A Japanese pearling mother ship that sank during a storm off the Northern Territory coast in 1937 has been brought to life on film.

The wreckage of the Sanyo Maru was dived for the first time earlier this month and today Environment Minister, Terry Mills, presented the first pictures of the ship to Darwin’s Japanese community at their annual cultural day.

“The vision obtained by NT Heritage of the Sanyo Maru is a significant find for the Northern Territory and the people of Japan,” Mr Mills said.

“Thanks to perfect weather conditions, the recent expedition to the wreck site was able to produce incredibly clear and accurate video and photos which show the ship remarkably intact.

“The footage allows us to imagine what life was like for Japanese pearlers at the time and shows that the connection between the Territory and Japan goes back many, many years ago.

“I think this find will now bring our two countries even closer together.”

Two people died when the Sanyo Maru sank in Boucaut Bay, 60 kilometres off Maningrida, and another perished during a later salvage attempt.

Maritime Archaeologist and expedition leader, David Steinberg, from the NT Government’s Heritage Branch, said the wreckage had provided his team important archaeological material.

“It is unique in terms of the Australian Archaeological Resource and will almost certainly have international interest, particularly with the Japanese” Mr Steinberg said.

“We have already made preliminary contact with the Osaka Museum of Ethnography and have let them know about the success of our fieldtrip and I hope this may lead to future research collaborations.”

The footage of the Sanyo Maru will now be uploaded to the Australian National Shipwreck Database at www.environment.gov.au/heritage/shipwrecks/database.html

The Sanyo Maru is protected under the Commonwealth’s Historic Shipwrecks Act 1976. Under the Act, it is an offence for a person to damage, remove or disturb a historic shipwreck or an associated relic and penalties for such breaches include fines of up to $10,000 or imprisonment of up to 5 years.

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