

INTRODUCING “WRECK SPOTTERS”

The New South Wales
Shipwreck Spotters Program



An Initiative of the
Heritage Branch
NSW Department of Planning



Planning



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Cover: Remains of an unidentified timber exposed by heavy storms at North Palm Beach in April 2009. Thought to be the remains of a wharf, the item is protected by the NSW Heritage Act 1977. A member of the local community is shown undertaking an inspection of the timber. Photograph: Tim Smith.

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Community members can play an important part in the documentation and preservation of our fragile historic shipwreck sites. Here Paul Wright locates a new shipwreck off the Barrenjoey Headland, the *Tuncurry* (1916), following reports of fisherman snagging nets in the area. The find was reported by dive buddy, John Riley. The site is a protected wreck under the Commonwealth's *Historic Shipwrecks Act*, 1976. Photograph by John Riley.

THE NSW WRECK SPOTTERS PROGRAM

Introduction

New South Wales has an estimated 1800 historic shipwreck sites and an active *Historic Shipwrecks Program*, administered by the Heritage Branch, NSW Department of Planning. Started in 1988, the program was established to help the community manage fragile maritime archaeological sites, both underwater and on land. Today the re-launched Program continues to grow with the support of community members who share a desire to document, protect, preserve and learn about these rare sites.

The Heritage Branch is inviting people with a recognised interest in the preservation of historic shipwrecks to join its *Wreck Spotters Program*. The program aims to establish a body of local shipwreck specialists to provide first-hand advice on local discoveries and the condition of visited sites. *Wreck Spotters* will be chosen because of their local knowledge and geographical spread.

Who Manages our Historic Shipwrecks?

The Heritage Branch¹ is the sole agency responsible for the direct management of maritime archaeology and underwater cultural heritage sites, including historic shipwrecks, in New South Wales. The Director of the Branch is the State delegate responsible for the implementation of the Commonwealth's *Historic Shipwrecks Act 1976* and relevant provisions of the State *Heritage Act 1977*. These two Acts provide protection to maritime and underwater archaeological sites in New South Wales and adjacent waters.

The Heritage Branch assumed this responsibility with the inception of its Maritime Archaeology Program in mid-1988. The program forms an important part of the federally directed *National Historic Shipwrecks Program* (NHSP). Employing two maritime archaeologists, the Heritage Branch leads by example in the research, documentation, management, protection and interpretation of maritime archaeological sites in the State. The work is undertaken with the close support of the community.

The Heritage Branch's Shipwreck Program

Prior to the implementation of the *Historic Shipwrecks Act* in 1976 and the *National Historic Shipwrecks Program* (NHSP), a handful of Australian recreational divers led the charge for national protection of Australia's intriguing shipwreck sites. Concern by local divers over damage to many of the sites in NSW was a primary motivation for the establishment of the NSW component of the *National Historic Shipwrecks Program*.

It is therefore appropriate that the Heritage Branch Maritime Archaeologists continue to draw upon community support for the preservation of underwater cultural heritage in New South Wales. The increasing awareness of the importance of Historic Shipwrecks and underwater cultural heritage has been achieved by fostering a shared approach to site protection and visitation. Key initiatives such as the development of the New South Wales *Maritime Heritage Online* website, the *Shipwreck Atlas of New South Wales*, and

¹ Previously the NSW Heritage Office.

various community wreck survey projects have been vital to developing a sense of shared responsibility for the management of this fragile, non-renewable resource.

For over twenty years the Heritage Branch has sought the close involvement of both divers and shore-based researchers who have shown a continued interest in the *NSW Maritime Archaeology Program*. These individuals often have a wide range of skillsets, and have generally made lasting contributions to the protection and management of underwater and maritime archeological sites. Some are noted specialists in their area of interest; others are simply interested individuals who have published their work in local maritime history journals or through other forms of digital or print media.

Need for *Wreck Spotters*

The *Wreck Spotters* initiative formalises these key contacts and is based on the regional spread of individuals. In most cases *Wreck Spotters* are located at major centres which in themselves have an established concentration of known or suspected shipwreck sites. The program aims at expanding a local network of contacts and activities.

By joining *Wreck Spotters*, you will assist the Heritage Branch in quickly responding to newly reported shipwreck sites, occasional appearances caused by storms and beach scouring, and in monitoring known sites.

The program's main area of focus is the New South Wales coastal zone, i.e. the area one kilometre landward, and three nautical miles seaward, of the mean high water mark (for information on how the state is managing this zone, refer to the NSW Coastal Policy 1997). Approximately half of our known wrecking events have occurred within this coastal region. In many cases the shipwrecks or remains associated with them become visible on a random basis, after sometimes remaining buried by sand for periods exceeding 10-20 years.

NSW has the largest accumulation of shipwreck sites of any other State or Territory in Australia, and approximately 27% of the national total. Almost 270 of the estimated 1800 Historic Shipwreck sites have now been located. The extent of this resource reflects the 'first state's' strategic importance, historic settlement patterns, the volume and frequency of maritime activity along its shores, and importantly, the increasing popularity of recreational SCUBA diving. New South Wales also has one of the largest coastlines in Australia. At over one thousand seven hundred kilometres in extent, this equates to one Historic Shipwreck for every kilometre of coast!

How Can You Help?

The large geographical area and the wide spread of potential heritage sites makes the role of local *Wreck Spotters* crucial to the management of maritime and underwater cultural heritage in NSW. *Wreck Spotters* can offer a rapid response to newly observed sites and provide a quick assessment. By forwarding this information to the Heritage Branch's maritime team, the need for further assessment can be then be considered, together with appropriate protective measures.

In many cases local *Wreck Spotters* may be able to complete the required documentation, and make a rapid site assessment without direct Heritage Branch participation, on the condition that the data is sent to the Heritage Branch for inclusion in the public record.

Wreck Spotters Framework

While as a *Wreck Spotter* you can act in a roving capacity, the coastal zone has been divided into individual geographic and administrative areas. This breakdown matches the areas already used by NSW Tourism, Local Government Authorities, and for describing shipwreck locations in the NSW component of the *National Historic Shipwrecks Database* (NHSD).

These divisions are as follows:

Northern Rivers	Northern end of Tweed Heads LGA* [Tweed Heads] to southern end of the Ulmarra LGA [Corindi Beach]
Holiday Coast	Northern end of Coffs Harbour LGA [Corindi Beach] to southern end of the Nambucca LGA [Scotts Head]
Mid North Coast	Northern end of the Kempsey LGA [Scotts Head] to the southern end of the Great Lakes LGA [Yacaaba Head]
Hunter	Northern end of the Port Stephens LGA [Yacaaba Head] to the southern end of the Lake Macquarie LGA [Catherine Hill Bay]
Central Coast	Northern end of the Wyong LGA [Deep Cave Bay] to the Pittwater LGA [to southern side of Broken Bay]
Sydney	Southern side of the Pittwater LGA [Broken Bay] to the southern end of the Sutherland LGA [Garrie Beach]
Illawarra	Northern end of the Wollongong LGA [Garrie Beach] to the southern end of the Kiama LGA [Black Head]
Shoalhaven	Northern end of the Shoalhaven LGA [Black Head]) to the southern end of the Shoalhaven LGA [Durras Lake]
Eurobodalla/ Nature Coast	Northern end of the Eurobodalla LGA [Durras Lake] to the southern end of the Eurobodalla LGA [Wallaga Lake, northern shore]
Sapphire Coast	Northern end of the Bega Valley LGA [Wallaga Lake] to the southern end of the Bega Valley LGA [Cape Howe]

(* *local government area*)

Some of these areas are by necessity large and include a number of established regional centres. An example is the Mid-North Coast zone which encompasses the centres of Nambucca Heads, South West Rocks, Port Macquarie, Camden Haven, Taree and Forster. Each of these areas has its own established collection of shipwreck sites, many of which are clustered around the major towns, bays, headlands and river bar areas.

Although the Heritage Branch is seeking a minimum of two (2) Wreck Spotters per regional division, it may be useful to have an increased number e.g. three (3) to five (5) in areas containing regional centres. In more isolated stretches of coastline, the Holiday Coast for example, fewer *Wreck Spotters* can cover the range of expected sites.

Nomination of *Wreck Spotters*

Wreck Spotters will be selected on the basis of a proven interest in reporting, recording and preserving historic shipwreck sites. *Wreck Spotters* are also chosen because of their geographical location and potential to undertake limited site inspection tasks (see above).

To be accepted into the *Wreck Spotters* program, individuals must have an accepted understanding of legislation developed to protect items of the State's maritime heritage. These include the provisions of the NSW *Heritage Act 1977* and the Commonwealth *Historic Shipwrecks Act 1976*.

Wreck Spotters should ideally have also completed Part 1 of the *Australasian Institute for Maritime Archaeology (AIMA) Nautical Archaeology Society (NAS) Maritime Archaeology Training Course*. This two-day course is considered essential minimal training appropriate to their role. The Heritage Branch will be happy to arrange this training for you.

The Role of *Wreck Spotters*

Participation in the NSW *Wreck Spotters Program* is totally voluntary. There is no provision for payment or reimbursement, either for time spent with field inspections, or travel, photography, research, correspondence, etc. The aim of establishing the *Wreck Spotters* program is to pool our collective interest and participation in the documentation, preservation and interpretation of our maritime heritage.

As *Wreck Spotters* has been successfully running for 10 years, the Program has already developed a body of local contacts who share an interest in investigating maritime heritage in their area. Existing *Wreck Spotters* have usually also formed a close working relationship with the Heritage Branch Maritime Archaeologists regarding wreck sightings and their own local or regional research projects. Those new to the Program will be provided with a list of relevant contacts in their area, including Marine Park staff, Water Police, Fisheries Officers, Dive Club coordinators and the like. As the expanded *Wreck Spotters* Program seeks to draw upon this resource and to formalise it into a more structured network of "on-the-spot" advisers, these contacts will be crucial.

This first hand reporting of local events and sites will significantly increase Heritage Branch response times to individual discoveries, and greatly assist speedy and considered management decisions.

Local Networks

One of the crucial benefits of the program will be the utilisation of local contact networks. Experience has shown that because individual *Wreck Spotters* are often local residents, they have a special ability to foster local and regional interest in their reporting and recording of shipwrecks and underwater cultural heritage.

Established *Wreck Spotters* have a close working relationship with individuals who have a detailed knowledge of local shipwreck sites. *Wreck Spotters* also have direct contact with other local researchers, historical societies, local studies libraries, regional museums, and are likely to have a personal knowledge of private collections of shipwreck memorabilia (including photographs and oral recollections). One of the *NSW Maritime Archaeology Program* priorities is to record these for future generations.

Established *Wreck Spotters* also have access to people who can provide information on sea and coastal conditions, local fishermen who often know about sites, and with regional media outlets. These people will be invaluable to you, in your 'spotting' activity.

Individual *Wreck Spotters* may also have a well-developed network of business contacts, including contact with officers employed by key Government agencies in their local areas. These can include: local council heritage staff, and personnel at agencies like: the NSW Maritime Authority, National Parks & Wildlife Service (DECC), Department of Commerce, NSW Department of Primary Industries (Fisheries), and NSW Marine Parks Authority etc. This broad local cross-section of the community is available for support and comprises a wealth of local information to draw upon. Those new to the program will be encouraged to get in touch with all those on their contact list provided. This will be the first step in developing a successful local 'spotting' network.

Appointment of *Wreck Spotters*

There are two ways to become a *Wreck Spotter*. An individual may approach the Heritage Branch and lodge an expression of interest, or known individuals who are already researching and reporting wrecks may be formally approached to join this exciting program. Pending agreement, a potential *Wreck Spotter* will be issued with appropriate educational materials developed by the Heritage Branch. This package includes the following:

1. *NSW Heritage Act 1977*;
2. *Commonwealth Historic Shipwrecks Act 1976*;
3. *Review of the Historic Shipwrecks Act 1976 Discussion Paper*;
4. *UNESCO Convention on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage*;
5. *Historic Shipwreck Poster: Managing the 'missing' Midget Sub*;
6. *Relevant Historic Shipwreck (forthcoming), AIMA & NAS Leaflets*;
7. *Relevant State and Commonwealth Wreck Reporting Form and Permit Applications*;
8. *Wrecks Alive: Community Wreck Survey Project Kit (forthcoming)*;
9. *Back issues of Heritage NSW* and inclusion on the newsletter mailing list; and
10. A list of known shipwreck losses in a *Wreck Spotters* region, to serve as a reference guide.

Each individual *Wreck Spotter* will also be presented with a Certificate acknowledging their participation in the project.

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