

**Check against delivery**  
**RMS Lusitania**  
**Opening Statement for Joint Oireachtas Committee**

The Lusitania was struck by a torpedo on 7 May 1915 approximately 11 nautical miles off the Old Head of Kinsale. The ship sank within 18 minutes and, of the 1962 persons on board, 1198 lives were lost. The fact that 128 American citizens perished is often cited as the catalyst for the United States of America entering World War I in 1917.

The wreck of the Lusitania has been owned by an American private citizen since the 1960s. It is one of over 17,000 shipwrecks recorded in the Shipwreck Inventory of Ireland Database (SIID), compiled by the Department's National Monuments Service.

An Underwater Heritage Order was placed on the *Lusitania* in 1995 by the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (now President Michael D Higgins) under section 3 of the National Monuments (Amendment) Act 1987 which allows for the protection of wrecks that are less than one hundred years old on account of their "historical, archaeological or artistic importance".

Since the making of the Underwater Heritage Order any person seeking to undertake diving or other investigations aimed at the exploration of the wreck, including the owner, must apply to the Minister for a licence.

As part of a more collaborative approach between the owner and the Department, a Memorandum of Understanding was agreed between the parties in April 2013 "in regard to present and future research priorities for the protected wreck". The object of the Memorandum of Understanding was to set the agenda for future research on the wreck, to identify areas where there might be room for collaboration on projects and to set out the respective aims, objectives and legal obligations of the parties.

The Memorandum of Understanding was also intended to provide a framework to facilitate the owner's continuing research into the cause of a second explosion that resulted in the vessel sinking in just 18 minutes and to facilitate appropriate artefact

recovery, subject to proper protection of the wreck site and the artefacts contained within it.

A number of licenses have been granted to the owner and other persons over the years for purposes ranging from recreation, investigation and artefact recovery, subject to a range of conditions in each case. A number of artefacts have been recovered in the course of these expeditions and the owner has indicated that his general intention is to place them on public display in a proposed Lusitania Museum on the Old Head of Kinsale.

The Department's believes that the position it has adopted in relation to regulation of activities on the wreck site is reasonable and balanced and takes appropriate account of the owner's rights and the need to protect the wreck and any objects recovered from it.

Licences under the National Monuments Acts are subject to review and input from the relevant professional archaeological services in the Department, are structured to reflect the particular nature, circumstances and objectives of the licensable activity and, consequently, will vary from case to case.

The most recent licence issued in this instance, which was subject to 20 detailed conditions, reflected the Memorandum of Understanding between the Department and the owner of the wreck to facilitate greater mutual co-operation and collaboration.

The licence also reflected the unique and extensive knowledge of the wreck site on the part of the person appointed to make the recovery, the complexity and arduousness of the dive, the nature, composition and location of the artefact being known, the fact that the artefact had been previously been filmed on the seabed and also the applicant's intention to recover the particular artefact for donation, conservation and display in a suitable local public facility.

**Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs**

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