

Shining a light on lighthouses

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Presenter: Wayne Shearman

The latest exhibition from the National Archives, *A Beacon by the Sea*, is shedding light on the history of Australia's lighthouses.

Julie Akmacic from the National Archives says lighthouses are very emotive objects.

"Everybody sees something different in a lighthouse. People think they're romantic, or they're a beautiful structure.

"Looking at a lighthouse, somebody else might think of shipwrecks. You might think about how beautifully it was designed, or the technology used to keep that light burning.

"I think lighthouses are quite special, because they are a part of our history. Not only are they a beautiful landmark, but they really do relate to a lot of people's lives. It really focuses on the community.

"That's another part of history as well; lighthouse keepers and their families used to live on the station, but that doesn't happen any more.

They were the mothers, the teachers, the doctors, they actually kept the family unit functioning.

"I think it's really important to remember the women who worked with the lighthouses. Even though the men were technically the lighthouse keepers, women really played an important role as well.

"They were the mothers, the teachers, the doctors, they actually kept the family unit functioning.

"So that's a part of the exhibition I find special, that focus on the importance of women's role in keeping the light burning."

The exhibition is more than just pictures of lighthouses. Julie Akmacic says there's not only a great human presence in the material on display, but the displays themselves have a hands-on element.

"There's letters, log books, photographs, films - the list is endless. There's quite a lot to do, and it's interactive as well, there are great activities for kids."



Lighthouse: a lonely beacon or a community focal point?