

Huge prop recovered off coast

Propeller weighs nearly 18 tonnes

LUKE MORTIMER

luke.mortimer@dailymercury.com.au

EXCLUSIVE: It's no easy task dragging a bronze propeller tipping the scales at a massive 17.5 tonnes from the depths of the big blue – just ask Mackay salvage diver Ed Korber.

The 40-year-old Subsea Pty Ltd director had been tasked by an undisclosed company to retrieve the 6.5m wide, 2m tall propeller, which snapped off a coal ship.

On Sunday, Mr Korber and a team of nearly 15 successfully lifted the propeller from 20 metres down on the ocean floor, about five nautical miles (9.2km) off Hay Point.

In coming days, the propeller, thought to be worth several hundred thousand dollars, will be loaded on to a low loader truck and hauled to North Queensland Bulk Ports at Mackay Harbour, accompanied by a police escort. From there, Mr Korber said, a 70-metre tugboat out of Singapore will ferry the propeller to the

Philippines, where it may later be reused by its owners.

Mr Korber, the diver of more than a decade behind the salvaged 12-tonne anchor propped up on a roundabout at Mackay Harbour, said he had never recovered a propeller before – nor had anyone else involved in salvage that he had touched base with. He said the unusual search for the propeller came to a close “about a month ago”.

“Basically, we've been engaged to do the search and salvage component, so we had to deploy, as we did for the anchor, some side-scan sonars,” Mr Korber said.

“Once we'd located the propeller we had to retrieve it using lift bags, spreader bars and a tug. The divers went down, rigged everything up, floated the propeller and then towed it back to Hay Point.

“I'd never salvaged a propeller. It's unheard of. No one so far that I've dealt with, from the project management team to the ship owners. Everyone



DEEP DOWN: Diver Steven Boyd, dive supervisor Gary Duel and skipper Graham Poole during Subsea's salvage off Hay Point. Photo: Ed Korber

we've dealt with had never heard of a propeller falling off.”

While Mr Korber makes the salvage sound relaxed, it was undeniably a tricky exercise to retrieve the propeller from its resting place, involving a team of divers working alongside crane and tugboat operators.

“It is no different to any other salvage though. You just base it on the weight, the dimensions. Once you get that, you get in and salvage it. It's a lot of preparation, a lot of planning, to determine what size lift bags we might need, how we're going to do it. Whether we'll

use lift bags at all, or do it hydraulically.

“It sure was impressive to bring up a propeller like that. It was just 'wow.'”

Mr Korber said the propeller would be metallurgically tested to determine how “the shaft snapped”. Currently, the salvaged propeller is on dry land at a holding yard at Hay Point. Meanwhile, Mr Korber revealed Subsea had pulled up a second 12.5 tonne anchor off the coast around Christ. A decision has not been made on what will be done with that particular piece of salvage.



Subsea used a tugboat and gear such as lift bags and spreaders to bring the propeller to the surface. Photo: Ed Korber

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