

WWII plane wreck found in Darwin Harbour may be heritage listed

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The director of the Northern Territory Government's Heritage Branch says a World War II sea plane found in Darwin Harbour is a significant piece of Australian history.

Japanese gas company Inpex found the sixth United States Catalina wreck while surveying the harbour for its proposed LNG gas plant.

It was bombed by the Japanese in 1942 and sank 18 metres below the surface.

Michael Wells says it is quite possible the Catalina will be declared a heritage-listed site, but the decision ultimately rests with the Northern Territory Government.

"This is a wreck which is directly associated with the attack that took place on February 19, 1942 which was the first attack on Darwin and in fact the first attack by a foreign enemy on Australian soil," he said.

"That was a very significant day in the history of Darwin and the history of Australia."

Inpex's Sean Kildare says the find is not close to the proposed \$12 billion gas plant.

But Mr Kildare says the company will look at how the discovery affects its potential use of the harbour.

"[Issues] such as LNG export shipping traffic and also dredging options for the shipping to come into the harbour, so we have to consider these issues in light of all of that," he said.

"We are working with the Northern Territory Government who will be consulting with various stakeholders as we are also consulting with other stakeholders in what's the full range options to manage these type of issues in relation to a development in middle arm," he said.

Mr Wells says a 150-metre protected zone will be declared around the wreck if it is heritage listed.

"I think it's very clear that this is a significant wreck but we have to go through the process of assessing it and then putting an assessment report up to the Heritage Advisory Council," he said.

"Ultimately it is the Minister's decision whether this wreck or the other wrecks get heritage listing."