

Topics

- President's update
- Diving Alor by Peter Hodge
- Next in our selection of Wellington Dive sites – some non south coast options

Octopress needs YOU!

Please email photos/stories/underwater updates/planned trips/memorable dive sites to judyormandy@hotmail.com or alison-grant@xtra.co.nz for us to share in the club newsletter. See Steve Sanderson's story of his trip to Vanuatu on Page 2.

Upcoming Events

Monthly WUC Dives

Watch your emails and Facebook for our monthly club dives and register your interest. And let us know if there's a spot you really want to explore! Our next planned shore dive will be 7 or 8 of March, conditions allowing.

Boat Dives

Our boat trip sites will be limited by wastewater pollution for the foreseeable future, but there are lots of places to explore beyond the offshore parts of the marine reserve, which remain off limits even now shore dive sites are open.

We'll open up bookings one trip at a time so that anyone whose trip is cancelled due to conditions gets first dibs on the next trip. To spread the love with this fantastic deal, we'll also prioritise members who haven't yet secured a spot a trip, and fill up remaining spots with returnees.

Member price only \$50. Non-member price... \$50+\$20 membership fee!

AGM

Watch out online and in your emails for details on our upcoming AGM, which we're aiming to have in late May. We have to give you 30 days heads up of the time, date, location and agenda, and we may or may not get our Autumn Octopress out in time. This will be your chance to tell us how you want to celebrate our 75th and catch up with your dive buddies... last year we had an excellent spread of food, and some cute and aptly named cats to help us along.

February 2026 – President's update

We didn't expect that the start of our 75th anniversary year would be so devastating to Wellington's underwater and coastal environment, and our ability to dive it. When I started this update we were a week into the catastrophic discharge of untreated sewage from Moa Point sewage treatment plant, and winds were picking up towards another severe weather event requiring Wellington Water to reopen the shortfall pipe in Tarakena Bay, resulting in further contamination of the south coast and our beloved Taputeranga Marine Reserve. On a purely selfish level, it was horrific to be cut off from a place that is so precious to many of us, but there's much more to it than that, and Wellington is, even after the rāhui has been lifted, only beginning to grapple with the implications.

Because our 2024 WUC constitution explicitly makes protection of our underwater environment part of our purpose, it's important that we use every tool at our disposal to do that right now. You may have noticed that our social media pages had multiple updates on the disaster; our committee made the decision early on that we needed to make this a priority in the coming weeks and months, to ensure that WCC and Wellington Water continue to feel pressure to fix both the acute short-term effects and work on a long-term solution, and to ensure Wellingtonians themselves keep thinking about it. I want to thank my fellow committee members for the work they put into that.

Our first action was to email Wellington's mayor, Wellington Water and City Council to express our concern and demand a full inquiry into the event, but that has to be only the start, and we'd love to hear from any WUC members with particular knowledge or skills to help us keep the topic of sewage pollution on top. Marine biologist/ecologist/pollution/wastewater specialist with knowledge to share? Politics-mad with in-depth knowledge of local-body processes? Comms or media-savvy type who can guide our committee on how best to navigate a complicated topic in a meaningful way for the wider community? Content creator happy for us to share your work? Humble keyboard warrior willing to help keep our comments section on topic when the many non-divers now following us opt shift the discussions to suit their agenda? Whatever your corner, we'd love to hear from you on wellington.underwater@gmail.com or on social media if you think you can help us keep this on top.

The other side to this is that it's normal to want an organisation or group or individual to blame, and we want that someone to not be us personally. It's *easier* to view this as an acute event, now "resolved", with clear cause and effect, and to ignore as a necessary evil the frequent small discharges of untreated sewage from Owhiro Bay, Seaview and Moa Pt. All of it matters, and there are probably decades of contributing factors, both systemic and individual. As divers, we see a part of the world that is completely invisible to many. We intimately know the environment this disaster is impacting. Now is the time to share our love of that environment with others, to make any lasting effects visible to others, and to think about how we are individually protecting this coastal environment personally and politically as we go about our lives on land. As individuals and a club, we can't fix this, but the information we share right now has the potential to help frame how Wellingtonians view both the disaster, and the cost of fixing it and preventing it from ever happening again.

Please make sure you're following us on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/WellingtonUnderwater/> and Instagram [@wellingtonunderwaterclub](https://www.instagram.com/wellingtonunderwaterclub)

The allure of Alor: wild currents, big fish and **spicy food**

Peter Hodge tells us about his 2025 Indonesia trip

In November I spent two weeks diving on Alor in eastern Indonesia. As a dive destination, Alor is not well-known - most divers head to Bali, Komodo and Raja Ampat. Alor's dive season runs from April to early December, the dry season and early rainy season.

The diving was superb, with warm and clear water, big reefs, lots of fish and large creatures (sharks, whales, dolphins and turtles) - all this in a setting of volcanoes, jungle, and small islands. But diving here is not for novices as wild currents make many dives challenging.

I stayed in a homestay in the village of Alor Kecil. Every morning we'd walk three minutes to the dive shop, get on the boat, and go diving. We mostly did three dives a day with lunch onshore. The dives were mostly reef, occasionally muck, and one where we explored two caves. Many dives were along vertical walls festooned with soft and hard corals and swarming with fish. Every dive was a drift dive. Sometimes the current was light, other times the current was fierce and could shift quickly. The rule was go with the current, whichever way it was running, and the boat would follow. The water temperature was around 25° C, which was pleasant but at times, in a 3mm wetsuit, I was feeling chilly.

We'd usually be back by 3 or 4pm so there was time to relax at the homestay or walk around the village before dinner. There was always something interesting to see - people building boats and mending nets, boats plying the waters, kids playing football. Village life is water life and boats of all sizes, painted in bright colours, come and go. I saw one boat, tied up at the wharf, painted in fiery red, yellow and purple and named *Kilat Putra*, which in Indonesian means *Son of Lightning*.

The villagers were welcoming and, like everywhere else in Indonesia, interested in where you come from, where you are going, and what you are doing. If you are male, boys will invariably ask you to name your top football team. They won't have a clue if you say 'the Nix' or 'Auckland FC' but will treat you like a demi-god if you mention Barca or Man City.

Some details (if you want to go there)

Getting there: Lion Air flies several times daily from Denpasar and Jakarta to Kupang, and Wings Air flies once a day (in the morning) from Kupang to Alor. On the way there you have to overnight in Kupang, but on the way back you can fly from Alor to Denpasar via Kupang in one day.

For booking domestic flights I used Traveloka, an Indonesian online travel platform. This is because, for some bizarre reason, it's almost impossible to book flights directly with domestic airlines unless you are in Indonesia and use an Indonesian credit/debit card (Garuda may be the exception).

Diving and lodgings: I dived with Lazy Turtle dive shop. The owners, boatmen and dive guides know their stuff when it came to sites, currents and wildlife. Lunches were superb, Indonesian food, spicy, lots of fish, chicken, vegetables and chili.

Lazy Turtle arranged for me to stay at Homestay Lereben. I give this family homestay top marks for comfort, food, friendliness and price. Breakfast, dinner and snacks are included in the full board - the food is plentiful, tasty and cooked on the spot with local ingredients. The family have limited English, so if you speak even a little Indonesian this will go a long way.

There are other options for diving and accommodation, small resort-style, but Lazy Turtle was the cheapest. For me, diving in Indonesia is about experiencing the local way of life as well as the diving, something you won't get staying at an isolated resort with other foreigners.

Best dives: Every dive I did was good, but 'Kal's dream' stood out. This is a pinnacle swarming with fish which is not often dived because of fierce currents. 'The Edge' is another great dive, located just offshore from an island village where the houses are painted in a bright array of colours.

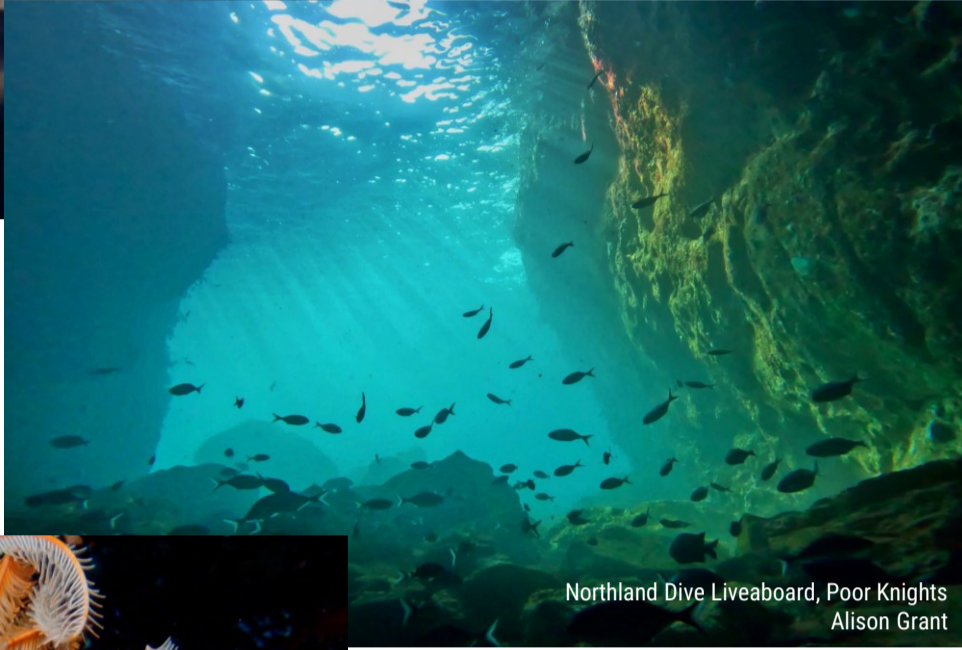
Top tip: Village life starts early, with roosters crowing, the mosque call to prayer and noisy boat engines. If you want a good night's sleep, wear ear plugs and an eye mask.



Poor Pete Hodge had the job of judging our recent "Boat Dive" themed photo comp.

It was a hard ask; the only entries were from his fellow committee members, Geoff, Judy and Alison. Whether out of a sense of propriety, or the overwhelm of having to maintain relationships with his colleagues, he decided not to award a prize, which seems eminently reasonable to the three competitors, who were already giving each other side-eye.

Night boat dive, Komodo Indonesia
Geoff Andrews



Northland Dive Liveaboard, Poor Knights
Alison Grant



Feather star on a boat dive in the Yamaha Islands, Fiji
Alison Grant

So, what does it take to get competition entries from members? We really need your fabulous photos to keep our Octopress pretty and show people the wonders of Wellington diving.

Is it time for a video competition instead? Do we need to up the prize? Are you all so professional that you can't give us your photos for free? Please, let us know, because we love getting your images, and they always get credited!

Former president Regan McGillicuddy on the Lermontov Wreck, Port Gore – photo by Judy Ormandy



From the archives 75 years thoroughly lived!

In 75 years, it's perhaps no surprise that there are some interesting episodes in WUC's history, but there have certainly been some surprises we hadn't bargained on. Perhaps some of the very historic members who left some of those surprises weren't really expecting them to be found....

Geoff Andrews combed the archives late last year, and has digitised a number of them, so we'll be sharing some through this year.

First things first; Wellington Underwater Club pre-dates the advent of recreational SCUBA diving; early members were freedivers and spearfishers who met each other diving, started diving together, and eventually formed a formal club.

What is amazing to modern scuba divers with a safety bent is that the early forays into – let's call it "equipment assisted diving" – involved members developing their own equipment. The "Hubble bubble" was the club's own creation, a surface air supply pumped by a petrol compressor, allowing two divers up to seven hours of underwater exploration. We tend to think that no-decompression limits aren't something we need to worry about in the majority of Wellington shore dives, but seven hours at 21 percent oxygen is enough to give most modern divers pause for thought, and Evans Bay might not be first choice for most of us to use such technological developments.

Despite the innovations in diving, for many years the club was largely a home to spearfishers and underwater hockey enthusiasts. The early WUC split off quite quickly into "Hutt" and "Wellington", probably largely driven by sports clubs; the Wellington region now supports three specific underwater hockey clubs which no longer subscribe to WUC. The broader "underwater sports" focus still lives on at the national level, with NZUA having a significant involvement and investment in national underwater sports including hockey. Spearfishing clubs were later to split off, leaving the non-competitive sport of diving to make up the major focus of the club.

WUC continues to develop; we are small enough now that the interests of individual divers and officers can drive the focus of the club from year to year – photography, tech diving, human factors in diving, sidemount, scientific diving, ecology; all of these are themes that are bubbling away at present because of the interests of our members, and we're always keen to hear from you if you want to push one to the fore with an article for our newsletter or social media, or to run a teaching session or event.

What keeps coming back though is that diving is, necessarily, a communal sport. It was the wish for dive buddies that brought WUC together in the first place, and it's the thing that's keeping us going in 2025; our members told us that more than anything, they want people to dive with.

So... join us in 2026! We look forward to sharing our 75th anniversary with you, diving often (even if the year didn't get off to a good start) and celebrating the underwater world of Wellington - Te Whanganui a Tara with both our members, and further afield.



The complete lightweight diver Joe Tomlin with the Hubble Bubble, capable of keeping two divers supplied with air for seven hours on one tank of petrol, and putting one man to a depth of sixty five feet. Photo taken 1956 at the now defunct Patent Slip in Evans Bay



Dave Moug appears to be casting a critical eye over my kitting up procedure in the Dunlop neck entry suit. We are putting on the air hose and phone line to a full face mask. This gear gave us the best combination of Standard Dress and Aqualung. 1969

Happy Birthday

The Wellington Underwater Club celebrates its 25th anniversary this year.

It all began when a hardy pioneer noticed he wasn't the only diver on the beach. Each, from thinking he was the only one, suddenly realised that there were 20 or more people actively diving around the coast.

These divers used largely home-made equipment and seldom had to venture further afield than the roads end or the tram terminal, to get full and easy catches of crays, moki, butterfish and paua.

By the summer of 1950/51 they were meeting one another for informal group dives, often enough that a Club seemed logical. Once the idea was mooted and word got around, the level of interest was surprising. Apart from local pioneers, there were people who had dived in the islands during the war, or while serving at met. stations, and who wondered what diving was like at home.

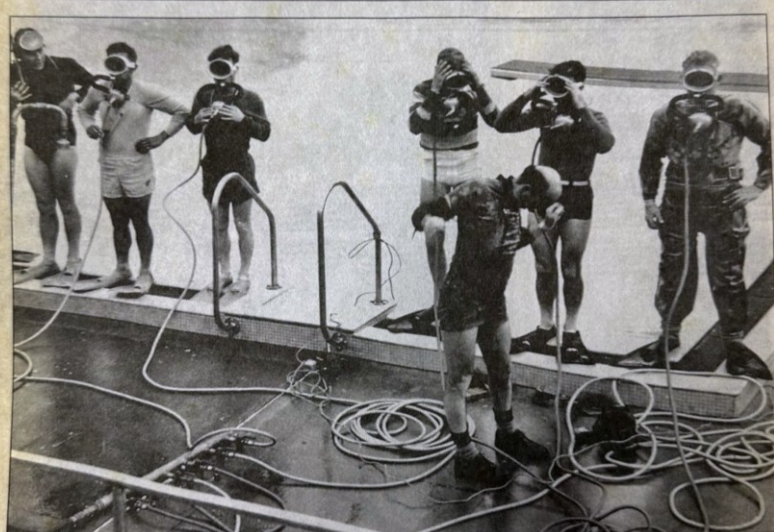
A lot of deerstalkers and other huntsmen fancied the idea of similar sport without the hassle of tramping miles into the mountains. Surfies and swimmers fancied a take-home profit from their aquatic activities.

So the Club was born. The first, we like to think, in New Zealand – though Whangarei and the now defunct Penguin Club of Tauranga dispute this claim!

Whoever was first, it didn't take long for the Clubs to get together and Whangarei, Auckland, Penguin and Wellington formed an association – would you believe "The New Zealand Underwater Research and Spearfishing Association Incorporated" With the NZUA's new interest in things scientific, we seem to have come full circle!

In a big area like this, it's not really surprising that Clubs form within Clubs, and then separate. Hutt Valley members set up their own Club very early on. From both our two Clubs, members have set out to form practically every other Club in the region. Since each new venture has brought its share of new recruits to the fold, this "divide and multiply" growth has only brought good to the NZUA, to diving safety and to friendly rivalry and competition between people interested in the intriguing, exciting, stimulating and fastest growing sport in New Zealand – SKINDIVING.

To the Wellington Underwater Club – its members and its friends, Happy Birthday and congratulations on the first quarter century!



DEEP MEMORIES – Wellington Underwater Club members and drainage board pipe layers, who were working on the Pencarrow sewage line, use a "hubble bubble" while training at Naenae pool in 1959.

New Zealand's longest surviving dive club celebrates its 50th anniversary with a splash this weekend.

Wellington Underwater Club president Dave Watson said that when it was formed members did free dives – they just held their breath under water. Then in 1968, they pioneered the use of breathing apparatus.

Club dives in to 50th year

A club member made a "hubble bubble" which was commonly used before scuba gear became accessible.

The bubble consisted of a petrol-powered compressor feeding air to the diver through a long garden hose.

As the sport of scuba diving developed, club members Bill McArthur and Tony Howell won the national championships two years running then represented New Zealand internationally in the mid-1970s. Another innovation enjoyed

by club members was the introduction of underwater hockey.

Eighty former members will gather in Wellington to celebrate the anniversary. The weekend will include a mystery dive on Saturday afternoon.