

Elvie (1900-1921) and other sites on Whalers Beach, Albany

WRECK INSPECTION REPORT – 13TH TO 14TH OF AUGUST 2020



Compilers Patrick Morrison and Deb Shefi

Department of Maritime Heritage

Report Number 335

W.A. Museum, December 2020



**WESTERN
AUSTRALIAN
MUSEUM**

Table of Contents

<u>BACKGROUND</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>AIMS</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>LOGISTICS.....</u>	<u>3</u>
PERSONNEL	3
SCHEDULE	3
<u>SITE LOCATION</u>	<u>4</u>
APPROXIMATE LOCATION	4
GPS POINTS	4
<u>HISTORICAL PRECIS.....</u>	<u>4</u>
<u>SITE CONDITIONS ON INSPECTION</u>	<u>5</u>
SITE DESCRIPTION	5
SITE CONDITION AND INTEGRITY	5
<u>MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS:</u>	<u>6</u>
NATURAL FORCES	6
HUMAN FORCES	6
PROJECTED SITE STABILITY	6
<u>SITE IMAGE (PLAN VIEW) – ELVIE.....</u>	<u>13</u>
<u>MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION.....</u>	<u>15</u>
INTERPRETIVE OPPORTUNITIES	16
<u>REFERENCES</u>	<u>16</u>

Cover Image: Patrick Morrison/Western Australian Museum. August 2020.

Background

On the 13th and 14th of August 2020, Department of Maritime Heritage staff visited Whalers Beach in Albany. The trip was in response to public reports of exposure and vandalism of *Elvie*. An ABC news article on Monday 10th of August (Hussey 2020) showed the wreck had been exposed by recent storms, justifying a prompt Museum visit.

Aims

1. To inspect *Elvie*, document its exact position, current condition and potential management concerns; and,
2. Investigate if other known wrecks in the area were also exposed and at risk.

Logistics

Personnel

Name	Role
Deb Shefi	OIC – Fieldwork, report
Patrick Morrison	WAM – Fieldwork, report

Schedule

Date	Activity Summary
13/08/2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Depart Shipwrecks Museum at 8am• Arrive at site by 2pm<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Pedestrian/drone survey of Whalers beach○ GPS recording of <i>Elvie</i>○ Probe survey○ Photography and drone photography○ Spoke with public about <i>Elvie</i> and other sites○ Drone survey for wrecks on Goode Beach• Depart site at 5pm
14/08/2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leave Albany at 7:30am• Return to Shipwrecks Museum at 2pm

File: /Volumes/maritime_image/MaritimeArchaeologyStorage/Site Related (Images & Docs)/Western Australia/1 SOUTH COAST/3 Albany (Images)/Elvie/Elvie 2020-08-13

Media: 273 images, 3 videos. Named: Elvie-20200813-*

Site Location

Approximate location

Whalers Beach, Albany. *Elvie* on the beach, in the inter-tidal zone.

GPS Points

WGS 84. Shown in Figure 1.

Description	Latitude	Longitude
Iron debris	-35.09255	117.94559
<i>Elvie</i> – seaward point	-35.09120	117.94308
<i>Elvie</i> – landward point	-35.09118	117.94289
Norwegian Whaling Station centroid	-35.09216	117.94916



Figure 1. Map of Whaler's Beach, Frenchman Bay, Albany. Basemap: Landgate WA Now Mosaic captured May 2020. WGS 84.

Historical precis

The history of *Elvie* is recorded in Boocock et al. (1990), from oral sources. *Elvie* was locally built flat-bottomed wooden lighter, used to carry oil to the whaling vessels in Frenchman Bay. After whaling station closed in 1915, the vessel was abandoned at its moorings. In 1921, it blew ashore and filled with sand, where it remains to this day.

Site Conditions on Inspection

Site description

Whalers Beach is approximately 9km southeast of Albany. It faces north-east into Frenchman Bay.

There are three known shipwrecks on this beach:

- *Elvie* (1921), a wooden lighter located in the intertidal zone, normally mostly buried under sand;
- *Rip* (1900), a wooden schooner, normally buried under sand just seaward of the beach; and
- An unidentified iron barge, located in shallow water.

There are three wrecks on nearby Goode Beach, just north of Frenchman Bay.

- *Fanny Nicholson* (1872), a wooden schooner;
- *Runnymede* (1881), a wooden barque; and
- An unidentified wreck.

WA Museum staff arrived at *Elvie* as conditions were approaching low tide (0.5m), with low swell. The seabed out from the beach was almost entirely covered in dense, suspended seaweed, which made it impossible to inspect any submerged features.

Pedestrian and drone surveys were conducted around the known wreck areas; *Elvie* was the only wreck able to be relocated.

The remains of the Norwegian Whaling Station (1912-1915) can be found in the south-east of Whalers Beach (Garratt 1994) (Figure 12). Currently, all that remain exposed are piles of weathered red brick and foundations.

Site condition and integrity

Images from the ABC news article indicated the bilge and interior of the hull were almost completely exposed. By the time WA Museum staff arrived, nearly one-quarter of the wreck was reburied in sand. At the lowest tide (0.5m) the hull was still located below the low water mark. Whilst undertaking the pedestrian and drone surveys, staff noted that sediment continued to move over the site.

Management Considerations:

Natural Forces

Elvie has been damaged by natural processes since its wrecking. The earliest known images of the wreck site are from Mrs H Hartman in the 1920s (Figures 2 & 3). These show the wreck in a state of disrepair, but with far more structure than there is today.

Photographs in the WA Museum archives (Boocock et al. 1990) and images provided by members of the public illustrate a progressive loss of structure over the last 30 years (Figures 4-11). As is evident from Figures 4 & 5, the majority of the shipwreck is normally buried under beach sand. The port side was mostly lost between the 1990 excavations and 1991. The wreck was very exposed after a strong storm in 2003 (Figure 7). The loss of almost all but the lower hull occurred some time since 2003, and the starboard side mostly disappeared between June and early August of 2020 (Figure 9). During inspection in August 2020, only the bottom of the hull and a small part of the port stern hull remains (Figures 10 & 11).

This process of site formation is typical of wooden shipwrecks located in beach inter-tidal zones, as wooden structures are mechanically, chemically and biologically degraded following storm wave action.

Human forces

Alleged vandalism to *Elvie* was reported to the Museum in June 2020 (Richard Vogwill pers. comm. 2020), and subsequently reported in the 10 August 2020 ABC media article 'Albany's *Elvie* shipwreck faces destruction almost 100 years after running aground'. It is evident from damage to some of the exposed hull frames that someone cut off timbers with a saw. A local member of the public noted this timber was used for firewood on the beach. Inspection of the hull remains suggests the site has been previously vandalised, as other frames have been cut off, exhibiting similar saw-marks. An intact section of dissociated wooden hull planking and frames believed to be from *Elvie* was recovered by the local community around 2006, and incorporated into a heritage interpretation lookout on Vancouver Road (MA File 195/72/8).

The beach is accessible from both sides of the bay, with frequent foot-traffic throughout the day. No interpretation or signage is located nearby to signal the historical significance of *Elvie*, or any of the other cultural heritage sites in along the beach.

Projected site stability

Based on the dynamic nature of the sediment movement during storms, without intervention, this site will continue to erode. It is expected, that without available legislative protection and interpretation in the nearby vicinity, the site will be subject to further interference.



Figure 2. Elvie in the 1920s. Images from Mrs H Hartman. WA Museum MA Negative 1423-05 and 1423-06.



Figure 3. Pre-disturbance photograph of Elvie in 1990 (WA Museum).

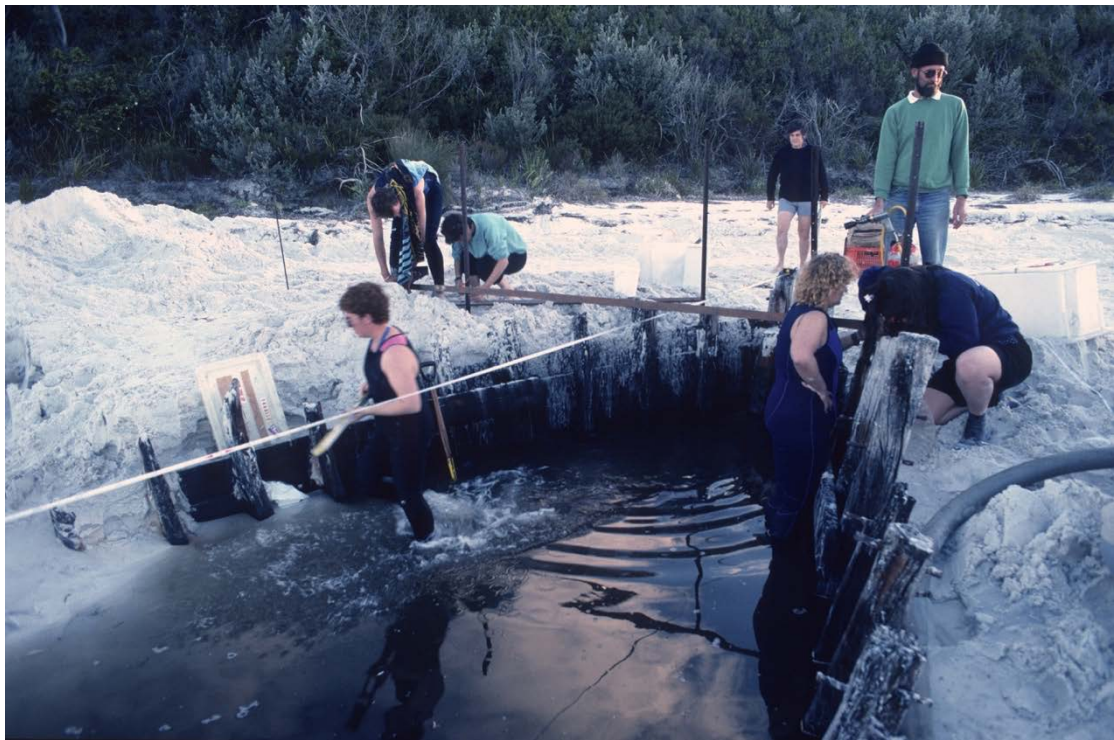


Figure 4. Museum excavation of Elvie in July 1990 (WA Museum).



Figure 5. Elvie in August 1991. Photo by Adam Wolfe/WAM MA Negative 4227



Figure 6. Part of Elvie in July 1991. Photo by Adam Wolfe/WAM MA Negative 4226

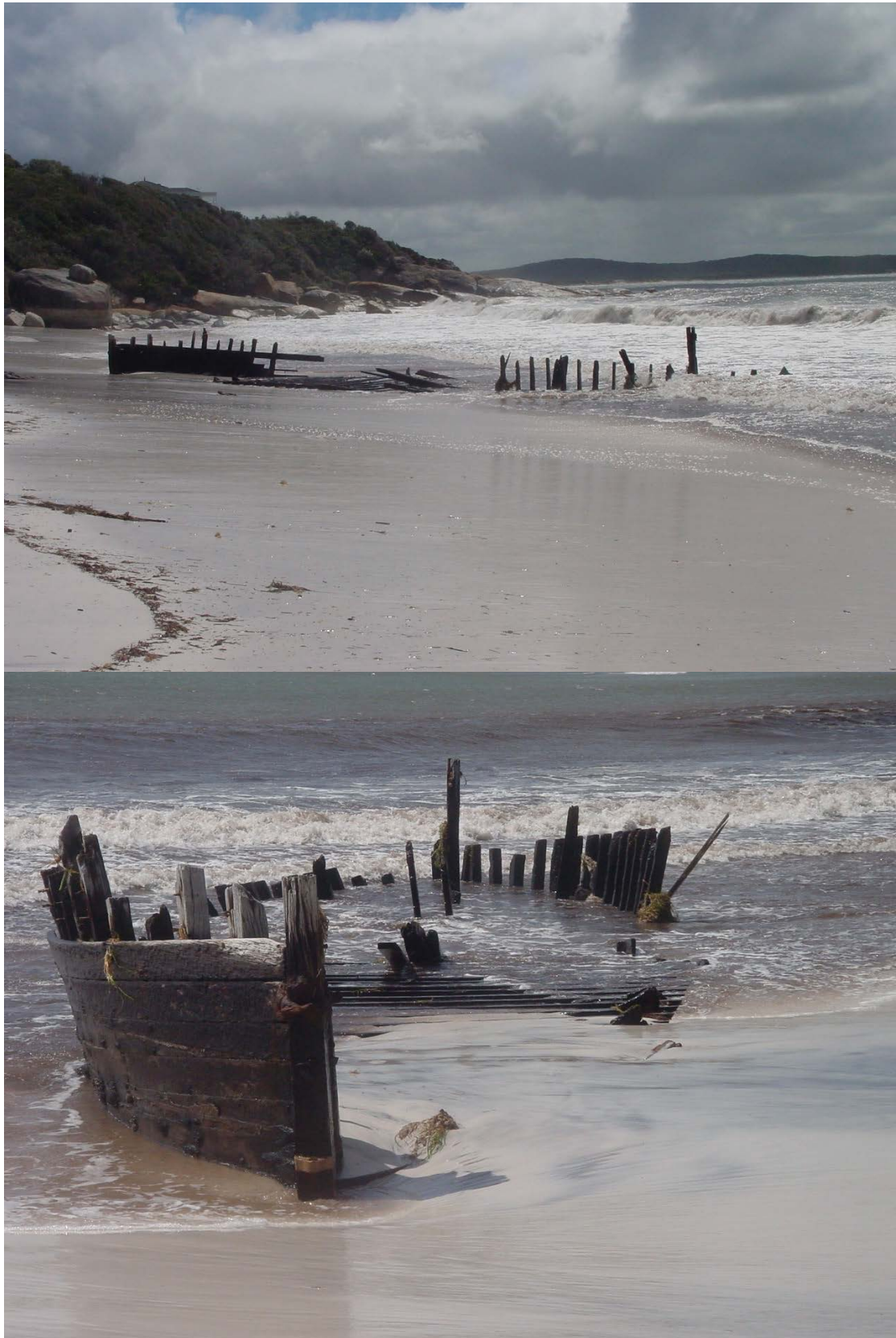


Figure 7. Elvie in 2003, after a storm. Photos supplied by Martin Beeck

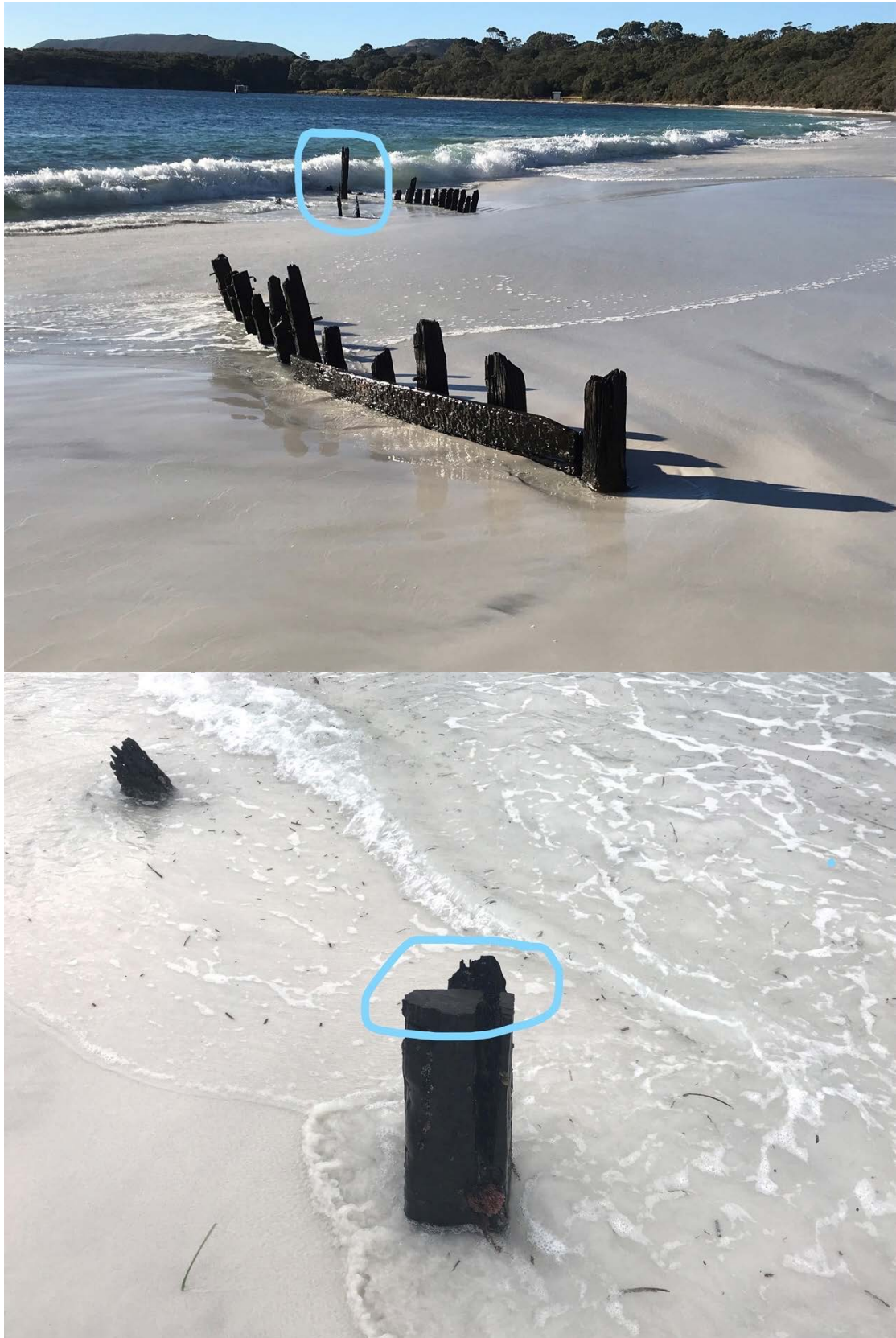


Figure 8. Photos supplied by Richard Vogwill showing Elvie in June 2020, showing alleged vandalism. Drawing indicates where pieces have been sawn off (drawing as supplied).



Figure 9. Elvie fully exposed immediately after the 2020 storm (ABC News).



Figure 10. Deb Shefi probing the extent of the wreck after the storm in August 2020 (Patrick Morrison/WA Museum).

Site Image (Plan View) – Elvie



Figure 11. Drone image recorded on 14/08/2020 at 16:51. (Patrick Morrison/ WA Museum).



Figure 12. Frenchman Bay Whaling Station orthomosaic. Recorded by Mavic Mini drone and processed in Agisoft Metashape. (Patrick Morrison/ WA Museum).

Management and Protection

The shipwreck *Elvie* is currently unable to be protected by the Commonwealth *Underwater Cultural Heritage Act 2018* nor the Western Australian *Maritime Archaeology Act 1973*. As *Elvie* (wrecked in 1921) has been determined to lie within State waters, the State Act does not protect the site because it can only protect historic ships wrecked in WA state waters before 1900.

Ascertaining jurisdictional boundaries of state waters can be a legally complex issue involving constitutional law decisions extending back to 1901, when Australia became a Federation. The WA Museum contacted Geoscience Australia (the Commonwealth authority for mapping Australia's maritime boundaries) for advice on the waters of King George Sound. Geoscience Australia in turn sought advice from the Commonwealth Attorney General's office. The Attorney General's office subsequently provided clarification defining all waters inside a line drawn between Bald Head and Herald Point as being State waters (Figure 13). Similar questions for other sites and areas will have to be resolved on a case by case basis. This will become an increasing concern for shipwrecks wrecked after 1900 within WA state waters, as the gap between eligibility for federal protection (wrecked >75 years ago) and state protection (wrecked before 1900) increases. It is also an issue as global best practice defined by the *2001 UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage* defines underwater cultural heritage as being over 100 years old, which the state *Maritime Archaeology Act 1973*—once pioneering legislation—is no longer consistent with.

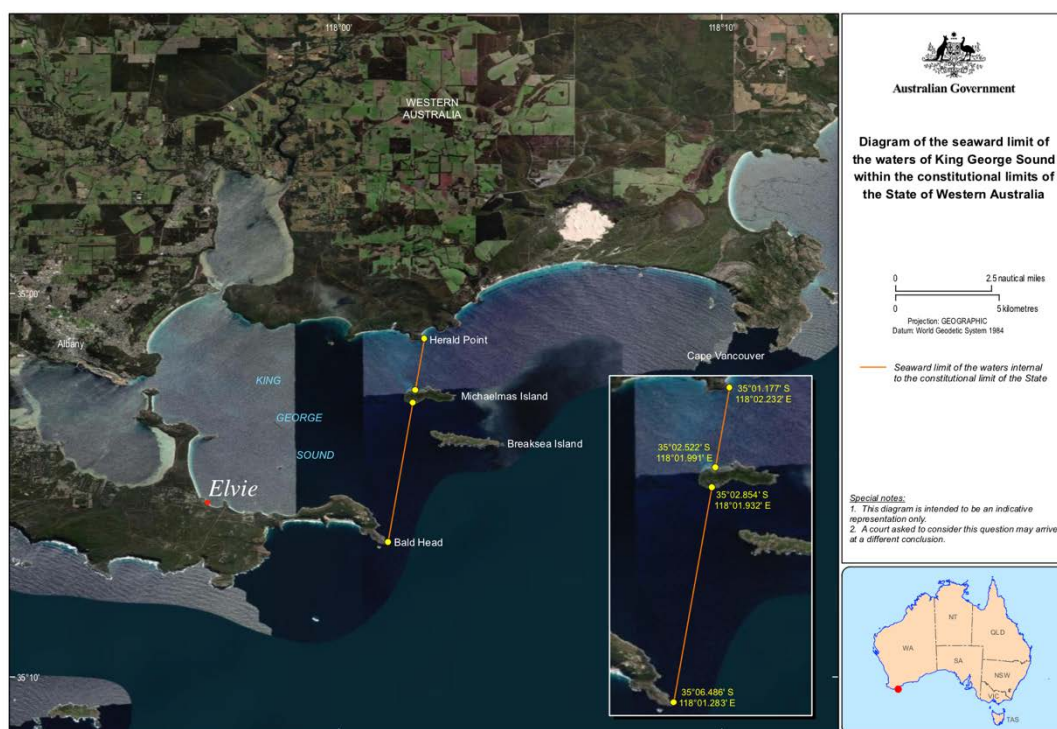


Figure 13. Information provided by the Commonwealth Attorney General on the limits of state waters in King George Sound. Mark for *Elvie* added by authors of this report.

Interpretive opportunities

The bay is a dense maritime cultural landscape with high potential for heritage interpretation, of the visible and buried shipwrecks and whaling station ruins. This could educate the public on the history of whaling and maritime activities in Albany, and could also help prevent interference by increasing public awareness of heritage values. Interpretive signage for the whaling station was previously recommended by a Museum report (Garrett 1994), and a heritage trail was the subject of a feasibility study for the Frenchman Bay Association (H+H Architects 2014).

References

- Boocock, A., Bower, R., Coroneos, C., McKinnon, R., Marshall, G. 1990 Survey of Wrecks Frenchman Bay, Albany. *WA Museum Maritime Archaeology Reports* 50.
- Department of Maritime Archaeology File 195/72/8, Albany Area.
- Garratt, D. 1994 Norwegian Whaling Station, Frenchman Bay. Maritime Heritage Site Inspection Report. *WA Museum Maritime Archaeology Reports* 82.
- H+H Architects 2015 Proposed Frenchman Bay Heritage Trail Feasibility Study. Unpublished report prepared for the Frenchman Bay Association.
- Hussey, T. 2020. 'Albany's Elvie shipwreck faces destruction almost 100 years after running aground', *ABC Great Southern*, 10 August 2020. Available at: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-08-10/albany-wa-shipwreck-elvie-nature-walks/12542032> (Accessed: 12 August 2020).