

“We’re all competing because some of the stuff is really amazing,” Ian McAllister of the environmental group, Pacific Wild, said in an interview.

“Tons of super-heavy plastic floats that are completely sealed. I have more than 30 of them now.”

One of the eight vessels — mostly smaller fishing boats — wound up near Estevan Point, the same area where a Japanese submarine reportedly fired shells at the Estevan lighthouse during the Second World War in 1942 (although one conspiracy theory suspects that the Canadian government had the U.S. take action to speed passage of a conscription bill).

Although the deadly tsunami released countless tonnes of debris into the water, origins can be difficult to trace. Vessels, however, can have identifying markers.

Other objects are obvious because they have never been seen on the coast before.

McAllister said residents of Denny Island on the central coast are taking a practical approach to the large volumes of floats washing ashore that are thought to have Japanese origins.

“They’re salvaging debris and making docks out of it,” he said.

McAllister is aware of at least three huge hard-rubber fenders, thought to be from ocean-going ships, that are being converted into docks. “They’re huge, the size of a ski cabin, and probably worth a small fortune.”

The Ministry of Environment says it is aware of only two pieces of tsunami debris other than the vessels — a cement tank and a shipping container with a motorcycle inside — that are confirmed to be from the tsunami.

“I don’t know what the heck they’re talking about,” responded an incredulous McAllister, adding it can take local expertise to distinguish the tsunami debris.

“You need a discerning eye. But these floats have never been seen here before.”

The Vancouver Sun earlier reported that Jeanne and Richard Beaver of Aristazabal Island discovered the first tsunami boat — a 6.5-metre Panga-style craft — at nearby Thomson Island last June 26.

Since then, the Ministry of Environment has reported the following vessel discoveries: August 2012, Spring Island, near Kyuquot Sound, Vancouver Island; September 2012, Rose Spit, Haida Gwaii; January 2013, the Cape Scott area, off Vancouver Island; March 2013, Masset, Haida Gwaii; March 2013, near Estevan Point, Vancouver Island; March 2013, Hecate Strait; April 2013 near Swindle Island, central coast.

The Canadian Coast Guard ship J.P. Tully was involved in the Hecate Strait case, recovering an overturned skiff, with identifying marks, floating one foot above the water, said spokesman Dan Bate. “There was a significant amount of growth inside the vessel and on the submerged sides, indicating it had been overturned and floating for a long time,” he said.

The skiff was transported back to Sidney for storage. In addition to carrying native goose barnacles, the skiff is thought to have supported another barnacle, *Semibalanus cariosus*, a common intertidal species on the B.C. coast with a reported range that includes Japan.

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### **The tsunami**

The World Bank says the earthquake and tsunami that hit Japan in 2011 is the most expensive natural disaster in history. Here’s what happened:

When: March 11, 2011

What: A 9.0-magnitude underwater quake 72 kilometres off the eastern coast of Japan. The closest major city to the epicentre was Sendai, about 130 kilometres away. The quake triggered a tsunami, with waves of up to 40 metres, travelling as many as 10 kilometres inland.

**Deaths:** According to the Japanese National Police Agency, 15,883 people died in the earthquake and tsunami. More than 6,100 were injured and close to 2,700 are missing.

**Damage:** More than one million buildings were at least partly damaged, with close to 130,000 totalled.

**Cost:** Estimates are as high as \$280 billion.

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