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## Retired navy ship Cormorant up for auction

By BEVERLEY WARE South Shore Bureau

BRIDGEWATER — For sale: one pre-owned, 2,131-tonne former navy diving support ship. In need of a little TLC.

Rick Welsford said the Cormorant is a really good buy for someone.

He's the chairman of the Artificial Reef Society of Nova Scotia, which has just received permission from the Federal Court to sell the ship, which has been under arrest at the Port of Bridgewater for several years.

There are a number of claims against the ship, including one filed by the society for \$175,000 in unpaid wharfage fees, a figure Mr. Welsford said escalates every day that the ship remains tied up there.

The retired navy ship used to be a trawler. She was built in Italy in 1965 and then sold to the Canadian navy in 1975 and converted to a diving support vessel. Anyone bidding on her would get the submersible mini-submarine that's still on board, along with all the other equipment.

The Cormorant was the first Canadian navy ship to have female personnel. One of her last great missions was to retrieve the bell of the Edmund Fitzgerald from the Great Lakes in 1995. She was put out of service in 1997 and first got into legal troubles for unpaid bills while tied up in Shelburne.

Those bills were eventually paid and the ship was towed up the LaHave River in 2002 to the Port of Bridgewater, where she has been ever since and has become the focus of several lawsuits. A number of court papers outlining claims against the Texas-based owner, Dominion Shipping, are taped to an inside window of the ship.

In a July 27 decision released by the Federal Court, the society is given permission to sell the Cormorant through a sheriff's sale.

The ship will be sold by sealed envelope auction "as is, where is," including all the equipment that's on board — even the keys and the logs.

Halifax lawyer William MacInnes has been appointed sheriff and is ordered to sell the ship to "the highest and best bidder."

The auction closes at 4 p.m. on Sept. 2.

The buyer must pay by cash or certified cheque and deliver 25 per cent of the bid price within 24 hours of the closing of bids. The balance is to go into a trust account within 72 hours of the closing date.

Potential bidders are allowed to go aboard and inspect the ship, but Mr. Welsford said anybody in the industry already knows the ship and its story.

"It's time to put up or shut up," and that is reflected in the tight closing schedule, he said.

The society is allowed to make a bid, although Mr. Welsford said "that's the least attractive of the alternatives."

"But if no one else places a legitimate bid, we don't want it sitting there and still presenting a problem and not having it under our control."

Mr. Welsford applied for permission to sell the vessel well over a year ago.

"It's a very expensive process."

He sees several potential uses for the ship, including the offshore oil and gas industry.

"Somebody with a little bit of imagination could take advantage of that."

Other options including stripping off everything of value and sinking the vessel as an artificial reef.

An appraisal has pegged the scrap value of the ship at just over \$100,000.

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CLOSE WINDOW

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