



# Robyn Parker MP

## Minister for the Environment

## Minister for Heritage

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### MEDIA RELEASE

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Tuesday, 5 February 2013

#### **WRECK OF THE LIMERICK SUNK BY THE JAPANESE IN 1943 FOUND OFF BALLINA**

One of NSW's wartime mysteries has at last been solved with the discovery of the wreckage of the MV *Limerick* off Ballina on the NSW far north coast, Heritage Minister Robyn Parker announced today.

Ms Parker said that while a lot is known about the sinking of the MV *Limerick* in 1943, it has taken almost 70 years and the opportunistic use of Australia's Marine National Facility research vessel, *Southern Surveyor*, to identify the ship's final location.

"Limerick was one of the largest vessels sunk by Japanese submarines off Australia's east coast during their offensive submarine patrols through 1942 and 1943," Ms Parker said.

"Local fishermen using modern depth sonars identified a large shipwreck in about 100 metres of water some 18 kilometres off the coast late last year.

"Following their discovery, NSW Water Police assisted the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) in an initial survey of the deep site with a side scan sonar but due to bad weather they were unable to conclusively identify the shipwreck as being *Limerick*."

OEH then approached Australia's Marine National Facility (AMNF), which operates Australia's ocean-going research vessel, the 66-metre *Southern Surveyor*.

Owned and operated by the CSIRO and funded by the Commonwealth, AMNF is a research facility which is available to all Australian scientists and their international collaborators.

"The team at AMNF were contacted by OEH and coincidentally a research voyage was already scheduled to operate in the suspected wreck area. OEH approached the lead scientist on board to see if they could assist in locating the wreck," Ms Parker said.

The research voyage, led by University of Sydney geologist, Associate Professor Tom Hubble, left Brisbane on 18 January to conduct geological research along the continental slope and shelf between Yamba and Fraser Island.

"When the team at AMNF contacted me to see if we could locate the wreck from on board *Southern Surveyor* we were pleased to assist," Dr Hubble said.

"Confirming the wreck as MV *Limerick* is in the national interest. We were already in the area, we had the necessary technology and technical expertise and in the end it didn't take long to create a 3-D image of the wreck."

The Minister for the North Coast and Member for Ballina, Mr Don Page, said the New Zealand-owned *Limerick* was part of a coastal wartime convoy from Sydney to Brisbane when struck by a torpedo at night on ANZAC Day, sinking the next morning on 26 April 1943.

“Four other vessels in the convoy survived, including the two naval minesweeper escorts, HMAS *Colac* and *Ballarat*. Seventy survivors were pulled from the water over many hours,” Mr Page said.

“Two of *Limerick*’s crew were killed after jumping into the sea, including NSW resident and the ship’s third officer Mr John Edgar Willmott of Edgeroi and a New Zealand national.

“This is a reminder of the huge sacrifice paid by merchant seamen during the war on the home front keeping food, materials and supplies going.”

Ms Parker said OEH was consulting with the NSW Office of Veterans’ Affairs in order to notify next of kin.

“I would like to take this opportunity to thank the local fishermen, Forfar Petrie and Neville Poynting, for reporting this site as soon as they realised it was of possible historic value,” Ms Parker said.

“We are also grateful to Dr Hubble for offering his valuable research time in order to positively identify the wreck as the *MV Limerick*.”

While the wreck lies in Commonwealth Waters, the NSW Government, through its National Historic Shipwrecks Program, has been entrusted to ensure that the *Limerick* is properly protected under the provisions of the *Historic Shipwrecks Act 1976*.

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For images of the *Limerick* please go to:

<ftp://ftp.csiro.au/Marine%20National%20Facility%20-%20Southern%20Surveyor/>