

## MEDIA RELEASE

**LAUREN MOSS**

MINISTER FOR TOURISM AND CULTURE



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Minister for Tourism and Culture

# 75 year maritime mystery solved - SS Macumba shipwreck found

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After lying hidden on the seabed for 75 years *SS Macumba*, sunk in WWII by a Japanese air attack has finally been located off the Northern Coast of Arnhem Land in the Arafura Sea by CSIRO's RV *Investigator* as it transited from Sydney to Broome.

Minister for Tourism and Culture, Lauren Moss praised the work of the Heritage Branch at the Department of Tourism and Culture and CSIRO who have led the joint investigation searching for the *SS Macumba*.

"The story of *SS Macumba* is another reminder that the northern coast of Australia was in the frontline in World War II, and ships, both naval and merchant, were in constant danger from enemy attack", Ms Moss said.

The Department of Tourism and Culture's Senior Heritage Officer and maritime archaeologist, David Steinberg has been the principal investigator for the search for *SS Macumba* for many years with the CSIRO finally locating this highly significant historic shipwreck, which is also the resting place of one of the three seamen killed in the attack.

"On 6 August 1943, whilst transporting a cargo of supplies from Sydney to Darwin the 2,540 ton merchant ship *Macumba* was attacked by two Japanese 'Jake' floatplanes," Mr Steinberg said.

"Despite return fire from both *SS Macumba* and her escort, the corvette HMAS *Cootamundra*, the Japanese bombers made a direct hit on *SS Macumba's* engine room and the vessel sank."

Chief Engineer William Alfred Lane was lost during the attack and his body was not recovered. His name is recorded at the Adelaide River War Cemetery alongside those with no known grave. Second Engineer Harold Keller and Donkeyman George Dew both died of their injuries in the following days, and were buried at the Adelaide River War Cemetery. The Captain and 36 crewmen survived.

The Department of Tourism and Culture's Heritage Branch had been searching for *SS Macumba* for many years with historic archives defining a large search area, which was far from the coast and distant from Darwin.

"We knew *SS Macumba* was out there, working with different collaborators over the years we have eliminated locations, and refined our search area and are so pleased the search with CSIRO has uncovered the wreck," Mr Steinberg added.

"*SS Macumba* is a highly significant historic shipwreck and archaeological site with the Australian Government planning to declare it a Historic Shipwreck which will protect the site under the Commonwealth's *Historic Shipwrecks Act*."

CSIRO Hydrographic Surveyor Stuart Edwards who is on board RV *Investigator* confirmed they had located the wreck of the *SS Macumba* early yesterday off the Northern Coast of Arnhem Land in the Arafura Sea.

"She is lying upright in approximately 40m water depth in an area of heavily pockmarked seabed," Mr Edwards said.

"The survey team and crew on-board RV *Investigator* are delighted to be able to finally solve the mystery as to her final resting place."

To learn more about maritime heritage in the Northern Territory visit <https://www.nt.gov.au/leisure/arts-culture-heritage/maritime-heritage> (<https://www.nt.gov.au/leisure/arts-culture-heritage/maritime-heritage>)

#### Attached Images:

1. *SS Macumba*
2. *SS Macumba* AWM 303559
3. *SS Macumba* sinking with crew in life boat NTRS 1389
4. Clipping from Sydney Morning Herald, 1943 'Survivors of Bombed Ship arrive in Port'
5. Burials taking place at Adelaide River War Cemetery AWM 055130
6. Image 1 of the discovered wreck on the sea bottom courtesy of CSIRO
7. Image 2 of the discovered wreck on the sea bottom courtesy of CSIRO
8. Multi-beam image
9. backscatter image (aka sidescan image) of wreck

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#### Media interviews:

- Senior Heritage Officer Department of Tourism and Culture, David Steinberg - 0404 302 015
- CSIRO Hydrographic Surveyor Stuart Edwards – contact Matt Marrison, Communications Advisor, CSIRO Marine Laboratories – 0438 785 399

#### Related files

1 *SS Macumba* (jpg 82.9 kb) 2 *SS Macumba* AWM303559 (jpg 4.9 mb) 3 *SS Macumba* NTRS1389 (jpg 395.4 kb)  
4 Sydney morning Herald 1943 (jpg 1.5 mb) 5 Adelaide River Cemetery AWM055130 (jpg 3.9 mb) 6 wreck image 1 CSIRO (jpg 146.9 kb) 7 wreck image 2 CSIRO (jpg 147.9 kb) 8 Multi-beam image (jpg 758.4 kb) 9 Backscatter image (jpg 623.9 kb)















