

SQUAD UNCOVERS SECRETS OF OUR WATER WAYS

By Brett Davis, Media and Public Affairs Branch

Scouring the murky, sometimes dangerous rivers, lakes and coastal waters of Queensland, police divers search for what has been lost or left behind.

Often their grim searches are an effort to tie up the loose ends of tragedy. But the members of this small, highly trained team are dedicated to their task.

The squad recently returned from Cardwell in north Queensland where they had been

salvaging a sunken yacht.

The vessel sank off the northern end of Hinchinbrook Island and the incident claimed two lives.

Sergeant Adam Reid, Officer in Charge, Diving Squad said the job was not all that glamorous but it was one he was more than happy to do.

"It is certainly not like *Water Rats*," he

said, referring to the popular former TV show about Sydney Water Police.

"We are a squad that usually operates in the background to get the job done and we often do not have a lot of contact with the members of the public.

"A lot of the work involves searches for missing people and recovering bodies, and that is important because it helps give grieving families some sense of

closure," Sergeant Reid said.

It can also be a risky occupation with sharks, stingers and crocodiles a distinct threat, particularly in the state's tropical north. Sergeant Reid said it was not uncommon to have officers with automatic weapons keeping watch on shore while they searched waterways in the area.

The main job of the squad is to search for missing people, evidence, weapons and

property. They also assist with the investigation of diving-related fatalities and inspect vessels and underwater structures in relation to security for VIP visits.

The unit is made up of an officer in charge, four full-time staff (one sergeant and three senior constables/constables), and eight part-time staff ranging in rank from constables to senior sergeant.

The part-time members of the squad are drawn from various branches of the Police Service including the Special Emergency Response Team or the Public Safety Response Team.

"The part-time members are an integral and important part of the team. Part-time members deploy on almost 100% of our jobs and the squad would not function without them," Sergeant Reid said.

Becoming a police diver is not easy with stringent physical and training requirements demanded of those who apply.

Officers must first hold an open water recreational diving certificate and pass a Diving Squad preselection course and fitness assessment.

Candidates then spend six weeks in Sydney on a commercial diver training course before completing another four weeks of police diver training on returning to Brisbane.

The Diving Squad was not officially formed as part of the Specialist Services Branch until 1996. Prior to then, the unit had existed since 1964 as a part-time squad within the Brisbane Water Police.

The squad responds to calls for assistance across the state to perform police-oriented diving tasks and ensure the waterways of Queensland yield all their secrets. ■



A Diving Squad officer prepares to start a training session in the Brisbane River near the squad's base at Lytton.