Fact sheet

Balls Head Coal Loader Wharf Safety and Stabilisation Works

Why is RMS removing part of the wharf?

The increasingly deteriorating condition of the wharf presents a significant safety issue. The wharf is unstable, and therefore it is no longer possible for individuals to access the wharf or the immediate surrounding area due to fear of collapse.

A mesh net has been installed around the base of the wharf to help catch and contain deteriorated elements of the wharf that have fallen off the wharf. The effectiveness of this has lessened as materials continually deteriorate and fall beyond the mesh net.

Pieces of timber decking and piling falling from the wharf present a hazard to marine navigation, particularly from the middle section of the wharf. Collapse of the middle deck is a risk to public safety and may lead to a significant loss of structural integrity to the wharf, possibly resulting in the loss of the entire structure.

On 31 July 2018, Roads and Maritime issued a Mariner Navigation Warning for Derelict structures and possible floating debris under the Marine Safety Act 1998, Section 12 for the area of Balls Head and Berry’s Bay. This notice advises marine traffic of increased risk, and to address the risk Roads and Maritime is removing loose timber that is at risk of falling into the water.

Is the work methodology sensitive to the Heritage significance of the fragile structure?

The work is being carried out with due care and sensitivity to the heritage community value of the structure.

The Contractor’s stabilisation works were planned in accordance with the Wharf Maintenance Program of Water Based Structures on Sydney Harbour, Parramatta River and Lane Cove River REF, 2014 and subsequent addendums that include a Statement of Heritage Impact for the Coal Loader Wharf at Balls Head. Engineering and Heritage reviews have also been carried out on the work that has been completed to date.

Is the equipment that is being used sensitive to the heritage significance of the fragile structure?

Given the unpredictable behaviour of the wharf structure and uncertainty about how the decayed materials would respond, the work method focuses first on the safety of workers. The method is actively reviewed as works progress. The removal methods are listed below in order from most delicate and preferred to higher risk of damage:

- Using two cranes at once: one crane to lift material and the other to hold a man box so that workers are suspended above the structure and can attach slings for lifting of items
- Using ‘gas axe’ with extension arm to cut metal if required (frame structure may spring back in partially collapsed state)
Cut the conveyor steel frame and timber decking into segments using chainsaws or other cutting gear
Attaching a line to an item and pulling material in a controlled fall so that it can be collected
Nudging an item if it is unsafe to approach due to its deteriorated condition.
Using a grab bucket to tug loose material off the structure – this is primarily to minimise risk of strong winds pushing the loose material into the navigable waters. The grab buckets was used to maintain a distance from the structure and minimise risk to workers from collapsing elements
Assess if further structural materials are at risk of falling into the water

What is the current status of heritage assessment of the wharf?

The former coal loader wharf at Balls Head is currently listed as a local heritage item in Schedule 3 ‘Heritage Items’ of the North Sydney Local Environmental Plan.

North Sydney Council has lodged an application with the Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) to have the wharf listed on the State Heritage Register (SHR).

What is the long term conservation of the structure?

Roads and Maritime is currently in discussions with OEH and other relevant organisations to consider a suitable long term conservation of the heritage structure. The work is being carried out with due consideration to the conservation of the wharf.

How can we be assured that Roads and Maritime is not using safety issues as a shield to demolish the structure?

Roads and Maritime is focusing on ensuring the structural integrity of the wharf is sound and safe, as it is currently presenting a significant risk to navigational safety, both in the immediate vicinity as well as more broadly into Sydney Harbour’s busy shipping lanes.

Any sections of the wharf that are stable are remaining and will not be removed as part of this work. This includes the section closest to the land, which is in a relatively stable condition.

We will continue to liaise with OEH around the heritage significance of this wharf.

What happens to the material removed from the wharf?

All recovered timber and steel components are being retained and assessed to see if it can be reused in some way. The timber that is unsound will be disposed of at the completion of work. Only two per cent of the timber removed to date has been assessed as suitable for reuse which unlikely to be for structural purpose. The material will be stored until a suitable re-use option is determined.

How will the community and stakeholders be notified of the work taking place on the wharf?

A letter has been distributed to the surrounding residents, and information is available on the Roads and Maritime Website at: http://www.rms.nsw.gov.au/projects/sydney-north/balls-head-coal-loader.html

If you need help understanding this information, please contact the Translating and Interpreting Service on 131 450 and ask them to call us on 0412 202 702.