

Wreck of HMAS WARNAMBOOL

I would like to share with shipmates a memorable experience for me that was a focal point of a recent cruise I undertook to Cape York. This was to locate and then dive the wreck of the Bathurst class corvette, HMAS Warnambool.

The sinking of Warnambool occurred on 13 September, 1947, while she was clearing mines in the vicinity of Cockburn Reef, in company with sister ship Swan. During the operation, Warnambool made contact with a mine, suffered extensive damage and sank, despite desperate attempts to save her. Four ratings were killed in the sinking, one being a signalman (N.L Lott, 28608). The four sailors had become the last naval casualties of WW II. The monument dedicating the loss of Warnambool can be found in the Coral Sea Monument Park, Cardwell.



This Monday 17th November, in good weather, I located the Warnambool and carried out two solo dives on the wreck, which is lying on her starboard side in approximately 25m water depth. The mortal damage caused by the contact mine (port side aft) is clearly evident. Some other notable features, from forward to aft were - the bow, with port anchor still in it's hawse,

focsle bollards, single open gun turret, small open bridge (missing helm and binnacle), single funnel lying on the seabed, winch/sweeping gear on the quarterdeck, davit on the stern, messdeck portholes, rudder approx midship position, unable to locate propellor (probably salvaged).

I should add that life in the wreck was prolific, near the stern I had a near brown stain moment when I encountered a huge groper, but he showed only slight interest in the strange intruder, and swam off. He is probably a long term resident.

Although visibility was not that good, have attached a few photographs of the dives,

Cheers and Merry Christmas to All,

Terry Gleeson
M.V Accalia
(VJD3536)
18/11/2014.



15/12/2014 – Further to the above, I would like to pass on to readers that a joint submission (prepared with great assistance from buddy and shipmate Skeet Dowling), requesting historic wreck consideration for Warnambool, has been submitted to the Minister for Environment. We're hoping for a positive outcome.

Letter is attached below.....

**The Hon Greg Hunt MP
Minister for Environment
PO Box 6022
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600**

**HMAS Warrnambool (I)
Nomination under the *Historical Shipwreck ACT 1976***

We wish to nominate the wreck of HMAS Warrnambool (I) to the Australian National Shipwreck Register under the Historical Shipwreck ACT 1976.

HMAS *Warrnambool* (I) was an Australian corvette constructed during World War II as part of the Commonwealth Government's wartime shipbuilding programme. During the war she spent the majority of her deployments in Pacific waters and along the coast of Australia on anti-submarine patrols, coastal and convoy protection. During the initial bombing of Darwin on 19 February, 1942, HMAS Warrnambool narrowly escaped damage from aerial bombing. Following the war, HMAS Warrnambool was still involved in defence activities sweeping the coastal waters of the Great Barrier Reef clear of submerged mines laid during hostilities. In 1947, while on operations in the vicinity of Cockburn Reef, she hit a mine and sank with the loss of four lives and twenty-nine injured. These casualties were the last in naval wartime operations during World War II.

The wreck of HMAS Warrnambool is now resting in 25 metres of water, accessible to casual divers and organised charter companies who visit the site on a regular basis. As such the site is vulnerable to damage and illegal salvaging. A further threat is damage by fishing craft anchoring on the wreck. Currently it has no statutory protection to mitigate its vulnerability.

HMAS Warrnambool is part of Australia's wartime heritage, and as such we ask you, as the Minister concerned, to declare the site for consideration as a historic wreck and afford it protection under the *Historical Shipwreck Act, 1976* Act.

Yours sincerely



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