



SEMAPHORE

Newsletter of the Maritime Law

Association of Australia and New Zealand



Iconic Wellington Vessel Sinks

A 76-year-old launch, which had been a fixture on Wellington's waterfront since the 1990s, sunk in a storm that swept the Capital City in the earlier part of last month.

The 100-GT and 26-metre Sealion – which had progressively deteriorated in condition, was known to take on water and required significant investment to bring it back into seaworthy condition – reportedly developed a problem with one of its bilge pumps late in the afternoon of August 8.

Wellington harbourmaster Grant Nalder reported that, although the person onboard felt it was under control, "it turns out it wasn't".

"The vessel had internal 12-volt pumps moving water back to the engine room and from three over-the-side via a 240-volt pump," said Mr Nalder.

"I hadn't dug deeply into the power and pumping arrangements, however, it seems likely that the pumping from the engine room either stopped or was reduced.

"Reports shortly before she slipped under was the stern was almost awash. That would have likely had the top of the rudder sleeve below the waterline."



The Sealion when still recently afloat at Wellington's Glasgow Wharf (among buildings in the background can be seen a glimpse of the Beehive)

Mr Nalder said a process was now being worked through with the vessel's owner, understood to be Nelson-based pensioner and boatie Selwyn Findley, and it was hoped that a salvage operation would get underway "shortly".

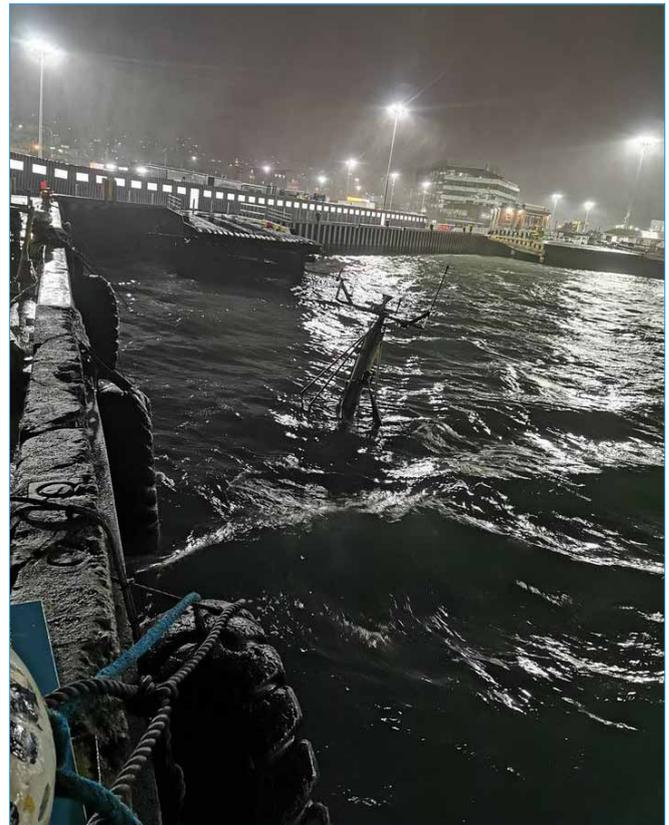
"In the short term she will sit where she is as we work through the process and make a plan. How and where she could be lifted out will form a big part of that plan."

He added that dive companies had also made enquiries as to potential plans for the vessel.

"I have had one call asking of it could be a dive wreck. Not a bad idea, however, preparing and cleaning it underwater could be a challenge."

An article on the history of the Sealion (referred to as "Sea Lion") – which was originally intended to be a "general purpose wooden-hull stores lighter for the Royal Australian Navy" – can be found in the [*New Zealand Maritime Index*](#).

Further detail on the vessel's more recent history in Wellington can be found in this [*RNZ article*](#).



Now under the water

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