

# Port History

## CAIRNS WHARF COMPLEX – WHARF 6

**The construction of the Cairns Wharves has played a significant part in the development of Cairns maritime infrastructure. The wharves represent an important stage of the development of Queensland and Australia throughout 1878 to 1942. From early settlement in 1876, the discovery of gold on the Hodgkinson River, made for a need to develop a port closer to the area.**

During 1910 - 1930 wharves 1-5 were constructed and replaced first settlement wharves, being among the earliest in Australia to use the medium of reinforced concrete into five 300 ft long concrete wharves (Wharf 1 to Wharf 5).

The first concrete wharf in Cairns was the third such structure constructed in Queensland and likely fourth constructed in Australia. Wharf 1 to Wharf 4 were constructed in 1911 to 1917 and Wharf 5 was constructed in 1925.



### World War II

Forces from Australia Britain and other allies had been fighting WWII for two years before conflict broke out in the Pacific, following the bombing of the United States naval base at Pearl Harbour in 1941. The action resulted in the Americans joining the war and taking command of headquarters for the Allied South-West Pacific Area command. A small number of American troops began arriving in Australia in late 1941 and by mid-1942 over 100,000 American troops were posted to facilities across Australia.

North Queensland's proximity to the battle front in the Pacific lent it great strategic importance, and several major military facilities were established, ranging from encampments to fixed defences and officers' clubs to aerodromes. One of the priorities in the port towns of the north were large dockage and wharfage schemes designed to swing the whole balance of Naval and material power in the southern seas. Existing wharf facilities were upgraded at Cairns, Townsville, and Gladstone, adding fuel and equipment storage, new wharves, jetties, and warehouses. Included among these early upgrade works was the addition of Wharf 6 to the Cairns waterfront in 1942.

### Construction of Wharf 6

Based on the need for a wharf as quickly as possible, the decision was made to construct a timber wharf with a concrete deck that would tie back into the existing wharf. The construction of number 6 wharf demonstrates the importance of Cairns as a centre for Pacific forces during World War II, and its timber and reinforced concrete construction reflects war-time expediency.

Wharf 6 was again modified in the 1960s when a crane was added to its deck. This involved the addition of three large crane footings added through the deck of the timber wharf, with each crane leg including a series of steel piles and large headstock. The crane remained in operation until the 1990s when it was removed, but the above and below deck foundations remained on site.



### New Wharf 6

Over a 2 year period commencing in 2018 work on the Cairns Shipping Development Project was undertaken which saw the widening and deepening of the shipping channel to allow larger cruise ships up to 300 metres in length to berth in Cairns, together with the upgrading of wharves 1-6 to improve berthing and mooring capacity. This included upgrading the heritage listed Wharf 6.

The upgraded Wharf 6 has been constructed adjacent to the existing quayline to ensure ongoing operations on the site and to cater to modern vessels and loadings, including new, larger cruise liners. As part of this new construction and to highlight the original timber construction of the wharf, sections of the concrete deck have been removed to expose the original timber substructure providing insight into how the wharf was constructed during the wartime period in 1941-42.

