



Coramba shipwreck discovery boat now on historic vessel register

By Mike Hast
THE Second World War patrol boat used by divers to find the ill-fated cargo steamer *Coramba* off Phillip Island in May has been listed on the Australian Register of Historic Vessels.

Divers from Mornington Peninsula-based Southern Ocean Exploration found the steamer in 63 metres of water about 15 kilometres southeast of the island, using *MV Action* as their main dive boat.

Action, based on a British motor torpedo boat, was bought by SOE diver and yachtman Justin McCarthy of Cranbourne earlier this year.

The discovery of *Coramba*, Australia's most searched-for shipwreck, closed a chapter in Australian maritime history and brought relief to ageing survivors of the 17 men who were lost when the steamer went down with all hands on a stormy night in November 1934.

Other famous Australian vessels on the historic register include the schooner *Alma Doepel*, America's Cup winner *Australia II*, and the nation's oldest sailing vessel, *The City of Adelaide*.

Built in Brisbane in 1942 for the war effort, TMB 02-14 *Action* was one of 12 PT boats used by the RAAF

as search and rescue vessels in New Guinea.

After the war, the boat was used for ceremonial duties, including carrying Queen Elizabeth across Sydney Harbour in 1953. It was used to the Williamstown Yacht Club in 1960 and used as the commodore's boat.

In the late 1970s, an Adelaide consortium bought *Action* and allegedly used it for drug smuggling. In the mid-1990s it was used to make a television documentary on the Murray Darling Basin and was moored at Goolwa for three years before changing hands again and undergoing a complete refit.

Mr McCarthy said Southern Ocean Exploration used *Action* as its primary search vessel.

"I am delighted the boat has been recognised for her contribution to our history. It's wonderful she is still contributing to our national story," he said.

"The boat has been well maintained over the past 70 years and is a piece of RAAF maritime history, a genuine link to our wartime efforts."

Action is a fully restored timber 48-foot long (14.6-metre) Spring & Denaro (Queensland) sea rescue patrol boat.

It has twin 300-horsepower diesel

engines and can cruise at 17 knots with a top speed of 24.

It has solar panels and inverters that enable the vessel to be at sea for weeks at a time. Fuel tanks of 1800 litres give the boat a range of about 1500km.

Action boasts a large galley (kitchen) and saloon (lounge) with all mod cons, and sleeps nine.

■ *The News* reported the discovery of *Coramba* on 16 June ('The sea gives up a secret as Depression-era shipwreck found off Phillip Island'). For more information about SOE, go to www.southernoceanexploration.com

History finds history: Top, *MV Action* underway off Phillip Island during the search earlier this year for the SS *Coramba*, which was found off Phillip Island after 76 years by members of peninsula-based Southern Ocean Exploration. Now the nearly 70-year-old former RAAF sea rescue boat has been listed on the Australian Register of Historic Vessels. Below, SOE divers meet up with colleagues on another boat and give the thumbs up after finding *Coramba*. Pictures courtesy SOE and Terry Cantwell



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