

The Case for Maritime Museum Centre in Docklands and Seafarers Heritage Centre at the Mission to Seafarers premises

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Melbourne, the State Capital City of Victoria, has turned its back on of Maritime Heritage. It has failed to acknowledge the significance of both maritime heritage and maritime industry – the basis of prosperity. Melbourne is unique amongst the Australian cities and comparable cities in the developed world in NOT having a dedicated Maritime Heritage Museum. Quoting 'Polly Woodside' Volunteers Association noted in their newsletter, 21/8/2018 "*Melbourne is the only maritime city in the developed world without a maritime museum.*"

However, there is evidence that advocacy by the Melbourne Maritime Heritage Network is have an impact. Significantly the City of Melbourne draft Annual Plan Initiative 2019-2020 includes "*Adopt a leadership and advocacy role with key stakeholders with the objective of securing collaborative co-funding partnership agreement to deliver maritime legacy outcomes in the municipality including interpretative heritage signage and a maritime museum.*" Progress indeed – and long overdue.

Back in August 2012 the State Govt. development authority VicUrban (predecessor of Development Victoria) invited The Sorrento Steam and Bay Steamers Group to submit a proposal for a Maritime Museum. A committee was formed and in collaboration with Maritime Museums of Victoria a proposal was duly submitted as both a Report and Concept. It noted the place-based approach in telling maritime heritage 'stories' of around the State. Yet no recognition at that the 'place' of Melbourne's entire maritime heritage and that Melbourne remains the nations largest port.

Earlier than this 2012 a proposal for a Maritime Museum, in 2011 Maritime Museums of Victoria (representing 17 groups) and Maritime Heritage Association of Victoria also made a similar submission to the State Government a Docklands Maritime Centre with the expressed objective to "complement" existing maritime attractions. A detailed design was submitted – and forgotten.

A decade on, times have changed in relation to maritime heritage. Clearly there has been a re-focus on approach economic, cultural and value in celebrating maritime heritage. Melbourne's maritime heritage and maritime industry should rightly be understood as an underdeveloped 'asset' to be exploited for the benefit of the community at large, for regional and international tourists. A 'place' in Melbourne needs to be established to inform and educate the younger generation so that they come to understand the history of the City and its Port.

The National Maritime Museum, Tianjin, China

MMHN notes with considerable chagrin (and envy) the impressive new Australian designed maritime museum in Melbourne's Sister City, Tianjin. Australian architectural firm **Cox Architecture** was awarded the project in 2013 after winning an eight-month iterative design competition process involving multiple stages of client and stakeholder feedback. The building is series of interconnected pavilions that cantilever out over the water in a 'fan-like' formation from a central reception hall. This central space is both for transition and exhibition and provides access to the upper of the two exhibition levels. It covers 15 hectares of land and 23,000 square metres in total - largest maritime museum in China.

Note: images reveal that this Tianjin Museum site is very similar to the Central Pier in Docklands.

There are two elements to be considered in optimizing the value of maritime heritage in two separate but complimentary' spaces. I.e. the establishment two 'places' that identify inform and celebrate Melbourne's undervalued, under-developed maritime assets.

1. An iconic architecturally exciting Maritime Experiential Centre (MEC) ideally located on either Central Pier or Collins Wharf in Docklands

Commissioned through international competition, an architecturally significant building will itself trigger much needed activation and visitation to Docklands. The broad scope of this MEC will encompass all elements of our maritime history and maritime industry - heritage, geography, operations, inventions, logistics, careers etc. Rather than the traditional museum displays of static objects, the MEC will rely largely upon '21st century technology experiential' learning using creative technologies. The MEC will be:

- A permanent tourist destination to attract visitation to Docklands.
- A showcase of cutting-edge creative technologies presenting the 'stories' of Melbourne's rich maritime heritage, its maritime industry and maritime trade.
- A repository for significant maritime archaeological assets and archives, which are currently in accessible to the public.
- A showcase featuring cutting-edge creative technologies to educate about Aboriginal relationships with, and stewardship of waterways (maritime and riverine), topography concepts of 'mapping' and belonging.

Emphasis on Trade/Commerce

There will be particular emphasis on commerce or trade at the MEC. E.g. specialist shipping, oil and gas rigs, docks, stevedoring, ports management etc. to create a clear point of 'differentiation' from all existing maritime museums in Australia as befitting Melbourne's current status as the nation's largest port. An emphasis on trade presented in an creative 'experiential' manner would trigger wider public recognition and education about the crucial role played by maritime trade in underpinning Melbourne's and Victoria's prosperity in the past and still. An MEC at Docklands has the potential to provide access to information, experiential learning and on-water experiences (e.g. Heritage Fleet, harbour tours, docks tours) and would clearly activate an area, drawing the public to Docklands as a destination.

Note: In the 19th century, the provision of such public 'education' was known as '*instructive amusement*' (referenced in City of Melbourne 2018-19 Annual Plan.)

In sharp contrast to the Melbourne's poor recognition of its waterways as public assets thus far, it is significant to note that two major international maritime museums (London and New York) make specific reference to an aspiration to create greater 'access' to their respective Docklands areas and value of the creation of informational trails.

Focus on currently inaccessible maritime assets and information

In alignment with the 'Experiential' focus of the MEC, and the benefits of '*instructive amusement*' space could be dedicated to showcasing the significant but currently inaccessible Heritage Victoria (HV) collection of maritime archaeological artefacts but also, importantly, actually displaying conservation work conducted behind glass so that the public could see the science and the art involved in conservation workshops of the HV.

Focus on Aboriginal Presence - Marine and Riverine

Aboriginal relationship with waterways is poorly understood. Conventional exhibitions are of limited value in conveying abstract concepts around water, navigation, mapping and climate which differ for the 'European mindset or consciousness Creative technologies will facilitate greater understanding of not only Aboriginal presence in this area but the changes topography – coastline, swamps, demarcations and season.

2. Seafarers Heritage Centre (SHC) at the Mission to Seafarers (MtoSF) between Flinders St and Seafarers Rest Park

MMHN acknowledges the extraordinary work carried out from the Mission to Seafarers continuously since its establishment during days where sailing ships tied-up along the Yarra, off-loading cargo into the numerous Good Sheds and Vaults up all along the banks. This maritime legacy is irrefutable and must be preserved. Seafarers continue to need support – and the public needs to understand the contribution made by seafarers to modern life. Time and tide change – the pattern of the seafaring life has changed, and the compliance standards required of such premises has changed too. The premises are owned by the State Government, which realises that considerable investment is required to ensure that seafarer's services continue and that the MtoSF premises are made compliant.

MMHN is strongly in supports the establishment Seafarers Heritage Centre in the current MtoSF premises. **Its heritage status requires that its original purpose of the MtoSF, which includes the Chapel, be retained.** MMHN believes that the premises stand on a site at the virtual centre of Melbourne's entire Docklands. We see that the premises in this uniquely 'central' site in the CBD (serviced by trams including the Tourist tram, and on the rivers edge, and on the Northbank Trail between Birrarung Marr / Docklands) the premises should be re-purposed in such a way as to retain all heritage value but also function as Maritime informational/ referral centre for Melbourne, Greater Melbourne and Regional Victoria. The object being to promote Melbourne as a Maritime City and Victoria as a State rich in maritime Heritage and generally educate the public on maritime opportunities.

With sensitive re-arrangement of spaces, within heritage constraints the premises could continue to provide services, continue to host exhibitions, and at the same time progressively move towards becoming financially self- sustaining.

MMHN proposes that the urgently necessary State Government expenditure in the premises should be directed towards re-purposing the creation of entirely new tourism asset for the City of Melbourne (CoM), Greater Melbourne and Statewide. MtoSF should be re-configured to enable the continuation of Seafarers Services and Chapel services in a single multi-purpose **Seafarers Heritage Centre** as the focal point in the

wider a Maritime Melbourne Heritage Precinct. Most importantly the **Seafarers Heritage Centre** will serve to effectively ‘anchor’ the Maritime Heritage Precinct in the CBD. It will compliment the proposed Maritime Experiential Centre in Docklands

Potential sites for Maritime ‘Experiential’ Museum / Centre in Docklands

There are several site options in Docklands. Whatever the option, the decision will be determined through negotiated partnerships and collaboration between government and industry.

Area 1. Collins Wharf, Docklands, Victoria Harbour

Located along Collins Wharf is a Lendlease development site with current ministerial approval and will commence work in 2021. Lendlease have indicated a space on the southern side of Victoria Harbour suitable for a new maritime museum as an appropriate element on their Collins Wharf development plans. It is on the water’s edge and Lendlease view a ‘maritime heritage presence’ as good for the promotion of this residential development. The site is accessible by public transport. There will be a public walkway along the wharf and heritage tram rails on the path are to remain. Development Victoria advises that there are existing plans for a pedestrian walkway from the wharf to the north side of Victoria Harbour. This would allow access to the museum from across Victoria Harbour. The MMHN proposed NorthBank Maritime Trail (AKA Greenline) from Birrarung Marr through the CBD to Harbour Esplanade and on to the Bolte Bridge at Ron Barassi Senior Park could easily incorporate a ‘spur’ trail along Collins Wharf to the proposed park at the tip of the wharf. Lendlease also intend to include the former Harbour Control Tower into their design.

Note: Adjacent to the Maritime Museum in Sydney, the Navy has constructed an elongated small two level Museum on a floating wharf.

There are several locations along Collins Wharf where an iconic Maritime Museum could be constructed. Part way down facing Victoria Harbour or at the tip of the Wharf almost beneath Bolte Bridge, next to the proposed park and near the heritage listed Harbour Tower.

Area 2. Yarra Bank North

a. Viaducts between Flinders St and North Bank trail and there are series of spaces under the viaducts managed by the City of Melbourne since 1958 which are currently vacant or leased. These viaducts and similar spaces could be re-purposed and re-designed as linked linear spaces, glazed to face the green Park spaces and the Birrarung. The darkened spaces towards Flinders St would be suitable for the latest virtual reality and augmented reality technologies whereas spaces with natural light would be suitable for display of the more conventional maritime artefacts. This would effectively form a precinct between Spencer Street and King Street. There is considerable space beneath the Flinders Street Viaduct which links Flinders Street station to Southern Cross station and forms the main link between the eastern and western parts of the Victorian Rail Network. From Spencer Street, the viaduct swings southward around the back of the former Fish Market (now Northbank Place and Rebecca Walk) behind Batman Park then north-east to avoid the re-created Turning Basin on the

The land beneath the Viaduct has been put to a various uses. When the King St Bridge was built in 1958, the land was turned over to the City of Melbourne. In 1997 the Northbank area was to an extent redeveloped, and

the area under the viaduct bordering Batman Park was converted into commercial space named 'Rebecca Walk' in reference to the schooner "Rebecca".

b. Vaults beneath and east of Princes Bridge are now either vacant or hospitality venues, controlled by Federation Square. So too is the promenade on the North Bank Maritime Trail running beneath Princes Bridge. This precinct is the base for Yarra tourist boats. The vaults could be re-purposed as a little history rowing in Melbourne.

Area 3. Harbour Esplanade area – Several options are feasible - but one is ideal.

Development Victoria controls various potential sites suitable for a new Maritime Heritage Museum. Regrettably this far DV has failed to acknowledge that permanent activation. With the objective of addressing the persistent challenge of activating of Docklands and properly recognizing the potential of the maritime site, Development Victoria could allocate any of the following sites for consideration as a museum:

a. Central Pier **This is the ideal site for an iconic architecturally astonishing Maritime Museum** With the requisite reconstruction to stabilise in the 100-year-old heritage listed Central Wharf, there is an opportunity to create a potentially iconic highly visible museum on a site surrounded by the waters of Victoria Harbour – a remarkable example of 19th century civil engineering in its own right. Regrettably DV have unlawfully neglected the heritage-listed pier. In 2019, the pier was inexplicably and dramatically closed to the lessee and public. A court case is pending.

b. A Tower Post-pandemic several suitable towers are permanently vacant. Such premises overlooking the harbour and on public transport routes could, with clever architecture, be satisfactorily re-purposed to create a maritime museum

c. A Goods Shed with inter-connected large pontoon along Harbour Esplanade. Two such heritage Good Shed frames exist on Yarra's edge, Bolte West Precinct. These structures could be dismantled and re-erected on Harbour Esplanade, glass upon which to project maritime images. The pontoons could feature stacked container construction used in other maritime museums elsewhere. Creating a multilevel internal space to accommodate a small maritime museum

Note: March 2021, Development Victoria Docklands Master Plan recently triggered an EOI to reconstruct a ferry terminal structure to replace the current inadequate aging 'temporary' premises on Harbour Esplanade. DV already has dedicated funding to reconstruct the Esplanade and has positioned two 'interim' pontoons with a café there already.

d. AFL/Marvel Stadium redevelopment sites (Docklands, Victoria Harbour)

The demarcation between State Govt. and Development Victoria (Dept. of Premiers) on this AFL site is unclear. There is scope within the site to incorporate a separate space for a maritime museum. The AFL is redeveloping Marvel Stadium and their concept plans indicate it may extend to or beyond Harbour Esplanade, even over the water in Victoria Harbour. The AFL is open to considering community benefit options, which presumably might include a museum (*Meeting September 2017.*) The State Government has agreed to provide significant funding support for the redevelopment (circa \$300 million.) Regrettably the AFL fail to acknowledge at all that they occupy a prime and unique maritime site in Docklands – and neither the State Govt. or DV seem prepared to raise this oversight as a problematic issue.

Note:

City of Melbourne 2018-2019 Annual Plan item: "Partner with Development Victoria and the AFL to

develop a Stadium Precinct Master Plan to deliver exemplar connected public spaces in Harbour Esplanade, Bourke and La Trobe Streets, integrated with the future direction of Etihad Stadium, Southern Cross Station and Central Pier.”

City of Melbourne Annual Plan 2019- 2020 –*Advocate to Development Victoria to ensure that Melbourne’s Maritime heritage is considered as part of the development of Harbour Esplanade and Victoria Harbour*

Note B: The Marvel redevelopment plans could incorporate a stretch of the Melbourne Greenline/Blueline Maritime Trail from Birrarung Marr through the CBD to Harbour Esplanade and beyond to the Bolte Bridge to possibly Moonee Ponds Creek

- **New Quay area**

Both options are acceptable on the waters edge, can be reached by tram and amenable to an architectural astonishing building.

a. Large square vacant site on the water’s edge adjacent to Ron Barassi Senior Park designated for development by MAB.

b. Long narrow vacant wharf site along the water’s edge adjacent to Ron Barassi Senior Park.

Australian Examples of Maritime Museums

Queensland Maritime Museum, Brisbane

Managed by an incorporated association. The CEO Matt Rowe has offered support to a Melbourne Maritime Museum via OSSA. Attracts 34,000 visitors annually (2016 report). Throughout the pandemic visitation ceased. Economic difficulties arise specifically because of the great cost of conserving ‘floating’ heritage assets. Average daily revenue \$750 rising to \$1500 during school vacations. Broadly self-funded through membership and sponsors. The Queensland Government invested a further \$600,000 added to three years recurrent funding from Queensland Arts.

Australian National Maritime Museum, Sydney

This is a Federal Government agency. The Museum is managed through a Council appointed in accordance with the Australian National Maritime Museum Act 1990. Visitation for 2016-17 exceeded 1,512,000. The Federal Government provided \$13.9 million over three years but 39% of revenue came from non-government sources. Note: An arrangement has been recently formed to allow AMC to deliver training at the Museum. March 2021 –media reports of the Sydney Heritage Fleet will no longer to re-locate to ANMM after the expiry of its current lease but to a new North Sydney Council Museum at Berry’s Bay. This is dependent on NSW State Govt. allocating land.

Maritime Museum, Hobart

Privately operated maritime museum dedicated to the history of Tasmania’s association with the sea, ships and shipbuilding.

Note: Although Hobart Museum holds archives and archives from the Australian Antarctic Division expeditions, Melbourne played a key role in Australian Antarctic operations until the 1970s. All Antarctic vessels including the iconic ‘*Nella Dan*’ left from Melbourne including the initial expeditions in 1953. Representatives from the Australian National Antarctic Research Expeditions organisation (ANARE) have approached the Melbourne Maritime Network for assistance in ensuring that this significant maritime heritage of Melbourne specifically the north bank of the Yarra is rightly and accurately acknowledged.

Note: The ANARE will feature in design of the Seafarers Rest Park on North Wharf Melbourne.

Fremantle, Western Australia

Reflecting the extent of acknowledgement of the importance of maritime heritage, there are two maritime museums in the city.

1. WA Maritime Museum Under the control of the Western Australian Government, Museums of Western Australia. The Museum aims to explore WA's maritime relationship from leisure boats and handcrafted sailing boats to commercial pearl-luggers. See <http://museum.wa.gov.au/museums/maritime>

2. WA Shipwrecks Museum. Specialising in maritime archaeology <http://museum.wa.gov.au/museum/shipwrecks>

The number and variety of magnificent Maritime Museums of various types around the world are too numerous to detail.

Each month the MMHN Update features a different Museum