



WWW.SEAPORTNEWS.COM

Search:

- ▣ [Welcome](#)
- ▣ [Captain's Table](#)
7/07/06
- ▣ [London Quay](#)
Redevelopment NEW
7/07/06
- ▣ [Kaipupu Point](#)
Underway NEW 7/07/06
- ▣ [Runaway Barges &](#)
[Sea Squirt](#) 23/06/06
- ▣ [Mid Winter Dip](#)
7/07/06
- ▣ [From The Crow's](#)
Nest 7/07/06
- ▣ [ONGOING PICTON](#)
ISSUES Updated
7/07/06
- ▣ [Picton Community](#)
Board
- ▣ [Picton Memories - 2](#)
- ▣ [Picton 25 Years Ago](#)
-- July 16 - 31, 1981
- ▣ [Local Events &](#)
[Happenings Updated](#)
7/07/06
- ▣ [Photo Gallery](#)
15/07/05
- ▣ [SEAPORT LOG](#)
Accommodation,
Business & Activity Guide
- ▣ [Contact Us](#)

Runaway Barges & Sea Squirt

There has been an unexpected casualty from the bad weather that swept the area on June 11 and 12.

When Dr John Whitehead, Head of Department of Science at Queen Charlotte College, and students from the Aquaculture College went out on the 'Spirit of Queen Charlotte College' on Wednesday, June 14, to inspect their experimental mussel line in Shakespeare Bay, it was in the expectation of seeing a certain degree of damage, but they were taken aback by what they did find.

During the Sunday night, the massive barge, 'Seatow 60', had been caught by the gale force winds and had dragged its anchors right down into Shakespeare Bay, fouling QCC's mussel line in the process.

Marlborough harbourmaster, Alex van Wijngaarten says that the harbourmaster's office was aware of the incident at the time. He said that, given the severity of the conditions and the quickness with which it blew up, this sort of thing can happen from time to time and the barge had been brought under control before any major incident occurred. He said any question of compensation was nothing to do with the harbourmaster's office and would be a matter between the College and the owners of the barge.

The college had been informed that some damage had been caused, but they were shocked and dismayed when they saw the actual extent of the destruction. The structure had been swapped end-for-end and what had been the northernmost float was now south of the rest, the lines that weren't snapped were irretrievably tangled, the students' experiments attached to the structure were broken and ruined, and both the mussel line's lights - at \$40 each - were lost somewhere 14 metres down.

All that could be done was to make the area as safe as

possible by grappling what lines and wreckage could be removed and arrange for the rest of the floats and their moorings to be picked up by a suitably-equipped vessel as soon as possible. The mussel lines will have to be rebuilt and relaid and the student's experiments begun anew.



Above: this lonely little huddle of buoys is practically all that remains of Queen Charlotte College's experimental mussel lines.

Below: a typical clump of *Didemnum vexillum* clinging to a rope and (bottom) the light-coloured masses of sea squirt smothering the mussels on two lines being raised.

Photo courtesy of Queen Charlotte College.





It was very noticeable just how much the mussel lines and other tackle had been infested with the sea squirt, *Didemnum vexillum*, and how it had almost completely smothered the mussels in some parts of the line, despite it being in a relatively dormant state over the colder months.

Didemnum vexillum is now multiplying in many parts of the Sounds as well as Tasman and Golden Bays, apparently transported on artificial structures such as boat hulls. The mussel industry is getting very worried, while Biosecurity New Zealand still cannot decide whether it is an indigenous species or an imported pest.

Government sources have likened the threat to that of the varroa mite on land that affects honey bees and for which the bee-keepers themselves have been left responsible for control and containment.

However, the Seaport News has heard comment from mussel industry sources likening the sea squirt infestation more to an outbreak of foot and mouth, due to its ability to spread rapidly and potential to cause incalculable harm to the whole of the aquaculture industry.

-- Gordon Fortune

 [To Top](#)

