UNDERSTANDING THE MEANING OF ‘SHIPWRECK’
BRINGING CULTURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE TOGETHER

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UNDERSTANDING THE MEANING OF ‘SHIPWRECK’

- WHAT DOES THE TERM ‘SHIPWRECK’ MEAN
  - Has similar meaning to the word ‘accident’
  - Construct of language that describes effects, errors, faults or mistakes that culminate in a wrecking event
  - Describes what we don’t know or wish to understand about the event
WHAT IS CULTURAL PRE-DISPOSITION?

- Describes a process that has been recognised but not clearly defined
- ‘Shipwrecks represent general cultural processes of which they were a part prior to wrecking. If natural and cultural processes affecting maritime activities reflect patterned regularities, sites resulting from them will be patterned and will best be interpreted in a wide sociocultural context’


- Represents a confluence of cultural and environmental evidence
UNDERSTANDING THE MEANING OF ‘SHIPWRECK’

- CULTURAL FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH SHIPWRECK
  - Economic factors
    - Foreign and domestic competition
    - Marine insurance and vessel classification
    - Vessel construction, repairs and maintenance
    - Equipment, crewing and provisioning
UNDERSTANDING THE MEANING OF ‘SHIPWRECK’

- CULTURAL FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH SHIPWRECK
  - Technological factors
    - Vessel design and handling
    - Problems with sailing vessels
    - Problems with steam powered vessels
    - Construction materials and techniques
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CULTURAL FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH SHIPWRECK
- Hydrographics and navigation
  - Navigation instruments
  - Charts and sailing directions
  - Lighthouses and navigation aids
UNDERSTANDING THE MEANING OF ‘SHIPWRECK’

- CULTURAL FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH SHIPWRECK
  - Problems with cargo or vessel employment
    - Improper loading of vessels
    - Hazardous cargoes
    - Risk associated with vessel employment
UNDERSTANDING THE MEANING OF ‘SHIPWRECK’

- CULTURAL FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH SHIPWRECK
  - Human factors
    - Incompetency of masters, officers or crew
    - Drunkenness, fatigue and disease
    - Piracy and barratry
UNDERSTANDING THE MEANING OF ‘SHIPWRECK’

○ ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS
  ➢ Seasonal weather patterns
  ➢ Severe weather events
  ➢ Regional geomorphology
  ➢ Tides and currents
  ➢ Geomagnetism
THE NORTH-EASTERN AUSTRALIAN REGION
- Coral Sea and the Great Barrier Reef
- Includes 520 shipwrecks 1791 - 1901
- Detailed wrecking event data for 167
- 67% caused by cultural factors
- 73% of vessels undermanned
- 68% wrecked during night time
UNDERSTANDING THE MEANING OF ‘SHIPWRECK’

- Case study: Raine Island Entrance
  - Surveyed in 1844 by Captain Blackwood in HMS Fly
  - Rejected Black Rocks Entrance
  - Constructed Raine Island Beacon
  - Ship trap that claimed 47 vessels
  - Majority of vessels wrecked due to cultural factors
UNDERSTANDING THE MEANING OF ‘SHIPWRECK’

THANK YOU FOR ATTENDING THIS PRESENTATION

QUESTIONS?