

# Victorian Heritage Database Report

Report generated on - 27/07/24

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## FIJI



Fiji Headstone at the grave of the 12 people who died as a result of the wreck



S259 Fiji MoonlightHead AnchorAndDiver



S259 Fiji MoonlightHead AnchorOnBeach



S259 Fiji MoonlightHead Chain MJ



S259 Fiji MoonlightHead HullView MJ



S259 Fiji MoonlightHead SiteView



S259 Fiji MoonlightHead CrewOnBeachHistoricPhoto



S259 Fiji SitePlan diveinfosheet 1992

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### Location

Wreck Beach, Moonlight Head

### Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

S259

### Date lost

06/09/1891

**Official number**

74478

**Construction material**

Iron

**Hull**

Moulded depth 25', classified 100 A1, 2 decks, raised quarterdeck 12',<br /> forecastle 31.5', built under special survey, cemented 1875, two<br /> bulkheads. In 1875 the vessel's dimensions were 235.1 x 36.6 x 23.0

**Propulsion**

Sail

**Number of masts**

3

**Length/Breadth/Depth**

229.40 Feet / 36.30 Feet / 23.00 Feet

**Builder**

Harland and Wolfe

**Year of construction**

1875

**Built port**

Belfast

**Built country**

Ireland

**Date lost**

06/09/1891

**Departure**

Hamburg

**Destination**

Melbourne

## **Cargo**

Spirits, toys, dynamite and other general cargo. Pianos, Cigar boxes, pig iron, dynamite, bitters, spirits, matches, furniture, glass, paper, chemicals, steel and iron wire, hardware, sewing machine, nails, bottles, jute, colour, toys, mouldings, china, woodware, pencils, dolls, cement, starch, candles, glucose, oil, grease, lampware, brassware, artist supplies, porcelain, brushware, tinware coke.

## **Owner**

W.J. Mayers, Son & Co.

## **Master**

Capt. Vickers

## **Weather conditions**

Squally, thick

## **Cause of loss**

The Fiji left Hamburg on 22nd May. The vessel went ashore at 3.00am on the morning of the disaster after squally and boisterous weather soon after sighting Cape Otway. The wind had suddenly veered, and the vessel missed stays after attempting to wear ship and was driven onto the rocks. Attempts were made to launch the boats but they were swamped and dashed to pieces. Delays in getting the lifeboat and the apparatus to the scene resulted in 12 of the 25 crew drowning after 10 hours trapped on board.

## **Statement of significance**

The Fiji is archaeologically significant as the wreck of a typical 19th century international sailing ship with cargo. It is educationally and recreationally significant as one of Victoria's most spectacular historic shipwreck dive sites with structural features and remains of the cargo evident.

## **VHR history**

The barque Fiji left Hamburg on 22nd of May 1891. The vessel went ashore at 3 am on the morning of the disaster in squally and boisterous weather soon after sighting Cape Otway. The wind had suddenly veered, and the vessel missed stays after attempting to wear ship and was driven onto the rocks. Attempts were made to launch the boats but they were swamped and dashed to pieces. Delays in getting the lifeboat and rocket apparatus to the scene resulted in 12 of the 25 crew drowning after 10 hours trapped on board. A local resident, Arthur Wilkinson, lost his life trying to save one of the crew who was struggling in the surf. Coffins were made out of the wreck timbers and the men buried on the cliff top above the wreck. The deaths precipitated critical comment in the press over the lack of prompt action. Other news items appeared claiming drunk and disorderly behaviour by plunderers amongst the corpses and wreckage on the beach. The controversy reached parliament.