



VICTORIAN ARTIFICIAL REEF **SOCIETY INC**

Proposal for a new Victorian Dive Tourism Wreck

Proposal

This proposal is to acquire and sink the former HMAS Canberra as a new artificial reef within Victorian waters. This will provide Victoria with a new dive wreck, artificial reef and tourist attraction.

Background

HMAS Canberra is a long range escort frigate that previously undertook roles including area air-defence, anti-submarine warfare, surveillance, reconnaissance and interdiction as part of Australia's Defence Force. The ship was decommissioned in November 2005 and has been offered by the Federal Government as a suitable wreck for sinking as an artificial reef.

There have been quite a number of ships that have been sunk as artificial reefs. Within Australia, this includes the HMAS Swan, HMAS Perth, HMAS Hobart, HMAS Brisbane as well as the two tugs at Eden and various ships at other locations. Internationally this is now a well accepted practice that is widely viewed as both the most environmentally responsible solution as well as a valuable addition to the local tourist economy.

From an environmental point of view, it is now well established that such wrecks greatly enhance the local environment by providing shelter for a large number of organisms and rapidly establishing a viable and diverse marine ecosystem that can be preserved for a very long period of time.

Economically, such projects provide a new tourist attraction that greatly benefits both at a local and state level by providing a new revenue stream and additional or more secure employment opportunities.

Victoria is well positioned to take advantage of this opportunity. The dive industry is well developed, especially in Port Phillip Bay and surrounds.

Suitable sites can readily be found for sinking of the ship and considerable support is available via the dive community to ensure successful completion of the project including meeting all environmental and safety requirements. A committee has been set up representing the key segments of the dive community that is willing and able to take on a project of this magnitude and see it through to its completion. Bipartisan political support has already been indicated and it is the intention of the committee to ensure broad consultation across all interested parties to obtain the best possible solution taking into account all interests.

Economic Benefits

By placing a properly prepared and safeguarded ship of the stature of HMAS Canberra in a suitably selected location, which offers safe diving, VARS is confident that as a result there will be significant potential to develop the recreational diving market, thus positively impacting the Victorian economy.

These benefits will be gained in the following way:

Attraction of Tourism

The sinking of the HMAS Canberra as an artificial reef will represent a significant new tourist attraction for Victoria. New tourists are expected to be drawn from both interstate and overseas. Currently Victoria is not well known as a dive destination although this has been improving with the addition of the Marine Parks. The HMAS Canberra artificial reef has the potential to significantly enhance Victoria's reputation in this regard. At present, Victoria does have quite a number of shipwrecks, especially in the vicinity of Port Phillip heads. These are known within the local dive community and form the basis of much of our local recreational diving. However, they are not well known outside of Victoria and have not proven to be easy to promote. Further, they are all quite old and significantly deteriorated – thus the long term future is not certain.

The addition of the HMAS Canberra will significantly change this and will provide new promotional opportunities that can be utilised in conjunction with the existing dive sites to substantially change the overall perception of Victoria as a dive destination.

It is anticipated that significant tourism numbers will be drawn from interstate and overseas, potentially doubling numbers of divers visiting. The current figure is given as 7000 per annum, based on a sample of three of the largest dive operators. Of these, it is expected that 30% will be drawn from overseas. This additional tourism will significantly benefit the local economy where the new wreck is to be located as well as Victoria in general, because visitors are unlikely to only want to dive, or to visit just one location.

It should also be pointed out that many diver tourists also bring their families, very often non-divers. Thus – it is likely that the overall effect is greater than the numbers indicated above.

Increased Security to the Industry

The dive industry in Victoria is currently under threat. The industry centres on Port Phillip Bay, especially around the heads where most recreational diving activities take place. Recent moves to deepen the shipping channel in Port Phillip Bay via dredging are likely to result in many of the existing dive sites becoming undiveable for quite some period of time. Combined with the fact that the existing shipwrecks outside the heads are deteriorating and have an uncertain future, this means that recreational divers will either turn to interstate or overseas to pursue their support. Further, the industry will find it increasingly difficult to attract new divers as opportunities to dive become limited. The provision of a substantial new dive site, such as the HMAS Canberra artificial reef will have a major positive impact.

The Victorian dive industry currently employs around 520 people full-time and 3120 part-time. Some 68,000 dives were completed in 2005, not including the "Dive Experience" market of schools, corporate and individuals. Approximately 5000 divers were trained.

The dive industry is relatively small, but does produce a high yield per participant. The advent of declaring and promoting Marine Parks in Victoria has established the belief amongst dive operators that tourists will come to Victoria with as much enthusiasm as Victorian divers head north to dive.

This industry and these jobs are at risk in the current climate. This project, if implemented is expected to not only redress this situation, but also add to the industry with increased divers, from locally, interstate and overseas. The addition of a major wreck, placed in an area where access can be maximised, will enable Victoria to be promoted as a true dive destination and will enhance the reputation that Victorian diving has been gaining. The feedback that operators are getting from tourists has indicated that Marine Parks have attracted them to the area and that our existing wrecks have reinforced the visit decision.

The Dive Industry of Victoria supports this view. There is ample documentation in overseas studies that demonstrates the potential for purposefully created dive wrecks to achieve significant economic benefits for the community. Studies carried out in Canada, the United States, New Zealand and other states of Australia have all clearly shown the economic benefits of vessels sunk in their region. The HMAS Swan, HMAS Perth and HMAS Hobart are excellent local examples of the benefits achieved from the ship reefing programme.

The establishment of a reef community produces large communities of diverse benthic organisms such as sponges, gorgonians, hydroids, anthozoans, bryozoans, crustaceans, and algae. This abundance of benthic species creates an ample food supply for recreationally and commercially important marine species such as crabs, snapper, crayfish, flounder, etc. Furthermore, species such as these may supplement the diet of larger piscivores, which have been noted in copious quantities on many artificial reefs. This abundance of prey attracts numerous species to artificial reefs, helping to establish a successful and thriving community.

The VARS Committee will develop a comprehensive plan in consultation with relevant environmental authorities to ensure that the highest standards are adhered to. This plan will draw on the experience of other similar projects both locally and overseas. Appropriate environmental studies will be undertaken prior to scuttling. If required, the VARS Committee will also coordinate longer term studies after scuttling.

Safety

Diver safety on the future wreck is paramount. Considerable experience has been gained in previous projects both locally and overseas. The VARS Committee has made personal contact with a number of previous project committees and will tap into that experience to ensure that the wreck is prepared in such a manner as to maximise diver safety and enjoyment. The committee will ensure consultation with all relevant authorities so that plans are carefully scrutinised and audited to ensure they are properly executed.

The actual scuttling will be conducted by highly experienced and skilled personnel. Following scuttling, properly experienced and skilled clearance divers will be employed to ensure that the wreck has been properly sunk and is in a completely safe condition.

Funding and Resources

The final cost of this project is yet to be determined. The ship itself is expected to be gifted at a nominal cost of \$1.00. However, there are significant costs associated with many project activities including site election and ship preparation. Based on known costs of similar exercises in Western Australia, South Australia and Queensland, it is expected that this will be in the order of \$3 million to \$5 million. In previous projects, this funding has been provided by the Commonwealth. It is anticipated that this will be also be forthcoming in the case of the HMAS Canberra.

Significant volunteer labour will be required. This will be coordinated and managed by VARS and will be provided by the dive community from across Victoria.

Site Selection

The site for the new artificial reef will be chosen by the Victorian Artificial Reef Society. Selection criteria for the site will include:

1. The ability to maximise access to divers. This will include –
 - a. Availability of supporting infrastructure.
 - b. Proximity to dive community population, especially Victorian.
 - c. Depth to accommodate a ship of this size.
 - d. Prevailing currents.
 - e. Prevailing conditions – especially sediments affecting visibility.
2. Maximise economic benefit to Victoria.
3. Maximise environmental benefit.
4. Minimise environmental damage.
5. Proximity to shipping lanes.

Community Consultation

The VARS Committee is planning to consult widely on this project to ensure that all views within the community are expressed and taken into account. The consultation will include (but not be limited to) the commercial fishing industry, recreational fishing industry, mining industry, aboriginal community, shipping authority, sea rescue, local councils, environmental authorities, environmental groups, fisheries department, water police and unions. A comprehensive contact list has been prepared (see Appendix i).

The VARS Committee will establish appropriate communication mechanisms, including an internet site, to ensure that the project is well communicated to all interested parties and that progress is visible to all. Active communication lines will be set up to promote dialogue and discussion on issues of importance.

Project Plan Key Elements

The project plan will include the following key elements:

Relocation of the vessel

The HMAS Canberra is currently moored in Perth. The vessel will need to be relocated to a suitable sheltered deep water mooring site in Victoria. This site will need to be sufficiently accessible so that the preparation works can take place. These works are expected to be considerable and require a substantial workforce, mostly voluntary, and will take quite some time. The mooring site will need to be secure. Initial thoughts are that this will be the RAN site – Cerberus.

Relocation of the vessel will need to be undertaken by appropriate professionals.

Data Collection and Analysis

Selection of the final scuttling site will require gathering and analysis of significant data to determine issues such as environmental impact and suitability. The chosen area must be of suitable depth, largely sandy bottom and predominately flat. Further data will need to be gathered and assessed to ensure that the chosen site best satisfies the selection criteria as indicated above (see Site Selection).

Stakeholder and Community Consultation

Wide consultation will be required in order to ensure that all relevant stakeholders and interested parties have the opportunity to provide input into the project. A Communication Plan will need to be prepared and actively managed throughout the course of the project.

Ship Preparation

This is a significant element of the project plan that will require close management and coordination. A large number of volunteers as well as professionals will be required over an extensive period of time in order to properly prepare the ship for scuttling. All environmental hazards must be appropriately removed from the ship and disposed of. The ship must be

rendered safe for divers. This will require removal of all hazards and the cutting of holes for access.

Scuttling

This element of the project must be performed by professionals expert in the scuttling of large vessels. Suitable experts must be engaged and their work coordinated with the other elements of the project. It is also expected that this phase will generate considerable public interest.

Project Management

A project of this magnitude is likely to require dedicated expert project management. A project manager will need to be recruited – either volunteer or professional.

All project elements must be carefully coordinated. This will be the key responsibility of the project manager. The project manager will report to the VARS Steering Committee who will be responsible for the key decisions related to the project as well as the provision of resource as required. Resources required will include funds as well as volunteer labour.

VARS will oversee this project from beginning to end. The steering committee, whilst small is capable of harnessing significant support via its network into the dive community. Considerable support will indeed be required in order to ensure that the ship is properly prepared for sinking, that all interested parties have been properly consulted and views have been taken into account, that the project is effectively and professionally managed and that the maximum social, economic and environmental benefits are gained, both for Victoria and Australia.

The VARS Steering Committee will oversee the project, but will draw upon considerable expertise available through the dive community and will utilise sub-committees to direct and implement key elements of the project.

Conclusion

It is highly apparent from the research material content collected that the benefits of utilising retired naval ships from the Royal Australian Navy for use as artificial reef and diver attractions around our coast, is clearly illustrated.

As these highly compartmentalised vessels were specifically constructed for use in the type of "Blue Ocean" surrounding Australia, they are ideal as structurally sound construction materials for artificial reef deployment in Australian coastal areas.

Ensuring the HMAS Canberra is utilised as an artificial reef, having ended its useful service career, will ensure the communities and marine ecosystems that surround her will continue to benefit for many years to follow.

Highly complex, made safe for divers, cleaned and environmentally prepared, this ship will add to the immense amount of research material that supports such use as artificial reefs, becoming home to hundreds of

marine species and as tourism attractions for many thousands of divers annually from throughout Victoria, interstate and overseas.

The Victorian Artificial Reef Society has been established as a unique group representing the diverse interests of the Victorian Diving Community and is ideally positioned to ensure that this project is successfully implemented.



Appendix i - Consultation Contact for VARS - Checklist

Body	Contact	Action by	Timing	Completed
Dept of Navy				
State Government/ Tourism Vic/ DSE	Bracks/Thwaites/ TV/DSE/Et Al	John Lawler	Work in Progress	
Local Councils	MSC/BSC	Tom Wende Alan Beckhurst	Work in Progress	
Legal		VARs		
Accounting	KPMG/PM	John Lawler	April 2006	Done
Insurance				
Public Relations				
Website	Mark Raphael	VARs	May 2006	Done
Operations Base				
Docking Location				
Work Cover				
Sponsors				
Data Base Manager	JohnFeeley	John Lawler	Feb 2006	Done
Members of Parliament	MOP	TW/JL/AB	Feb/Mar/Apr/May	Done
Volunteers				
Recruitment				
OH&S				
Media/Advertising				
Marine Board				
Pilots (Water)				
Harbour Master				
Port of Melbourne				
Water Police		John Allsop		
Sponsors				
Equipment Suppliers				
Guests				
Patron				
Project Manager				
Fund Raising Items	Bob Scott	John Lawler		
EPA				
Fisheries Dept				
Aboriginal Group				
Unions				
Food Suppliers				
Protective Clothing				

Sinking Day Ball				
On Land Ceremonies				
Guests of Honour				
Anchor Memorial Site				
Canberra (S) Personnel				
Ship Marker Buoys	Parks (tbc)			
SHIP Maintenance (when sunk)	Parks (tbc)	VARs		
Dive Industry				
Dive Log	Barry Andrewarta	John Lawler	Work in Progress	
Stationary/Letter Heads				
On Board Cameras	Mark Harris Et Al	VARs	TBA	
Person to Sink Ship				
Explosives Experts	Jennings/Gabriel	John Lawler	TBA	
Documentary Maker	Mark Harris	John Lawler	TBA	

Appendix ii - VARS COMMITTEE

Alan Storen	15 Regal Court, Vermont South, VIC 3133	0417 017 446	storens@bigpond.net.au
Mike Reed	4 Thorburn St, Hampton, VIC 3188	0418 144 084	mike.reed@simplot.com.au
Tom Wende	17 Robin St, Rye VIC 3941	0415 148 619	tomw@ozdivecharters.com.au
John Lawler	7 Cloris Ave, Beaumaris, Vic 3193	0414 922 916	jylawler@tpgi.com.au
Mick Jeacle	5 Donn Close, Frankston, VIC 3139	0438 712 786	mpjeacle@bigpond.net.au
John Allsop	31 Gellibrand St, Williamstown, VIC 3016	0417 922 055	john@diveexperience.com.au