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Canadian government funds removal of abandoned boats

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C\$1.3m in funding announced for derelict boat recovery welcomed by recreational boating industry

The Canadian government has announced the first round of funding recipients under a new C\$1.3m program to recover and dispose of abandoned boats.

The Honourable Marc Garneau, Minister of Transport, made the announcement this week as part of Canada's C\$1.5b Oceans Protection Plan, itself the largest investment ever made to protect Canada's coasts and waterways. "Abandoned boats are not just an eyesore, they are a safety concern and a financial burden to communities," said Garneau. "The Oceans Protection Plan's Abandoned Boats Program – one of many initiatives launched to improve the issue of abandoned boats in Canada – is providing crucial financial support to communities. Our government is also pursuing other measures to reduce the number of problem vessels that pose hazards in Canadian waters, and support the preservation and restoration of marine ecosystems."

The funding comes as welcome news for the Canadian recreational boating industry, which has been working closely with government to tackle what has become a growing problem. NMMA Canada president Sara Anghel addressed the House of Commons Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities last month offering support for the Oceans Protection Plan. "Our goal is to reach across the nation to identify the size of the problem and then consider recycling options," said Anghel. "We place great importance on ensuring marine safety, preserving marine ecosystems, and promoting improvements to environmental stewardship."

Abandoned boats are a particularly significant problem along Canada's Pacific coast, where salvage costs in remote locations can prove prohibitive and a comparatively mild climate allows a year-round boating season. "The issue of derelict and abandoned vessels is a serious one, and most prevalent along the British Columbia coast," said Don Prittie, president of the Boating BC marine trade association. "Abandoned or derelict boats may wash ashore or sink, releasing fuel or toxins which put marine life and habitat at risk. Likewise, these vessels pose a danger to the boating public and beachgoers and are a hindrance to waterfront businesses and local economies."

Although minister Garneau made the funding announcement in British Columbia, he emphasised the national scope of the program, with removal, assessment and awareness initiatives in Quebec, Ontario, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland among those funded under the first phase of the program. Public education ventures received particular attention. "While most boaters are responsible some people may not recognise the dangers that are posed by not properly disposing of boats when they reach the end of their life," said Boating Ontario CEO, Rick Layzell.

"Abandoned boats can become navigational hazards or impact local environments. Public education is the first step in reducing the incidence of abandoned boats and addressing this important issue."

For Anghel, the new federal initiative represents an opportunity to reduce the incidence of boat abandonment in the future through education and improved licensing measures. "NMMA is committed to a strong and enforceable licensing program, and welcomes the opportunity to see an expanded and enhanced registration process," said Anghel. "Having accurate data will help address the abandoned vessels issue and safety, while also provide valuable data for the boating industry."

Applications for the next round of funding are being accepted until March 31, 2019.

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