Fishing nets and other equipment occasionally become fouled with historic shipwreck remains. This is often the way that shipwrecks are found.

Recovering, repairing and replacing fouled equipment is costly. The shipwreck itself can also suffer extensive damage.

Shipwrecks are markers to the lives and the tragedies faced by mariners. In many cases they are the only tombstones that exist for many seafarers. Preserving their memory through photographs and publications is part of the work of the NSW Heritage Office.

What to do if shipwrecks are snagged by fishing equipment

1: Note the location and depth of the wreck site
   This will assist with a detailed archaeological survey to record the extent and nature of the remains. The information will help to avoid subsequent damage to fishing equipment and the wreck site. Notify the NSW Heritage Office of the location.

2: Return anchors as close as possible to the remainder of the wreckage
   Historic anchors, in particular, should be left at the site as they are key markers to the location of a wreck and can assist in determining the size of a ship. The concretion on an anchor should not be removed as it provides a protective coat that reduces corrosion. If possible, photograph the anchor. Anchors that cannot be immediately returned to the seabed require specialised and costly conservation. If an anchor is brought ashore, it should be kept in the shade and kept moist continually with fresh water. Notify the Heritage Office.

3: Keep ships’ timbers moist
   Ships timbers that have been removed from beneath the sand will be quickly attacked by marine worms. Out of the water the timbers will dry out, shrink and warp. Preventing this also requires extensive, specialised and costly conservation treatment. In the short term, keep all objects from a wreck site moist. Seawater is sufficient until adequate supplies of fresh water are available. Photograph the timbers as soon as possible and notify the Heritage Office.

4. Notify the NSW Heritage Office of any site that may be an historic shipwreck
   The Heritage Office will take steps to identify the shipwreck and its history. If the site is likely to be damaged by, or cause damage to, other fishing equipment it may be marked on a navigation chart. This will assist fishing boats to avoid unnecessary damage to their equipment and to the site.

The remains of historic shipwrecks are protected under the provisions of the Commonwealth Historic Shipwrecks Act 1976 and the NSW Heritage Act 1977.

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