



9th August, 2013

Operational Update & Dive Survey: Dive survey reveals abundant marine life; latest underwater photos (see

Resolve Salvage & Fire has completed the reduction of the bow to at least one metre below the lowest astern. Current priorities now include:

- continuing to remove material from the debris field adjacent to the submerged stern section. To date, 100 tonnes of material has been removed to land
- removing remaining contents from the last of the two plastic beads containers in cargo hold four. All but one container have been removed. Now waiting on a period of settled weather to work on the second container
- a dive survey of cargo hold five is scheduled for next week (weather permitting) to locate and assess remaining containers, followed by a survey of cargo hold six at a later date. Once completed, this work streamlines the decision on whether the four remaining containers of interest are still within the wreck, their condition and the approach to their removal
- underwater survey and engineering preparations for the removal of the accommodation block in October
- co-ordinating with Rena Recovery Group scientists from the University of Waikato and Bay of Plenty for water quality and marine life sampling.

Dive Survey

Experienced photographers, Maketu-based Andy Belcher and Aucklander Darryl Torckler recently undertook a dive to photograph the state of the reef and bow section on Astrolabe Reef (Otaiti). Photographs from the July 20th dive report is below.

Belcher and Torckler have also been contracted to dive and photograph the deeper stern section and surrounding area once Resolve's operations are completed to a stage where it would be safe to do so.

Dive report by Andy Belcher & Darryl Torckler

“Over two days we did five dives on Astrolabe reef, photographing the Rena wreck, debris fields and surrounding reefs. Our maximum dived depth was 27 meters.

We were surprised by the abundance of fish life on and around the wreck. These included marblefish, blacktip sharks, and many species of wrasses. The top wreck surfaces were covered in green algae and juvenile seaweeds. Young blue Mao Mao and sweepfish were frequently feeding on these top surfaces. Large blue Mao Mao had made their home underneath sections of the wreck.

We swam north from the wreck, up a rocky rise and across a field of debris. On the walls I encountered numerous species of sponges, yellow and gray sponges, nudibranchs, chitons, anemones, sea urchins, triplefins, red moki, spotties, blacktip sharks, blue Mao Mao, leather jackets, wrasses and many species of algae.

As we swam down the drop-off Rena debris was not evident, except for a chain which disappeared into the distance. A diverse range of algae and butterfly perch were hovering under it. On the drop-off we also spotted blacktip sharks, demoiselles, wrasses, octopus, red crabs, nudibranchs and triplefins down to a depth of 22 meters. Seeing the wreck at such close quarters is quite an experience.

Having dived Astrolabe reef quite a number of times over the years prior to Rena grounding we were expecting some devastation. There is certainly an area of debris but the marine life on the reef generally seems more prolific than expected.

We did dive in a large tomo (vertical shaft) in the reef which has always been popular with divers. It contains a variety of sponges and large green seaweeds. At a depth of 10 meters its vertical rocky walls were adorned with bright yellow & orange sponges and large green seaweeds. Exiting the cave we saw a large school of Spanish mackerel and an even larger school of Kahawai.

Our overall impression after five dives on Astrolabe Reef was that it's still a wonderful place to dive. If the wreck was removed or made safer for divers and left on the reef it would undoubtedly become a major dive tourist attraction for the Bay of Islands.

We spent a whole weekend at Astrolabe Reef and, of course, also made many observations above the water. During the large salvage operation in progress we were also rather surprised to see that five seals resident on the beach were completely un-phased by all the salvage activity right beside them. We also witnessed shags diving on to the mooring buoys.”

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