

Victorian Heritage Database Report

Report generated on - 23/09/23

SS IRON CROWN



S340 IronCrown BassStrait HistoricView

Location

Bass Strait, 44 miles SSW of Gabo Island

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

S340

Date lost

04 Jun 1942

Official number

151806

Construction material

Steel

Hull

Moulded depth 26' 1", freeboard 2' 4 3/4", draught 23' 1", steel deck and shelter deck, web framings, longitudinal framing, Anchors & chains proved, WB - cellular double bottom under engine 115', 145' overall, 820 ton; collision bulkhead to shade deck

Propulsion

Steam - Screw

Engine specification

Triple expansion engine 3cyl. 25" 41" 68" x 45" stroke, 180lb boiler, 3 single faced boilers, 387 NHP, 9 corrugated surfaces, 141 sq.ft grate 53.6 sq.ft heating surface

Engine builder

Thompson & Co. Castlemaine Pty Ltd.

Length/Breadth/Depth

331.00 Feet / 47.90 Feet / 27.10 Feet

Year of construction

1922

Built port

Commonwealth Government Dockyard, Williamstown, Victoria

Built country

Australia

Registration Number

36 in 1923

Registration Port

Sydney

Date lost

04 Jun 1942

Departure

Whyalla, SA

Destination

Newcastle, NSW

Cargo

Manganese ore, iron ore

Owner

Australian Commonwealth Shipping Board (March 1923) / Interstate Steamships Pty. Ltd. / Scott Fell & Co. (November 1923-1940).

Master

Capt. A. McLellan

Weather conditions

dusk, clear

Cause of loss

Torpedoed by the Japanese submarine I-24

Number of crew

43

Crew comments

Survivors George Fisher (18, deck boy), N. McKelvie (trimmer, Port Adelaide), A.A. Sabiston (57, able seaman, Newcastle), Bruce Miel (4th Engineer, Keswick), James Reach (greaser, Wickham NSW)

Statement of significance

The Iron Crown is historically significant as one of only four World War II shipwrecks in Victoria. It is one of Victoria's worst shipwrecks in terms of loss of life, and represents the importance of Bass Strait as an international shipping lane and Australia as a supplier of raw materials for the war effort. It is the only ship to have been torpedoed by a submarine in Victorian waters.

VHR history

The fourth of Victoria's World War II wrecks (After the SS Cambridge, MV City of Rayville, and HMAS Goorangai) was the SS Iron Crown, which was torpedoed by a Japanese submarine resulting in the loss of 38 lives. It was a 3353 tons gross steam freighter built in 1922 at Williamstown, Victoria and originally named the Euroa. Its name was changed to the Iron Crown in 1923, and in 1942 was being chartered by BHP to transport ore from Whyalla, South Australia to Port Kembla. Between June 1942 and June 1943 the Japanese Imperial Navy operated 13 submarines off the east coast of Australia. Their operations resulted in the loss of 22 Allied ships and 194 lives. On 4 June 1942 the Iron Crown, with 43 crew and a cargo of manganese ore was steaming south-south-west of Gabo Island, when at 4.45 pm it was torpedoed by the Japanese submarine believed to be HMIJS I-24, which reported three sinkings in her operational area at this time (Wallace:42). I-24 was one of the Japanese Imperial Navy's Eastern Attack Group which had previously been involved in the attack on Pearl Harbour, the Battle of the Coral Sea, and that launched midget submarines in the attack on Sydney Harbour on 31 May 1942. Other sources have suggested it may have been HMIJS I-27 that was responsible for the attack. The torpedo hit the port side of the Iron Crown causing a large explosion, and it sank immediately within 60 seconds. Most of the men were trapped in the forecabin or were sucked down by the rapidly sinking vessel, with only five survivors managing to jump clear of the ship in hastily grabbed lifejackets and who clung to floating wreckage until they were rescued. The site of the Iron Crown has not yet been reported or located, but its general position is in very deep water. World War II saw the theatres of war extend to Australia and Victoria's southern coastline. These four wrecks are an important part of our maritime heritage as a reminder to us of how near the war came, and of the naval and merchant seamen who became its victims.