



MELBOURNE MARITIME HERITAGE NETWORK

MMHN Proposal

Maritime Experience Centre

Central Pier, Victoria Harbour, Docklands Precinct

Melbourne is a major maritime port city in the south of a vast island nation. Melbourne exists because of its river and its wealth from trade is due to the creation of Victoria Harbour.

Unlike comparable port cities across the globe Melbourne has NOT recognised or capitalised on its waterfront, or promoted its maritime strengths.

Victoria Harbour is the centerpiece of Maritime Melbourne and Central Pier is at its heart. The unique status of Victoria Harbour, our prime heritage-listed maritime infrastructure asset adjacent to Melbourne's CBD, is largely ignored and certainly undervalued.

Furthermore, our waterfront and the Docklands Precinct surrounding this prime heritage asset is languishing. The Docklands Precinct lacks legitimacy – a '*reason to be*'. It is an historically significant waterside area, developed without genuine regard for the waterways location or regard for its critical role in driving Victoria's prosperity. Such oversights have contributed to Docklands' *failure to thrive*.

COVID has obviously exacerbated the Docklands Precinct 'problem' over recent months but the pattern of failed activation pre-dated COVID. Conceptual change is necessary.

A MMHN Maritime Experience Centre in will conceptually 're-boot' the Docklands Precinct as a legitimate destination.

1. Business Case

Factors

In order to 'fix the problem' of Docklands Precinct/Victoria Harbour five ameliorative 'steps' need to be addressed:

1. Re-activate languishing Victoria Harbour/Docklands Precinct
2. Re-develop the degraded near-derelict but highly visible Central Pier in the heart of Victoria Harbour on a major Precinct thoroughfare
3. Capture the tourism potential of *Maritime Melbourne* – its unique harbour, heritage-listed maritime infrastructure and rich heritage of maritime trade and innovation,
4. Establish a permanent iconic and innovative 'attraction' on Harbour Esplanade with a programming focus capable of repeatedly drawing local, regional, interstate and international visitors, young and old.

MMHN Maritime Experience Centre on Central Pier will address all five steps.

2. Concept – Maritime Experience Centre (MEC)

Perception

MMHN has consistently encountered overwhelming enthusiasm for such an initiative and can confidently anticipate endorsement and support from many relevant organisations with which MMHN already has forged productive relationships with diverse stakeholder groups. As the MEC proposal progresses, MMHN is confident that these will evolve and solidify into on-going collaborative partnerships in relation to funding and specific exhibits. Further, the MEC Proposal aligns with stated government policy.

Government Policy

This MEC Proposal aligns with current federal and local government policy.

Federal Policy

The **2021 Infrastructure Australia Plan** included for the first time cultural infrastructure. Quoting ANA this represents *recognition of the significant value Australians place on access to arts and cultural experiences and the need to ensure all Australians can benefit from them, no matter where they live.*

The 2015 **Australian Heritage Strategy (revised 2021)** noted that heritage assets have social and cultural value and have the capacity to generate economic up-lift.

City of Melbourne Policy

In its **Asset Plan 2021-2031 Capital Works Major initiative**, the City of Melbourne sought to *increase visitation to Docklands by partnering with the Victorian Government and key stakeholders to enable reconstruction and redevelopment in Central Pier and surrounds.*

3. Growing Visitation to the Docklands Precinct

MEC Driving Demand

Visitation will grow if a shift in popular perception can occur – that is, if the public is enabled to recognise what makes Docklands Unique. The public needs to be shown the richness of Docklands maritime heritage and in particular the unique status of the world-renowned Victoria Harbour – Port Victoria. In order to achieve a shift public perception of Docklands Precinct, new thinking and imagination is required of responsible agencies. Without this, the current negative public perceptions of Docklands Precinct as a cold windy ‘void’, a destination without legitimacy will persist.

The public needs to be enticed to see Victoria Harbour in a new light. The public needs to be persuaded that Docklands Precinct is a worthy destination like, for example, Federation Square. Rather than being adjacent to the river waterway, like Federation Square, Docklands Precinct surrounds a vast visually exciting aquatic ‘amphitheatre’ which is a short tram ride or walk from the CBD. Patterns of visitation to Docklands will only change when public perception changes.

So how can this perceptual shift be achieved?

People need a reason to visit Docklands Precinct. Just as is the case with Federation Square, architecture has the capacity to inspire visitation. Similarly genuine permanent ‘attractors’ can inspire visitation. Sporadic events have proved to be ineffective over time in building visitation. Events are at best only ‘attractors’ of intermittent visitation value. However, this value can be optimised if held in conjunction with permanent ‘attractors’ such as the MEC.

MMHN proposes that an iconic MEC on Central Pier, in the middle of Victoria Harbour, will trigger visitation. Iconic architecture and cutting-edge exhibits will have on-going appeal over a longer time-frame. Iconic architecture generates a sense of 'destination' and also functions as a symbol of Melbourne's design and technological capability. More broadly still, the MEC will also reflect strength of maritime research, innovation and maritime industry as befits *Maritime Melbourne* – a major port city.

Visitation Predictions

The Melbourne Maritime Centre is an entirely new and exciting concept for Melbourne – and obviously for the Docklands Precinct. Any strictly applicable visitation data sourced from other cultural organisations should be understood as merely indicative.

COVID-19 lockdowns have obviously had an impact on visitor behavior. However, informed commentary suggests that local and interstate tourism will grow as a consequence of pandemic restrictions limiting international tourism. The cruise industry is predicted to resume and may even grow stronger. Pre-pandemic data from 2017-2019 shows that 1240 cruise ships visited 47 Australian ports with 3.8 million visitors. Coastal ports like Melbourne are likely to become more important tourist destinations post pandemic, as well for maritime trade.

Another visitation data source, though again merely indicative, may be gleaned from 2021 data produced by City of Melbourne (CoM) collected to support its investment in the *Greenline* Trail along the Yarra River, which lists organisations proximate to the *Greenline* trail. Listed organisations are, in fact, proximate to Harbour Esplanade and Central Pier and likely to be relevant in predicting visitation to the MEC on Central Pier.

- Marvel Stadium 5.3 million pa
- Crown Complex 6.5 million pa
- Aquarium 1.4 million pa
- Southbank and Southgate 1.5 million pa
- Immigration Museum, 2019-2020 MV Annual report cites 85,621
- Arts Centre 3.7 million pa
- Federation Square 10.5 million pa
- ACMI 558,000 visitors 2019

4. Heritage Maritime Infrastructure

Current definitions of heritage assets may be tangible in form (e.g., structures, geography) or intangible (e.g., operations, functions, ritual, role). Central Pier and Victoria Harbour represent both tangible and intangible public heritage assets, which are of significant heritage value to this city, this state and this nation. Their value lies not only in the remaining tangible infrastructure, but also in the intangible maritime industrial heritage inherent in these currently degraded structures and the role they played in generating economic prosperity. It is this role which links past maritime strength to current maritime industry and trade strength, and to maritime research and innovation in the future of *Maritime Melbourne*.

Appropriate Re-development

With any heritage listed structure the responsible authorities have an obligation to preserve or conserve – or, if necessary, sympathetically re-purpose. The central position and visibility of Central Pier requires exceptional care in relation to sympathetic re-purposing. MMHN argues that a MEC on a heritage-listed maritime infrastructure absolutely aligns with the spirit of its heritage listing.

Central Pier played a key role in the economic evolution of Melbourne. It is a compelling ‘story’ and one that should be told. It is the only existing wooden pier structure of its kind in Australia. With the advent of containerisation, the working port of Melbourne at Victoria Harbour and Central Pier moved to the west. By showcasing the many aspects of *Maritime Melbourne*, the MEC will effectively convey respect for heritage values as well as the unique geographical aquatic site, the amphitheatre that is Victoria Harbour and Central Pier at its heart.

Imaginative and appropriate re-development of Central Pier will inevitably sharpen the focus on Victoria Harbour. It will shift the public perception of Docklands Precinct towards the water. The world over, waterways are understood to naturally ‘attract’ the public. Docklands is languishing because the public cannot ‘see’ that Docklands Precinct is on the waterways. Why would the public travel to the Docklands Precinct if only to ‘see’ urban real estate and cafes amid a forest of tall towers? To activate Docklands Precinct, it is imperative that a waterways focus be maintained to counter the decades of land-based development attention. The underlying DV objective has been to sell real estate and maximize profit, rather than grow visitation by celebrating the maritime heritage of the Precinct. The redevelopment of Central Pier as the site

of the MEC is at the very heart of shifting public perception about the waterways and the Docklands Precinct.

MEC Programming Focus

The MEC programming agenda will entice and excite on-going public interest. Stimulating fast-paced programming of a permanent 'attractors' showcasing Victoria's maritime credentials will draw visitation locally, as well as from interstate and internationally. Innovative engagement activities attached to these preparatory or preliminary works will increase visitation. The MEC will constitute a reason to come to the Docklands Precinct where none exists now. The flow-on impact will be a boost for local businesses.

Central Pier is irrefutably an ideal site on which to locate the MEC. It is an appropriate sympathetic re-purposing of this heritage-listed site. It will also provide an opportunity to showcase many aspects of *Maritime Melbourne* – which are seldom recognized in the public realm. Given that Central Pier itself is at the heart of Victoria Harbour, the MEC on the heritage pier, in the heritage harbour, is doubly appropriate.

Appropriate re-development of Central Pier with the MEC will be critical to the successful re-activation of the Victoria Harbour/Docklands Precinct.

5. MEC Externals: Form, Dimensions and Spaces

Form

Iconic architecture has the capacity to inspire and attract visitation especially on a highly visual site as Central Pier. An exciting design for the MEC will attract the public to the Docklands Precinct and if managed properly this can commence even during the construction phase.

What must also be factored in with the re-development is that residents or corporations within the existing tower developments, which encircle Victoria Harbour, are likely to have invested in Docklands Precinct and possibly paid a premium for water views. It is reasonable that residents, corporations and developers around the harbour will require that any Central Pier re-development should be designed in such a way as to complement views of Victoria Harbour. A low-rise but striking architectural design, which does not impair harbour views, will align with resident and corporate expectations and also enliven the entire Docklands Precinct.

Height

Given that the structural integrity of Central Pier is unknown, estimating the footprint for the MEC is of necessity merely an early estimate. However, what is clear is that the Maritime Experience Centre will not be a tall structure (e.g., only three floors) and it will need only a proportion of the pier.

Projections

The MEC design should incorporate internal and external areas where visual display of maritime images or events can be projected. There are numerous examples where such projections are used to great effect. Given the location of Central Pier, this use of the MEC external structure would be particularly appropriate and valuable. It would attract much casual visitation around the entire Victoria Harbor amphitheatre. Laser projections across the water could trace the outline of the original extensive pier structure. Spectacular viewing from the Marvel Stadium would guarantee exposure to waterways and generate greater public awareness of the MEC. Such public awareness is likely to result in visitation growth in the longer term.

Services

Depending on what structural constraints are found to exist on Central Pier, there may be opportunities to accommodate commercial ventures which align with, or complement, the maritime focus of the MEC. For example, cafes or restaurants (particularly those with an emphasis on seafood) around the perimeter of the MEC, hireable spaces – workshops, retail outlets, art galleries, maritime and tourism business or lecture spaces will be compatible. Any of these can be out-sourced within or adjacent to the MEC. Leases or % of turnover could be directed towards funding the operations of the MEC. The appeal of the MEC for commercial operators is obvious - magnificent site and on-going visitation generated by the MEC.

6. MEC Internal Considerations:

Experiential Learning Concept

Conventional passive transfer of information characteristic of museums or galleries is no longer attractive to modern, particularly young, audiences. To address this change in audience behavior, visitor engagement with the MEC will be specifically designed to align with, or cater to, changed cultural and social tastes.

The MEC will:

- Focus on proactive engagement, inciting curiosity, engaging and informing the public and schools in particular, in creative technologically- enabled and fast-paced exhibits and activities.
- Deliver high-technology futuristic, stimulating and educational experiences to the public – above and below (virtually) the water, including visibly accessible and engaging ‘Living Labs’ and workshops designed to showcase and inform on all relevant activities, including relevant specialist or ‘lost’ heritage skills.
- Provide experiential learning – Virtual and Actual. Programming and mode of delivery will emphasize public access, knowledge transfer and engagement with diverse aspects of maritime heritage and marine industry – past present and future. Some examples are commerce and trade, specialist shipping, marine research, green energy generation (wind and wave), offshore extractive industries, stevedoring, logistics, ports management, new propulsion, aquaculture, marine archeology, oceanography, marine environmental sustainability, marine research, wrecks and their archaeology, propulsion, logistics & supply chain technologies, bio-environmental science, aquaculture – harvesting and extraction.
- Provide opportunities to engage with marine-focused ‘Living Labs’, Citizens Science investigations; visual access to specialist skills through glass- walled workshops to observe real-time restoration, preservation and maintenance of artifacts (vessels, dockside cranes, buoys etc.); not only engage the public but also provide a potential source of income and to provide training on lost skills through collaboration with heritage fleet; professional work on restoration and preservation.
- Showcase relevant and cutting-edge work undertaken by professionals within the State Public Sector authorities and agencies including but not confined to Heritage Victoria, PROV, Fisheries, Melbourne Water, Parks Victoria, Environment Victoria, AMSA, CSIRO, PROV Safety, CSIRO, various universities – a plethora of data collection and monitoring.

Themes - Curated Experiences

Creative technology enables an immense range of ‘themes’ or topics to be presented to audiences in ways, which were not available in the recent past. Fascinating science and research across the maritime sector have recently become accessible via such new technologies. Potential ‘themes’ or topics appropriate for the MEC include:

- Melbourne and regional Victoria’s maritime heritage ‘story’ from Indigenous times. For example, Indigenous celebrations and food gathering, fording places, weirs, bridges; re-shaping the Yarra, Coode Island, Coode Canal, to the urban concept of Docklands Precinct and Webb Dock; Fishermen’s Bend.
- Victoria’s coastal marine environment including research into sustainable aquaculture, climate, coastal geology and geography, identification, reclamation and preservation of wrecks.
- Maritime logistics and innovation including containerisation, refrigeration, multi-modal transport, AI, the evolving Western Transport Hub.
- Victoria’s recreational boating & fishing industries including aquaculture, kelp farming, marine architecture, propulsion and materials technology
- Victoria’s new ocean energy extractive industries including wind, wave, current, tide and floating solar feeding into the grid or stand-alone.
- Australia’s vast Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in the waters and landmass of Antarctica and the Southern Ocean.
- Maritime Trade - Maritime Trade is the continuous thread in the evolution of Victorian prosperity. As an island nation the social and economic relationship between humanity and waterways (coastal, riverine and oceanic) has been both bountiful and yet perilous for over 60,000 years. We are at a point of profound geographical and social change, which will re-shape these relationships in the next 50 years.
- Maritime Industry Careers and Education – Options for maritime work are rapidly changing. Career education pathways are changing. Few have grasped this reality. The education sector is struggling to determine skills gaps and offer new combinations of relevant credentials for new maritime industries best served by merging new and traditional skills.

Format and Mediums

Creative technologies make it possible to deliver information and experiences through a range of formats and mediums which far extend what was formerly available to curators. For example:

- Storytelling is powerful and can now take many forms - faces, voices, with images relevant to their stories, soundscapes – the sea, the wind in sails, keening of many masts; using the external surfaces as giant screens to project maritime images.
- Projections - Various laser projections across the water could trace the outline of the original extensive pier structure or of particular vessels or rigs.
- Simulations – maritime careers, investigative and research processes
- Curated pop-up spaces for temporary, maritime and marine exhibitions to promote exposure to the regional Maritime Museums of Victoria and interpretation training.
- Lectures theatres or conference rooms purpose-built for participation Zoom- style audience interaction - local, regional, interstate and international audiences.
- Presentation suites technologically capable of efficiently effectively delivering mini-conferences.
- Restaurants, cafes, test-kitchens through which to showcase Victorian aquaculture, conventional products, new seafood and nutrition.

7. MEC Deliverable Outcomes

The MEC on Central Pier will become a highly visible ‘architectural icon’ in the Docklands Precinct, which will:

- Re-focus on, and boost, ‘brand ‘*Maritime Melbourne*’ post-COVID
- Demonstrate that Melbourne values its maritime heritage; values its maritime industry strength; values its strength in creative technologies and innovation; reminding the nation and the world that Melbourne remains a major port city with a unique past.
- Comprehensively reflect Melbourne’s multi-layered maritime heritage.eg. Indigenous, and 19th and 20th century industries and heritage assets.
- Comprehensively reflect and interpret maritime matters of geo-political importance to Australia. e.g., EEZ, Antarctica, sovereignty.

- Point to the maritime industries of the future – innovation, extraction (ocean energy and food), environmental sustainability in relation to waterways.
- Represent public sector investment in a significant and impressive ‘asset’ in offering genuine ‘value’ to languishing area of Melbourne adjacent to the CBD, e.g., a presence akin to the Southbank Arts Precinct or Federation Square, incorporating spaces for exhibitions, lectures, projections, workshops, events involving cutting-edge technological delivery modes which will ‘activate’ the surrounding precinct. in substantial and impressive spaces.
- Showcase all relevant diverse State Government Public Sector departments, authorities and agencies to present their work, such as research and operational capabilities.
- Catalyze optimal collaboration via programming between relevant state agencies and authorities, universities and the maritime industry.

Multi-faceted Public Benefits

MEC deliverables generate a range of public benefits:

- **Cultural benefit** - Celebrating maritime heritage, maritime industry, marine science providing opportunities for public and private sector engagement.
- **Economic benefit** – Capture and capitalize on the latent value of Victoria Harbor and at the tourism (local, interstate and international), Docklands Precinct Activation and opportunities for maritime industry engagement
- **Educational benefit** – Creative technologies will deliver ‘instructive amusement’ in heritage, innovation, science, information, experiential learning and careers.
- **Social benefit** – A post pandemic, iconic inspirational project showcasing Docklands Precinct, architectural and technological expertise, and the multi-faceted maritime industry sector.
- **Reputational Benefit** – Showcase local architectural design developed initially as a design competition to not only generate excitement by an iconic project but also showcasing the abundant local expertise in creative technologies.



Maritime Melbourne in brief

Despite Melbourne's comparative wealth and culture, the State has not ambitiously invested in any internationally acclaimed construction in recent decades. Melbourne has thus far in effect turned its back on its waterfront and its maritime heritage

- Melbourne is the largest container port in the nation, Melbourne is the home-port for specialised shipping
- Melbourne has more navigable waterways than Sydney.
- Melbourne has world-renowned 19th century maritime heritage infrastructure.
- Melbourne is the centre of maritime industry sector innovation (e.g., shipping, logistics, aquaculture, blue water extractive industries and exploration).

These attributes have enabled 200 years of prosperity in Melbourne and regional Victoria. Melbourne's status and economic prosperity is directly attributed to maritime endeavor and capability.

Maritime stakeholders succinctly observe that absence of due recognition for Melbourne as a maritime city renders Melbourne as *the only maritime city in the developed world without a maritime museum.*¹

¹ National Trust, *Polly Woodside* Volunteers, 21 August 2018.