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Minister for the Environment and Energy

MEDIA RELEASE

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**NEW UNDERWATER HERITAGE LAW WILL PROTECT EVEN
MORE OF OUR HISTORY**

Protection of Australia's unique underwater heritage will be strengthened under new legislation to be introduced to Parliament next year.

The Underwater Cultural Heritage Act will extend the protection currently afforded only to shipwrecks, plane wrecks, Indigenous heritage sites and other underwater cultural sites.

This change will mean the historic sites will be registered on the Australian National Shipwrecks Database, and all access will require a permit, which acts as a deterrent to vandalism and theft.

Australia was one of the first countries to protect its underwater cultural heritage in 1976 with the Historic Shipwrecks Act, making it one of Australia's oldest heritage protection programs.

Today I'm pleased to announce we're building on this, ensuring the continued protection of more than 8,000 shipwrecks in Australian waters and any wrecks older than 75 years yet to be discovered.

It will have a significant positive impact at shipwreck areas like the Great Barrier Reef and Shark Bay World Heritage Area, and aircraft wreck areas in Darwin Bay and off the Kimberley Coast.

This will broaden and improve the protection of Australia's underwater history using the principles set down by the UNESCO 2001 Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage.

It will also enable Australia to pursue ratification of the convention. This is a further demonstration of the Turnbull Government's commitment to protecting heritage.

The Coalition will continue to work collaboratively with state and territory government agencies to protect and conserve Australia's irreplaceable historic shipwreck heritage to ensure it can be enjoyed and studied now and by future generations.

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