



HMAS Canberra for Melbourne

New Dive Wreck Creates Opportunity to Boost Tourism in Victoria

The Minister for Defence, Dr Brendan Nelson announced on the 18th of October 2006 that Victoria has been successful in winning the bidding process for this former Navy ship. John Lawler, President of the Victorian Artificial Reef Society says this is a wonderful opportunity to boost tourism by attracting divers from around the world and establishing Victoria as a world-class temperate water diving destination.

The HMAS Canberra is 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 was offered by the Federal Government through the Minister for Defence, Dr Brendan Nelson, as a suitable wreck for sinking as an artificial reef.

The Victorian Artificial Reef Society Inc. is a community group that was formed with the objective to secure, prepare, position and scuttle the ex-HMAS Canberra as an artificial reef and scuba dive location in Victorian waters. All major groups in the Victorian Scuba Diving Industry have recognized VARS as the voice on all matters relating to official Artificial Reefs in Victorian waters and are completely in support of the project.

From an environmental point of view, it is 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. 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.

The waters of Victoria, and in particular around Port Phillip Heads, are home to an amazing diversity of marine life. Many of the species are unique to these waters and are not found anywhere else in the world. The addition of the Canberra as a new artificial reef will add to the recently proclaimed marine parks as a further boost to the environment.

It is expected that there will be a major boost to Victorian tourism as a result of our successful bid. In recent years, a number of ex-naval vessels have been sunk as artificial reefs both in Australia and overseas. In all cases, tourist numbers have increased with the new dive site acting as a magnet for divers both nationally and internationally.

Perhaps the most exciting news is the fact that the estimated date for the scuttling of the vessel is late March or early April 2007. Yes that is only 4 months from now. VARS is currently working with the Victorian Government to finalise the position of the vessel with our preferred position being close to the J Class submarines at South 38.18 and East 144.32.

Together with the dive industry, VARS will drive to ensure that this great opportunity benefits both Victoria and Australia with significant ongoing tourist development using this ship as the centrepiece to a new world class temperate water dive destination.

Plans are currently underway to hold a gala black tie ball on the evening prior to the scuttling as well as celebrations when the vessel first arrives in Port Philip bay and of course at the scuttling itself. As you can imagine there are a million and one things that need to be done in a very short time and as a consequence VARS are actively seeking members.

If anyone is interested in helping with VARS and becoming part of Victorian dive history please contact your local Victorian dive store for membership applications. Membership is only \$50 and will ensure that you are kept aware of all the development regarding this exciting venture.

For further information contact John Allsop – Vice-President – Victorian Artificial Reef Society at Dive Experience on (03) 9397.5066

