

Statement

Florence D Wreck

The Department of Natural Resources, Environment, The Arts and Sport (NRETAS) advises that two members of the public have reported the possible discovery of an historic WWII shipwreck.

Local fisherman Wayne Keeping and local diver Jim Miles believe they have located the wreck of the WWII ship *Florence D* in the waters off Bathurst Island.

NRETAS heritage officers and maritime archaeologists had planned to visit the site last weekend to confirm whether their discovery is indeed the *Florence D*.

However the trip was cancelled due to poor weather conditions and has been re-scheduled for March 2009 conditions permitting.

NRETAS Heritage Officer David Steinberg said if the shipwreck is verified as the *Florence D* it is another piece in the puzzle of the Territory's World War II heritage discoveries.

"The *Florence D* has considerable significance in Australia's wartime history, if the wreck discovered by Mr Keeping and Mr Miles is confirmed it will be a remarkable find," he said.

The *Florence D* was a merchant cargo ship requisitioned by the allies to take supplies to the forces holding out in Manila, but was bombed and sunk by the Japanese after its devastating attack on Darwin on the 19 February 1942, and four people on board died.

"Should the wreck be identified as the *Florence D*, the site may be protected under both the *Northern Territory Heritage Conservation Act* and the Commonwealth's *Historic Shipwrecks Act*," he said.

"Under the *Northern Territory Heritage Act*, the Minister for Heritage has the authority to declare an Interim Conservation Order be placed over the site to prevent the site being interfered with until its officially declared a heritage site and listed on the Territory's heritage register.

"WWII shipwrecks serve as memorials to those who lost their lives defending Darwin during the first bombing raid on Australian soil.

"Maritime heritage is an important part of the Northern Territory's identity and shipwrecks are a vital historical and archaeological record of our maritime past."

Ends

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