



## *Shipwrecks and Shipping Casualties*

Wellington Harbour, its adjacent coastline, and Cook Strait, all have a history of many shipwrecks and casualties over the past 160 years.

Wellington's unpredictable winds and weather, especially southerly storms, creating currents and swells has accounted for many wrecks.

From the years 1841 to 1996 there has been at least 57 shipwrecks recorded in this area. In 1841 a barque called the *Winwick* was wrecked at Lyall Bay to the *Maria Luisa* in 1996.

Two of New Zealand's worst shipping disasters have occurred in this area: on the evening of 12 February 1909 the passenger steamer *Penguin* hit a rock while returning back from Picton, this stormy night claimed 75 lives. A more recent disaster, the inter-island ferry the *Wahine* foundered at the entrance to Wellington Harbour in a severe southerly storm on 10 April 1968, with the loss of 51 lives.

Other wrecks or casualty that remain in peoples mind is the liner the *Wanganella*. It struck Barrett Reef on 19 January 1947 and spent 18 days stranded on the rocks because of the calm weather. This event lead the locals to adopt the term "Wanganella weather" to describe a succession of fine, calm, windless days.

The loss of the police launch *Lady Elizabeth II* which capsized at the harbour entrance in 1986 when hit by a 8 metre high wave. Two policemen died in the tragedy, while two others were picked by from the sea by the Wellington Rescue Helicopter by Peter Button in dangerous weather conditions.

An example of four different vessels encountering trouble around Wellington waters are the *Yung Pen* (steel fishing vessel), *Wellington* (full rigged ship), *Progress* (iron steamer) and the *Cyprus* (three masted barque). These different vessels came to grief for different reasons. The reason they are so unusual is that these four shipwrecks, which happened years apart are all located at Owhiro Bay. Not only have they come to rest in the same location, but they are almost situated on top of each other.

An incident in which the ship was saved occurred in 1936 when the first inter-island ferry *Rangatira* grounded near Sinclair Head in conditions of poor visibility. In that instance the ship could be backed off the rocks and her Captain managed to bring her safely into Wellington Harbour stern first.