

St Leonards Local Port Area Plan

Community Update



December 2024 Issue 3

We've been working hard to identify design options for the St Leonards Pier rebuild and we have uncovered some fascinating history.

We have heard what stakeholders and the community have had to say about the pier rebuild and are prioritising features including the pier length, access for fishing and scuba diving, and protection of marine values.

As part of this work, we've been investigating the underwater heritage of a shipwreck that lies beneath the existing pier and the implications of disturbing it. We're also studying the protected marine flora and fauna that inhabit the breakwater and harbour.

Over the coming months you may see us out and about as we complete our underwater heritage investigations. The insights gained from these surveys along with community feedback and environmental investigations will be used to refine a pier design option. This design will be a key component of the final Local Port Area Plan, which we look forward to sharing with you as soon as we can.

The Maritime Mystery of a Heritage Hulk

In the late 1850s, Coles Jetty sat in the current location of St Leonards Pier. Fishing was the primary occupation of residents in St Leonards, with farming and timber harvesting also being significant occupations. The jetty was mostly used for shipping timber to Melbourne but also enabled the transport of goods such as fish, poultry, grain, and vegetables.

To assist in the movement of goods along the jetty, a tramway was constructed along its length. In 1859 Coles Jetty was extended at its seaward end with a large, two-decked hulk (an anchored ship that is no longer seaworthy often as a result of being wrecked or otherwise damaged). Until recently, this hulk was thought to have been the St George. St Leonards Pier was subsequently built over Coles Jetty, including the submerged hulk.

As all historic shipwrecks are protected under the Heritage Act 2017, preliminary investigations into the heritage values of the pier were undertaken to inform the management of these values during any

future rebuild. These investigations confirmed that the wreck is still there.

Surprisingly, the research has also revealed that the wreck is not the St George as originally thought, but of another, as yet, unidentified ship. We know this because the measurements of this ship were inconsistent with the St George and its timber was found not to be oak but from a wood endemic to India and South East Asia.

Additional investigations will determine the full extent and dimensions of this wreck. This information will assist in determining the future alignment and design of a new St Leonards Pier.

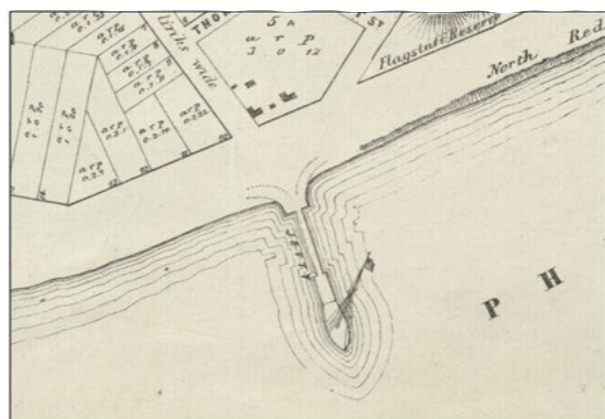
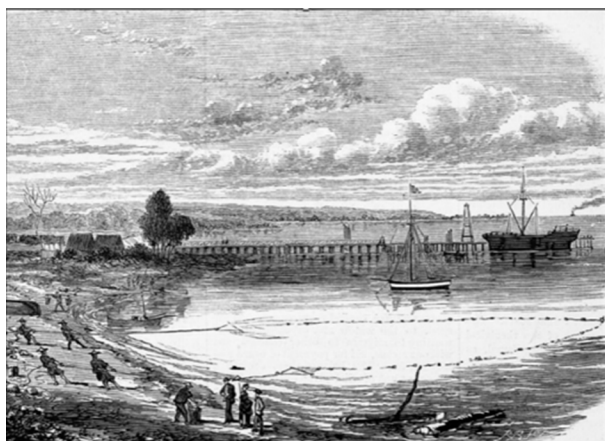


Image: Sketch of Coles Jetty and Subdivision plan of St Leonards on the bay showing the outline of a ship at the end of the jetty c. 1860 (Source: State Library of Victoria)

Protecting seagrass

St Leonards Harbour is home to dense and extensive seagrass and marine plant cover, creating a large, continuous meadow for local fauna. The dominant species found in the harbour is a type of seagrass *Heterozostera nigricaulis* that is protected under the Victorian *Flora and Fauna Act 1988* (FFG).



Image: Sparse subtidal seagrass *Heterozostera nigricaulis* in St Leonards Harbour (2023)

As part of the pier design and rebuild we need to minimise disturbance to this seagrass meadow and protected species through design and construction works and consider potential effects of vessel moorings, berths or access channels on the seagrass meadow.

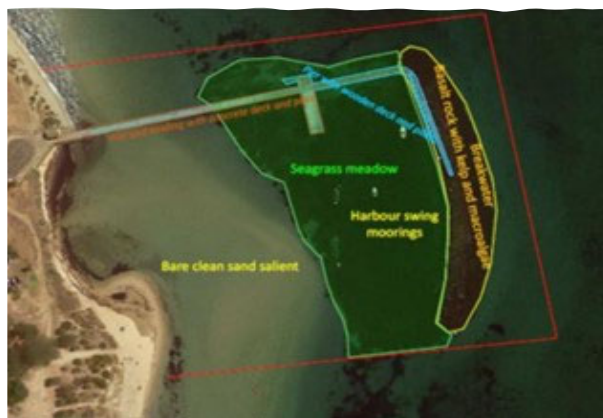


Image: Current layout in St Leonards Harbour showing the location of seagrass

What does all this mean for the new pier?

We are committed to ensuring the Local Port Area Plan considers community feedback as well as the protection of heritage and environmental values.

We're using teams of heritage and environmental experts as well as maritime engineers to consider design options that can be constructed within budget and have a serviceable life of up to 50 years while responding to future sea level rise.

As you will appreciate, this is a complex task and one that will take some time. But rest assured the rebuild project is going ahead.

We appreciate your patience and anticipate having a final Local Port Area Plan available to share with community in 2025.

Learn more and subscribe for updates at the project page - www.parks.vic.gov.au/projects