

Archaeology and your Marine Licence Application



Guidance Notes

Britain has a maritime history stretching back through the millennia. Our seas and waterways have long been used for trade, travel, defence and fishing. From Roman ships exporting valuable minerals and trading resources to the Mediterranean, to trade with overseas colonies that played a vital role in the United Kingdom's industrial revolution, the marine area has a rich history. As a result of this our seas and coasts can often hold sites of archaeological significance that must be protected.

The historic environment is one of the factors taken into account when a marine licence is granted. Many activities that require a marine licence can affect sites of archaeological interest – dredging, construction work and activities on the shoreline can all cause damage. The purpose of this document is provide an introduction to the place of archaeology in the marine licencing system.

Examples of coastal archaeology

Due to the ever-changing nature of the sea, the marine environment is in a constant state of flux and valuable archaeological sites are constantly being discovered. Other sites may be under threat from development and other activities. A medieval ship was unearthed during work on a new theatre at Moderator Wharf, Newport in 2002.

Marine features of historical/archaeological interest include:

- Historical Harbours and Docks. These sites offer an insight into the trade, industry and culture of an area.
- Lighthouses and other historical structures related to seafaring.
- Shipwrecks are time capsules that give us a look at the everyday economic and military functions of the past.
- Submerged landscapes have been preserved by changing sea levels throughout history. These allow a unique insight into our prehistoric past, when sea levels were much lower, including ancient trackways and structures and also pre-historic forests.
- Historical artefacts, such as items lost overboard or remains from other sites mentions may be located within the marine licencing area. The presence of lone artefacts does not necessarily mean there will be any restrictions to the granting of a marine licence, but there is a report system in place to record any that may be found during the course of the works.

How the historic environment is protected with the marine licencing system?

The [Marine and Coastal Access Act \(2009\)](#) requires a licence for a number of activities such as:

- Dredging
- Constructing, altering or improving any works within the marine licencing area
- Removing any substance or object from the sea bed/marine area
- Depositing substances/objects in the marine licencing area
- Scuttling a vessel

- Using explosives or incinerating materials

Marine activities, particularly construction and dredging can cause considerable damage to archaeological sites. Construction work can cause damage to archaeological remains. Building waste can contaminate the site with pollutants and construction can also damage or disturb artefacts on the shore and seabed. Proper consultation during the licencing process can ensure that this is avoided

When undertaking an activity that requires a marine licence, you should take a number of steps to ensure that you provide sufficient information so that your activities can be evaluated for their impact on the historic environment; for example:

- Ensure that your applications is sufficiently detailed for NRW's archaeological advisors to assess the possible impact of your activities
- If you are carrying out dredging, state not only the depth of intended dredging but also any previous depths the body of water has been dredged too and whether the area has been previously extended

When your licence is granted it may contain conditions to protect the historic environment; such as:

- You may be expected to commission a survey by qualified, experienced archaeologists to carry out a watching brief during the works
- Other conditions may involve the recovery of structures before alteration or demolition
- Excavation of an area where archaeological remains are expected.



For more information on archaeology and marine licencing in South East Wales, contact the Heritage Management team at the Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust. Email hmggat.org.uk or telephone 01792 634225 or 01792 634227.