

The HMAS Brisbane Wreck Dive

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The HMAS Brisbane has celebrated its second anniversary deep in the ocean off the Sunshine Coast by cementing its place as the top dive wreck in Australia.

More than 10,700 people have explored the former warship since it was scuttled on July 31, 2005 - injecting an estimated \$2 million into the local dive industry and many millions more into the broader tourism industry.

Ian McKinnon, of dive operator Scuba World, said the wreck had surpassed expectations and was now recognised as number one in Australia.

"After Truk Lagoon (between Papua New Guinea and Guam) and Vanuatu, it would also be right up there on the world stage," he said.

"The other world-class diveable wreck in Australia is the Yongala (off Townsville), which is in the top-10 world dive sites, but the Brisbane has moved ahead of it."

That was mainly because of the easy access and the proliferation of sea life, he said.

"Divers want to be able to penetrate a wreck and explore it, which they can do on the Brisbane but they can't on the Yongala because it's been banned for safety reasons.

"Divers love to explore things - they want to get inside a ship, into the galley where all those servicemen had their meals served up.

"They want to explore the engine room and the boiler room, which they can do on the HMAS Brisbane."

Mr McKinnon said the wreck's transformation in the past two years had been spectacular and it was impressing divers from around the world.

"The whole structure of the ship is now covered in marine growth - barnacles, oysters, hard algae and so on.

"They, in turn, are attracting micro-organisms which are attracting fish and other marine life.

"For example, there's a huge octopus which has made its home under the anchor winch on the bow, and we are seeing gropers up to two metres long and weighing a couple of hundred kilos. It's a perfect environment."

Maroochy mayor Joe Natoli welcomed the wreck's growing popularity.

"Maroochy is fortunate to have the largest diveable wreck on Australia's east coast so close to shore, as the revenue generated benefits our dive operators but also has a positive knock-on effect for businesses across the Coast," he said.