

Media Release



Warship Still In Limbo

VARs reports on the ex HMAS Canberra Project

Friday, 20th July 2007: Nine months after announcing that the ex HMAS Canberra warship would be sunk off Victoria, the State and Federal Governments are yet to agree on the financial terms under which the project will proceed.

In the lead up to the Victorian state election, the Bracks Government announced that it had secured the ex HMAS Canberra for sinking as an artificial reef and wreck dive site in Victoria. Everyone agreed that this would be a magnificent tourism and recreation asset for the people of Victoria, plus assist the local diving industry to promote Victoria as the world class temperate water diving destination it truly is.

Since the announcement last October the Victorian Government says that it has undertaken substantial work on this project. This includes assessing the ship's condition, refining the project scope, undertaking appropriate environmental studies and the appointment of an independent project monitor.

The State Government now estimates that it will require \$7 million to properly prepare such a large warship for sinking as an underwater treasure.

Tim Holding, Victorian Minister of Tourism, has written to Dr Brendon Nelson, Federal Minister of Defence, asking for further financial support. It is believed that the State Government is prepared to increase its contribution from \$500,000 to \$1.1 million, if the Federal Government proportionately increases its promised contribution from \$2.8 million to \$5.9 million.

The initial promised date for the sinking of April 2007 has long since passed into history. Every month for the last three months the Victorian Artificial Reef Society (VARs) has been told by the appointed government spokesperson that a decision should be made by the end of the month, and each month the due date passes without an agreement being reached.

We can only hope that these two branches of government can finally reach agreement. Then ownership of the ex HMAS Canberra will transfer to Victoria so that the real work can begin.

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About VARS

The Victorian Artificial Reef Society (VARS) is a non-profit, volunteer dive community group working towards the goal that one day you will be able to come and dive the ex HMAS Canberra as an artificial reef and wreck site in Victoria. All major groups in the Victorian scuba diving industry, plus the Victorian sport diving clubs, have recognised VARS as their voice on all matters relating to the ex HMAS Canberra. They fully support the proposal VARS will be making about the dive site location.

Once the next stage of the ex HMAS Canberra project begins, VARS will be working with Tourism Victoria and the other government authorities involved, to finalise the site location and access conditions.

The VARS committee and volunteers are actively working with the dive industry, Geelong Otway Tourism, Mornington Peninsula Tourism, Tourism Victoria and Tourism Australia to capitalise on the sinking of the ex HMAS Canberra as a vehicle for an interstate and overseas promotion of Victoria as a world class temperate water diving destination.

There is still much to be done and the wheels of government have been moving slowly so far. However, as the representative of all Victorian divers and the Victorian dive industry on this matter, VARS is focused on ensuring Victoria secures the ex HMAS Canberra as a great new dive site.

VARS will be having its Annual General Meeting at 8 pm on Tuesday the 11th September 2007 at Bells Hotel, corner of Moray and Coventry Streets, South Melbourne (Melway 1D L12). Anyone interested in the ex HMAS Canberra project is welcome to attend.

For more information on VARS and the HMAS Canberra, visit www.hmascanberra.com.au.

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