



PROJECT A.B.I.S.

ANNAPOLIS BIODIVERSITY INDEX STUDY

By Doug Pemberton

Photo: Chris Straub

Over the past 27 years the Artificial Reef Society of British Columbia (ARSBC) has been very busy. We have sunk one coastal freighter, five Canadian destroyer escorts, one WWII Victory ship and a Boeing 737. In the beginning our motivation for sinking ships was to increase diver tourism to British Columbia. The lure of diving and exploring basically intact sunken ships has always been a popular draw for divers and most of the historical wrecks along the BC coast are seriously degraded and fragile to the point of being of little interest to many divers.

Divers flocked to the early projects, but within a few years, it became obvious that divers were drawn to these ships not only for the opportunity for adventure and exploration but also attracted by the rich accumulation and diversity of marine life that the ships attract. It soon became obvious that these projects could provide an important part of the marine ecosystem.

Now, with the recent sinking of the HMCS Annapolis, a helicopter carrying destroyer escort, in Halkett Bay, Gambier Island we have a living laboratory a stone's throw away from Vancouver and we are pleased to announce Project ABIS, the Annapolis Biodiversity Index Study, an academic science study that will observe and report marine

species recruitment on the artificial reef Annapolis. The ARSBC has consulted with marine academics and advisors over the past few years on a plan to collect data on the biological changes that will take place on the Annapolis over time, and have now come up with a dedicated team of academics and citizen scientists in order to bring this about. Participants in the study include the Vancouver Aquarium,

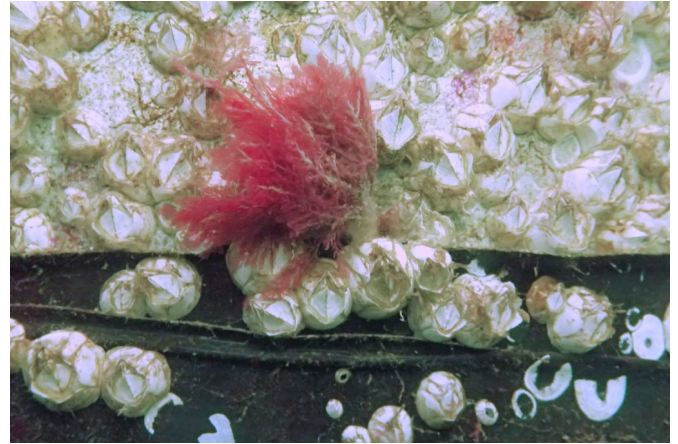
Squamish Nations, the Marine Life Sanctuaries Society and BC Parks. DFO has also expressed interest in the project.

Creation of the Annapolis artificial reef was implemented with several goals in mind, including increased recreational

diving opportunities, resulting in economic benefits for local businesses. More importantly, by providing

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additional habitat structure for fish and invertebrate species, the Annapolis will make possible an increase in population of these animals. The Annapolis enhances the diversity and health of the marine environment that we all share, replacing habitat that has been degraded by human impact and potentially providing improved fish stocks area wide.

We have been very surprised and encouraged by the amount and diversity of marine life we have already seen on the Annapolis to date, including plants, invertebrate and fish species. A marine life taxon (catalogue of organisms) has already been set up at the Vancouver Aquarium and

we are asking the diving community at large, including photographers and videographers to help us expand this growing list. The study is expected to run for five years, allowing for a fantastic and continuing opportunity for diver involvement.

**For more information please visit
the ARSBC website**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Doug Pemberton is presently the Vice-President of the ARSBC and has been since 2006. He has been with the society since 1990, and was also a diver for 36 years.