This guideline note sets out recommended practice for anchoring when visiting an historic shipwreck site.

Anchoring on shipwrecks raises two concerns – safety of divers and protection of the shipwreck itself.

The option for some sites is to establish moorings that resolve both the damage and safety factors. This type of facility is not always available or possible. Most shipwrecks have no permanent mooring facility.

Please note, if the site is that of an historic shipwreck (75 years or older, or otherwise gazetted as protected under the Commonwealth Historic Shipwrecks Act 1976), then it is illegal to anchor into the shipwreck as this will inevitably cause severe damage. It is also illegal to damage shipwrecks in internal waters of the State protected by the NSW Heritage Act 1977.

Steps to anchoring:
Step 1: Pinpoint the location of the wreck - generally using an echo sounder.
Step 2: Drop a small marker buoy attached to a line and small weight, sufficient to resist any current that may be present but light enough not to pose a significant danger to the shipwreck.
Step 3: Motor upwind or, if appropriate, up-current of the wreck site.
Step 4: Drop an anchor appropriate to the size of the vessel you are operating and to the type of seabed beneath (e.g., reef, sand).
Step 5: Lay back on the anchor line until the dive vessel is positioned over the wreck site, i.e. close to the marker buoy placed in Step 2).
Step 6: If there is little wind or current that could move the marker buoy off site then it can be left in place. If the marker buoy may move with wind or current, then retrieve it.
Step 7: Drop a shot line to a depth that will hover over the wreck site but will clear the top of the wreck by about 5 metres. The shot line should be appropriately marked for decompression stops.
Step 8: Secure the shot to the seabed. Ideally this will be to a large rock firmly attached to the sea floor and clear of the shipwreck. If such a fixture is not available, consider laying a small anchor outside of the wreck area and attaching it to the shot with a light weight line. If no such options exist and there is little significant current or wind, then consider leaving the shot line to hover over the wreck without further attachment. If a line must be attached to the wreck, chose a very light weight line that will break before doing serious damage to the wreck. The attachment point should be to a section of the wreck that is particularly strong and stable.

Interesting facts:
1. A small reef anchor can exert great force when attached to even a 5m dinghy. It takes only a slight knock to dislodge protective concretion covering iron components on a shipwreck site. The damage will leave the iron unprotected until at least the next season of marine colonisation. During this time it will be corroding 10 times faster than before the damage occurred.
2. Anchors are more damaging than the mechanical effects of divers manoeuvring around a shipwreck site or the effects of rust-inducing diver’s bubbles trapped within an iron hull.
3. If the current is sufficient to necessitate a strong direct attachment to the wreck, then diving should be postponed to another day.

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