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Rena Wreck Site: Heritage assessment and comparative analysis: Proposal to leave the remains of the MV Rena on Astrolabe Reef by Andy Dodd, Subsurface Ltd, 27 May 2014

Peer review by:

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Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga

10 June 2014.

1. Executive Summary

The heritage assessment by Andy Dodd (the Assessment) concludes that “the Rena wreck site has high historical and social values. On the basis of these values it is recommended that the remains of the Rena be given recognition in the proposed Bay of Plenty Coastal Environment Plan”.¹ The assessment also recommends that Otaiti and the Rena together be considered for registration under the *Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014*

In my view the Assessment confuses significance of the event with the significance of the wreck itself. As an enduring association is yet to be formed, I believe that historic values are not able to be ascribed to the place at this current time and that Heritage New Zealand would not be in a position to consider the Rena wreck site for listing on the New Zealand Heritage List for some time.

Heritage qualifications

I am the Senior Archaeologist for Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga. I have held this position since December 2012. Prior to this I was employed with the Department of Conservation for 23 years as an archaeologist and historic heritage specialist working in the Bay of Plenty, East Coast, Hawke’s Bay and nationally.

I hold a Bachelor of Arts (Hons) and Master of Arts in Anthropology from the University of Otago and a Post –Graduate Diploma in Education with Massey University. I have been a member of the New Zealand Archaeological Association for over 30 years. During that time I have served 10 years on Council as a Council Member, Vice-President, President and Immediate Past President. I have been a member of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) since December 1994. In my role as Senior Archaeologist, I am a member of the Heritage New Zealand Technical Review Committee which undertakes multi-disciplinary peer review of draft registration papers.

¹ Dodd, A 2014 Rena Wreck Site: Heritage assessment and comparative analysis: Proposal to leave the remains of the MV Rena on Astrolabe Reef pg 3

2. Scope of Review

This review is of the heritage assessment completed by Andy Dodd, Subsurface Ltd . The Assessment considers the values associated with the wreck site and does not include an assessment of Maori cultural values. It is difficult to do a review of historic heritage values without considering Maori cultural values. It is therefore suggested that this this review should be considered in association with a Maori cultural assessment.

3. Review

The Assessment is comprehensive and considered. It is well researched and set in a comparative and statutory context.

The values statements addressed in the assessment and listed below are considered to be of low to medium significance with high significance ascribed to historic and social values.

Aesthetic	Low
Archaeological	Low
Architectural	N/A
Cultural	Low
Historic	High
Scientific	Low
Social	High
Spiritual	N/A
Technological	Medium
Traditional	N/A

Heritage New Zealand undertake heritage value assessments using the framework set out in section 66 of the *Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014* (HNZPTA) and the Assessment uses this framework which is appropriate. The assessment of values under the RMA historic heritage definition are also factors that Heritage New Zealand usually considers within the HNZPTA criteria and as such are appropriate for consideration.

The process for inclusion on the New Zealand Heritage List requires that a place or area has to demonstrate that it possesses at least one of the criteria identified in section 66 (1): aesthetic, archaeological, architectural, cultural, historical, scientific, social, spiritual, technological or traditional significance or value.

I agree with the Assessment ascribing the relative values of low and medium to the various criteria. However, with regard to the criteria given the highest value, historic and social significance, I provide the comments below:

a. Historic value.

Historic values should be assessed based on whether the place is closely connected with an event, idea or trend that has had an important impact on New Zealand history at a local, regional or national level.²

The report ascribes high significance to the historic values because the Rena:

- I. Is one of the most costly salvage operations nationally
- II. Is the largest wreck to have occurred in NZ waters
- III. Is the most costly clean up job

All these comments are accurate and valid and relate specifically to the story associated with the Rena. However, while the Heritage New Zealand List process has no age limit as to what can be considered to have historic value, a period of time should have elapsed in order that a direct and enduring association can be formed with the event, place or persons involved. For example, Heritage Victoria note that as a general principle a generation, or 25-30 years, should pass after the creation of a place or object before that place or object is considered for listing at any level. The passing of time allows the enduring cultural heritage values of a place to be more rigorously assessed.³

In the case of the Rena, the event itself will certainly be remembered in New Zealand's history. However, ascribing heritage value to the remains of the wreck is considered premature as it is not known whether an enduring association with the wreck will eventuate.

In addition, while leaving the wreck on the reef would create a physical connection between the event and the place, there may be other options on land to recognise the importance of the event. At the current time the story is not yet complete.

b. Social values

A place may be ascribed social value if it is associated with events that have had an intense impact on a community or communities. It is clear that this event has had a social impact on the communities of the Bay of Plenty region and even further afield. These are identified in the Assessment as:

² Assessing Places and Areas for Inclusion on the Historic Places Trust Register. NZHPT March 2001 pg 5

³ The Victorian Heritage Register, Criteria and Threshold Guidelines pg 3.

http://www.dpcd.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/127485/HV-HR_Criteria_and_Thresholds_Guidelines-2012.pdf

- I. Profound impact on the Bay of Plenty coastal community
- II. Unprecedented clean up response. Over 8,000 people volunteered their time.
- III. It has been estimated that approximately one third of the recovery cost was spent on New Zealand goods and services, and approximately 70% of that was spent in the Bay of Plenty.

Heritage New Zealand recognises the importance of this event in the history of the Bay of Plenty and New Zealand for a range of reasons including social, environmental, community and economic. Given the recent nature of the event, however, it is unknown at this stage what enduring association the community will have with the wreck itself.

4. Conclusion

It is clear that the wrecking of the *Rena* is a significant event which will form part of the history of New Zealand. The event itself, and the wreck, are obviously closely linked. However, it does not follow that in order to recognise the importance of the event the remains of the wreck need to be retained on heritage grounds. Other factors may be more appropriate to determine whether it is appropriate for the wreckage to remain. For example, following the Tangiwai rail disaster parts of the wreckage were not kept at the site in order to create a memorial. A separate memorial was erected on a nearby land parcel which has views of the railway where the disaster occurred. This memorial is on the New Zealand Heritage List due to its focus as a meeting place for many years by survivor's families and the site's close association with the event.⁴

The Assessment undertakes a comparative analysis and notes that other large twentieth century wrecks have been recognised for their heritage values.⁵ They have been recognised as having historic value many years after the ships were wrecked.

The Assessment also notes that other vessels have been commemorated by remains on shore and that there are several monuments to the *Wahine* around Wellington harbour, although nothing remains of the wreck on Barretts Reef or its final resting place near Steeple Rock.⁶

The Assessment also notes that the significance criteria listed in the *Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014* reflect the fact that something can have significance despite its age by ascribing value to events that have shaped New Zealand's history, rather than to places that are simply old.

⁴ <http://www.heritage.org.nz/the-list/details/7591>

⁵ Dodd, A 2014 *Rena* Wreck Site: Heritage assessment and comparative analysis: Proposal to leave the remains of the MV *Rena* on Astrolabe Reef pg 30

⁶ Dodd, A 2014 *Rena* Wreck Site: Heritage assessment and comparative analysis: Proposal to leave the remains of the MV *Rena* on Astrolabe Reef pg 30

Whilst the wreck of the Rena can be considered to represent the event, the community may find other ways of recognising its significance to the Bay of Plenty and New Zealand.

In my view the Assessment confuses the significance of the event with the significance of the wreck itself. As an enduring association is yet to be formed, I believe that historic values are not able to be ascribed to the place at this current time and that Heritage New Zealand would not be in a position to consider the Rena wreck site for registration for some time.

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