



**UWA PhD student Tiffany Simpson deploys a device at berth six on Tuesday that will reveal if King George Sound is a breeding ground for invasive marine pests.** Picture: Laurie Benson

# Pests under scrutiny

■ **Lisa Morrison**

The presence of marine pests in King George Sound will be investigated for the first time this summer.

More than 250 plant and animal species with the potential to displace native varieties have hitchhiked into Australian waters on vessels, according to a Federal Government research program which aims to limit their impact on fishing, aquaculture and tourism industries.

UWA plant biology and oceans institute PhD student Tiffany Simpson launched two settlement arrays from Albany Port on Tuesday, which will be removed and analysed in February.

“They will act as a habitat so anything larval in the water can settle and grow,” she said.

“A whole community will form within the three months ... I am looking in particular for *didemnum perlucidum*.”

The invasive plant, which originates from the Gulf of Mexico, can

overgrow a wide range of organisms. “It is officially a tropical species but they found it in Perth boat harbours and the Swan River,” Ms Simpson said.

“It might have been triggered during a heat wave a few years ago when there were very high ocean temperatures ... once colonies have been established they are able to survive in cooler waters.”

Ms Simpson said it was the first time the plant has been found growing in sea grass instead of on boat hulls or harbours.