

VARS News Update



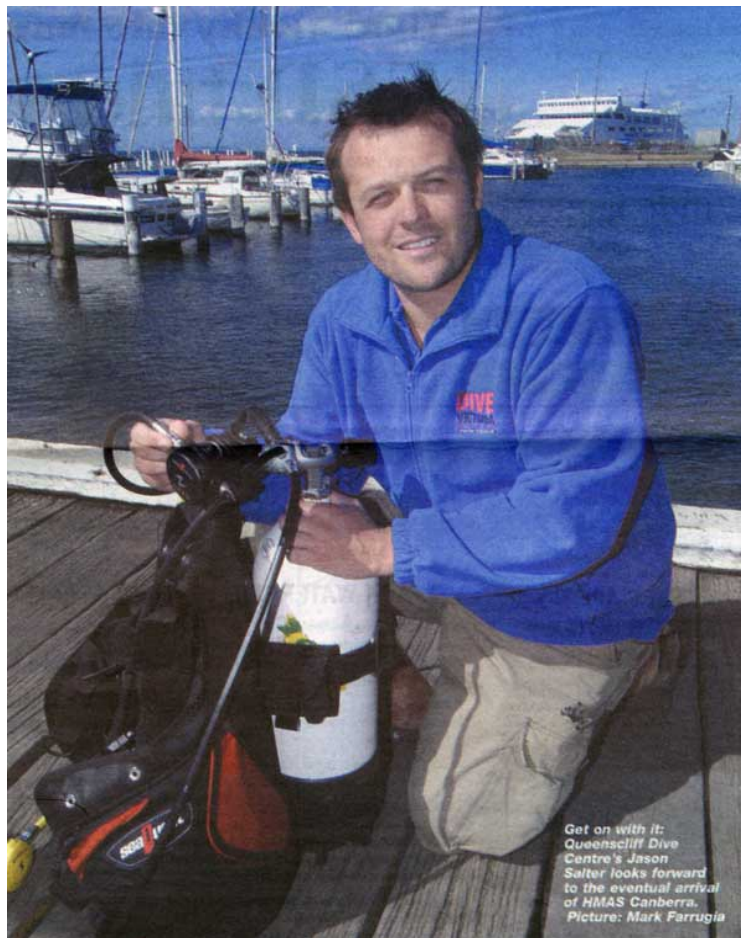
Keep up to date with the “Let’s Sink the HMAS Canberra” project at www.hmascanberra.com.au

Join VARS and support the project — www.vars.org.au

The Bellarine Peninsula Independent, Friday April 20, 2007, Page 1

The Bellarine Peninsula Independent

Ship to languish in Western Australia for months



Get on with it: Queenscliff Dive Centre's Jason Salter looks forward to the eventual arrival of HMAS Canberra. Picture: Mark Farrugia

Get on with it: Queenscliff Dive Centre's Jason Salter looks forward to the eventual arrival of HMAS Canberra. Picture: Mark Farrugia

Delay strikes divers

BY ANDREW MATHIESON

CASHED-UP divers and ambitious tourism operators will wait at least until summer to explore a sunken warship off Point Lonsdale.

State Labor Member for Bellarine Lisa Neville has defended several months of delays in bringing the promised HMAS Canberra to the region.

Negotiations with maritime defence service provider Tenix for the ship to be transferred from Perth have stalled.

State Government said before last year's election that it planned to sink the vessel in December.

The Liberal Federal Government has committed \$2.8 million to the project.

Ms Neville denied she was "trying to shift the blame" amid accusations that state authorities were delaying the process during a federal election year.

"I'd hope the negotiations would be resolved within the next few weeks in terms of what work needs to happen," she said.

"This ship will be sunk, in my view, and it will happen this year.

"But the question will be whether it can happen during the winter and that probably won't be the case."

Ms Neville said limited availability

of experts on sinking ships was compounding the delays.

Authorities would also have to remove dangerous materials to make the former warship safe for the marine environment, she said.

A spokesperson for Liberal federal Member for Corangamite Stewart McArthur told the *Independent* he would like the ship issue resolved as soon as possible.

The delay has disappointed Queenscliff Dive Centre manager Fiona Holding.

"I think it's because the governments have been hesitant to sign with the election coming up," she said.

"We were told February or something like that when it was first announced but now they don't really know."

Ms Holding rejected Ms Neville's claim that winter was unsuitable for creating the dive site.

Ms Holding said the diving school still attracted "technical divers" during winter.

Sinking of the ship "can't come quick enough", she said.

State Government has estimated a net benefit to local tourism of \$1.3 million a year.