

Victoria Dock, Docklands (H1720)

Heritage permit for demolition of Central Pier – Q&A

Why is Victoria Dock of cultural heritage significance?

Victoria Dock is included in the Victorian Heritage Register for its historical, scientific (technical) and architectural significance to the State of Victoria.

Victoria Dock is a 37.6-hectare water basin which was constructed between 1887 and 1892 to accommodate large ships of the time. Designed by the British Engineer, Sir John Coode, and modified by Melbourne Harbour Trust Engineer, Joseph Brady, the dock was constructed by excavating the West Melbourne wetlands. The dock is between 8.5 and 9.5 metres deep and is bordered by linear wharfage with an entrance at the western end.

When it was opened in 1892 Victoria Dock was the second largest single dock in the world. By 1950 it was handling over two million tons of cargo per year. In the mid-1980s this had increased to 20 million tons annually. Central Pier was constructed in 1916-17 in the middle of the harbour to increase the cargo handling capacity at Victoria Dock.

What has happened?

Heritage Victoria has issued a heritage permit (P37012) which allows for the demolition of Central Pier. In early 2020 Central Pier was permanently closed due to concerns regarding the safety of the structure. Since that time the structure of the pier has deteriorated further, to the extent that it may imminently collapse. The heritage permit has been issued to resolve this urgent safety issue.

Why has the permit been approved?

Central Pier is an element of primary heritage significance within the heritage registration of Victoria Dock. The remaining section of the pier represents about one third of the full extent of the structure as originally built. Other sections of the pier were demolished over several stages prior to its heritage protection, and more recently under heritage permits issued by Heritage Victoria.

Central Pier was closed in August 2019 due to structural concerns and was permanently closed in early 2020. As part of their heritage permit application Development Victoria provided structural engineering advice which demonstrated that Central Pier is in extremely poor condition and presents a significant public safety risk. Since the permanent closure of the pier, the condition of the structure has worsened to the extent that access onto, or beneath the structure is not possible. Heritage Victoria is satisfied that there are no feasible options to retain or restore the pier while managing the risk to safety.

Heritage Victoria acknowledges that the demolition of the remaining section of Central Pier will result in a detrimental and irreversible impact on the heritage place. The heritage permit requires Development Victoria to develop and implement a Heritage Interpretation Strategy. Underwater cultural heritage will be managed in accordance with a Maritime Archaeology Framework Management Plan. Any material that is able to be salvaged from Central Pier or Sheds 9 and 14 will be documented and securely stored for future re-use.

Heritage Victoria recognises that a well-considered future plan is required for Victoria Dock, and acknowledges that this will take some time to develop. The risk of collapse is such that Development Victoria has not lodged a proposal to rebuild or redevelop the site as part of this permit. Development Victoria has publicly declared their intention to engage on the future of Victoria Dock, and community engagement has commenced via <https://engage.vic.gov.au/central-pier>. Heritage

Victoria continues to engage constructively with Development Victoria on the future of Victoria Dock.