

Fathoms

Official Magazine of the Victorian Sub-Aqua Group (est. 1954)

WINTER 2025



Elodie Camprasse - Eaglehawk Neck Tasmania

Port of Melbourne Deputy Harbour Masters presentation

Diving Santo Island Vanuatu

Getting to know the Great Southern Reef

Tasman Peninsula Dive Trip 2025

Diving before the days of GPS

Jervis Bay 2025 Trip

VSAG Photo competition winners



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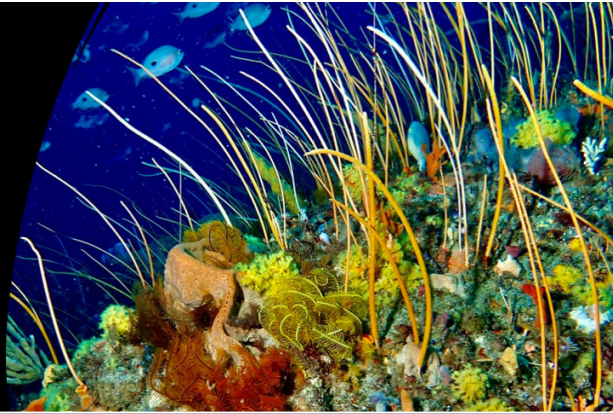


ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2025

President's Report Slides

Travel

- North Sulawesi – August 2024
- Great Detached Reef – November 2024
- Tasmanian Peninsula – March 2025
- Palau – April 2025
- NSW road trip – May 2025
- Vanuatu – June 2025

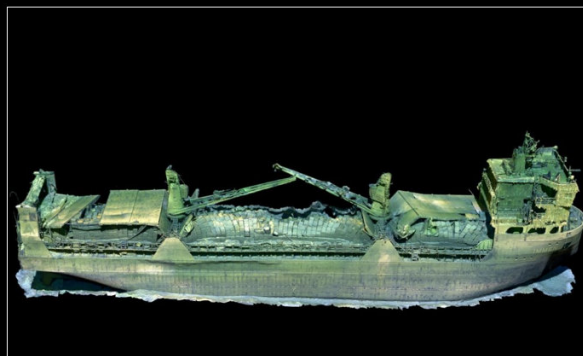


2025 Event Highlights

by Andrew McKernan

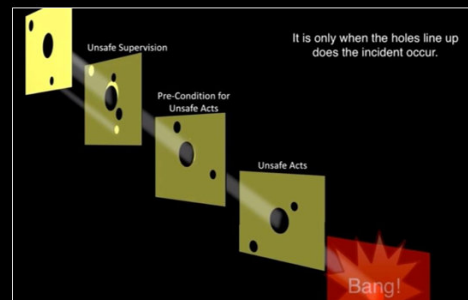
Presentations

- Brandi Mueller – Bikini Atol
- Dom Robinson – Deep wreck diving
- Ian Scholey – Photogrammetry
- Richard Pensak – Invasive Species / Earthcare St Kilda
- Tara Jones – Australian Marine Conservation Society – Plastics in the Ocean
- Elea Lewendon – Falkland Islands Marine Heritage Trust – Finding the Endurance
- Sandy Webb – Jawbone Sanctuary



Discussion group sessions

- Getting Back in the Water – Peter Mosse
- Boat Safety Checks & O2 kits – Andrew McKernan
- Tips and Tricks from Cave Diving Experiences – Terri Allen
- iNaturalist – Elodie Camprasse
- DCS & other diving illnesses – Peter Walters & Imogen Manins
- Barotrauma, Ear & Teeth Maintenance – Sandrine Balbao
- 'If Only' – Gareth Locks Human Factors video – Andrew McKernan
- Dive Debriefing Systems – Open group discussion
- Advanced Nitrox Diving – Mark Ryan



Local Events

- Victorian Fish Count & Rye Pub lunch
- 2025 VSAG Labor Day Weekend Away – Philip Island
- Hogan Island Trip(s)
- Eliza Ramsden - Anchor Search
- Rescue Diver Refresher Day



- 70th Anniversary Dinner
- Inverloch diving
- VSAG Christmas Party 2024
- Christmas in July !
- Ocean Film Festival
- Nudibranch sensis
- VTS – Port Operations Tour

CLUB EVENTS

VSAG Life Members Re-union Luncheon - 25th June 2025

by Des Williams

For the last 15-20 years, Life Member John Lawler has organised an annual re-union of VSAG Life Members. A great initiative by John all those years ago, to keep the camaraderie and collegiate spirit of VSAG pals going, as time moves on. We all thank JL for his forward thinking as we know just how much the good ol' VSAG means to him too.

It all began years ago when JL arranged the first annual evening dinner of Life Members at the Olive Tree restaurant in South Melbourne, these were always enthusiastically attended. However, more recently, we have reverted to a midday luncheon at Young & Jackson's Hotel in the city, which says more about our age group than anything else! Sadly, we have lost three Life Members since those early days, viz: Dr. Jeanette Watson, John Noonan and Frank Coustley. Today not all Life Members are able to attend, as several now live well out of town. The exception though is the amazing Peter Matthews, who each year comes to Melbourne from his home at Angelsea for our gathering.

Attendees this year were: John Lawler, Alan Storen, Don Abell, John Goulding, Peter Matthews, Patrick

Reynolds, Peter Galvin, Christine Reynolds, Matthijs Smith, Angus Stuart-Adams, Peter Walters and Des Williams.

Our group of nine VSAG Life Members were joined by Matthijs Smith, Angus Stuart-Adams and Peter Walters (representing President Andrew McKernan). The attendance of Matthijs, Angus and Peter was VERY much appreciated by the older VSAGers especially, as their presence confirms that the club is still a powerful organisation run by an amazing, enthusiastic committee in front of a dedicated membership who are all STILL enjoying the VSAG club spirit, after 70 years.

It was a very pleasant luncheon on a very cold wintery day in the city. This year we were delighted to welcomed Christine Reynolds and Peter Galvin who were attending their first Life Members gathering. It was wonderful to have them join us and we hope they will also keep up the friendship and connection with the Club for the future.

Peter Walters captured the event in the attached image. Thanks Peter, Angus and Matthijs and fellow Life Members for your company and most importantly of all, BIG thanks to John (JL) Lawler, who convened the event and welcomed us with a fine opening greeting speech. Hopefully, next year we will see a few more of the Life Members who could not make it this year.





VSAG in Vanuatu

A diary of the Santo Island dive trip 2025

by Ian Scholey

June 20

A great first days diving in Vanuatu. We did our first two dives on the SS President Coolidge, the WW2 era Ocean Liner turned troop ship. The first dive was a check out of the twin 3 inch deck guns at the bow, an exploration of hold one and a quick look at the promenade deck windows from the outside. Our second dive started with a look at the medical supplies and aircraft drop tanks before entering hold two for a look at the barber's shop. Lots of different artefacts to be seen with bits of uniform, boots, rifles, jeeps. some tank tracks and loads of different ammunition among my memories. We bottomed out at 34m and will now go progressively deeper with more penetration inside as our 10 days progress.

June 21

Our first dive on the SS President Coolidge today was a step on from yesterday's two dives with a much deeper and longer penetration into the wreck. From the bow we swam outside the ship to the sea door at midships. Here we entered the wreck led by guide Stefan and dropped down to 40m to the new location of the iconic Lady. After grabbing a good luck kiss from The Lady we next headed into the head. With the ship on its side the

toilets are now like some crazy wall art. Continuing we proceeded via holds two and one to the bow. Here we negotiated the tight squeeze into the chain locker and exited the ship there.

Hanging back inside the chain locker to make sure everyone made it out of the wreck I grabbed a picture of everyone in the group. Everyone did great on this dive and all enjoyed it. A taste of what's to come as the week progresses.

Our second dive today was a more extended exploration of hold 2. We needed that as despite being through there twice already we hadn't noticed the field gun in a little side room. It must have been well fixed to



Santo Island cont.

the deck as it didn't move when the ship rolled over onto its side, so it now sits on the wall, previously the floor.

I also had a good look at the anchor chain and winch at the bow and the starboard deck gun. I was lagging behind a little on the way back across the hull. I saw a really long sea snake swim under everyone else without any of them seeing it. I grabbed a snap to prove it was there before following the others back to the decompression stop. Another great dive. We had a 3rd dive today - heading out for a night dive to check out the Lantern Fish that fill the holds after dark. Torches off for the best effect.



June 22

We had an epic days diving on the SS President Coolidge today. First dive was the engine room. We swam along the hull to the huge hole cut during salvage operations. By the hole is what they extracted from the engine room, fitting all piled up, it was mainly condensers and pipework. Dropping down into the gloom it takes time for your eyes to adjust. When they do you are confronted by the huge starboard electric engine. At 200m long you can imagine the size of engine required to push a ship that size along at 20knots but it still takes your breath away. As it is where the ship hit the first mine that sank it, the engine room is a mass of debris and twisted metal. Entering further and swimming towards the port side of the ship you can see the massive hole from the mine blast. We ducked into the engine room control room where there is a huge panel of gauges all with the glass still in place. At almost 50m our time was limited and we exited through the blast hole and swam back towards the bow. We passed the open skylights that lit the Promenade deck. A truly memorable dive.



June 22

Our second dive today was the most challenging so far, with a long penetration. We entered the ship through a window on the bridge. With walls now floors and vice versa along with doors on their side it is easy to get a bit disorientated in the blackness. It's just a matter of staying calm and moving slowly and carefully so as not to silt the place out. We had some inexperienced wreck divers in the group but all did superbly well. From the bridge we traversed decks A, B and C before once again popping out in Cargo hold 2. Reminders of the men on board when she hit the mines were everywhere. Amongst the artefacts scattered about were boots, plates, bottles, jars and razors. Exiting the cargo hold we swam past the port 3 inch gun and under the bow before ascending to complete our decompression stops. Another great dive.

June 23

A change of scenery today. We headed over to Bokassa Island by boat to dive MV Henry Bonneaud - an inter-island trader that was sunk as an artificial reef in 1989. Those of you who were on the VSAG trip here in 2017 will remember the wreck being pretty complete. Not any more though, thanks to an earthquake that broke her in two. The bow is now on its port side while the stern remains upright. While the others stayed on the outside I had a good poke around inside. Extreme care was needed as the decaying ship was pretty unstable and there were sharp edges a plenty. The stern is at 35m but she sits on a slope with the bow down at 48m. The visibility was absolutely superb making photography easier than normal. Lots of Deco racked up on this one.

Santo Island cont.



June 25

David Geekie and I paid a visit to the WW2 Museum in Luganville this afternoon. It was small but very interesting. Lots of things from the Coolidge obviously, including the ships bell and one of its steam whistles. Well worth a visit if you are ever here.

June 26

First dive today was a return visit to the Engine Room. There were a few extra bits we wanted to check out and, as we were victims of a bit of silt last time, we were given

priority at the highlights of the room. This time we swam out from shore to the buoy attached to the bow to conserve a bit of gas and give ourselves more time down there. It was nice to be back in the water after our rest day yesterday.

Our second dive today was at Million Dollar Point - a short distance from the wreck of the Coolidge and Pacific Dive. It is a unique dive site with lots to see.

For those that don't know the story:

At the end of WW2 the Americans had an enormous amount of heavy equipment on the Island. The stuff had been bought with a contract condition that it wouldn't be returned to the US. The manufacturers were concerned that an influx of cheap ex-military equipment to their market would kill it. So, they had no choice than to offer it to the island's French Government at a knock down price. The government decided to try and negotiate hard as they knew that the Americans couldn't take it home - they assumed they would have to leave it anyway and that they would get it for free.

They were wrong - the exasperated Americans started it up, locked throttles on and put weights onto accelerators. Jeeps, trucks, cranes, bulldozers and all sorts of other stuff simply drove into the sea in a massive pile just offshore. Game, set and match to USA. The site was immediately dubbed Million Dollar Point

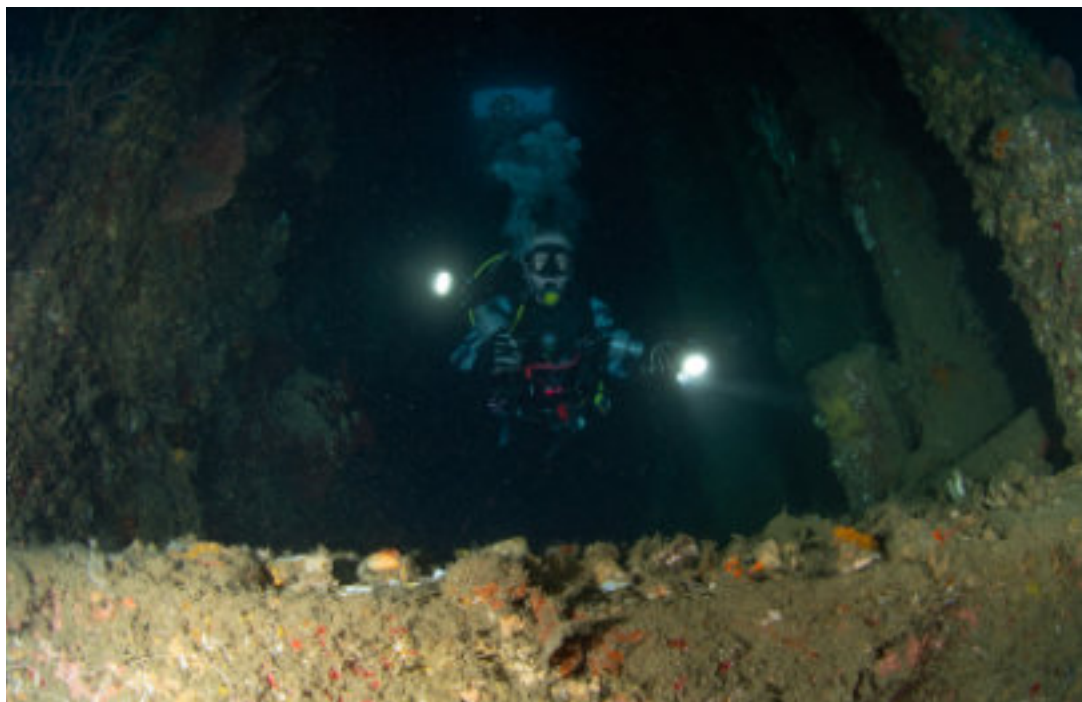


Santo Island cont.

based on an estimate of the value of stuff dumped there.

Over the years a bit of salvage has occurred but most of it is still there. In 1978 an island trader - the Dedele - was also scuttled on the spot and there is a second wreck which while trying to salvage hit a bulldozer and sank. That one is called the El Retiro.

Given some of the dives we have done over the last few days it was a relatively easy dive with a maximum depth of 35m. Some of it is quite hard to distinguish exactly what it is as its all piled up on top of each other.



June 27

I had a big day's diving today. I saw off the rest of the group who were boat diving. I had Trimix deco gasses and a guide arranged for a couple of the deep dives. First up we headed to the stern of the Coolidge. We left deco gasses at 6m and 20m and headed down the hull past the engine room entrance and the piles of machinery removed by the salvagers. At 50m I switched from the air in my twins to Trimix for the deeper part of the dive.

Continuing down past 60m, the first thing we saw was the massive starboard prop shaft. The props have been salvaged so there was just the shaft to see. It was massive but was insignificant compared to the huge rudder we came across next. The fixings to the vessel were enormous on their own but the rudder itself is on a different scale. Looking to my right up to the stern, the name of the ship on the stern came into view. It has recently been cleaned so was really clear. Down on the sand at 67m was the visible outline of one of the ships life boats. Swimming past the stern we came to the larger 5 inch stern gun and the starboard 3 inch gun both heavily covered in growth. Great care was needed in this area with lots of rope to get tangled in being present. We started to ascend past Cargo holds 6 and 7. These seemed to contain bigger trucks rather than the Jeeps found in the holds at the bow. We continued slowly ascending past the area where the swimming pool used to be. I remember the tiled pool from my last visit but the whole thing has now fallen to the sea floor. Passing the promenade deck we continued to ascend towards the ship's starboard side hull. At 20m we picked up our first decompression gas - a 50% O₂, clipping it off and switching over. We then continued back up the line to our next stowed cylinders at 6m. Here, we again clipped our tanks on and switched onto our 100% O₂ and completed our 30 minutes of remaining decompression. I will remember this dive for a long time.

My second dive today wasn't one for the faint hearted. I was pretty pleased there were just the two of us making the dive as it was a long penetration inside with some very tight squeezes. Given the covering of silt inside it required a slow and careful swim taking great care with fins to avoid silting it out and making seeing anything very difficult. We made our way down the hull past the engine room entrance. This time I noticed a huge cylindrical object, possibly a condenser or heat



Santo Island cont.



exchanger but really don't know. We dropped down to the back of the Promenade deck and entered through a small entrance. Once inside we descended to 45m and entered B deck. We then traversed the ship inside along B deck. We called in at the doctor's office where there were a number of interesting bits and bobs including a syringe and the sign from above the door.

Continuing, we passed through a succession of bathrooms. In places I could make out the tiled surface. Amongst the pipes, wash basins and other debris, Max pointed out a nice wall mirror. In fact, to make sure I knew what it was he wrote 'Mirror' on it for me.

In one of the Bathrooms there was a discarded snippers rifle. There were all sorts of artifacts partially buried in the silt, so lots to see. After what seemed like ages in the pitch dark, we finally glimpsed a small blue window above us. Ascending to exit, we once again popped out in cargo hold 2. From there we returned to the bow, grabbing

the 50% mix there before ascending to 6m and switching to the final 100% mix. Another cracking dive. After two really big dives I am doing the sensible thing and taking a day off from diving tomorrow.



Santo Island cont.



June 28

A pretty miserable wet and windy day. We had a boat arranged and I was planning to take the group to dive a couple of wrecks - Tui Tawate and USS Tucker. In the small boat it wasn't really practical in the conditions so we switched to a couple of reef dives off Aore Island. I think it's fair to say that it wouldn't win any prizes for best reef in the world but it was OK I guess. The best features of the dives were some pretty big sea fans. Although there are scattered areas of reasonable reef there was very little in the way of fish life to be seen. Hoping for better diving tomorrow.

June 2

Our penultimate day of diving in Vanuatu today. We once again headed out by boat for a double dive. First up we dived the channel between Bokissa and Tutuba

Islands. We found some very nice reef with a good Eagle Ray encounter and decent amounts of other fish life. We then took a surface interval on the beach on Tutuba Island before our second dive at Charles Reef. Again, the reef was healthy with some very good coral formations. We saw a turtle but couldn't get close enough for snaps. A nice day's diving without going past 22m as we get closer to our flight home and start easing back.

July 1

Our Vanuatu trip has wrapped and we are waiting for the trip back home. It's been an interesting trip to say the least. Yesterday we finished our diving with a couple of easy boat dives. We headed over to Aore Island and dived two different spots on Cindy's Reef. The first was a bit ordinary although we did see a nice spotted eagle ray and a couple of cuttlefish. The second dive more than made up for that. It was spectacular, I'm not sure I have ever dived with so many fish. We were engulfed by schools of them for pretty much the whole dive.

Our next overseas trip will be to New Zealand next March. If you have been inspired by the SS President Coolidge and want to dive an Ocean Liner then that trip is your chance. While the Mikhail Lermantov falls just short of the Coolidge's 200m length it's a not too shabby 170m. With a maximum depth of just 38m it is very accessible. Add to that the marine life in the Poor Knights and it should be a great trip.



CLUB UPDATES

VSAG Point Scoring Update

by Arthur Kokkinos

This year has been a very interesting year in the VSAG Club Champion Award. The award starts collecting points from the 1st of July to the 30th of June each year. There are 10 categories where members can score and add to a final tally. The member with the highest number of points wins the Club Champion Award for the year with their name engraved on the VSAG CLUB CHAMPION HONOURS Board. There is also recognition for 1st runner up and 2nd runner up. All 3 place getters receive a stunning trophy with their name on it. A presentation of these trophies takes place eCH year at the annual VSAG Christmas Party.

The VSAG club champion award originated back in 1972 with the inaugural winner being Frank Maguire. Over the years there have been 19 individual winners. Nine have won this award more than once. Only 3 members have won it more than 5 times. Back in 1994 the club champion award for the first and most likely the only time had to be shared between Don ABEL and Pat REYNOLDS. Winners of this award that need special mentioning are: Don ABEL who has won the VSAG club champion award five years in a row from 1990 to 1994. Mick JEACLE has won this award 6 times between the years from 1987 to 1999. From 2015 to 2022 Ian SCHOLEY has won this award every year bringing his tally to 8. The great John LAWLER has won this award an astonishing 11 times. He first won the VSAG club champion award back in 1986, then 4 years in row from 2001 to 2004 and then 6 years in a row from 2009 to 2014.

There are many of you who would love to win this prestigious award and forever be remembered with their name engraved on the VSAG CLUB CHAMPION OF THE YEAR HONOURS BOARD.

In keeping with tradition and respecting past winners whoever wins this award will have participated in many dives throughout the year and contributed a considerable amount of dive reports and articles to Fathoms. There are 10 categories where you can score points, as shown on the right.

Like any other club, we need champions to drive us forward. Their passion for diving and ongoing contribution to all aspects of the club can only have a positive effect for VSAG. In my opinion a club champion creates a benchmark and a level of participation where other members aspire to reach.

To make my job easier I would really appreciate if all members email me a dive report. Keep it simple with the following information: name of divers, boat owners and the organizer of the dive. Every year Category 3 and 4 are the highest scoring categories. The more you dive and take your boat out (boat owners take note) you will be getting more points. To score well all you have to do is DIVE as much as you can.



Point Scoring Categories

1. Organising a Local, Interstate or Overseas dive. (Location, Logistics, Pricing, Accommodation, Safety briefing/debriefing etc.) Must have 1 or more VSAG members participating in the dive. There needs to be an open invitation to all VSAG members (20 Pts).
2. Participating in a FIFO/Dive trip anywhere outside of Victoria, Interstate and also overseas. Must have 1 or more other VSAG members participating (20 Pts).
3. Bringing your boat to a dive. Must have at least 1 other VSAG member on board. (15 Pts).
4. Participating in a dive off a boat in Australia. Must have at least 1 other VSAG'er on board. (15 Pts).
5. Participating in a shore, river, lake, pier or cave DIVE. Anywhere in Victoria with at least 1 VSAG member or more (20 Pts).
6. Attend a club meeting (10 Pts).
7. Entering a photo in the photo comp at a club meeting (10 Pts).
8. Photo Competition – winning 1st prize (15 Pts).
9. Photo Competition – 2nd or 3rd prize (5 Pts).
10. Writing a Fathoms article or dive report (20 Pts).

CLUB TRIPS

Jervis Bay Trip Report

by Sandrine Balbo

Our May 2025 Jervis Bay trip brought together the club's intrepid spirit and sense of adventure, even as the weather threw us some real challenges.

The diving

Big swells and gusty winds set the scene for the week, but that didn't dampen anyone's enthusiasm.

Saturday's outing saw David's boat, Dire Straits and Franks's boat, Big Red Rib, head to the Nursery, while the other two boats explored a nearby site first. Underwater, visibility was a respectable 10+ meters. At the nursery, as we descended, we were greeted by a magical sight—a huge school of fish swirling around us. Encounters with nurse and wobbegong sharks, Greg the resident blue groper, and a host of vibrant species made for a great first dive.

We knew there would be no dives Sunday and Monday. Andy and Stevo opted to head home early, a sign of the persistent weather woes.

Tuesday's conditions limited us again, with all three boats returning to the Nursery. Visibility had dropped, but spirits remained high. A particularly inquisitive Wobbegong took a keen interest in David, swimming between him, barely a meter from the bottom, and the sand. We were also reunited with Greg and the ever-impressive school of fish, plus a sizable group of Old Wives.

Wednesday's outing to Currarong was a no-go, due to the combination of the weather and extremely low tide.

Unfortunately, worsening rain and a less-than-ideal dive's weather led all three boats to make the wise call to head back to Victoria. Those who stayed behind

faced leaky houses, resorting to gaffer tape and towels to keep the rain at bay.

Social Highlights: Making the Most of Every Moment

Despite the weather, the social side of the trip was a resounding success. With the group spread across three houses, we made sure to come together most evenings. The first night saw most of us at the RSL, followed by a lively second night at the local pub.

Between dives, we explored museums, took in a movie night at the Blue House (where we all enjoyed "The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou"), attended the club meeting online, and listened to a fascinating talk by Elena Lewendon (FMHT CEO) on the discovery of the Endurance. Some ventured to the local antique movie theater, while others braved walks around town—sometimes dodging showers, sometimes not.

Wednesday night ended with us hitting up the pub for a few more drinks and some games of pool, really bringing everyone together and reminding us that these trips are not just about diving.

Thank You to Our Organisers

A huge thank you goes out to Andrew for his tireless email communications and for booking all three houses, and to John, David, and Andrew for towing their boats from Victoria and then taking us all out through challenging conditions.

Most importantly, thanks to everyone for their good humor, flexibility, and the friendly spirit that never let us down (not like the weather).

Here's to the next adventure—hopefully with calmer seas but just as many memorable moments!

Jervis Bay, we'll be back 🍷





The Great Southern Reef

Let's meet the locals! Part I

by **Elodie Camprasse**

Before coming to Australia, I was working at a dive shop in Vietnam. Whenever I had Australian customers, I was always very excited to tell them that the next step of my journey was going to take me to Melbourne. A lot of customers suggested that the 'diving was not that good' there, or that 'there was nothing to see' in Port Phillip and the waters I would have access to near Melbourne. I was not relocating to Melbourne for diving reasons but to pursue my academic aspirations, but I started to get worried as I sure was hoping for good diving to enjoy in my spare time. When I finally reached Melbourne and started diving around Port Phillip, on Bunurong (Mornington Peninsula) and Wathaurung Country (Bellarine Peninsula), I realised how lucky I was to have put down roots in Melbourne.

The Great Southern Reef spans the Southern coastline of Australia, from Kalbarri in Western Australia to the border between New South Wales and Queensland. In Melbourne like in other parts of the Great Southern Reef, amazing marine life can be encountered. In fact, the uniqueness of the Great Southern Reef's marine life exceeds that of the Great Barrier Reef and other tropical areas around Australia, with the vast majority of species of the Great Southern Reef found there and nowhere else in the world.

Given how under appreciated marine biodiversity in this part of world is, I wanted to introduce you to the locals, so you can get to know them, and their incredible adaptations (a.k.a.. superpowers) better. I am hoping this article will represent more than a collection of fun facts, but a way to connect with marine life, to generate a curiosity towards the species we encounter as divers, and perhaps even a desire to visit the Great Southern Reef and experience this incredible biodiversity in person!

Let's play a game and see if you can you guess which superpowers the species below are equipped with, which makes them unique and help them thrive in the marine environment. Check your answers after the questions.

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The Quiz



Meeting the locals cont.

Multi-choice Question 1

Southern Dumpling Squid (a.k.a.. Bobtail Squid)

- a - it can squirt ink at predators to confuse them
- b - it has a light organ filled with bacteria that helps cancelling out its silhouette making it hard for predators to see
- c - it uses its arms to rake sand grains all over itself and use mucous as a "glue" to keep the sand around it
- d - all of the above

other clever tricks up its sleeve, hmmm, excuse me, its mantle (the dorsal, fleshy part of molluscs, which protects its internal organs) as well!

Under this dome-shaped layer of muscle lies the gill cavity, which contains a butterfly-shaped light organ. This is not to light its way in the dark, but rather to cancel out the dumpling squid's silhouette so predators have a hard time seeing them.

What is even cooler is that this light organ is fuelled by bioluminescent bacteria. Baby dumpling squids are not born with these bacteria but have to hunt them down in the water before benefitting from the added protection; they also have to produce sugar to keep the bacteria happy. Nothing comes free in life!

Bobtail squids, which are actually more closely related to cuttlefishes than squids possess yet another clever



Answer - all of the above

The Southern Dumpling Squid, with its incredible iridescent colours, possesses a series of neat adaptations that make this small, seemingly vulnerable mollusc very successful at avoiding predation. Like most cephalopods (octopuses, squids and cuttlefishes), they can squirt ink at predators left staring at a dark 'cloud' suspended in the water, whilst they retreat to safer areas. The dumpling squid has

way of becoming invisible to hungry mouths passing by, but this time during daytime. They can use one of their pairs of arms to rake sand grains over its head and body. Using mucous glands, it can glue a layer of this sand all over itself to hide on the bottom. Voila!

Meeting the locals cont.

Multi-choice Question 2

Weedy seadragon (a.k.a. common seadragon)

- a - it can dislocate its jaws to eat prey as big as its head
- b - it can orientate all the leaf-like protrusions on its body depending on the currents to swim faster
- c - the males take care of the eggs and can keep up to several hundred eggs on their tails
- d - none of the above

they are doing things a bit differently than the rest of us as they are among the few vertebrates that display male pregnancy. Their elaborate mating dance mirrors the graceful way they sway in the water among seaweed beds and seagrass meadows. During the ritual, the female will transfer several hundred eggs to the males, who fertilises them as they fuse to cup-like indentations on his tail. After the exchange, the male broods the eggs on his own for a couple of months, after which hatchlings will be left to fend for themselves. It's a tough life out there!



Answer - the males take care of the eggs and can keep up to several hundred eggs on their tails

Most photographers would agree that it is hard to find a fish more iconic than seadragons with bright pink eggs on their tails! It's no wonder that this fish, with its characteristic long toothless snout, individually unique and colourful spots on the body and head, leaf-like appendages and exquisite colours, has been selected as the marine emblem of Victoria.

"Weedies" and their South Australian and West Australian cousins "leafies", belong to the syngnathids, a family of fishes comprising seahorses, pipefishes and seadragons. When it comes to sex,

Another characteristic of the syngnathids is their fused jaws and long, tube-like snouts. Imagine having to use a straw to suck up your meals as they drift past you in the water column! Fortunately, they can generate quite a lot of suction thanks to specially-developed muscles and bones, which help them patiently capture the tiny crustaceans that happen to come near. Seadragons are not very efficient swimmers and they are slow going, but fortunately for them, their ability to camouflage so well by swaying in the current among seaweed and seagrass, and their bony structure discourage predators from turning them into their next meal!

Meeting the locals cont.

Multi-choice Question 3

Giant spider crab (a.k.a.. Geat Spider Crab)

- a - it has great hearing and can burry itself in the sand quickly when detecting approaching predators
- b - it can leave the water to go hunt on land when food availability is low
- c - it can grab other crabs and rub them against their bodies to get rid of parasites
- d - none of the above

Spider crabs are crustaceans covered by a hard 'shell' (also called exoskeleton or carapace) acting like an armour, which offers them protection against predators. This armour impedes the crustaceans' growth, which have to shed it in order to grow bigger. At that time, they are soft and vulnerable to predators, which might be the main reason why they come together in such big numbers – to seek safety in numbers. To the delight of divers and snorkellers, this phenomenon, which occurs nowhere else in the world, takes place in shallow waters where those who are keen to brave the cold can witness the behaviours of the crabs and their predators.

Little is known about this species, but it is thought that giant spider crabs live solitary lives in deeper waters



► Answer - none of the above

Every winter in Naarm (Port Phillip) and other parts of the Great Southern Reef, an amazing natural spectacle unfolds – the gatherings of tens of thousands of Giant spider crabs. Whilst I think this is the best reason to dive in winter, I have to admit that, as a marine ecologist who studies spider crabs, I might be a tad biased.

when they are not congregating to moult. Researchers have yet to find out what environmental cues trigger those gatherings and why the crabs choose the locations they do, but it seems like they like to congregate in shallow embayments in Victoria, Tasmania and South Australia.

Meeting the locals cont.

Multi-choice Question 4

Little penguin (a.k.a.. fairy penguin)

- a – it uses oil from a gland situated near its bum to waterproof its feathers
- b – one of its three eyelids act like goggles, allowing it to see and hunt underwater
- c – some of its feathers are structured so that they trap air under its plumage providing insulation when hunting
- d - all of the above

Their superpowers include some incredible adaptations that make them very efficient predators. These marine birds feed at sea, hunting fishes and other prey in the water column, for their own sustenance, or to bring back to their burrows, where their chicks wait patiently for their next feed.

They use their beak to collect and spread oil from a gland near their bums all over their plumage, making them waterproof. They are also able to withstand the cold thanks to the structure of their feathers, which comprise tiny barbs which interlock to trap air under the plumage, preventing water from reaching the penguin's skin. Pretty handy when most of their lives is spent in the water!



► Answer - all of the above

We all know that great things come in small packages, and Australia's only resident penguin, the little penguin, is no exception!

Little penguins, the world's smallest penguin, nest in colonies spread across the Great Southern Reef and in New Zealand, sometimes in urban areas where tourists can observe their behaviours as they come back from sea to rest and tend to their offspring.

Like other penguins, they can see well, in and out of the water. They have no need for masks or goggles - a third eyelid protect their eyes in the water. Along with a well adapted cornea and eye muscles, this allows them to have sharp underwater vision, necessary to catch the prey they rely on.

CLUB EVENTS

Port of Melbourne Deputy Harbour Masters presentation

by Peter Beaumont

Presenter: Mr David Tilsley

Members present:

Jak Grimm, Imogen Manins, Mike King, Priya Cardinaletti, John Olden, John Mills, David Politakis, Peter Beaumont, David Flew, Angus Stuart-Adams, Walter Medenbach, Stuart Cousins & Andrew McKernan



In order to better understand the workings of the Port of Melbourne & the management of shipping in & out of Port Phillip Bay the VSAG President (Andrew McKernan) was able to organise an after-work presentation by Mr David Tilsley on the issues of safely managing Port Phillip Bay commercial shipping movements.

The areas of concern covered included:

1. Recreational craft (small boats/yachts) not observing sufficient awareness of commercial vessel limitations ie: dead ahead blind spots of approx 800mts where bridge staff are unable to see recreational vessels & quite often have to post bow lookouts to report distances to recreational vessels so as ensure safe navigation.
2. Recreational vessels fishing whilst anchored in turn basins & not hearing repeated VHF calls as they are wearing ear pods or the radio is turned off. Vessels are then moved on by the water police once an infringement notice is issued.
3. Ski boats towing skiers or jet skiers approaching within the minimum safe distance whilst a vessel is underway.
4. Commercial dive operator (no AIS fitted) attempting to retrieve divers on an incoming tide near the heads (Point Nepean side) as shipping enters the bay

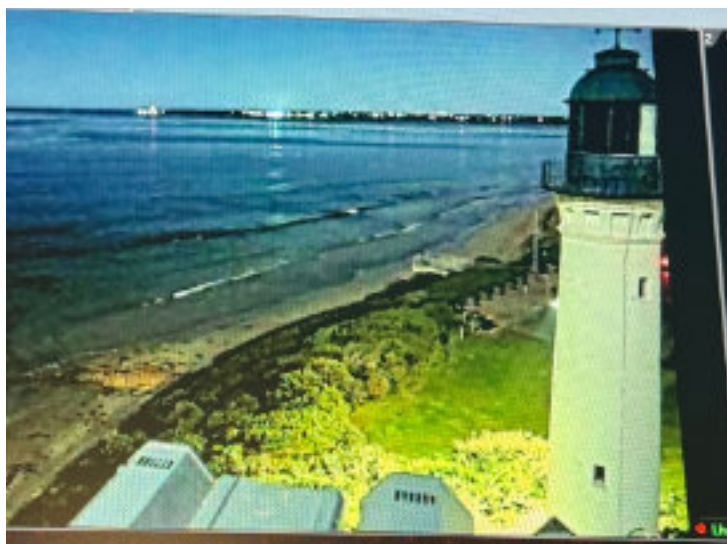
resulting in the ship having to steer heavily to Port whilst doing approx 18knots then recorrect heavily to Stb'd in order to recover track & keep the ship safe albeit at the very western edge of the shipping channel. Divers reported being on the bottom at 20mtrs as the ship passed over the top of them!!

5. An emergency stopping distance of approx 8X the length of the vessel at 18knots should an emergency full astern / stop scenario arise – distance may increase if the main propulsion plant struggles to cope with achieving full astern.

6. Swimming event organised to be held within Parks Victoria waters which rapidly expanded into Port of

Melbourne waters due to stronger than expected weather conditions/tidal flow rates that resulted in swimmers being carried outside the bay via the shipping channels with emergency rescues being conducted up to 2km outside the bay. Harbour Masters office had no knowledge of the event until their phones started ringing alerting them to an incident involving people in the water & in the shipping channels – Worksafe Investigation currently underway.

Upon completion of the presentation David expressed that he is committed to engaging with local groups that use the Port Phillip Bay waters for recreational use as he feels it is important to continually educate/raise awareness of recreational boating safety around shipping movement within the Bay. To complete the presentations David divided us into two groups for a guided tour of the Ops room to highlight the resources in place to safely manage the Port of Melbourne shipping movements. We thanked David for his presentation efforts & went our separate ways.



Deputy Harbour Masters presentation cont.

Visibility limitations from the bridge of large vessels



The view of the sea surface from the conning position shall not be obscured by more than two ship lengths, or 500 m, whichever is the less, forward of the bow to 10° on either side under all conditions of draught, trim and deck cargo



Deputy Harbour Masters presentation cont.



DIVING HISTORY

Diving Back Then - Without GPS

by Peter Mosse

A long, long time ago

I can still remember how we used to dive:

- With no GPS
- And no satellite fixes for dive sites!
- (With apologies to Don Mclean *American Pie*)
- Yes, long before GPS, we were diving all those sites inside the bay, in the heads and outside including the graveyard.

So how were the sites found?

We used marks or transits. This involved lining up some feature in the background with something in the foreground. A tree, a clump of trees, a radio tower, the roof of a building, a fence line, a sand scar. Anything you could see reliably.

But then of course on hazy or foggy days, forget it. Have you ever wondered why Foggy Reef has that name. It was found by accident on a foggy morning. But that's another story. Two old hands claim ownership to the name! I was with one group.

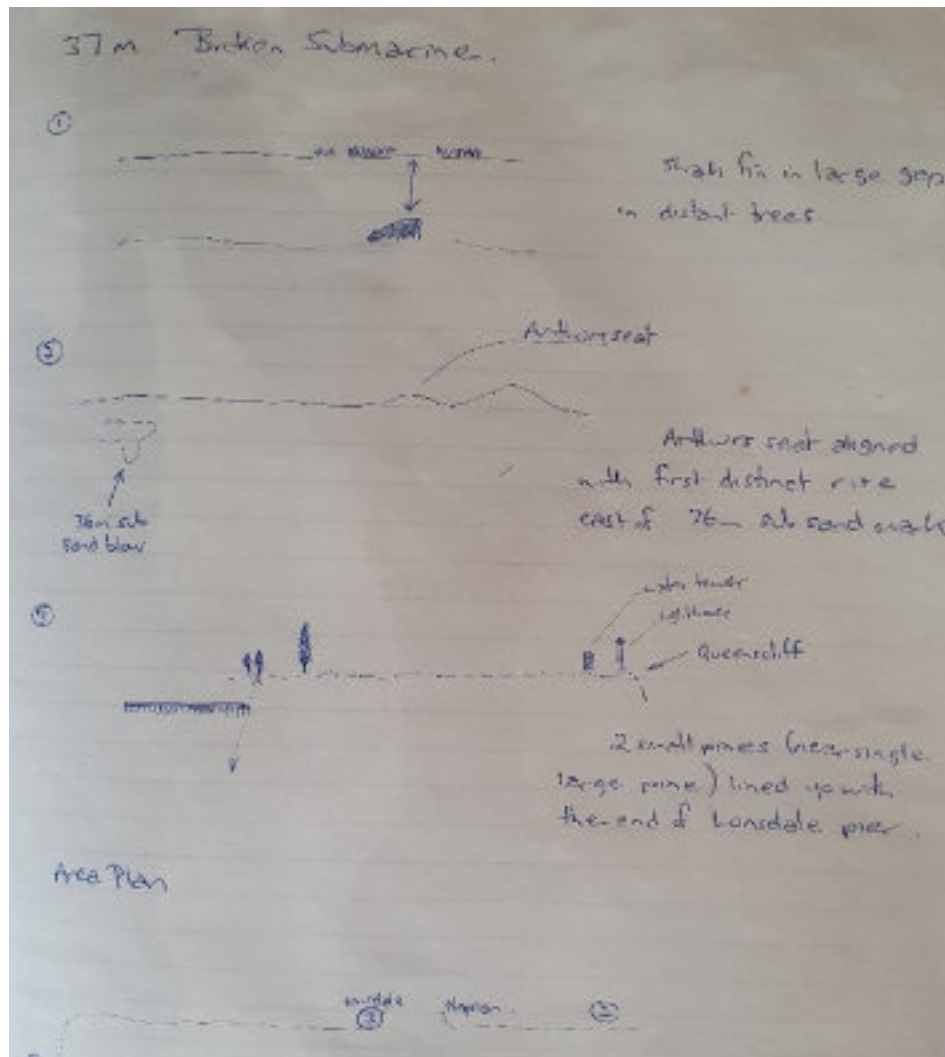
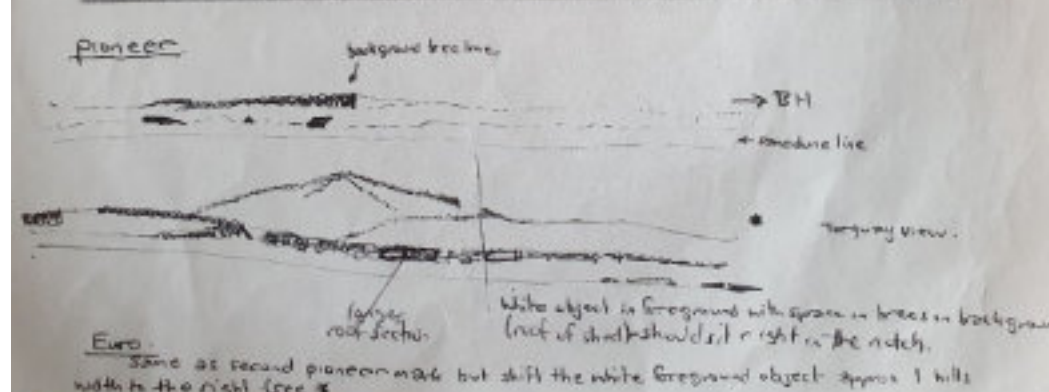


Figure 1. Hand drawn marks for the 37m submarine.

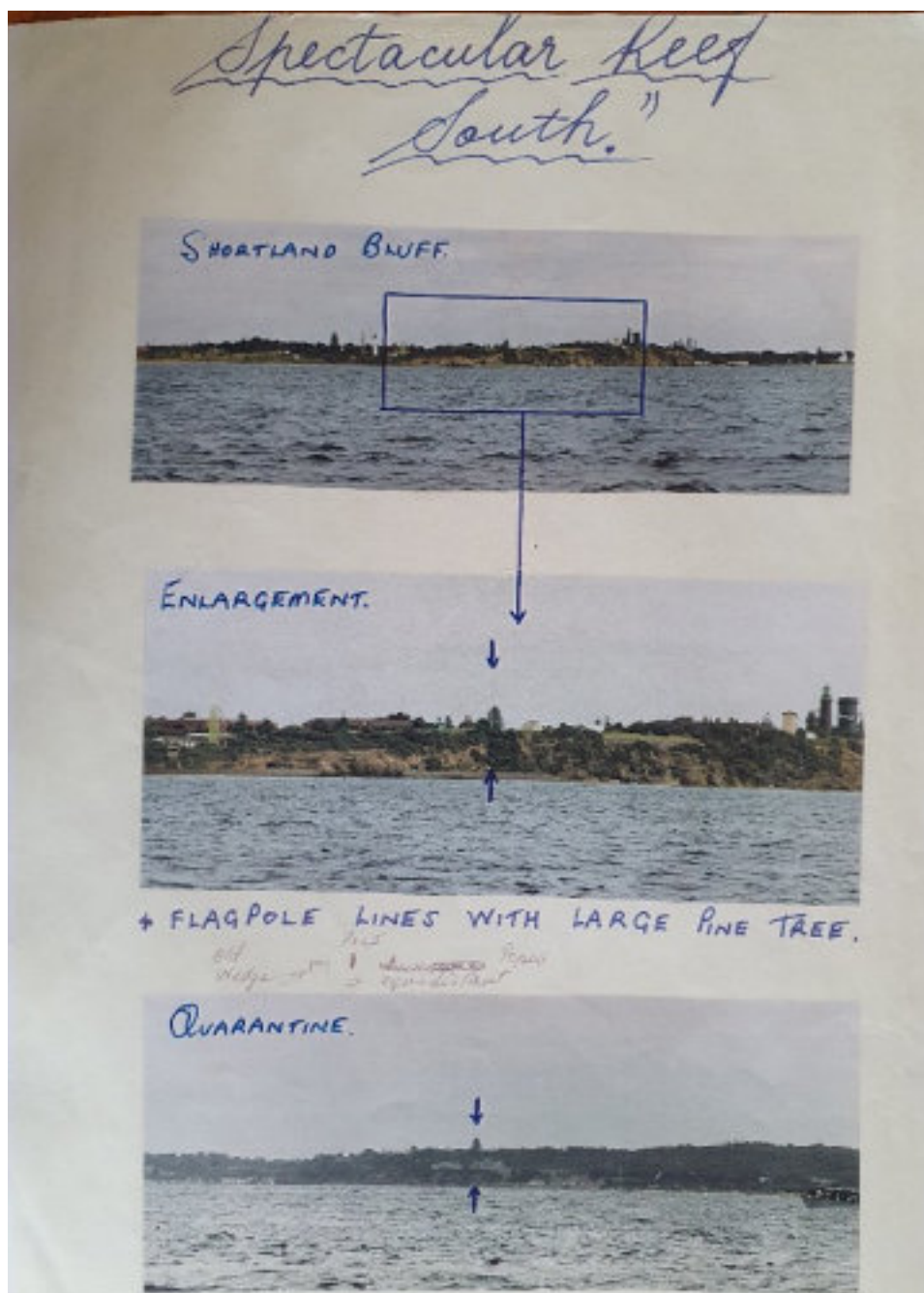


Most of my marks were hand drawn. For example, the 37m submarine (Figure 1) and the Pioneer (Figure 2).

Others used photographs (no digital cameras at that stage with easy zoom in function). Figure 3 is the photographed marks for Spectacular Reef.

Figure 2. Hand drawn marks for the Pioneer wreck in the graveyard.

Diving Back Then - Without GPS cont.



get back to the site with confidence. Walls were easy but wrecks, well that was another thing. Even with good marks it often involved searching round and round with the sounder running.

And speaking of sounders, you have probably all seen the brightly coloured depth sounder, side scan, chart plotter and GPS instruments almost universally in use today. Before that we had paper sounders where a stylus rotated and when a pulse was received from the echo system, a flash of current burned a mark into special heat sensitive paper. It worked. I even still have one on my boat (Figure 4). And I think I have one more roll of paper. Possibly the last in existence! If sounders could speak, this one would have some stories to tell.

Figure 3. Photographic marks for Spectacular Reef.

But then there would be an occasional dive where a mark was suddenly missing. Trees cut down or cleared, bushes growing in front of a building (George Kermode), Navigation markers removed (Stony Creek Jervis Bay). But of course, there were occasional bonuses. A new radio tower on the back hills suddenly provided more accurate marks for the George Kermode.

So next time you are out diving one of those sites, think of how it was done back then. Look at the land and horizon, near and far and see what marks you think you could line up and

Figure 4. The legendary Furuno FE 400. Top of its line in its day and still performing well.



CLUB EVENTS

VSAG Dive Computer Survey

by Sandrine Balbo

The survey responses highlight Shearwater and Suunto as the leading brands among active divers, with a strong preference for clear displays, air integration, and ease of use. Most divers use default or slightly conservative settings, and while advanced features and apps are appreciated by technical users, simplicity and reliability remain top priorities for the community.



Detailed results

Brands and Models

- Most Common Brands: Shearwater and Suunto are the most frequently mentioned brands.

Popular Models:

- 20 have a Shearwater: Perdix, Teric, Peregrine, Petrel 3, Perdix AI.
- 9 have a Suunto: D5, Ocean, Zoop Novo, Vyper, Eon Core, Vyper Nove.
- Other brands/models: Scubapro (Luna 2, G2, Galileo Sol), Aqualung (i300c), Uwatec (Aladdin Pro), Oceanic (Data 2 Plus).

Dive Experience

Reported number of dives since the start of the year, per respondent, ranges from 0 to 100

- 11 respondents reported less than 20 dives;
- 22 between 20-50;
- 5 between 60-100

Usage Patterns and Settings

- Dive Types: most respondents are recreational divers (23 rec only). Technical, cave, or rebreather diving were also mentioned.

- Settings: Many use default or standard settings, with some adjusting for Nitrox, conservative factors, or gradient factors for technical dives.
- Planning: A minority use dive planning features or external software; most rely on the computer's real-time data.

Software

- Commonly used apps: Shearwater Cloud/App, Subsurface, MultiDeco, DiverLog+, Suunto App.
- Several respondents value cloud integration and data logging for dive records.

Features Liked

- Display: Large, clear, easy-to-read screens are highly valued, especially for aging eyes or challenging underwater visibility.
- Air Integration: Many appreciate air integration and tank pressure monitoring.
- Ease of Use: Simplicity, intuitive menus, and reliability are recurring themes.
- Customisability: Technical divers appreciate configurable displays and settings.
- Durability: Several mention long-term reliability and robust build quality.
- Customer service: with Shearwater especially

Criticisms and Suggestions

- Some find certain displays hard to read in bright conditions.
- Menu navigation and compass features can be confusing on some models.
- A few users express a desire for larger screens or more straightforward interfaces.
- Occasional firmware or boot issues reported, especially with older Suunto models.

Additional Insights

- Many respondents have experience with multiple brands and models.
- Several mention using older computers as backups.
- There is a strong emphasis on the importance of understanding one's dive computer and not relying solely on technology for safety.

And a few quotes to finish

- "Just because you have a technical DC does not mean you can/should dive technical."
- "If you have a good plan you just need depth and time."
- "Users need to stay current and familiar with their unit."
- "Have 2. Choose big screens"



VSAG in the Deep South

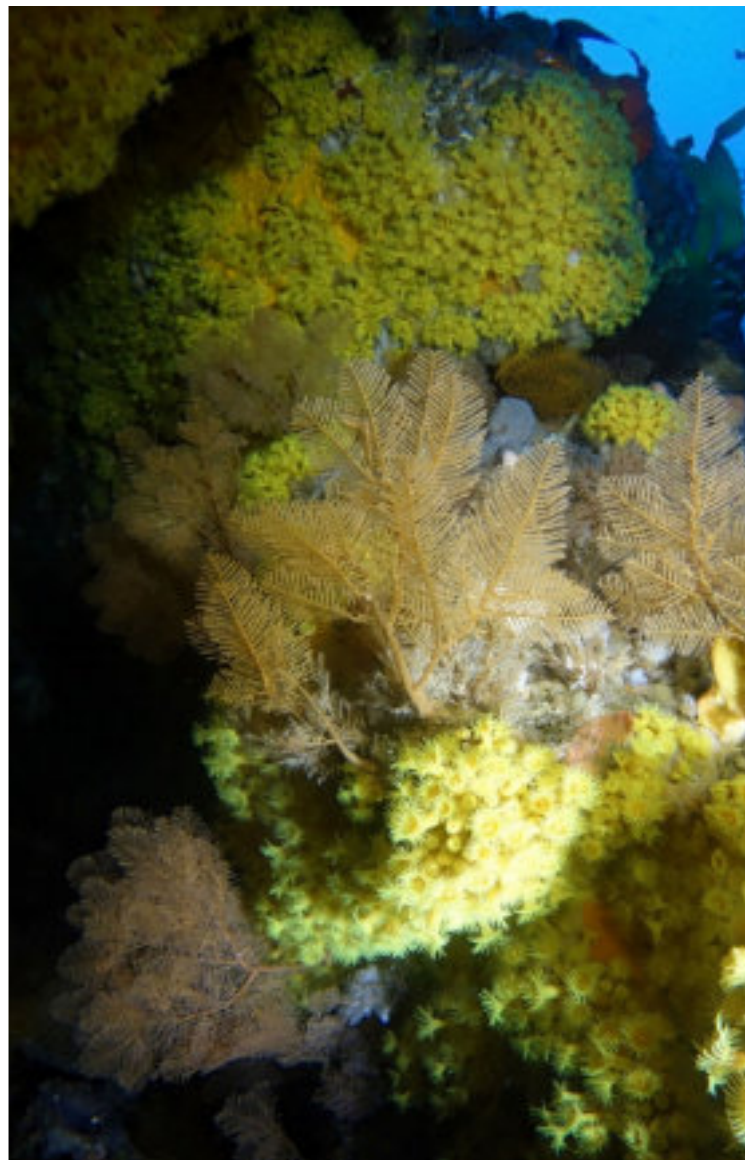
Tasman Peninsula Dive Trip 2025 Report

by Peter Mosse, Elodie Camprasse

Tasmania, perched on the edge of the Southern Ocean, captivates the imagination with its breathtaking landscapes, both above and below the surface. On the Tasman Peninsula, where we were fortunate to dive in exceptional conditions in March 2025, towering cliffs extend down to steep, deep drop offs underwater. It's an ideal playground for adventurous divers seeking unforgettable experiences far from the beaten path.

With names like The Trident, The Monument, The Hippolytes, and the newly discovered Fields, these dive sites practically beg to be explored. Who wouldn't be tempted to dive them? The best territory is deep, generally over 35m but what a sight as you reach those depths, particularly if the water is clear as it was for us. As underwater photographer and marine scientist Matt Testoni highlighted in his presentation to the club at the end of last year, the magic of Tassie's underwater world only grows with depth, the deeper you go, the more extraordinary the marine life becomes.

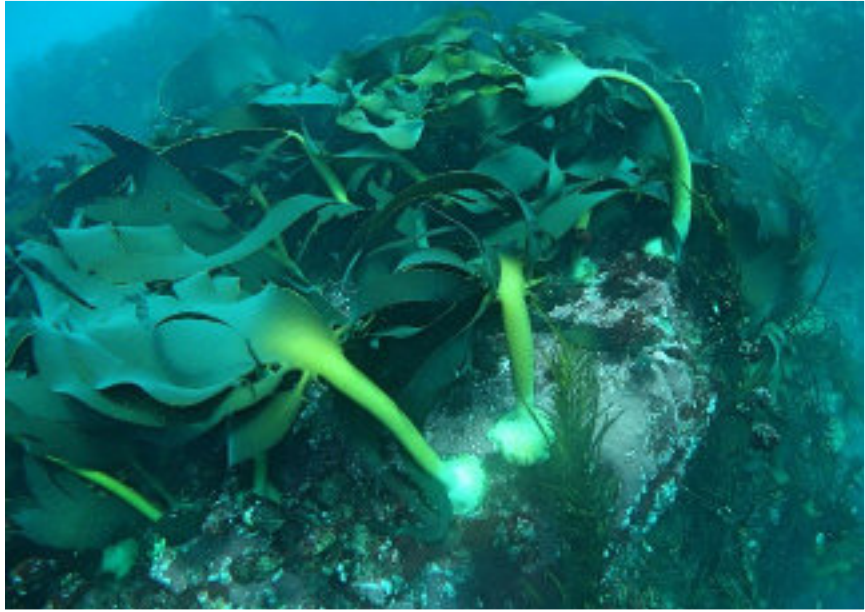
Diving the Tasman Peninsula was a highlight for everyone on the trip, the week seemed to pass in a flash. On our first day, we settled into our routine for the week: driving from our nearby accommodation to the dive centre, assembling our gear, and loading it onto the inflatable dive boat. From there, we'd launch at either the Pirates Bay boat ramp, just south of Eaglehawk Neck, or from Port Arthur in the heart of the Tasman Peninsula.



Tasman Peninsula Dive Trip cont.

At most dive sites, our descent took us through dense forests of bull kelp with impressive holdfasts anchoring them firmly to the seafloor, while long, leathery fronds languidly flowed to and fro in the ocean swell, a mesmerizing welcome to the underwater world below. Below the kelp, we encountered thick clusters of sea tulips attached to the walls, also moving with the swell. And as we continued our descent in some lucky moments, we encountered big schools of Real Bastard Trumpeters, a unique Tasmanian fish.

Continuing down the steep walls, the first hint of what was to come were the few isolated sea whips which quickly gave way to the fields of whips and clouds of pink butterfly perch. We marvelled at impressive Bastard Trumpeters gliding through the valleys and along the walls, along with many, many other species. In terms of fish species, the highlights included tarakihi, banded morwongs, marblefish, red perch, toothbrush leatherjackets, rosy parrotfish, swell sharks, southern red scorpionfish, and various species of sea perch.



Colourful soft corals, intricate mulberry anemones, basket stars clinging onto sea whips, yellow zoanthids and an elusive Maori octopus added even more wonder to our dives throughout the week. And for those with a fondness for seafood, there was no

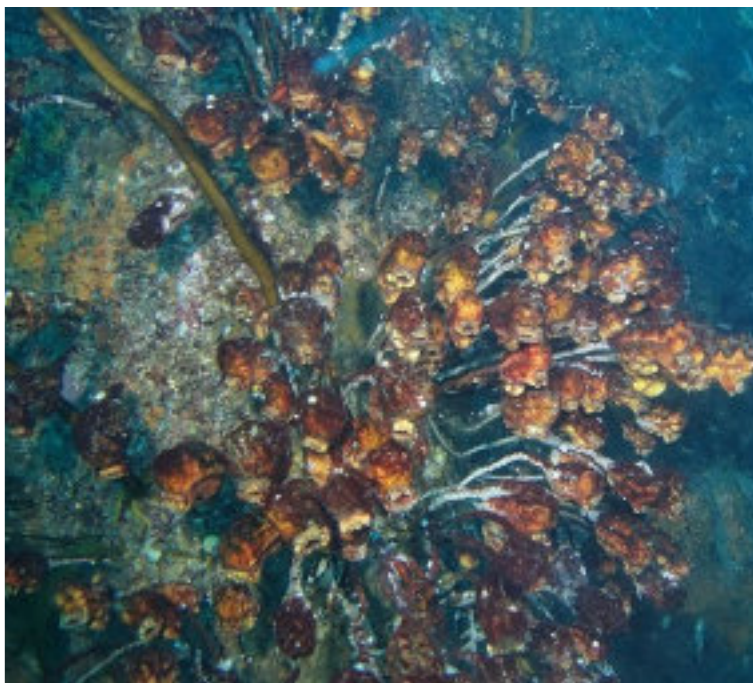
shortage of large, relatively easily caught red beasts.

Our transits to and from the dive sites were nearly as memorable as the dives themselves. Flurries of shearwaters gliding above the water were joined by several species of albatross and the occasional sea eagle. On multiple occasions, pods of common dolphins escorted our boat or fed on nearby baitballs in the company of fur seals, prompting our skipper to pause so we could take it all in. And as if that weren't enough, we were treated to the sight of humpback whales cruising by on a couple of occasions.

After the week of deep Tasman Peninsula dives, Peter M and Elodie braved the cool onshore wind on a Hobart beach to look for the endangered spotted handfish in the shallow, murky water of the Derwent River. Spotting one of those rare handfishes made the search all worth it! A great end to a week of stunning diving.



Tasman Peninsula Dive Trip cont.



Tasman Peninsula Dive Trip cont.



Tasman Peninsula Dive Trip cont.



PHOTO COMPETITION

Winner

January 2025



Elodie Camprasse - Is this you? - Pope's Eye

PHOTO COMPETITION

Winner

February 2025



Elodie Camprasse - So swell - Hogan Island

PHOTO COMPETITION

Winner

March 2025



Marcia Riederer - Pylon Appreciation Club - Busselton Jetty

PHOTO COMPETITION

Winner

April 2025



Michael Lyons - Prowfish after a big night out - Portsea

PHOTO COMPETITION

Winner

May 2025



Elodie Camprasse - Can I help you? - Rye Pier

PHOTO COMPETITION

Winner

June 2025



Marcia Riederer - Blue Smile - Cottage by the Sea

PHOTO COMPETITION

Winner

July 2025



Erhan Onfidan - The Eye - Blargowrie pier



Club Equipment

As a reminder to all, we have a range of club equipment for use by VSAG Club Members.

This includes Emergency Oxygen Administration and First Aid kits. These are typically provided on long-term loan to active Club boat owners and permanently located on their boats for the safety of Club Members.

Other equipment available for short-term loan includes:

- 2.8 litre pony bottles including 1st/2nd stage regs; redundant gas for deep or wreck diving
- Ambient carbon monoxide (CO) meter; for monitoring member's compressors.
- Automated External Defibrillator: with plans to increase the number of units over time
- Sand Launching Ropes

In addition, the Club owns a number of standard aluminum dive cylinders and a few smaller sized cylinders.

A full list of equipment available for loan by VSAG Club Members, and instructions on how to access this equipment, is available at the VSAG site: <https://www.revolutionise.com.au/vsag/vsag-equipment/>

For Club Members to access this equipment, the first point of contact is the Equipment Officer - Brian Heatherich.

The general email address to enquire about accessing of equipment is equipment@vsag.org.au.

The Equipment Officer will know the current location of pieces of equipment and can assist with arranging access. It is advised to make arrangements as far in advance as possible to ensure availability and sufficient time to collect the equipment.

For any further questions or requests, please contact John Olden.

Emergency Contact Information

Anywhere on Victorian Waters, your first response should always be to call

000

or call the Water Police on 1800 135 729

In the event you cannot place a call, use

VHF Channel 16

and follow the Radio Emergency Message Protocols shown below.

If all of the above fail, activate your

EPIRB

Radio Emergency Message Protocols

Ensure all vessel passengers are familiar with the operation of a VHF radio and the following process for placing a Mayday or Pan Pan call

Speak slowly and clearly

Mayday call

Vessel or an occupant is in grave and imminent danger and requires immediate assistance

Distress call

Mayday, Mayday, Mayday

this is

"Name of your vessel", "your call sign" x 3

Distress message after call has been acknowledged

Mayday

"Name of your vessel", "your call sign"

Vessel position (GPS, bearing, what3words)

Nature of distress and assistance required

Other useful information such as number of persons on board, vessel description, life-rafts, EPIRB, etc.

Pan Pan call

An urgent situation exists but there is no imminent danger

Urgency call

Pan Pan, Pan Pan, Pan Pan

All Stations x 3 (or *"specific station"* x 3)

"Name of your vessel", "your call sign" x 3

Urgency message after call has been acknowledged

Pan Pan

"Name of your vessel", "your call sign"

Vessel position (GPS, bearing, what3words)

Nature of distress and assistance required

Other useful information such as number of persons on board, vessel description, life-rafts, EPIRB, etc.

VSAG Committee & Club Roles 2025

President - Andrew McKernan

president@vsag.org.au

Vice-President - Peter Walters

vicepresident@vsag.org.au

Treasurer - Walter Medenbach

treasurer@vsag.org.au

Secretary - David Geekie

secretary@vsag.org.au

New Members Coordinator - Angus Stuart-Adams

membership-enquiry@vsag.org.au

Safety Coordinator - John Olden

joldenau@gmail.com

Travel Coordinator - Ian Scholey

ischoley@me.com

Merchandise Coordinator - Ian Scholey

ischoley@me.com

IT Coordinator - Walter Medenbach

waltbach@gmail.com

Equipment Coordinator - John Olden

joldenau@gmail.com

Club Awards & Points - Arthur Kokkinos

arthurkokkinos1718@gmail.com

Photo Competition - Matthias Klapperstueck

photos@vsag.org.au

Chief Archivist - Ian Scholey

ischoley@me.com

Fathoms Editor - Peter Walters

editor@vsag.org.au

SCUBA Theory Discussions Lead - Sandrine Balbo

sandrine.balbo@gmail.com

