

19 December 2024

## Maritime Safety Queensland wraps up \$2.7 million project with wreck removal from Warul Kawa

- Maritime Safety Queensland has removed the wreckage of the *MV Reef Connection* from Warul Kawa (Deliverance Island).
- Completion of this project wrapped up a \$2.7 million project to remove 13 wrecks from Far North Queensland under the State Government's War on Wrecks Program conducted from January 2021 to November 2024.
- Removal of its wreckage proved to be a difficult operation but has restored to its natural state an island of great spiritual and cultural significance to Torres Strait Islanders.

Maritime Safety Queensland (MSQ) has finalised a \$2.7 million project to remove 13 wrecks from Far North Queensland by removing the wreck of the former charter vessel *MV Reef Connection* from Warul Kawa (Deliverance Island).

The 18-metre vessel caught fire and sank during a voyage in February 2015.

All of its seven crew survived, but the whereabouts of its wreckage was unknown, until it was discovered a year later by Torres Strait Regional Authority rangers, washed ashore on Warul Kawa—an island of deep spiritual and cultural significance for Torres Strait Islander peoples.

In 2021 the removal of *MV Reef Connection*'s wreckage was included in a contract awarded by MSQ to Carpentaria Contracting to remove a total of 13 vessels from MSQ's Cairns maritime region under the Queensland Government's War on Wrecks Program.

Locals would remember many of the sunken vessels and wrecks dotting the islands of the Torres Strait, such as those at Horn, Friday, Prince of Wales and Seisia.

The *MV Reef Connection* was the last vessel remaining to be removed by MSQ under the salvage contract with Carpentaria Contracting, with its removal hit by a series of delays and practical difficulties.

These included travel restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic, challenging sea and weather conditions, and short tidal windows that prevented the salvor's vessel, laden with the required heavy machinery, from accessing Warul Kawa's shoreline.

There was also a need to respect important cultural protocols.

These included attendance by Kuiku Mabaigal (Cultural Authority) representatives and rangers from five communities—Boigu, Saibai, Dauan, Badua, and Mabuiag—each with a connection to Warul Kawa, to observe and monitor the removal of the wreckage.

The end for the *MV Reef Connection* finally came on 20 November 2024 when contractors removed it from the shoreline and barged away its wreckage.

**Quotes attributable to Maritime Safety Queensland General Manager, Kell Dillon:**

*"I am very pleased that Maritime Safety Queensland (MSQ) and our contractors have finally closed the chapter on the MV Reef Connection."*

*"It is even better that Warul Kawa has been returned to its natural state and that MSQ was able to involve Torres Strait Islanders to ensure their spiritual and cultural needs were met during removal of the wreckage."*

*"This brings to an end a single \$2.7 million contract to remove 13 wrecks from Far North Queensland. But this contract is part of a bigger story."*

*"To date, MSQ has spent \$7.7 million removing wrecks from our Cairns maritime region as part of a War on Wrecks that has so far seen over 120 wrecks removed from this region by MSQ or our partner agencies since 2018."*

*"This has been important work, but I want vessel owners to understand that the legal responsibility for maintaining, salvaging or removing their vessels from Queensland waters remains with them."*

*"MSQ does so only when vessel owners fail in that responsibility, and will seek to recoup the costs of the removal operations from the owners, through the Courts if required."*

**ENDS**

**The following wrecks were removed under the \$2.7 million contract awarded to Carpentaria Contracting:**

| Vessel Name/ID             | Location removed                |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Ester                      | Horn Island                     |
| Venture 111                | Badu Island                     |
| Remains of Reef Connection | Warul Kawa (Deliverance Island) |

|               |                        |
|---------------|------------------------|
| TK Enterprise | Horn Island            |
| Odee          | Horn Island            |
| Fleetwood     | Prince of Wales Island |
| Ocean Pearlz  | Horn Island            |
| Owen Pearl    | Friday Island          |
| Unknown Barge | Horn Island            |
| Sea Rose      | Seisia                 |
| Taipan        | Loyalty Beach          |
| Telopea       | Seisia                 |
| SV Tia Wanako | Albany Island          |

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