

Commercial Fishing Q&A

Have you ever found historic artefacts during your fishing activities?

If you have, they may come from a shipwreck

Heritage Victoria, in consultation with Seafood Industry Victoria, has prepared guidelines to simplify the reporting of shipwrecks and other underwater cultural heritage discovered by commercial fishers.

The guidelines are available on the Heritage Victoria website:

[Commercial Fishing Industry Victoria Guidelines for Reporting Shipwreck Discoveries](#)

What is the purpose of the guidelines?

Underwater cultural heritage including shipwrecks are an important part of our past and it is our collective responsibility to protect Victoria's heritage for current and future generations.

Underwater cultural heritage is legally protected by the *Heritage Act 2017* (Victoria) or *Underwater Cultural Heritage Act 2018* (Commonwealth).

The purpose of the guidelines is to provide a step-by-step guide for fishers to report shipwrecks and historic artefacts discovered during fishing activities.

I come across many objects while fishing. What are we talking about in the guidelines?

The three types of discoveries that fishers may come across are (1) shipwrecks, (2) other underwater cultural heritage such as aircraft wrecks, and (3) historic artefacts which may indicate the location of a shipwreck or other underwater cultural heritage site.

The guidelines mainly apply to reporting sites that have not been previously recorded, as well as historic artefacts that have been found.

How do I know if I've discovered a shipwreck?







Possible shipwreck sites are marine obstructions which lead to snagging or damage to fishing gear. The material raised might be metal or wooden material or an artefact. A marine obstruction may be a known shipwreck, a natural feature (such as a geological outcrop) or a new shipwreck. If in doubt, assume it's a new shipwreck site and report it.

What is an artefact?

Artefacts are any human-made objects relating to a shipwreck or other underwater cultural heritage site. They may be recovered in fishing gear.

Items of modern origin (post 1950) such as plastic objects, should not be reported. The following table provides common examples of artefacts that might be found and which ones should be reported.

Commercial Fishing Q&A

Category	Examples		Should I report it?	Comment
Plastic or fibreglass	Plastic bottles		No	These are items of modern origin.
Iron and steel	Metal sheeting, bolts, nails and related objects	 	Yes	Iron and steel finds may indicate the presence of a shipwreck site.
Other metals	Copper and aluminium objects		Yes	Copper and bronze objects may indicate a shipwreck site. Aluminium objects may indicate an aircraft wreck.
Bone	Human or animal bone		Yes	Large quantities of animal bone may indicate a shipwreck (e.g. cargo or provisions). Any suspected human bones should be treated with respect. Notify the Police and the Coroner.
Wood	Different types of hardwood, bark		Yes	Pieces of wood that have been shaped, smoothed, jointed and/or fixed with nails, bolts or wooden pegs may indicate a wooden shipwreck or structure. May include large quantities of bark (i.e. cargo).
Stone	Large groupings of stones		Yes	Recovery of a large number of stones may indicate the ballast mound of a shipwreck.
Ceramic and glass	Bottles, plates and bowls (whole items and fragments)	 	Yes	Ceramic and glass objects may come from a wreck or historic site.
Brick	Bricks and brick fragments		Yes	May indicate a ballast mound of a shipwreck or an historic site.

Please note that any Unexploded Ordnance including munitions, bombs and mines need to be reported in the first instance to Victoria Police and advice provided to Heritage Victoria.

What do I do if I discover a possible shipwreck?

The first step is to record the GPS co-ordinates or estimate the position of the marine obstruction as soon as the fishing gear is snagged.

As soon as practical while at sea, call Heritage Victoria's Maritime Archaeology Team on 0419 043 951 to report the find and location. This allows the archaeologist to give an initial assessment and advise the finder on what to do next.

Not all marine obstructions need to be reported. If the find is new, the finder will be acknowledged as the discoverer of the shipwreck or historic artefact. There is opportunity for positive publicity for the commercial fishing industry and the finder if discoveries are reported.

Fishers can also help protect our underwater cultural heritage by reporting diving activity and intentional lifting of artefacts from known shipwreck sites.

What do I do with an artefact that I have recovered?

Record the GPS co-ordinates of the fishing vessel at the time the artefact is recovered and if possible, take photos of the artefact and notify Heritage Victoria's Maritime Archaeology Team. Artefacts recovered during a previous fishing trip can also be notified.

If the discovery is a small artefact try to keep it in a container filled with seawater. If the artefact is too large to bring ashore, the GPS co-ordinates of where it is dropped at sea should be recorded.

If I am unable to contact the Maritime Archaeology Team at Heritage Victoria while at sea what other way can I report a discovery?

A discovery can be reported once you return by email heritage.victoria@delwp.vic.gov.au.

I know of shipwreck sites where I fish. If I report their position does it mean that I will be prohibited from fishing there?

Protected Zones are intended to keep shipwrecks safe from damage caused by anchors and fishing line entanglements. However, there are very strict requirements to be met before a shipwreck is covered by a Protected Zone. Only 10 shipwrecks in Victoria out of 324 wrecks found (3.1%) have been declared Protected Zones. The likelihood of restrictions being placed on fishing if a shipwreck is reported is very small.

If I find an artefact can I keep it?

The legislation requires all individuals to report the possession of artefacts from a shipwreck. It is not possible to own an artefact, but in most cases the reporter can become a custodian of the artefact.

Anyone in possession of previously un-notified artefacts needs to contact Heritage Victoria to become a registered custodian.

Can I sell any artefacts I possess?

Heritage legislation allows the sale or transfer of legally held artefacts from one custodian to another within the State of Victoria, providing the artefact has a permit number and a notification of the transfer is made to Heritage Victoria within 14 days following the transfer of the artefacts.

I want to be involved with any discovery I made. Can I do this?

Yes, Heritage Victoria's Maritime Archaeology Team will keep you informed of the assessment regarding your discovery. They can also assist you to report it to the Australasian Underwater Cultural Heritage Database, or they will provide you with a copy of the report. If you are interested, you may also be invited to participate during investigative site activities as appropriate.

Why search for the Top 20 Undiscovered Shipwrecks?

The guidelines also refer to advancing the search for Victoria's Top 20 most significant undiscovered shipwrecks.

In 2016 Heritage Victoria identified the State's Top 20 undiscovered shipwrecks from about 450 undiscovered shipwrecks along the Victorian coast. Approximate areas where the wrecks may be located will be provided online. The discovery of any of these shipwrecks will give Heritage Victoria valuable information on our underwater cultural heritage.

Can I obtain more information on the Shipwreck Discovery Program?

Further information on the program is available in the "Commercial Fishing Industry Victoria Guidelines for the Reporting of Shipwreck Discoveries" document available on the Heritage Victoria website.

In addition, there is an awareness program aimed at assisting fishers with how to identify and report

Commercial Fishing Q&A

discoveries. The program provides information in print, on-line and in person.

For more information please contact:

**Heritage Victoria's
Maritime Archaeology Team**

Tel: 0419 043 951

Email: heritage.victoria@delwp.vic.gov.au

Postal Address:

PO Box 500 East Melbourne 8002

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