

EX-HMAS CANBERRA DIVE SITE

October 2009

Background to the project

The State of Victoria was successful in a competitive process to secure the ex-HMAS Canberra to become a premier dive site in Victoria. The State paid 1.5 million dollars to the Department of Defence towards the delivery of the project.

Preparation of the vessel took many months with items such as tonnes of lead, internal fitting and fixtures being removed, openings to the hull and superstructure being cut, concrete ballast being added and areas being secured.

During this time detailed environmental assessments were undertaken to determine the scuttling location. Of particular interest was the depth of sand and the type of marine species present. The Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts issued a Sea Dumping Permit for the scuttling and future management of the wreck.

Ownership and Management of the Site

The State of Victoria owns both the ex-HMAS Canberra and the land on which it is situated. Parks Victoria, on behalf of the State, is responsible for the ongoing management of the wreck as a dive site. The site has been reserved and will be governed by regulations and boating zones. These are available on the Parks Victoria website.

Parks Victoria's aims to provide a first-class and safe, wreck dive experience.

Current Status of the ex-HMAS Canberra

On October 4th 2009 the ex-HMAS Canberra was scuttled off shore from Ocean Grove. It took 1 minute and 49 seconds to slip beneath the sea.

The high pressure of water rushing through the ship as she sank disturbed the remaining fixtures and fittings, stripping the remaining floor coverings and insulation from surfaces throughout the vessel. Conduits, steel plates and internal furniture moved and the holes cut by the explosives have sharp edges creating hazards to divers all of which will require remediation.



The wreck is on the sea floor and has settled into the sand by 0.5 of a metre at the bow and 1.5 metres at the stern. The orientation of the wreck is 210 degrees and the bow is to the south. The shallowest part of the wreck is about 7 metres below Lowest Astronomical Tide for Rip Bank Datum. It has a slight list between 4 and 10 degrees to starboard.

The Port of Melbourne Corporation has undertaken a survey of the vessel and is preparing an accurate chart of the vessel position and location. This will be placed on the Parks Victoria web site as soon as it is available. Four moorings and two navigation marks have been installed, by Parks Victoria's contractors. These are well visible from the coast at Ocean Grove.

When will I be able to access the site?

Contractors are working on the wreck to ensure the ex-HMAS Canberra is safe for diving. This work requires ideal weather conditions as the sea swell and surge may cause safety issues for the divers. Once these works have been completed the site will be opened to divers. We anticipate the site will be open before the end of November 2009.

How do I access the site?

The ex-HMAS Canberra is located offshore from Ocean Grove within Bass Strait in Victoria. It is approximately 25 minutes by boat from Queenscliff Harbour (on the Bellarine Peninsula) or Portsea (on the Mornington Peninsula). Melway Maps 497 & 498. The dive site is clearly marked by two special mark buoys and four mooring buoys.



Access to the dive site is restricted to those participating in diving and snorkelling activities only. To enter the dive site divers must either:

- book a dive tour with a licensed tour operator; or
- book a 2 hour time slot on the public mooring through Parks Victoria via an online booking system.

Moorings

Based on advice from the commercial and recreational dive industry that the site can only safely accommodate approximately 60 divers, the number of moorings is limited to four. To ensure safety constraints are met, divers will be required to moor their vessel to a designated mooring for the duration of the dive, and only one vessel can be moored to a mooring at any one time.



Following a rigorous public tender process, Dive Victoria were awarded exclusive access to mooring number's 1 and 3, all other Licensed Tour Operators will have access through an on line booking system to mooring number 2, and the fourth and final mooring will be available to independent recreational divers.

Independent divers

Independent recreational divers will be required to book a permit for a two-hour mooring time slot. The cost of the permit is still under consideration, however all fees from dive permits will directly contribute to ongoing site safety and maintenance and are based on cost recovery principles.

Operators

Licensed Tour Operators will also be required to book via an online booking system. The price to access this mooring is yet to be determined. Licensed Tour Operators will be limited to booking 2 hour slots and there will be restrictions on block booking. Further information will be available on Parks Victoria's web site (www.parkweb.vic.gov.au) once the booking system has been finalised.

Safety Message

Divers will need to be very careful when accessing the dive site as even in calm conditions there is a significant surge effect on the wreck. For your safety, only undertake activities appropriate to your skills and abilities. Take all necessary precautions; be aware of changing weather conditions and watch for potential hazards. Wreck diving is challenging and adventurous for divers, but also carries with it potential risks. The risks to divers include entrapment, getting lost, injury from sharp protrusions and decompression sickness (bends). All divers must have relevant experience and hold a current and industry recognised entry level qualification (equivalent to Australian Standard AS4005.1). The site is not suitable for inexperienced divers.

The eagerness shown by divers and dive companies to get access to the wreck demonstrates the demand for this experience. That is a good sign for the tourism and dive sectors in Geelong and more broadly. All divers and operators will have access to a mooring at a great new attraction for Geelong and the Bellarine Peninsula. To follow progress on the ex-HMAS Canberra dive site, check out www.parkweb.vic.gov.au