



: IMAGES ROBB WESTERDYK © 2011

# SHE'S OPEN FOR BUSINESS!

> TENS OF THOUSANDS OF SPECTATORS FLOCKED TO AVOCA AND NORTH AVOCA BEACHES TO WATCH THE LONG-AWAITED SCUTTLING OF A FORMER WARSHIP. THE EVENT WAS DELAYED FOR MORE THAN AN HOUR BY A LARGE POD OF BOTTLE-NOSED DOLPHINS, WHICH WERE FEEDING WITHIN THE SHIP'S EXCLUSION ZONE. ONCE THE AREA WAS CLEARED, IT TOOK LESS THAN A MINUTE FOR THE FRIGATE TO DISAPPEAR BENEATH THE WAVES.

The HMAS *Adelaide* was the second ship to be christened HMAS *Adelaide* in the Royal Australian Navy. The HMAS *Adelaide II* (now known as Ex-HMAS *Adelaide*) was a long-range escort frigate with roles including area air defence, anti-submarine warfare, surveillance, reconnaissance, and interdiction. Built in the USA, HMAS *Adelaide* was commissioned in November 1980 and was the first of six *Adelaide* class guided-missile frigates delivered to the Royal Australian Navy. The HMAS *Adelaide* participated in the 1990/91 Gulf War, in peacekeeping operations in East Timor in 1999 and 2006, and was deployed to the Arabian Gulf in 2001 and 2004. The ship was

also involved in the high profile search and rescue of solo yachtsmen Thierry Dubois and Tony Bullimore from the Southern Ocean in 1997.

The HMAS *Adelaide* was decommissioned by the Australian Navy in January 2008. It was demilitarised and all oils and fuels removed by Australian Department of Defence during 2008.

In 2000 the Central Coast Artificial Reef Project (CCARP) began lobbying the Australian Government to secure a navy vessel to be sunk as an artificial reef and dive site off the New South Wales Central Coast. The group were finally successful in obtaining the Ex-HMAS *Adelaide* – in February 2007 the Australian Government

announced that the vessel would be gifted to the NSW government for the purpose of creating an artificial reef and recreational dive site off the NSW coast near Terrigal. Original plans to scuttle the ship in March 2010 were halted due to legal action, but the scuttling was approved by an Administrative Appeals Tribunal decision on 15 September 2010. While ex HMAS *Adelaide* is the first of its kind in NSW, it's also one of six naval dive sites around Australia, but is closest to shore and a well populated area.

Final preparations for the scuttling were made at Berth No. 2 Glebe Island in Sydney, which included placement of cutting charges. Notifications were made to the relevant maritime and aviation

*One of the first underwater shots: Geoff Paynter swims past the starboard side of the bridge*





Clockwise from above Adelaide nears her final resting place; the orange marker is her mooring position

Geoff Paynter and Lynne Curnow, consultants to the project, waiting to be picked up by the work boat

Taken from a microlight looking towards Terrigal and Avoca Beach

Adelaide at her final mooring position ready for scuttling off North Avoca

Workers from McMahan workboat Strictly Business boarding the Adelaide to prepare for her final anchorage

authorities and mariners. On 11 April the Ex-HMAS Adelaide was moved out through Sydney Heads and towed north to the Central Coast, escorted by police and other authorities and with an exclusion zone in place. It was anchored approximately 1.87 km off Avoca Beach for two days for final preparations such as cutting dive access holes above the water line.

The scuttling event was on Wednesday 13 April 2011. An exclusion zone of around 1000m was in place until after the Ex-HMAS Adelaide was down and all safety checks completed. Weather conditions had to be suitable for the tow and final preparations onboard the ship once anchored at the scuttling location. The

vessel's final resting place is approximately 1.4km south of the Skillion at Terrigal and 1.8km off Avoca Beach in around 32m of water.

Post-scuttling checks included:

- Checking all explosive devices had been detonated;
- Clearing all debris from the Adelaide (both floating on the water surface and underwater);
- Checking the structural integrity of the sunken wreck;
- Installing navigation markers.

After this, the site was safe to dive but not yet open to dive. Prior to opening the site the following activities were required:

- Installation of moorings – There will be six moorings placed around the ship. Two will be exclusively licensed to commercial operators, another two will be available for any commercial operator to book on a casual basis. The final two moorings will be available to recreational divers.
- Location of the Adelaide on navigation maps
- Install any signage
- Complete dive site tour with rescue



authorities and designated divers

- Open the site to dive – A Crown reserve (the HMAS Adelaide Reserve) has been declared over the final resting place of the Ex-HMAS Adelaide. An agent is promoting to the dive and tourism industries, issuing permits to dive the vessel and taking bookings for moorings.

Central Coast Tourism was flooded with enquiries – the first dive group took the plunge after Easter in late April.

#### Ex-HMAS Adelaide Photographic record:

Robb Westerdyk, a member of the Central Coast Artificial Reef project and a noted underwater photographer, captured a remarkable series of topside pictures, and the first underwater images. He was a member of the survey dive team which checked the ship after the scuttling. His duties included taking photos of the Adelaide's condition and position.

#### Environmental Information

The comprehensive environmental assessment of the scuttling of the Ex-HMAS Adelaide is available online and downloadable. This assessment was completed over one and a half years and considered aspects such as the potential for impacts on flora and fauna, coastal processes, sediment movement and marine archaeology. The assessment shows that the scuttling of the Ex-HMAS Adelaide will have no significant impact as defined by the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979.

The Administrative Appeals Tribunal considered a comprehensive range of environmental issues in reviewing the Permit issued by the then Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts (DEWHA). The decision is on the

AAT website, or alternatively go to LPMA's plain English summary of the decision.

#### Divng the ex-HMAS Adelaide

Pro-Dive Central Coast  
[www.prodivecentralcoast.com.au](http://www.prodivecentralcoast.com.au)  
 Terrigal Diving Centre  
[www.terrigaldive.com.au](http://www.terrigaldive.com.au)  
 Dive Imports Australia  
[www.diveimportsaustralia.com.au](http://www.diveimportsaustralia.com.au)  
 Dive enquiries, dive permits and boat mooring bookings:  
 Central Coast Visitor Information Centre 1300132975 or 0243434444  
[www.visitcentralcoast.com.au](http://www.visitcentralcoast.com.au)  
**Event History:**  
[www.ccarp.net](http://www.ccarp.net)  
[www.hmasadelaide.com](http://www.hmasadelaide.com)

**Robbert Westerdyk** has been open water scuba diving for over 35 years and cave diving for 17 years. For the past 20 years he's been passionate about taking



underwater photographs and has won various competitions. In particular, he loves taking images on wrecks, inside caves and of macro subjects. Many of his images have

been published in various books and journals. When not diving, he's a local builder on the Central Coast of NSW. Robert's been a member of the Central Coast Artificial Reef Project (CCARP) since its inception in 2000.