

Marina

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Essential reading for marina and waterfront developers, planners and operators



Open for business; the Royal Melbourne Yacht Squadron's 250-berth marina.

was the venue for the 1956 Olympic sailing competition and is known for its busy race programme.

Time for an upgrade

RMYS leaders recognised in the late 1990s that the existing marina with its fixed timber docks and swing moorings was outmoded and becoming a liability. Melbourne has several yacht clubs that compete for members and the marina was inadequate by comparison. Seeing that a new marina was essential to the club's financial viability, the members formed a new entity called St Kilda Safe Harbour Ltd in 2003 to prepare the way for a new facility. The work was funded by \$5,000 pledges from 140 members.

The first applications for permits and approvals were filed in 2005. As the applications worked their way through the approval process, Parks Victoria launched the St Kilda Safe Harbour Concept Plan to redevelop the harbour and breakwater. The RMYS application was subsumed into that process and RMYS and Parks Victoria worked together on researching, planning and eventually phasing the construction.

Planning challenges

The complexity of the planning and approval process had exploded since the club built its first shed.

"No one can appreciate how long and complicated the process of building a structure on water can

New RMYS marina brings breath of fresh air

by Robert Wilkes

The Royal Melbourne Yacht Squadron (RMYS) is one of the mainstays of Melbourne boating with a vibrant 140-year history. History has a way of repeating itself. Case in point: in 1879 the St Kilda Sailing Club (as it was then called) had a few dozen members and a bank balance of £17 (the currency of the time). The club submitted plans to the town council to build a club shed. St Kilda residents opposed the project and quashed the application, but club leaders persisted and were rewarded in 1885 when the Lands Minister provided a 'free grant site' for the shed. It was built at a cost of £120. The project took nine years.

Fast forward 125 years to 2nd February 2014. On a hot summer day in Melbourne, RMYS welcomed the public to its all-new 250-pen marina. The festive occasion attracted more than 300 celebrants, many of whom plunged into the water in the 40°C heat.

The new marina features floating concrete pontoons by Bellingham Marine Australia and accommodates boats from 10m to 23m. New gangway, utilities, fire protection and pump-outs were included. The harbour's wave protection was enhanced by extensive improvements to the breakwater and the addition of a new wave attenuator, also from Bellingham Marine Australia. Service pedestals and Keco pump-outs were provided by M-Tech.

Just as happened more than a century earlier, the project took nine years.

RMYS sits within Port Phillip, a large protected body of water on a scale with San Francisco Bay.

RMYS is a familiar landmark on Port Phillip, a large protected body of water on a scale with San Francisco Bay. Convenient to the city's CBD, RMYS





During the second stage of the marina works, Parks Victoria decided to rebuild the public jetty connecting the shore to the marina. When the jetty became impassable, a temporary pontoon walkway was installed to provide access to the marina for its work crews and to allow members of the club to get to their boats.

The pontoons were manufactured in Bellingham's Brisbane facility and trucked 1,650km to Melbourne. Transporting pontoons and accessories required 128 semi-trailers. Limited access at the site made it necessary to crane the pontoons into the water or onto barges 10km away in Melbourne's Docklands area. Larger pontoons up to 140m long were assembled and towed to the marina while smaller sections were taken by barge to be off-loaded and installed. Despite the workarounds and potential conflicts, all construction went according to schedule and the entire project was completed in under 11 months.

Little penguin, big deal

Protecting the habitat of the world's smallest penguin was a major concern during the project. Only 33cm (13 inches) high and about 1.5kg (2.2 lbs), the fairy penguin (or more commonly, the 'little' penguin) has slate blue colouring, does not migrate and clearly is adorable. Around 1,300 live permanently in the breakwater at St Kilda, the second largest colony in Australia. They leave their burrows at dawn, hunt in the ocean all day and

The RMYS is spectacular by night (above) and has great views of the Melbourne CBD by day.

be until they've done it," said RMYS general manager, Rod Austin. "This is a politically sensitive area and we had to satisfy 11 separate community interest groups, meet with them and resolve their concerns. It took a long time. We depended on our volunteers to attend the meetings and win over the public, and they did a magnificent job. Once the work began, there were no problems, only compliments. Because of our people's community relations skills, our project is done. There are several other projects on Port Phillip, some of which started before ours did, that are still waiting for approval."

Pontoons and breakwater

RMYS hired the engineering firm GHD to be lead engineer and lead contractor for the project. The club reviewed tenders from several pontoon manufacturers with differing pontoon systems and eventually opted for a floating concrete system from Bellingham Marine Australia. The 140m wave attenuator was also sourced from Bellingham Marine Australia due to its proven performance and durability.

Fitzgerald Constructions was the contractor for the improvements to the breakwater. The project included an extension to the south end of the breakwater and a new spur, or groyne, at the north end. Construction presented unique challenges. Because the breakwater is far from the shoreline, the massive rocks had to be accumulated on the beach then loaded onto 'Moxy' trucks. The trucks were then loaded onto barges and moved across the harbour to the breakwater. The rocks were placed in exact locations determined by GPS coordinates,

after which the trucks had to motor backwards to the barge and return to shore for another load. The operation took nine months and 2,000 truckloads of rock.

Building the marina

Coordination between the contractors was carefully managed to keep the programme on schedule. To ensure flat water for the marina installation, the breakwater extension was phased in first. Before this was complete, Bellingham Marine was able to begin work on piling and installation for half the marina while maintaining unrestricted access to Fitzgerald Constructions for the completion of the breakwater.

"In addition to working around the breakwater construction," said Marc Carney, project manager for Bellingham Marine Australia, "we had to work around a fully functioning marina."



return en masse at dusk. Going out or coming in, it makes quite a show.

To protect the birds during construction, RMYS had to hire a professional 'penguin watcher' to be on site every morning before dawn. The penguin watcher walked the rocks and sand to see if any penguins were in danger of being crushed by rocks from the breakwater construction. Teams of volunteers equipped with miner's lamps assisted in moving the penguins to safety.

The penguins are an even more popular attraction now that construction has been completed. Dusk is the most popular time to watch the birds return to their burrows and the public is invited to use the jetty to reach a viewing area adjacent to the breakwater without entering the secure gates of the marina.

New sense of community

With the construction of the new marina and breakwater, RMYS has written a new chapter in its proud history. New branding, as seen on smart new signage in the marina, promotes the club's long history beginning in 1876



Pontoon access is secured without obstructing views of the water.

and its venerable 'royal' designation. As expected, the new marina has injected energy into the club and attracted new blood to the membership rolls. The new pontoons and pens make the marina a much more inviting environment compared to the fixed timber docks and swing moorings of the old facility.

"We're very happy with the Bellingham Marine pontoons," said Linda Goldsmith, RMYS Commodore.

"The floating concrete pontoons have changed our club's social climate. It's a breath of fresh air. Access is so much easier...you can jump from boat to boat and socialise. On Friday nights people are on their boats having dinner and enjoying a fabulous view of the Melbourne city skyline."

Robert Wilkes writes about the marina industry from his home in Bellevue, Washington.

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