

Wahine disaster

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(MCH, 2014q)

Tragedy in Wellington Harbour

The sinking of the Lyttelton–Wellington ferry *Wahine* on 10 April 1968 was New Zealand's worst modern maritime disaster. Fifty-one people lost their lives that day, another died several weeks later and a 53rd victim died in 1990 from injuries sustained in the wreck. The *Wahine's* demise also marked a coming of age for television news broadcasting in New Zealand as images of the disaster were beamed into the nation's living rooms. The footage was later screened around the world as the international media spotlight focused on Wellington.

Would-be rescuers stood helplessly on the beach at Seatoun as the *Wahine* succumbed to one of the worst storms recorded in New Zealand history. It seemed impossible that so many lives could be lost so close to shore. Although the main cause of the accident was the atrocious weather conditions, the subsequent inquest also acknowledged that errors of judgement had been made both on board the ferry and on shore. Shipwrecks were commonplace in the 19th century, but this was the 1960s – how could a large, modern vessel founder almost within sight of New Zealand's capital city?

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Reference