

Shipwreck and boating accident records



Research Guide to shipwreck and boating
accident records at Queensland State Archives

Queensland State Archives (QSA) is the official repository for Queensland Government records selected for permanent retention because of their continuing value. The archived public records are from state government departments, state courts, local government authorities and statutory authorities. The records are in our facility at [Runcorn, Brisbane](#), and open records are available for viewing in the Reading Room, free-of-charge.

The circumstances of each shipwreck and boating accident vary, and information is recorded by various departments and courts according to those circumstances, e.g. where lives are lost or major damage occurs there is likely to be a Marine Board enquiry; if there is a legal case over a salvage claim or payment of insurance, information may be in the Vice Admiralty Court records; and if the Queensland Government paid for the search and rescue expedition there may be correspondence in the Treasury Department records.

Queensland State Archives' map collection, particularly hydrographic charts may be useful for pinpointing the location of wrecks. Although wrecks may not be shown on charts, the identification of place names including names no longer used, and navigational aids may assist in establishing the location of wrecks.

The main finding aid for records held at QSA is the [Queensland State Archives' online catalogue](#) (known as ArchivesSearch).

The following citation abbreviations are used throughout our catalogue:

ITM	QSA Item (describes the item)
PR	Physical Representation (generally the original or microfilm copy)
DR	Digital Representation (for a digital image)
S	Series ID (for a series of records)
A	Agency ID (for the creating or responsible agency).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are advised that our catalogue contains images, names and voices of people who have died.

Harbours and Marine Department

Unfortunately, few of the early records of the Harbours and Marine Department and its predecessor agencies have survived. For the nineteenth century, it may be necessary to search the general correspondence series of departments such as the Colonial Secretary's Office, the Treasury Department, and the Governor's Office, provided the approximate date of the wreck is known.

Harbours and Marine Department records are most relevant to the twentieth century, particularly when a government vessel was involved.

List of Vessels Involved in Accidents along the Queensland Coast

11/9/1863–7/12/1945

[S12814](#)

This series consists of an alphabetical register containing a list of vessels involved in accidents on the Queensland coast. Each entry includes the date, name of vessel, nature of casualty, locality, inquiry date, master officer or pilot in charge, result of inquiry, remarks. This series is available in the Reading Room on Microfilm Z1010. This series is used to find Reports and Decisions on Shipping Accidents S14205.

Reports and Decisions on Shipping Accidents

31/1/1873–31/12/1977

[S14205](#)

These reports record the enquiry into each shipwreck, and findings handed down by the Marine Board of Queensland after a Marine Board enquiry. These reports are available in the Reading Room on Microfilms Z1010 and Z808. The format and contents of the reports change over time and there is a significant gap in the series between 1911 and 1972.

Accident Files - Department of Harbours and Marine

21/6/1983–3/11/1989

[S21205](#)

This series contains files relating to marine accidents resulting in deaths. The files include boating accident reports made to the Department of Harbours and Marine, as well as interviews, witness statements, depositions, departmental correspondence relating to the accident and investigation, newspaper clippings, coroner's reports, copies of sailing directions with charts attached, Marine Board of Queensland reports and findings, copies of Marine Board sailing rules and regulations and any other information relevant to the accident.

Hydrographic Charts and Maps - Key Map and Indexes

Circa 17/5/1910–Circa 30/5/1973

[S4828](#)

This series is used to find Hydrographic Charts and Maps, S2010.

Hydrographic Charts and Maps

Circa 1/1/1826–Circa 31/12/1985

[S2010](#)

The charts were mainly published by the British Admiralty, the Royal Australian Navy and the Queensland Harbours and Marine Department. To find charts and maps in this series, search Hydrographic Charts and Maps - Key Map and Indexes, S4828.

Hydrographic Charts and Marine Drawings

Circa 1/1/1860–30/9/2010

[S5756](#)

This series comprises hydrographic charts prepared by the Harbours and Rivers Department and its successors, as well as the British Admiralty, Royal Navy, Royal Australian Navy and the Australian Hydrographic Service. Details include regular water depth; positions and least depth over all shoals, wrecks, reefs, banks; position of coastline (HW and LW mark); nature of the bottom; leading lines fixed and sounded; tidal stream measurements and observations; navigation marks; lights and sailing directions; details of wrecks.

Marine Survey Charts and Drawings of Marine Infrastructure and Vessels

Circa 1/1/1860–Circa 31/12/1969

[S17709](#)

This series comprises drawings and charts of Queensland ports and harbour areas together with port and harbour infrastructure and government vessels.

Marine Board of Queensland

Agendas and Minutes - Marine Board of Queensland

27/8/1863–31/5/1994

[S6326](#)

From 10 October 1978, Agendas and Minutes were amalgamated, with previous annotations to agendas becoming formalised as minutes. Matters discussed include inquiries into shipping and boating accidents; use of waterways; issue and renewals of certificates for pilots, motorboats and masters and crew; hire and plying of ships and other vessels; permits to water-ski; changes to regulations and acts; dredging and removal of sand; approval of jetties; pontoons and moorings; and administration of harbours' surveys of ships. Attendance at each meeting is included.

In Agenda Books, each agenda item is numbered and a hand-written annotation such as approved, recommendation, or decision has been added beside each number. Minute Books report on the items discussed and decisions made in prose format, signed off by the Chairman or Secretary of the Board. Information appears to be drawn directly from agenda items and associated annotations. In the first volume of minutes (MBQ/D1) special meeting minutes relating to enquires into shipping accidents are recorded at the back. In subsequent volumes, they are interspersed between general meeting minutes in chronological order.

Vice-Admiralty Court

Legal cases for shipwrecks are heard in the Vice-Admiralty Court. Matters before the Court include disputed insurance claims, salvage rights, and payment for damages.

Papers in Connection with Vice-Admiralty Court, Cases Involving Ships

Circa 1/1/1864–Circa 31/12/1891

[S15554](#)

Minute Book for Actions in the Vice-Admiralty Court

Circa 1/1/1901–Circa 31/12/1959

[S15555](#)

Action Book for Vice-Admiralty Court

1/6/1864–14/8/1885

[S15566](#)

Harbour Masters' Office

Harbour Master, Cairns

Miscellaneous Correspondence

Circa 1/1/1943–Circa 30/9/1955

[ITM293237](#) in S9117, Miscellaneous Correspondence - Regional Harbour Master's Office, Cairns

Miscellaneous correspondence about shipping accidents.

Harbour Master, Innisfail

Miscellaneous Subject Files

3/8/1944–21/8/1954

[ITM292564](#) in S9040, Miscellaneous Subject Files - Harbour Master's Office, Innisfail

Miscellaneous subject files about marine accidents and groundings.

Police Department

Administration Files - Police Department

Circa 1/1/1870–23/8/1999

[S39](#)

To find records in the catalogue about injuries, deaths and missing persons resulting from boating accident, use keywords combined with S39.

Treasury Department

Registers of Inwards Correspondence

Circa 1/1/1860–Circa 31/12/1980

[S6303](#)

This series is used to find General Correspondence, S6232.

General Correspondence

1/1/1860–31/12/1980

[S6232](#)

This series represents discharge of business connected with general financial administration. To find letters and documents, search Registers of Inwards Correspondence, S6303.

Office of the Governor of Queensland

Registers of Official Correspondence

Circa 1/1/1886–Circa 31/12/2011

[S4341](#)

These registers are used to find Official Correspondence, S1139.

Official Correspondence

20/12/1859–Circa 31/12/2003

[S1139](#)

These contain some accident records from the 1800s. To find correspondence, search S4341.

Supreme Court of Queensland

Judges' Notebooks: Southern District, Registrar's Record, Vice-Admiralty Cases

8/2/1915–19/10/1923

[ITM96991](#) in S18554, Judges' Notebooks (Supreme Court)

Colonial Secretary's Office

Register of Letters Received

15/12/1859 - Circa 31/12/1896

[S11936](#)

This series is used to find Inwards Correspondence, S5253.

Inwards Correspondence

12/10/1859–Circa 31/12/1903

[S5253](#)

To find inwards correspondence, search Register of Letters Received, S11936.

Other sources of information

The Annual Reports of the Harbours and Marine Department (and its predecessors) were published in Queensland Votes and Proceedings (later Queensland Parliamentary Papers) and may reference major shipwrecks and boating accidents. These publications are available on request – please see the Archivist on duty in the Reading Room.

Another useful general index is the *List of Queensland Shipwrecks, 1791-1914* compiled by A.J. Pixley. Pixley's lists shipwrecks chronologically with alphabetical indexes by ship and geographical location of wreck. A copy is held in the QSA staff library. Please see the Archivist on duty in the Reading Room to discuss access.

For more information about hydrographic charts refer to [Research guide to maps](#).

Need more information?

Check our online catalogue [ArchivesSearch](#).

Phone us on (07) 3037 6777 or you can [email](#) an archivist.