Canada may buy back Amundsen's Maud

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After sinking Norway's plans to repatriate explorer Roald Amundsen's three-mast ship Maud from the Arctic, Canada signalled Monday it may buy the shipwreck.

Canadian Heritage Department spokesman Pierre Manoni told AFP a local group may be given a chance to purchase the shipwreck with the help of a grant from the Canadian government.

The wreck now sits at the bottom of Cambridge Bay in Nunavut, but its hulk is partly visible above the frigid waters that preserved it for decades at the eastern end of the famed Northwest Passage.

Canada last week denied a Norwegian group's application for an export permit to return the shipwreck to Norway to become the centerpiece of a new museum.

Many residents of Cambridge Bay oppose losing a treasured part of their history that has also become a tourist attraction in Canada's far north.

The Norwegian group has asked for a review of the decision to deny the export permit. That will likely occur in March.

Amundsen was the first European explorer to sail through the Northwest Passage in search of a new shorter shipping route from Europe to Asia in 1906, and to the South Pole in 1911.

He again sailed through the Northeast Passage with the Maud in 1918-20

without getting far enough north to start the drift from east to west and maybe over the North Pole.

After one more failed try from the Bering Strait in 1920-21, he finally gave up.

The Maud was sold to Hudson's Bay Company in 1925 and was rechristened Baymaud. It ended its days as a floating warehouse and the region's first radio station, before sinking at its moorings in 1930.

Asker Council, the local district where Maud was built at Vollen, bought the wreck for just $1 in 1990 and obtained an export permit from Canada, but it has expired.

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