

FATHOMS

AUG - SEPT 2005

VSAG

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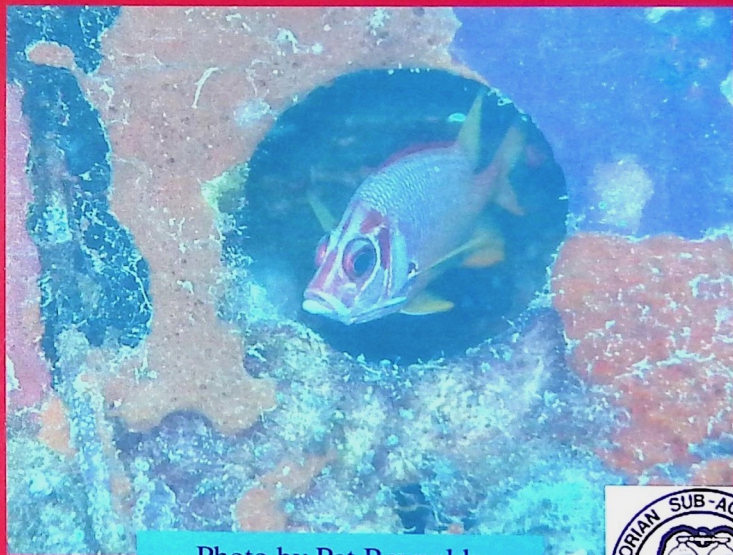


Photo by Pat Reynolds
—Truk Lagoon 2005



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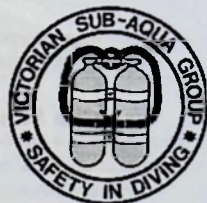
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FATHOMS



Official Journal of the Victorian Sub-Aqua Group
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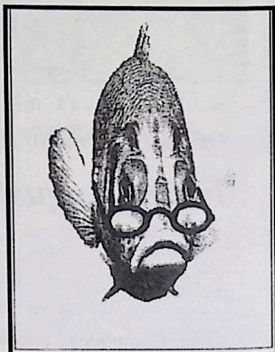
VSAG General Meetings
3rd Thursday in the month

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South Melbourne, 8.00 pm
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Editorial

Alan Storen



Editorial

Winter is almost over and the weather should be getting better. As I write this the temp is 5°C outside and it is raining – one can only hope! Put your diving gear in for service and get it ready for the next few months. There are some social events on as well so please book in and join the fun.

I am just back from Tasmania and did a few dives down the east coast – Eaglehawk Neck and Bicheno. The viz was great (30+m) and the water temp reasonable (12-13°C)- my 6mm wetsuit was just OK. I was disappointed with the kelp forests as they had probably been reduced in size/quantity by at least 2/3 rds since I was there last.

Those of you that have not caught up with the latest – I have left Wesley College, after 25 years, and I am now a 'consultant'. When I go into a school I can now say "I do not work, I am just a consultant!" This means that ALL the articles, photos, jokes, etc that you have for Fathoms need to be sent to me at home, the address is on the inside front cover, or emailed to me at home: storens@bigpond.net.au. I will be printing this mag from home and if it not up to the usual standard you can

The AGM is coming up, September meeting, and the committee hopes for a big roll-up. Please make the effort to be there. Nominations for the 2005/2006 committee are due by the end of this month and if you would like to nominate someone, or be nominated, please get your form in to the secretary asap.

Subs for the year are also due, actually overdue now, and if you have not paid please do so asap so that the club can sort out its finances. Please let the treasurer know if you have lost the account as I am sure it can be replaced.

VSAG's Christmas function has been booked at Milanos and the date is the 25th November. Always a great function and if you can donate a prize for the raffle please contact one of the committee.

The Blues train is now booked for the 22nd October and from all reports a fantastic night. Cost is \$60 and this covers the meal, drink and entertainment (blues music). Contact Priya if interested – time is running out!

The dredging is still on the agenda and the many protests are attracting some publicity in the press. One only needs to look at the photos in the Age re the 'trial' dredging to imagine the effect of the full dredging. The trial, one-hour dredge caused massive plumes in the bay. What will it be like when the dredging operates for 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, for 18+ months!! The spoil would fill a trench 15m wide by 2m deep from Melbourne to Sydney! SDFV is on the consultative committee and it is hoped that it can have some influence on the outcome.

SDFV are also working on our behalf regarding the changes to the abalone regulations and crayfish regulations. For details see Pat (VSAG rep) or John Lawler or me. This was reported on last edition.

The xmas trip to Eden as arranged by Pat Reynolds is almost finalised – see Pat for any last minute changes.

The dive calendar is almost set but many of the dives are going to be subject to the dredging. What effect it will have on a dive on the subs, the Courier, Coogee, the reef just outside the heads can only be imagined. In some cases it will be 'lets have a look!' Some Westernport dives are planned and this could become the preferred site. Launching a Flinders is a bit of an effort but might be the only option unless we go around to Phillip Island/ Newhaven.

Hope to see you in the water soon,
Regards
Alan Storen

Reports on dives and other activities are urgently needed. Please submit to the editor. Photos also needed of club trips and social activities.

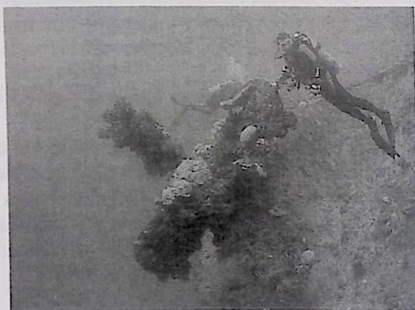
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TRUK (CHUUK) LAGOON, MAY '05

Alan Beckhurst

Travelling to and from Micronesia is, well, character building. After fighting with Jetstar over luggage allowances, and having the flight delayed, I finally made it to Cairns. The Continental flight to Guam leaves just after midnight, then you have to suffer the customs in Guam, before boarding the flight to Truk.

We should have been knackered after our mid morning arrival, but excitement does wonderful things, and what better way to freshen up than a dip....to 30 metres!



Pat, Alan, and Darren agreed, and we were soon in a Banana boat under the command of our trukese guide, Makency. Checkouts are usually carried out on the Fujikawa Maru, but that doesn't mean it is in any way a lesser dive.

My first impressions were how colourful these wrecks can be, with all the soft and hard corals, and anemones encrusting the shallower sections. We returned to the

Fujikawa Maru for two more dives, one a night dive, and were always satisfied. The only letdown on the Fuji was the filthy conditions in the holds, but we did get to see its cargo of dismantled Zero aircraft.

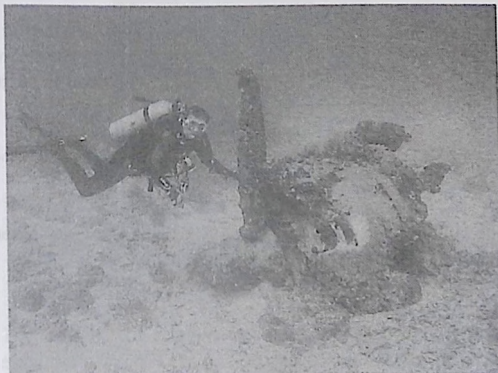
Blue Lagoon Resort is nestled in an expansive lawned allotment, with hundreds of coconut trees. Its eco green two storey buildings have comfortable, air conditioned rooms, one of which I shared with Alan Storen. Contrary to his initial claim, he does snore, it's just that he's never heard himself snore. It wasn't that bad, and I did get a couple of nights sleep near the end of the week! The room was about 100 metres from the wharf, which can be a long way to cart cameras and dive gear each day.

The rest of Truk is strictly third world. A tropical paradise thrust into a western lifestyle, but with no garbage collections, no road maintenance, and obviously no facilities to repair cars. Most houses have a collection of dead cars shielding them from their garbage mounds. Driving is a thrill ride as although you are supposed to keep right as in the USA, there are so many potholes people drive on both sides of the road.

As most tour group bookings are for groups of 10, and we only had 4, the other six positions were filled by a group from Geelong Dive Centre. We combined some of our activities, and dives, and made friends with these guys through the week. Breakfast and Dinners were normally taken in the dining room, and while enjoying the excellent meals we swapped reports on the different dives we had done that day. Lunch packs could be ordered, but Alan S and I found that fruit and a drink were sufficient.

Pat had been here 5 times previously, so we relied on his direction for the early part of the stay, and enjoyed excellent dives on the Heian Maru, Shinkoku Maru, Yamigiri Maru, Nippo Maru, Kensho Maru, and some great snorkels on a Zero aircraft as well as some quality coral reefs. The highlights were the soft corals on the Shinkoku, the skull and vertebrae inside the Yamagiri, and the whole dive on the Nippo.

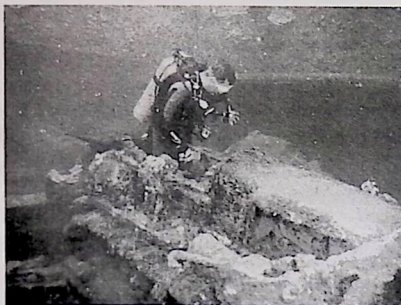
Alan S, Darren and I joined up with a couple of guys from Geelong to do a deep dive on the San Francisco Maru, while Pat joined the other Geelongites on an unsuccessful attempt to dive the Momokawa Maru. The San Francisco dive was awesome, with tanks and trucks on the decks and in the holds, but not as colourful as the others due to the depth. Pats group missed the Momokawa, and dived the Nippo instead, which is a pretty good consolation.



We resumed our original team to dive the Betty Bomber, Hoki Maru, another dive on the Shinkoku, and the Fumitsuki, which was the only true warship we dived, the rest being freighters and tankers. The standout in this bunch, and for me, the whole trip, was the Hoki Maru. It had superb growth and fishlife, and holds full of bulldozers, trucks, and steam rollers. The others rated the Nippo as the dive of the trip, but put the Hoki as a close second.

We had snorkelled the wreck of a Suzuki class sub chaser, and finished off our diving week with a shark dive at Shark Island. We had 11 sharks, White tip, Black tip, and Grey Reef sharks cruising around quality coral reef for 50 minutes, but my highlight was when Darren jumped back in the water to relieve himself, all of the sharks rushed up under him. He was oblivious in his release, I didn't have

my camera, and the sharks didn't take up his offering, and so our week of diving was over!



Alan S, Darren and I made a tour up to the Japanese Tunnels, and the Xavier College which was a former Japanese headquarters. We also went up to the Japanese Ruins on Etan Island between dives, where Pat entertained the local kids. All around the Lagoon is evidence of a war from half a century ago, in which the Trukese suffered greatly, but from which they now prosper, (but not enough to buy a rubbish truck and grader).

Alan S, Darren, and I went to the Truk Stop Hotel for dinner one evening, and to check out their dive operation. The meal was superb, and actually fed us the following day as well, thanks to the doggy bags. The dive operation looks a little more diver friendly, with the lockers closer to the rooms, but I have reservations about the 40 foot dive boat, and diving with 23 others. They also had smaller boats available. We were given a lift back to Blue Lagoon by Truk Stop's owner Bill Synnot, who had a wealth of stories about the locals.

All too soon we were back in Guam, which is much like L.A. or Miami, all traffic, neon lights and tall buildings. After a small drama exchanging rooms for a non smoking one, we hit the Saturday nightlife in Guam. Along the neon lit strip we found strip joints, Versace, gun clubs, Gucci, more strip joints and gun clubs, and Luis Vuitton, which I found an odd mix. We lingered at the slingshot bungy ride, but Darren wouldn't go on his own, so we moved on to the Aquarium / entertainment complex to watch the young 'uns having fun.

Despite all the shops being open past midnight Saturday, a lot were closed when we took the shopping bus tour Sunday morning. We ended up at a Micronesian Festival on the foreshore where we sampled the local dancing, arts, and food. The local cops were also eating, you guessed it, donuts, and Pat soon had made friends with an officer who invited him and Alan S to a "ride along". Darren and I were due to fly out that afternoon, but Pat and Alan S were staying on for a couple more days.

That evening we arrived at our Cairns motel near midnight, but I was happy to be on my way home. My midday flight to Brisbane broke down, and I was stuck in Cairns until I could get on another flight home. I finally drove up the driveway at Quenscliff at 12.40 A.M the next day. Travelling sucks, but the desti-



nations are worth it! Thanks to Pat for organising the trip and to Alan S, and Darren for being great dive trip buddies. I didn't go into detail about the dives, so I advise you to go see them yourselves, believe me, it is an excellent destination.



Subject: Yeah for the senior citizens!

Shown below, is an actual letter that was sent to a bank by a 96-year-old woman.

The bank manager thought it amusing enough to have it published in the New York Times.

Dear Sir:

I am writing to thank you for bouncing my check with which I endeavoured to pay my plumber last month.

By my calculations, three nanoseconds must have elapsed between his presenting the check and the arrival in my account of the funds needed to honour it.

I refer, of course, to the automatic monthly deposit of my entire salary, an arrangement which, I admit, has been in place for only eight years.

You are to be commended for seizing that brief window of opportunity, and also for debiting my account \$30 by way of penalty for the inconvenience caused to your bank.

My thankfulness springs from the manner in which this incident has caused me to rethink my errant financial ways.

I noticed that whereas I personally attend to your telephone calls and letters, when I try to contact you, I am confronted by the impersonal, overcharging, pre-recorded, faceless entity which your bank has become.

From now on, I, like you, choose only to deal with a flesh-and-blood person.

My mortgage and loan repayments will therefore and hereafter no longer be automatic, but will arrive at your bank, by check, addressed personally and con-

fidentially to an employee at your bank whom you must nominate.

Be aware that it is an offence under the Postal Act for any other person to open such an envelope. Please find attached an Application Contact Status that I require your chosen employee to complete.

I am sorry it runs to eight pages, but in order that I know as much about him or her as your bank knows about me, there is no alternative.

Please note that all copies of his or her medical history must be countersigned by a Notary Public, and the mandatory details of his/her financial situation (income, debts, assets and liabilities) must be accompanied by documented proof.

In due course, I will issue your employee with a PIN number which he/she must quote in dealings with me.

I regret that it cannot be shorter than 28 digits but, again, I have modelled it on the number of button presses required of me to access my account balance on your phone bank service.

As they say, imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.

Let me level the playing field even further.

When you call me, press buttons as follows:

1. To make an appointment to see me.
2. To query a missing payment.
3. To transfer the call to my living room in case I am there.
4. To transfer the call to my bedroom in case I am sleeping.
5. To transfer the call to my toilet in case I am attending to nature.
6. To transfer the call to my mobile phone if I am not at home
7. To leave a message on my computer, a password to access my computer is required. Password will be communicated to you at a later date to the Authorized Contact.
8. To return to the main menu and to listen to options 1 through 7.
9. To make a general complaint or inquiry. The contact will then be put on hold, pending the attention of my automated answering service. While this may, on occasion, involve a lengthy wait, uplifting music will play for the duration of the call.

Regrettably, but again following your example, I must also levy an establishment fee to cover the setting up of this new arrangement.

May I wish you a happy, if ever so slightly less prosperous New Year?

Your Humble Client

(Remember: This was written by a 96 year old woman!!!)

JUST GOTTA LOVE US SENIORS

Dive the Brisbane

It is anticipated that the Brisbane artificial reef and dive wreck will be a centre-piece for dive tourism in Queensland.

The Reef will provide a range of SCUBA diving activities and limited snorkelling. It will offer opportunities for divers with varying levels of experience and certification – from open water level licences to advanced wreck divers.

Divers will be able to explore the 133 metre former warship and view different areas of the ship.

Access holes will allow passage into the forward engine room, boiler room and the ship's interior, where divers can view living and sleeping quarters used by the crew during the ship's service from 1967 to 2001.

Divers will also be able to explore the development of the artificial reef – as new marine communities inhabit the wreck and surrounding area.

Access

Access to the Brisbane is available to:

- 1 commercial operators who have licensing agreements with QPWS
- 2 club and private divers through a controlled booking system.

The QPWS has advertised for Expressions of Interest from commercial dive operators to conduct commercial activities at the ex-HMAS BRISBANE Artificial Reef.

They have been offered the chance to bid for ten-year licences to the site (with the first option for extending licences for another five years). Applications close on Friday 10 June 2005.

Four exclusive access moorings will be available to licensed commercial operators.

Licence numbers will be restricted to ensure site safety, amenity and sustainability of dive operations.

Diver requirements

Divers must be certified to a level appropriate to the planned dive.

To ensure protection of this precious reef environment, dive operators and in-

dividual divers will have to comply with a code of conduct (link) to be developed in consultation with the dive industry

Safety

Diving shipwrecks requires careful planning and experience. Divers must be experienced and have received the appropriate level of training.

To enhance diver safety, the number of licences offered is limited, and the maximum number of divers allowed on the ship, excluding dive masters and guides, will be limited.

Dive operators will be responsible for ensuring the safety of their staff and clients, and for ensuring clients are properly informed of risks and safety procedures.

Divers must follow a code of conduct to ensure their own safety, and to protect the natural values of the site and surrounding marine environment.

General boating and fishing on and around the reef is prohibited due to the serious risks posed to divers by these activities.

User charges

- 1 fee revenue will cover ongoing management of the reef estimated to cost \$200,000 per annum over ten years
- 2 approximately \$10 per diver per visit, for club and private divers
- 3 commercial dive companies will pay for access to the site, but determine their own fees for individual divers.

Site management

The Reef will be managed as a Conservation Park under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*. It will be subject to controls aimed at effectively managing dive operations, while restricting or prohibiting activities that would compromise safety, amenity or protection of the site.

Public Benefit Test for proposed conservation park for the ex-HMAS BRISBANE

Open for business

The site will open about two weeks after the ship is sunk, to allow for proper environmental and safety checks to be made. After safety checks and mooring installation the site is due to open in August 2005.

ED: The Brisbane is now down and ready for diving!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

The Ex-HMAS BRISBANE

Ship's history

The Ex-HMAS BRISBANE, nicknamed 'The Steel Cat', is a Charles F. Adams class guided missile destroyer (DDG), constructed by the Defoe Shipbuilding Co. in the USA.

It was the third ship of this class to be purchased by the Royal Australian Navy, the others being the HMAS HOBART and HMAS PERTH. These three destroyers formed the First Australian Destroyer Squadron and were based at Sydney's Garden Island naval dockyard. The ship was launched on 5 May 1966 and commissioned on 16 December 1967. The Brisbane was the second vessel of that name to serve in the Royal Australian Navy - the first was commissioned in 1916 and made her final voyage in 1935 to England where she was sold off to a Sheffield scrap yard.

The crew

HMAS BRISBANE's crew of 332 included 20 officers and 312 sailors. Her final captain, Commodore Campbell Darby commanded the ship from December 1999 until it was decommissioned at the end of 2001. Four former HMAS BRISBANE officers were promoted to the rank of Admiral or Rear Admiral, a unique feat for any ship in the Royal Australian Navy, reflecting the ships motto 'We aim at higher things'.

Service - The Vietnam War

The HMAS BRISBANE undertook two tours of duty in Vietnam, the first from 20 March - 13 October 1969, and the second from 16 March - 11 October 1971. During her two tours of duty in Vietnam, HMAS BRISBANE served as part of the United States Seventh Fleet, mainly providing fire support to the allied land forces along the South Vietnam coast.

During this time, HMAS BRISBANE fired 15,651 rounds. The role of the ship in the bombardment of shore positions in Vietnam earned her the nickname 'The Five Mile Sniper'.

Chief Petty Officer Jesser wrote the ship's newsletter 'The Brisbane Broadcast' during his tour of Vietnam and recalls that, "We were called upon a great deal in Vietnam."

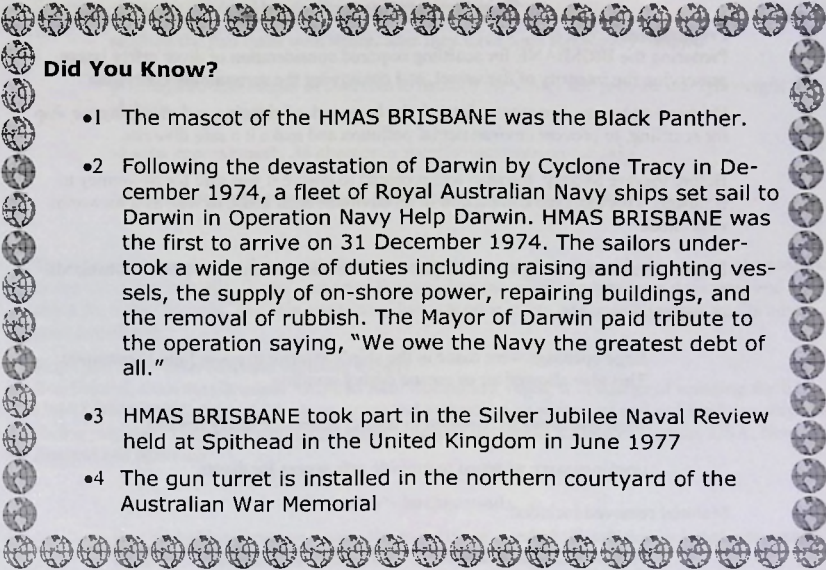
The second deployment to Vietnam was the last combat tour of a Royal Australian Navy destroyer and the return of the ship to Australia in 1971 was the end of the Australian warship commitment to the war.

Service - The first Gulf War

HMAS BRISBANE was one of four Australian warships to serve in the first Gulf War, operating in the Persian Gulf between 20 November 1990 and 26 March 1991. The ship spent much of this time as part of Battle Force Zulu, the force of United States Navy aircraft carriers and their escort vessels that formed part of the anti-aircraft screen for the US Navy carrier battle groups.

Her duties included providing anti-aircraft and anti-surface ship protection, planeguard duties, interception of merchant vessels and escorting replenishment vessels. During her time in the Persian Gulf, HMAS BRISBANE did not come under fire.

Outside the war zone, destroyers including HMAS BRISBANE played key roles in numerous joint exercises with the United States in both Australian and American waters. These exercises earned the crews a reputation for operational excellence and, in particular, for gunnery accuracy.



Did You Know?

- 1 The mascot of the HMAS BRISBANE was the Black Panther.
- 2 Following the devastation of Darwin by Cyclone Tracy in December 1974, a fleet of Royal Australian Navy ships set sail to Darwin in Operation Navy Help Darwin. HMAS BRISBANE was the first to arrive on 31 December 1974. The sailors undertook a wide range of duties including raising and righting vessels, the supply of on-shore power, repairing buildings, and the removal of rubbish. The Mayor of Darwin paid tribute to the operation saying, "We owe the Navy the greatest debt of all."
- 3 HMAS BRISBANE took part in the Silver Jubilee Naval Review held at Spithead in the United Kingdom in June 1977
- 4 The gun turret is installed in the northern courtyard of the Australian War Memorial

Statistics

Ship dimensions

Length: 133.19 metres

Beam: 14.3 metres

Draught: 6.1 metres

Displacement: 3370 tons (standard); 4500 tons (full load)

Speed: 35 knots

Range: 4500 nautical miles at 15 knots

2000 nautical miles at 30 knots

Machinery

2 x GE steam turbines driving two shafts producing 70,000 shaft horse power

Armament

2 x 5 inch Mk42 Mod 10 automatic rapid fire guns

standard anti-air missile system

Harpoon anti-ship missile system

2 x 20mm Vulcan Phalanx Mk15 Close in weapons systems

4 x 0.50 calibre machine guns

2 x triple mounted anti-submarine torpedo tubes firing Mk48 torpedoes

The ship, although no longer in service, will remain a significant icon of Australian waters and its proud history will be complemented with its establishment as an artificial reef off the Sunshine Coast.

Ship preparation and scuttling

Preparation

Preparing the BRISBANE for scuttling required consideration of diver safety issues, preserving the integrity of the vessel, and conserving the surrounding ecosystem.

Brisbane company, Forgas undertook the huge task of cleaning and preparing the ship for scuttling, to prevent environmental pollution and make it a safe dive site.

Before leaving Sydney, the ship was prepared to ensure it was safe for its journey to Brisbane. This included completion of an environmental audit, as well as a seaworthiness check.

Preparations for scuttling were completed to international and best-practice standards.

In preparing the ship:

- large openings were made in the ship's exterior to allow light to penetrate. This also allowed air to escape during scuttling
- some entrances were sealed to restrict access for safety reasons
- openings were widened to provide safe access for divers.

Material removed included:

- oil and other contaminants
- sharp and protruding objects along the divers' access path
- all furniture and other items that are not fixed and which may obstruct access or compromise diver safety
- all doors and hatches
- all plastics and loose components, cabling and wires.

Items of historic value removed included:

- the ship's bridge ,missile launcher ,propeller.

These items go to museums and the Australian War Memorial in Canberra for display. Removal of other items has been minimised to maintain the ship's integrity and value as an interesting dive site.

Scuttling

On the day

On 31 July 2005, in front of a flotilla of hundreds of spectator vessels, and tens of thousands of people watching from shore, the ex-HMAS BRISBANE was scuttled off Mooloolaba, 2.8 nautical miles east of Mudjimba Island.

The ship sunk to the ocean floor in two minutes and ten seconds.

Method

Scuttling of the BRISBANE involved:

- refilling the fuel tanks with water, after they have been thoroughly cleaned
- pouring 200-250 tonnes of concrete to balance the vessel and provide enough weight for sinking
- placing approximately 38 charges in specific locations on the ship
- following detonation of charges, the filling of the ship with water.

The ship settled on the sea floor, embedded more than one metre in the seabed in an upright position facing the ocean currents. Divers inspected the vessel to ensure all charges were detonated and check for safety hazards. The ship opens as a dive site once safety and environmental audits have been completed.

Roy Gabriel — international scuttling expert

Roy Gabriel, from the Canadian Artificial Reef Consulting Team, is in charge of scuttling the EX-HMAS BRISBANE. Roy and his team are world authorities on preparing and sinking large ships for diving purposes. They have worked on projects around the world, mainly in Canada, USA, New Zealand and Australia.

Roy's background:

- Roy started his career as a navy clearance diver, aged 18. His duties included retrieving mines in some of the most dangerous conditions imaginable.
- Later joined the Royal Canadian Mounted Police tactical team.
- He has 37 years in the explosives business
- He is experienced in all methods and techniques applied in the explosives field and as an explosives field investigator
- He launched his artificial reef business 12 years ago when British Columbia in Canada was searching for a way to sink ships safely.

Roy's role in sinking the BRISBANE involved controlling all aspects of the scuttling process including:

- working out where charges are laid
- determining explosives to be used
- deciding where vent holes are cut
- making up and laying out charges
- priming the ship
- detonation.

After scuttling

Vessels were on standby to retrieve debris following scuttling. Highly experienced divers inspected the ship within a couple of hours of scuttling to ensure that all charges were detonated and that there was no internal damage to the ship from the sinking.

INAUGURAL LIFE MEMBERS DINNER

15 TH JULY 2005

John Lawler

An observation was made after VSAG celebrated it's 50th birthday, that the Life Members were only meeting as a group every 10 years.

The suggestion was put forward to Life Members that an "Annual Life Members Dinner" would be a good idea.

The initiative was fully and enthusiastically endorsed by all but one member and the plan was actioned.

On Friday 15th July 2005, 13 Life Members met at the "Olive Tree" restaurant in South Melbourne, for pre dinner drinks and welcome, prior to settling in for a great meal and loads of good comradie, laughs and story telling.

Members changed seats after the entrée and main courses to ensure we all had the opportunity to mix well over the next few hours.

To say this was an exceptional and historic night would be to understate the evening...it was just that...exceptional!

Prior to the evening the question was asked if the Life Members felt this should be an Annual event, the result was a unanimous "yes"

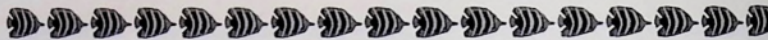
And so it now will be into the future.

LIFE MEMBERS.

Don Abell, Pat Reynolds, Frank Coustley, John Goulding, Mick Jeacle, Des Williams, Barry Truscott, Tony Tipping, Alex Talay, Peter Mathews, John Noonan, Bob Scott, John Lawler. Alan Cutts (non participating)

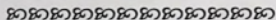






The Troubadour

Thoughts and experiences of a new VSAG member and diver.

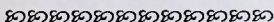


A rare opportunity to dive mid-week - three of us to dive for scallops and then dive in the marine park off Queenscliff! The sky is a wonderful, overcast grey-blue. The bay is flat, a perfect mirror as we launch "Miles Ahead" from Rye boat ramp.

In the distance the bay is churning. Directly over the shipping channel hundreds of birds swoop and whirl. Salmon are running, driving bait-fish to the surface. Many hundreds of Gannets are a feeding frenzy.

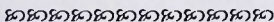
"Let's take a look."

"Miles Ahead" eases into the myriad of birds. Gannets all around! In front first two, then four, ten, twenty birds dive and pop to the surface with a catch. Ahead the sea calms with the birds as around us the frenzy continues. The birds rise again to the hunt, and the frenzy continues as the scene is repeated to right and left. For fifteen minutes we are awed by this spectacle.

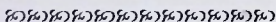


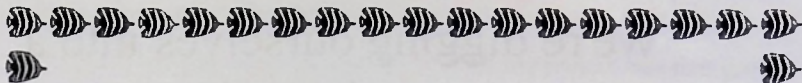
Over the scallop fields the perfect mirror is slightly disturbed as we rise with our catch.

"Miles Ahead" skims the mirror as we head for Sorrento pier. "A day for dolphins!" The small crowd on Sorrento pier gathers as we approach. And there, running parallel to the pier, are three dolphins - a pod lolloping towards the Heads. We follow slowly at a safe distance as the dolphins disappear for a considerable time and surface an extraordinary distance ahead. My first experience of dolphins in the wild!



In winter the bay is cold. Marine life is vibrant. Visibility is clearer. Diving in winter is a must do.

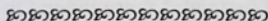




Winter in the Northern Territory is warm. Inland waters are often brilliantly clear with virtually untouched marine animals and vegetation. Snorkeling (and in some cases diving) inland waters is a great relief from the heat and dust.

Mataranka, on the Stuart Highway, has famous thermal pools where other tourists legs are about all you will see under water.

Nearby Bitter Springs is in a virtually untouched national park. Snorkeling in the pristine stream you will see turtles, frogs, fish of many hues, underwater plant life of extraordinary colour and variation. Enter down a ladder into the warm water, drift on the current for a few hundred meters, climb the exit ladder and then do it again. If you are ever up north, try it.



I am keen to include items by other new members and new divers. Send them to twilliam@bigpond.net.au.



Large cray taken by ex-member Robert Adamson and Barry Truscott on a recent outing.

Bazza

ED: talk to Bazza for details

We're digging ourselves into a very deep pit

The Age
July 28, 2005

There are more questions than answers concerning the bay dredging project, writes Kenneth Davidson.

To provide some sense of scale (of the Port Phillip channel-deepening project) it is necessary to have some simple comparators. For example, the amount of material to be dredged in the capital phase of the project is more than the equivalent of digging a two-metre deep by 15-metre wide trench from Melbourne to Sydney. The dredged material will then be transported and dumped at two spoil grounds. If instead it were placed in the city of Melbourne Hoddle grid (central city area), it could cover it to a depth of approximately 23 metres, the equivalent to a typical eight-storey building."

This is from the panel report on the Environmental Effects Study of the Port Phillip channel-deepening project by the Port of Melbourne Corporation.

Given the size of this project, you would think the Government would have asked questions before deciding in principle to go ahead with it: how much will it cost, what are the benefits, and what are the consequences for the environment?

AdvertisementAdvertisement

Incredibly, none of these questions appears to have been asked by the Bracks Government before it announced its "in principle support" for the project in 2001.

Shippers are strongly in favour of the project but they want the taxpayer to pay for it. The Government wants the shippers to pay for it, but it appears they don't have a clue about how much the project will cost or how container vessels are likely to bypass Melbourne if the channel deepening doesn't go ahead. The available evidence

suggests the project is high risk.

Let's start with cost. In November 2001, when the project was first given "in principle" support by the state authorities, the cost was projected to be \$231 million. In June 2004 the Port of Melbourne estimated the cost at \$377 million. Two months later in August, the estimate was revised up to \$498 million and one month later in September the cost was revised again to \$545 million.

According to Frank Hart, who recently retired as harbour master at Western Port after 32 years, the Port of Melbourne estimates of the cost suggest that the harbour deepening can be carried out for a cost of \$6 a cubic metre of material. He points out that this is only a fraction of the cost of deepening the Geraldton Harbour (which the contractor is claiming was the equivalent of \$33 a cubic metre) and the proposal to deepen Adelaide Harbour, which is estimated to be equivalent to \$20 a cubic metre.

Hart points out extreme dredging conditions can be expected at Port Phillip Heads and that special dredging techniques, together with special containment techniques (bundling), will be required for the toxic spoil that has to be taken out of the Yarra. Hart argues that when the conditions likely to be experienced in the bay and Yarra mouth are taken into account, a conservative estimate of the cost of the proposed channel deepening will be well over a billion dollars.

The Port of Melbourne response to Hart's claim is that the dredging costs for Melbourne would be lower because of economies of scale involved in the massive project.

But how would they know? It is only since the panel hearing that it has been announced that the Port of Melbourne has hired one of the two largest dredges in the world to sail from the Middle East to Port Phillip to undertake trial dredging for nine weeks at a cost of \$32 million.

Clearly, the Port of Melbourne cost estimate is based on the ability of one of these giant dredges to do most of the dredging.

It emerged from questioning at the panel hearing that the turbidity and toxicant modelling of the Environmental Effects Study was flawed.

Under questioning, the Port of Melbourne had not assessed the environmental risks or their financial effects.

And then we have the benefits. According to Port of Melbourne evidence to the panel, over 25 years the benefit of the channel deepening is estimated to be \$1.5 billion in the form of lower transport costs distributed equally between Victorians (\$523 million), the rest of Australia (\$447 million) and foreigners (\$479 million).

The panel made the obvious point: what if the cost of the project is borne by the Victorian taxpayer in the form of higher taxes rather than the shippers in the form of a container levy? "The state of Victoria may bear all the costs of the project and yet receive only a proportion of the benefits."

If the shippers won't pay, the project doesn't add up, even on the Port of Melbourne's own figures, which suggest that after inclusion of the cost of test dredging, the cost to taxpayers will exceed benefits to Victorians by \$54 million.

Based on more realistic cost assumptions by Hart, the net cost to taxpayers is likely to be more than \$500 million — before taking into account the investigations of Melbourne consultant Peter Fitzgerald that because Melbourne can already handle any container vessel that can pass through the Panama Canal, the potential demand for super-container access to the port is likely to be only a fraction of that estimated by the Port of Melbourne.

Kenneth Davidson is an *Age* columnist. Email: kdlv@ozemail.com.au



The dreaded dredger —
Queen of the Netherlands,
now in the bay!

From: 'Mick Jeacle'
Subject: Nimrod trip 2006

I have booked :
8 quad share berths
1 double berth
1 twin berth

Price ex cairns per person <<...>> :
\$1595.00 quad
\$2395.00 twin or double
\$135.00 gear hire (if required)

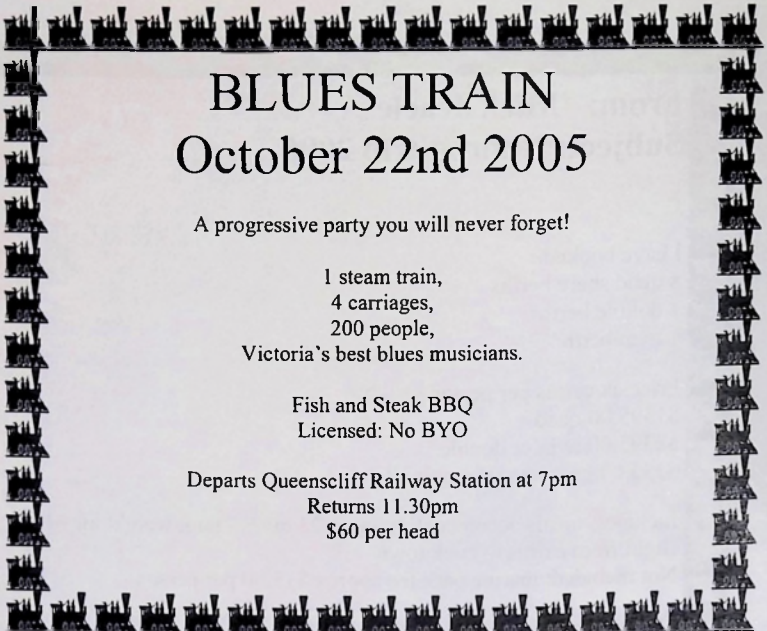
Includes: meals/accomodation/up to 23 dives - tank/weight/air fills & flight from cairns to cook town
Not included: marine park fee approx \$15.00 per person

Dates reserved:
18-24 july 2006

Melbourne/cairns/melbourne airfares from \$530.00 per person flying qantas (subject to conditions)

Need to be in cairns 18 July by 12.30 pm
Vessel returns to cairns 24 July at approx 9.00 am

**IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN THIS TRIP PLEASE CONTACT
MICK JEACLE ASAP TOCONFIRM YOUR PLACE.**



BLUES TRAIN

October 22nd 2005

A progressive party you will never forget!

1 steam train,
4 carriages,
200 people,
Victoria's best blues musicians.

Fish and Steak BBQ
Licensed: No BYO

Departs Queenscliff Railway Station at 7pm
Returns 11.30pm
\$60 per head

SCUBA MARKET

SCUBA TANK FOR SALE

**LOOKING FOR AN ADDITIONAL TANK?
LOOKING FOR YOUR FIRST TANK?**

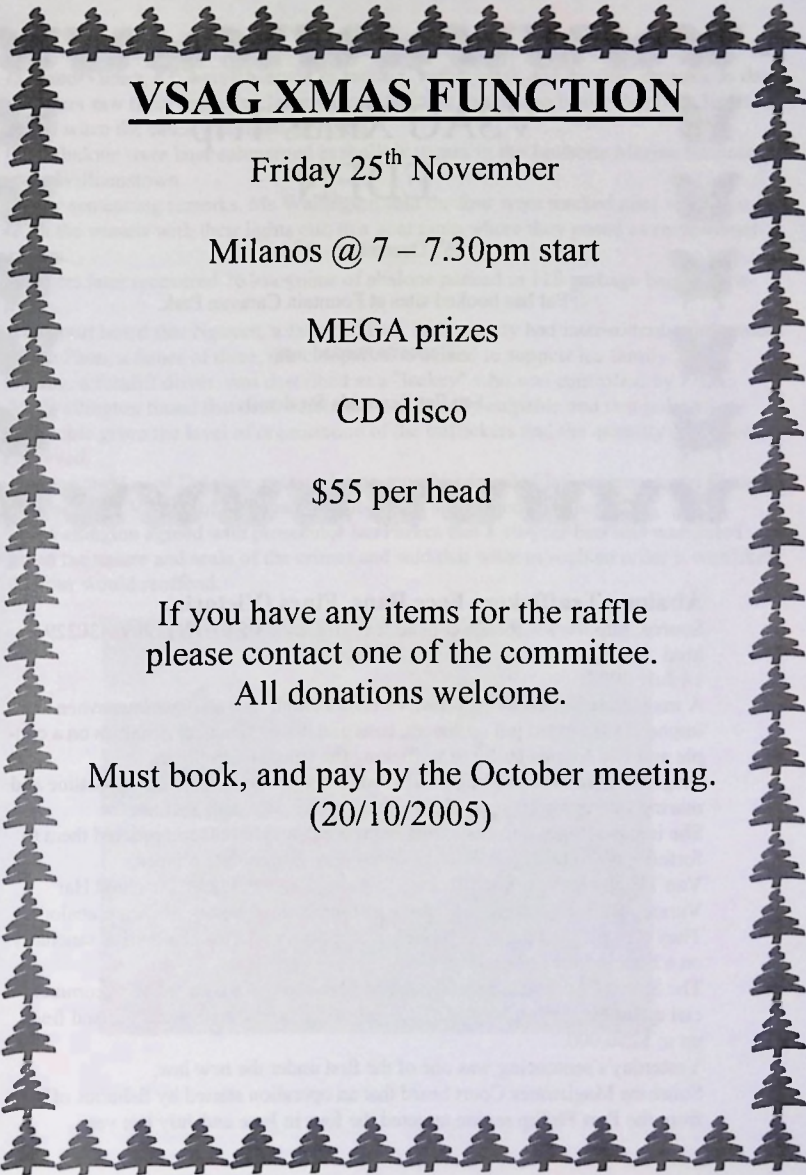
**HERE'S YOUR CHANCE TO PICK UP A GOOD OFFER
ON A SCUBA TANK.**

This tank has just been tested, is in top condition, filled and
ready to go diving.

95 cu ft, CIG aluminium, yellow, mesh protector and boot:

\$249 (new \$500!)

Contact John Lawler.



VSAG XMAS FUNCTION

Friday 25th November

Milanos @ 7 – 7.30pm start

MEGA prizes

CD disco

\$55 per head

If you have any items for the raffle
please contact one of the committee.

All donations welcome.

Must book, and pay by the October meeting.
(20/10/2005)



VSAG Xmas Trip EDEN

26th December – 9th Jan

Pat has booked sites at Fountain Caravan Park.

Deposits needed asap

See Pat Reynolds for details

Abalone Traffickers Face Bans, Fines (Victoria)

Source: <http://www.theage.com.au/text/articles/2005/07/13/1120934302291.html>

14 July 2005

A magistrate yesterday enforced Victoria's tough new abalone laws when she imposed suspended jail sentences, bans and heavy financial penalties on a couple and two friends guilty of trafficking the valuable shellfish.

Magistrate Belinda Wallington also banned them from the state's coastline and marine waters for 10 years if connected in any way with abalone.

She imposed fines and costs totalling more than \$10,000 and ordered them to forfeit a speed boat, professional diving gear and mobile phones.

Van Thach Nguyen, his wife Thi Ut Huong Le, Van Phuoc Phan and Hai Vuong pleaded guilty to trafficking a commercial quantity of illegal abalone. They also pleaded guilty to possessing a priority species in a marine sanctuary on a boat in Port Phillip Bay.

The State Government recently enacted laws to make trafficking in commercial quantities of "priority fish" subject to a maximum 10 years' jail and fines up to \$250,000.

Yesterday's sentencing was one of the first under the new law.

Sunshine Magistrates Court heard that an operation started by fisheries officers from the Port Phillip region targeted the four in June and July last year.