



## Newsletter No 3

Oct/Nov/Dec 2009

Welcome to the third edition of the Bicheno Dive Centre newsletter. Bruce and the staff at BDC would like to wish you all the very best for a safe and happy Christmas and a wonderful and prosperous New Year.

And speaking of staff it's great to have our youngest member, Rhys, back on deck (and in the water) after being so rudely interrupted by 12 month's leave of absence. BDC's number one New Year's resolution for 2010 will be to get Rhys along to the barber for a sorely-needed haircut!

## Dive Trips

2010 is shaping up to be an exciting year with the first Hobart to Bicheno cruising/diving long weekend planned for January 15, 16 and 17. The comfortable 13 metre powercat 'Kahala' will leave Hobart with its complement of skipper plus six divers on the Friday morning, motor out around spectacular Tasman Island to dive the wreck of the Nord, then head north for a great cruising/sightseeing trip around the outside of Maria Island. After a dive at Maria the boat will continue on to Bicheno where passengers will be accommodated for the night at the BDC's Divers Den. On Saturday it's aboard the boat once again for a dive in the Governor Island

marine reserve, followed by a night dive in Waub's Bay then back to the Divers Den for an early night and a big sleep. On Sunday morning divers once again board the Kahala for the trip south, calling in at Wineglass Bay on the way for sightseeing, photography and a dive, then down through the Dunalley Channel and back to Hobart.

Cost of these trips will be \$485 which includes boat hire and accommodation, fills are extra and divers will need to provide their own food and equipment. The first is already fully booked but more are planned for the future, so please contact Bruce if you would like to get aboard one of these great trips to see and dive Tassie's fabulous southern and eastern coast. Spots will be filling fast.

**Overseas trip.** The BDC overseas dive trip for 2010 will be to Kavieng, PNG departing on 27 Aug ex-Brisbane. The trip will be for nine nights, and six divers have already booked. Please contact Bruce for details if you would like to be part of this great trip and experience some of the world's best diving.

### Training update

BDC continues to play its part in swelling the ranks of the Australian and international diving community. Ten more open water certifications have recently been achieved by Tassie divers through BDC, along with a number of continuing education courses run over the last few months. A recent addition to the international diving community undergoing training at BDC is Fiona, a pretty young backpacker from Holland who is currently working her way around Australia and undertaking deep, nitrox, night and navigation diver, and in her spare time has done a little modeling for this edition's underwater photographs.



Fiona displays her reg removal technique during the Deep Diver Course.



Divers undertaking tech instruction at Bicheno.

On the technical front, four divers have completed their Tech Foundations and Advanced Nitrox Courses and will now move on to do Decompression and Advanced Decompression Trimix courses. Trimix dives associated with this course will be on the sunken barge lying to the north of Bicheno at a depth of 58 metres. This lucky four will be the first to dive the wreck since its demise in 2008.

## In-store Products

In the last issue we promised a photo of the new Alpha BackPack torch. Unfortunately we're advised this torch is still undergoing testing and won't be available for release until Jan 10, so we'll provide a photo then. But in the meantime check out this little beauty. It's the Supernova from Intova products, a heavy-duty aluminium case, wide-angle LCD torch providing 500 lumens of light and suitable for use as a torch or lighting for still and video photography. The three LEDs can run at



full power for three hours, or at one third power for 20 hours. The torch is waterproof to 120 metres, is powered by a Li-ion battery with protection circuit, and has a recharging time of around 1.5 hours, depending on discharge. The bracket allows it to be hand-held or it can be easily mounted to a video or still camera housing via a ball joint (included). It comes complete with a handy travel case and the recommended retail price is \$549. Contact Bruce for further details.

## Critter Corner

Perhaps one of the most popular marine creatures sighted and photographed around Bicheno is the Weedy Sea Dragon (Phyllopteryx taeniolatus). It's found only in Australian southern coastal waters, and Bicheno appears to be one of the more easily-accessed dive locations where seadragon numbers have actually increased over the past 10 years. While this elaborate and intricately-shaped creature might resemble a dragon in appearance, it is actually a bony fish and related to



seahorses, pipefish and seamoths. Unlike seahorses though, the male seadragon does not have a pouch for rearing its young but instead carries the fertilised eggs fixed to the underside of its tail where they hatch after six to eight weeks.

Seadragons can grow to about 45 cm in length and live for up to 10 years. They tend to be solitary creatures but occasionally pair up, and very infrequently up to three might be found in one location. They are slow-moving and their elaborate shape is an important factor for defence, blending perfectly amongst the seaweed where they are most often found foraging for food. Despite small mouths they are prolific feeders and live on a diet of mysid and other small crustaceans. Perhaps one of the reasons for this beautiful creature's seemingly high survival rate thus far is that unlike seahorses they do not survive well in captivity, and hence are not attractive to the aquarium trade. Little is known of any predators and the main threat to seadragons appears to be from pollution and habitat destruction – the latter being of concern with the spread into Tasmanian waters of the long-spined sea urchin.

Photographing seadragons can be a challenge and requires a great deal of patience.



Only rarely can a front-on shot be achieved and most acceptable photographs will depict lateral views, invariably with the creature facing slightly away from the camera. Nevertheless, seadragons are protected by law in Australia and it is important to follow some simple rules when photographing or observing them. These are:

- Never touch seadragons as this may injure or stress them (additionally, seadragons are sensitive to quite small changes in pressure due to depth, so moving them up or down through the water column can injure or kill them)
- Never surround, 'herd' or chase the animals seeking that opportune shot, particularly egg-bearing males that move more slowly and are more easily stressed than animals without eggs
- Do not expose the animals to extended periods of bright light, particularly at night, and limit flash photography to 3 – 4 shots per encounter.

This 'look but don't touch approach' will assist in the survival of seadragons, so they can continue to delight and enchant visiting international divers well into the future.

## Local news

CSIRO in Hobart recently enlisted the services of the BDC dive boat (Iruka) to launch an automated robot marine glider over the continental shelf off Bicheno. Six seagliders, as they are known, have been purchased from the US by the University of Western Australia for about \$200,000 each, and are being launched at locations around the Australian coastline to gather ocean data used in fields of climate change research, marine biology, physical oceanography and weather forecasting.

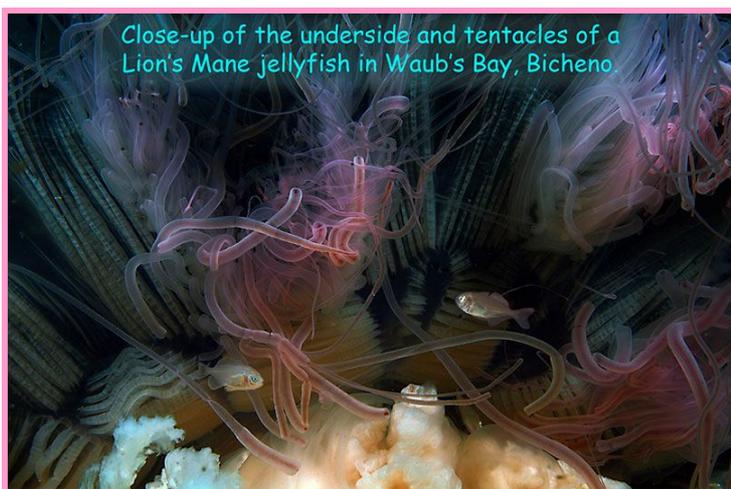
The gliders are hot pink in colour, two metres in length, adorned with delicate fins and antenna, and weigh-in at around 50 kilos – a real handful for Bruce, a deckie, the Seaglider 'pilot' and a CSIRO technician. Able to be deployed for up to six months, the Seaglider will be remotely controlled from Hobart to dive/descend/turn, while the data collected will be relayed directly to Perth for analysis.

The early morning 26 km trip out to the launch site proved uneventful, but was followed by four frustrating hours of repeatedly trying to calibrate the beast with an array of computers, satellite equipment, and numerous phone calls to Hobart, Perth and the US (not helped by the fact that it was Thanksgiving Day in the US and relevant scientists had to be located and dragged away from their celebrations). Eventually though, SG152 was launched and Iruka turned for home into a now blustery nor-easterly. It was late afternoon when a very tired, wet, and cold crew eventually arrived back in Bicheno.



Getting it sorted. A CSIRO engineer onboard Iruka speaks to Perth and Washington prior to launching Seaglider SG152 off Bicheno.

## Diving conditions



Close-up of the underside and tentacles of a Lion's Mane jellyfish in Waub's Bay, Bicheno.

Local diving conditions appear to be on the mend after a few months of fairly average visibility. Viz in Waub's Bay is presently around 15 metres and better out in the reserve. At this time of the year offshore winds and currents bring clusters of Lion's Mane jellies inshore at Bicheno,

and particularly into Waub's Bay. These are the world's largest species of jellyfish and in polar waters can attain a size of a metre across with tentacles up to 10 metres long. While they're not quite this size in Bicheno, they nevertheless make wonderful photographic subjects, particularly with the array of interesting smaller animals that shelter amongst their tentacles.



So that's the news for this issue. Once again we wish you a Merry Christmas, and look forward to seeing you in the New Year and sharing the fabulous underwater world and wonderful sights that Bicheno has to offer.

Safe diving,  
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