

## **Protection of Wrecks Act 1973**

### **Designation criteria**

The following non-statutory criteria are used for assessing the importance of wrecks or the sites of wrecks, and for considering whether designation as a restricted area under the terms of the Protection of Wrecks Act 1973 is appropriate. Wreck sites may comprise the remains of vessels, their accoutrements, armaments, cargo, and other associated objects or deposits, and restricted areas may include that area of the seabed around the wreck site considered appropriate by the Secretary of State to secure its protection. Wrecks or wreck sites may be considered to merit designation if they contribute or appear likely to contribute significantly to the understanding of the past on account of their historical, archaeological, or artistic importance. Such significance may be assessed on the basis of the following criteria (which are not presented in any order of ranking). The criteria should not be regarded as definitive, and wrecks or wreck sites need not satisfy all the criteria in order to qualify for designation. Rather the criteria are indicators which contribute to a wider judgement based on the individual circumstances of each case.

#### *Period*

The historic interest of all types of wreck which characterise a category or period should be considered, and the selection of sites for protection should include wrecks which illustrate important aspects of our social, political economic, cultural, military, maritime and technological history. In identifying sites to be protected, regard will be had to the currency of any particular wreck type (the length of time over which any particular vessel type was constructed and used or any cargo type transported) and how representative it is (whether the vessel or cargo type was one of few or many types representative of that period).

#### *Rarity*

There are some wreck categories which, in certain periods, are so scarce that all surviving examples which still retain some archaeological potential should be preserved. The age of a vessel is often closely linked to its rarity. The older a vessel is, for example, the fewer comparable vessels are likely to survive either in use or as wrecks, and the more likely it is to have historic interest. The loss of one example of a rare type of site is more significant than the loss of one example of a very numerous class of site. In general, however, a selection for protection must be made which portrays the typical and commonplace, as well as the rare. This process should take account of all aspects of the situation and distribution of a particular type of vessel or cargo, in a regional, national, or international context.

#### *Documentation*

The significance of a wreck may be enhanced by close historic association with documented and important historical events or people, or by the supporting evidence of contemporary records or representations. Historical records are generally only relevant to wrecks of recent date; although it is important to recognise that some types of more recent vessel, such as working vessels or vernacular craft, may not be served by any historical records. The probable range of contemporary records that might be expected for a particular type of vessel needs to be considered, so that the value of any known surviving records which relate to it can be assessed. Finally, the importance of a wreck site may also be enhanced by the existence of records of previous archaeological recording or survey work.

### *Group value*

The value of a single vessel or of its cargo may be greatly enhanced by its co-location with other similar vessels (for example at the site of a battle) or by its association with other contemporary features such as port facilities or defensive sites. Association with vessels of other periods (for example on long-standing navigation hazards) may also enhance the value of a site. In some cases it is preferable to protect the complete group of archaeological remains, rather than protect isolated features within the group.

### *Survival/condition*

The degree of survival of a wreck is a particularly important consideration. In general, early wrecks are less likely to survive well than later examples, and in assessing the survival of any site, it is important to consider the likely normal degree of survival of vessels of that date or type. Assessments of survival should consider the degree of intactness of a wreck, the likelihood of the preservation of constructional and technological detail, and the current condition of the remains.

### *Fragility/vulnerability*

Highly important archaeological evidence from some sites can be destroyed by the selective or uncontrolled removal of material, by unsympathetic treatment, by works or development, or by natural processes. Some vessel types are likely to be more fragile than others, and the presence of commercially valuable objects within a wreck may make it particularly vulnerable. Vulnerable sites of this type would particularly benefit from protective designation.

### *Diversity*

The importance of wrecked vessels can reflect the interest in their architectural design, decoration and craftsmanship, or their technological innovation or virtuosity, as well as their how representative they are. Consideration should be given both to the diversity of forms in which a particular vessel type may survive and to the diversity of surviving features. Some vessel types may be represented in the surviving record by a wide variety of building types and techniques which may be chronologically, regionally, or culturally conditioned. The sample of protected sites should reflect this wide variety of forms. In addition, some vessels may be identified as being of importance because they possess a combination of high quality surviving features or, occasionally, because they preserve a single important attribute.

### *Potential*

On occasion, the nature of remains cannot be specified precisely but it still may be possible to document reasons anticipating their existence and importance and so to demonstrate the justification for identifying a site for protection. For example, each type of site may provide a slightly different range of contexts for the preservation of archaeological and palaeo-environmental evidence, and the environment of a site may provide strong indications of its likely level of survival. Sites may also be significant in terms of their potential to provide information on site formation and decay processes and the examination of physical, chemical and biological processes on cultural remains or through its potential for public education.