

The approximately 800 shipwrecks in South Australian waters are a testimony to our maritime past when settlement, transport, trade and communication relied on shipping and the sea.

Dating from the earliest recorded loss in 1837 (the *South Australian* at Encounter Bay) to the present day, these wrecks include wooden and iron sailing ships, steamships, coastal traders, tugs, barges and fishing boats.

Each shipwreck has a unique and often powerful story associated with tragedy, death and loss of cargoes and personal possessions. They lie in varying conditions from rugged coastlines to calm bays, from shallow shores to great depths and from entirely covered to exposed. Some wrecks have been heavily salvaged over the years while others are still unlocated and remain relatively intact.

Shipwreck material, preserved to a greater or lesser degree on the seabed, forms an invaluable archaeological resource. It contributes to a wider appreciation of the history and culture of South Australia and of the maritime industry during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.



▲ *Loch Vennachar*, wrecked Kangaroo Island

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Snagged Objects

from the marine environment



Shipwrecks – finders are not keepers!



Heritage South Australia



Government
of South Australia



▲ *Hougomont*, Stenhouse Bay

Life on the bottom

During their time underwater, shipwreck objects become water-logged and impregnated with salts so that their structure and composition alter drastically. If brought to the surface, decay begins immediately because of the chemical shock of moving the objects from water into air.

Although corrosion and decomposition of iron, wood and other materials is rapid following the wrecking event, over time these destructive processes are stabilised by protective concretions, mud and silt. Any activity that exposes wreck material destroys this stability, accelerates decomposition and causes objects to disintegrate rapidly.

Finders are not keepers!

Shipwrecks and associated relics do not belong to the individuals who find them. They are part of Australia's cultural heritage and are protected by law.

The Commonwealth *Historic Shipwrecks Act 1976* and South Australia's *Historic Shipwrecks Act 1981* prohibit interference with Historic Shipwrecks. Wreck material must not be damaged, moved on site or taken from a wreck.

Heritage SA is the South Australian Government agency responsible for administering the Historic Shipwrecks Acts. It is a requirement of the legislation that Heritage SA be notified of any newly discovered wrecks and that all relics recovered from wrecks, irrespective of how long ago, be registered with Heritage SA.



▲ *Margaret Brock* anchor, near Kingston, South East

On site first aid

Ideally shipwreck artefacts should be carefully returned to the sea, as close as possible to their original location. Unfortunately this is not always practical, so immediate precautions are necessary to protect the object from further damage.

Remember, the two main threats to the object are drying out and the expansion of salt crystals that form within the structure. Immediate treatment involves keeping the object wet, preferably in salt water.

Do not remove any concretions or cause further damage. Record the position of the 'find' and if possible photograph the object. Notify Heritage SA at the first opportunity.

Artefacts from a shipwreck site can be made from a wide range of materials. Wood and iron are common, though other metals, ceramic, glass, textiles, stone, leather and bone can also be found. Each of these materials will require different long-term conservation techniques to ensure that they survive.

Snagged objects

Anchors, fishing tackle, nets and other equipment occasionally become fouled with shipwreck remains. The most appropriate action in this situation is:

Note the location and depth of the wreck site.

This will assist with a detailed archaeological survey to record the extent and nature of the remains. This is sometimes the way that new wreck sites are discovered. The information will also help to avoid subsequent damage to fishing equipment and the wreck site.

Return anchors as close as possible to the remainder of the wreck.

Anchors should be left at the site as they are key markers to the location of the wreck and can assist in determining the size of a ship. The concretion on an anchor should not be removed as it provides a protective coating that reduces corrosion. If possible, photograph the anchor. Anchors that cannot be returned to the seabed require specialised and costly conservation. If an anchor is brought ashore, it should be kept wet, preferably with salt water.

Keep ships' timbers moist. Out of the water, ships' timbers will dry out, shrink and warp. Preventing this requires extensive, specialised and costly conservation treatment. In the short term, keep timbers wet, preferably with salt water.

Notify Heritage SA of any snagged shipwreck artefacts and the location of the 'find'. Steps will then be taken to identify the vessel and its history. If the site is considered potentially hazardous it may be buoyed or marked on navigation charts.