

Tsunami mystery: Fish on boat were from different part of Japan



Allen Pleus

A striped beakfish swims March 22 in a water-filled compartment aboard a 20-foot-long Japanese boat that had washed ashore recently at Long Beach.

By Hal Bernton, The Seattle Times

As of Thursday, April 11, 2013

SEATTLE -- The 20-foot boat that drifted ashore near Long Beach on March 22 has been identified as debris from the 2011 Japanese tsunami, but plenty of questions remain about the five striped beakfish found swimming in its open well.

The fish are native to the coastal oceans of southern Japan, not the cooler coastal areas

farther north, where the tsunami struck, according to Curt Hart, a spokesman for the state Department of Ecology.

So how did these fish end up in the boat?

Hart says one likely scenario is that the boat drifted south in the ocean currents upside-down, and became an attractive hiding place for the striped beakfish. Then the boat at some point flipped upright, cupping the fish in its interior.

"It will probably always be a mystery as to exactly how it happened," Hart said.

Four of the beakfish died after the boat came ashore, and the fifth is being held at the Seaside Aquarium in Seaside, Ore.

As for the boat, the Sai-shou-maru, the consulate-general of Japan in Seattle said Wednesday that its owner does not want it back. Washington State Parks is working with the Columbia River Maritime Museum in Astoria, Ore., to place it on permanent loan.

State officials say the boat contained 30 to 50 species of plants and animals.

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