



SINKING SHIP CHANCE FOR WATER POLICE TO SHINE

Water Police provide a crucial service to Queensland.

Inset: An explosion erupts on the HMAS Brisbane as it is sunk off the Sunshine Coast.

By Penny Doust, Media and Public Affairs Branch

Rather than keeping vessels afloat, it was a deliberate sinking that posed one of the biggest coordination challenges for Queensland's Water Police.

The HMAS Brisbane, a 3,300 tonne guided missile destroyer, was sunk three nautical miles off the Sunshine Coast in July 2005 to make an artificial reef for recreational diving and fishing. "If the weather had turned nasty, the

ship, which was fully wired with explosives but not armed, could have sunk on the way," Inspector Shane Chelepy, State Water Police Coordinator, said.

The decommissioned HMAS Brisbane was towed from the Brisbane River to its final resting place over three days with Water Police coordinating the event and providing the escort. Nine Water Police and seven other government agency vessels were used in

the operation which had to maintain a 24-hour escort and exclusion zone around the destroyer.

More than 1,000 pleasure craft turned out to see the rare event.

"Through the sheer hard work of the police officers involved, the event went very well and there were no arrests," Inspector Chelepy said.

Story continues page 24.



Another event involving a large number of pleasure craft was the annual Riverfire festival held at the beginning of September on the Brisbane River.

Inspector Chelepy said Riverfire presented a unique challenge "as there are hundreds of vessels from 12-foot dinghies to 40-foot long cruisers and it's promoted as a party".

"It is a high-risk situation with a very real potential for a marine accident," he said.

"But with eight vessels and staff from two Water Police units, this year was one of the most successful, with only one incident."

Apart from performing aquatic crowd control and escorts, water police units all along the Queensland coast provide a crucial service to the people of this water-loving state.

Some of their key activities include search and rescue operations with training taking a large part of a water police officer's life.

The Queensland Police Service's search and rescue course is recognised as one of the best in Australia with interstate officers regularly coming to Queensland to participate.

Other key activities include policing drink driving on the water, and investigating and preventing the theft of marine equipment.

Sergeant Edi Mian, Brisbane Water Police suggested that marine thefts were still common and boat owners should pay as

much attention to their vessels and equipment as they did to the security of their cars.

He also highlighted the need for boat users to have the correct safety equipment on board, including marine radios.

"Nowadays, too many people rely on their mobile phones when out on the water. You can only talk to one person on a phone, whereas, a marine radio, can reach many people who can offer quick

assistance if a distress call is broadcast."

Sergeant Mian also said too many people did not store their life jackets appropriately.

"There's nothing worse than having the life jackets packed away looking pristine - they have to be in a situation that is easily accessible when out on the water."

Water Police can also fine people for having too many fish or undersize fish and crabs with a number of officers throughout the state trained in fisheries legislation.

An important message Water Police are sending to recreational boat users this summer is the benefit of using preventative measures to reduce the risk of marine crime.

"It's better to take out or hide items like fuel tanks, electronic equipment and ropes where possible, which doesn't give

a potential offender the opportunity to steal something," Sergeant Mian said.

"Engraving is also a good way of identifying your equipment if it does get stolen and later recovered."

None of these activities could take place without the skills of the staff in the Marine Technical Unit (MTU) which consists of two police officers and two civilian marine technicians.

The MTU has developed a number of innovative changes and modifications to the equipment used by the Water Police.

Inspector Chelepy said the unit also provided technical advice to the manufacturers of marine engines. ■

Water Police activities include search and rescue operations and investigating and preventing the theft of marine equipment.

