



The Brisbane's main anchor exposed on the reef at low tide.

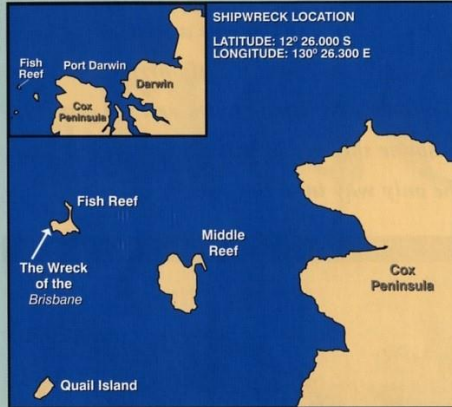
Photo: Silvano Jung

## Recreational Access

The *SS Brisbane* can be a remarkably good recreational dive experience. However, Fish Reef is located in unsheltered waters and is accessible only in calm conditions. Careful planning and suitable weather are therefore necessary for a safe and enjoyable visit. The best underwater visibility for diving is usually on a neap tide at slack water or on a neap flood tide if there is little variation.

One of the main boilers is the first visible feature of the wreck to appear on an ebbing tide (at 2.46 metres). This boiler is 20 metres away from the intact midships and stern section. In order to anchor over the midships section of the wreck, a boat should align itself with the following bearings (beacon 59°, main boiler 109° and the east-side of Quail Island 180°).

By visiting the wreck on a spring low tide, non-divers can explore on foot the bow, main boiler, water tanks and machinery located on the high reef plateau, as the wreck is dry for a few hours.



For further information contact:



Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory  
(08) 8999 8201

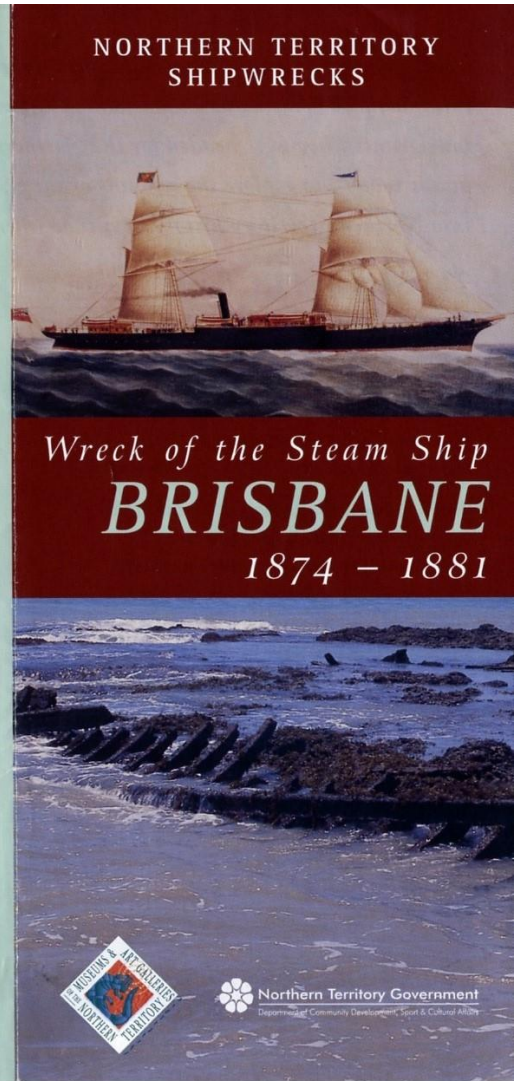


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Cover: Painting of the steam ship *Brisbane*  
in the Queensland Maritime Museum.  
Keelson and floors exposed at low tide.  
Photo: Silvano Jung

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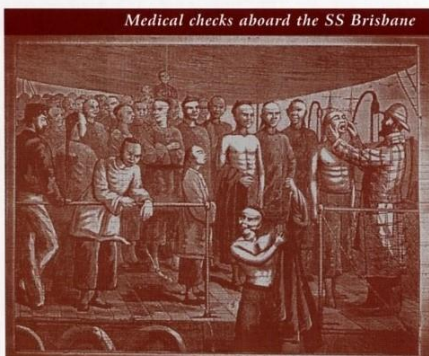


*When the SS Brisbane struck Fish Reef on the 10th October 1881 it was a frightening introduction to Australia for the many Chinese passengers on board. Newly arrived immigrants, they were headed for the Northern Territory goldfields. Divers and the general public today can explore the remains of the SS Brisbane shipwreck. It is a dramatic glimpse into Northern Territory history at a time when the only way in or out was by sea.*

## The Ship and its Trade

Inglis of Scotland built this formidable four decked, two-masted iron steamship in 1874. It was 281.5 feet (85.3 m) long with a gross tonnage of 1503 tons. Powered by a compounding, two-stage steam engine, the *SS Brisbane* could also be rigged as a two-masted brig to assist the engine when the wind was favourable.

Commissioned by the Eastern and Australian Mail Steam Company, the *SS Brisbane* was used in the company's international trade between Asia and Australia. The ship worked one of the earliest Queensland mail services through the Torres Strait and called at Port Darwin when financial incentive existed.



Medical checks aboard the SS Brisbane

S.M.H. 9.7.1881



Steering mechanism attached to stern post

Photo: Paul Clark

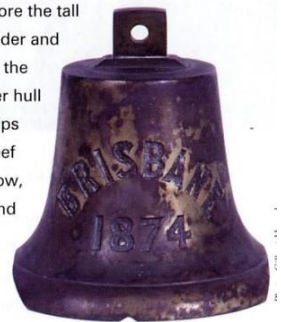
## The Wrecking Event and Fate

On the 10th October 1881 the *SS Brisbane*, having departed Hong Kong on the 29th September, was steaming down the west coast of Bathurst Island heading for Port Darwin. Poorly navigated by Captain Craig and his officers, the ship twice struck reefs north of Bynoe Harbour. The second time it stayed firm on Fish Reef. Eventually an officer was dispatched in a ship's boat to go for help.

Some cargo was salvaged, but many damaged goods were sold locally in Port Darwin. A few undamaged consignments of tea and opium eventually reached Sydney, their original destination. The ship remained stranded and local newspaper accounts suggest that it provided "odds and ends of furniture for half the houses in Darwin" (Northern Territory Times and Gazette, 11th December 1903).

## The Shipwreck Today

The ship came to rest bow forward onto a gradually ascending rocky reef. Today, the most intact part of the shipwreck is the stern and midships section that lies at a depth of 2-9 metres during a low tide. The upper decks of the ship are gone, but the wreck's lower hull is intact. Divers can explore the tall stern section with its rudder and huge cast iron propeller, the dramatic ribs of the lower hull and boilers in the midships section. Higher on the reef are the remains of the bow, a main boiler, anchors and machinery which non-divers can explore on foot at low tide.



The ship's bell from the *Brisbane* in the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory's Collection M89.01

## Protective Legislation, Site Access and Raised Relics

The *SS Brisbane* shipwreck is protected under the Commonwealth *Historic Shipwrecks Act 1976*. It is illegal to disturb, interfere with, or remove material. Raised relics, even those taken prior to the site's declaration as an historic ship, are protected and it is illegal to possess them without a permit.

The disturbance or removal of relics diminishes the experience of future divers and drastically reduces the potential for archaeological research. For further information regarding the *SS Brisbane* or the *Historic Shipwrecks Act*, contact the Director of the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory.