

The MPV Fish Eagle:

Retiring to the Deep

By Sander D. den Haring, Project Coordinator

The MPV Fish Eagle is a multi purpose vessel that was originally built in Germany by J.G. Hitzler Schiffswerft (Hitzler shipyard) in 1966. Her early days were spent as an oil field supply vessel in the North Sea. In the early 80's a British company called Eagle Tugs Ltd bought her and changed her name from the original Fangturm to Fish Eagle. The company positioned her in Mombasa to assist with the rising oil industry in Madagascar. MPV Fish Eagle was purchased by Comarco in 1997 and has been based in Mombasa ever since. Throughout her time in Mombasa Fish Eagle has been used as an offshore supply vessel, a tug, an accommodation vessel and a diving support vessel, in the following countries: Kenya, Somalia, Djibouti, Tanzania, Mozambique, Madagascar, Mauritius, South Africa, Eritrea, UAE, Turkey, Pakistan, India, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia. MPV Fish Eagle has performed her multi-faceted jobs with distinction, however, the time has come to retire her.

When a vessel reaches the age and/or state of retirement there is generally one of two possible options: decommission the vessel for scrap metal (the most commonly used method and the most profitable for the owner), or use the vessel to create an artificial reef. The latter option has gained global momentum in the past two decades, especially for decommissioned navy vessels. Transforming vessels into artificial reefs is also not something new along the Kenyan coastline: the MV Alpha Fungua and the MV Dania were sunk as artificial reefs in 2002 in the Diani and Mombasa areas respectively. The MPV Fish Eagle will soon follow suit as Comarco has chosen a similar fate for the decommissioned vessel in a bid to return something to the Mombasa area.

This conservation initiative aims to create a new (artificial) reef in the Mombasa Marine Park and Reserve. It will achieve this by creating shelter and habitat for fish, and by providing substrate for coral (and other invertebrates) to attach onto. The location for this new artificial reef will be on a flat sandy area about 300m off of the main fringing reef within the park. This barren sandy area currently offers no shelter or substrate and therefore attracts little wildlife. Once the ship is sunk, it will not only attract huge schools of fish and other diverse marine life (as have the MV Dania and MV Alpha Funguo), but also recreational scuba divers. The local diving industry is given a great boost having a dive site such as this to offer and the wreck's popularity has already been guaranteed by local support and interest.

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Comarco has generously donated not only the vessel, but also the cleaning and preparing of the vessel. Before a vessel can be sunk as an artificial reef, it must be cleaned of all materials toxic to the environment. This includes all lubricants, hydrocarbons (oil and diesel), and refrigeration coolants. Furthermore, all machinery (including the engines), electrical materials (appliances and wiring), wall paneling and insulation material will also be removed from the vessel. Once the vessel is cleaned, it will be prepared for diver safety: doorways will be widened, windows will be removed, access holes will be cut throughout the vessel and any areas deemed unsafe for diver visitation will be permanently sealed. The cleaning and preparation of the vessel is expected to be completed by February 2014 and the vessel shall be sunk shortly thereafter. The tentative date is February 16 2014.

To raise awareness of this endeavor various events are planned to introduce residents and visiting tourists to this new dive site. The local dive centers operating within the Mombasa Marine Park and Reserve have all embraced this initiative and have already generated enthusiasm with their current and future diving clients. The Kenya Wildlife Service (the management authority of the marine park) is also actively supporting this project and will work with the dive centers to raise the profile of the upcoming dive site. A museum experience documenting the life and intricacies of the MPV Fish Eagle is also planned. This experience will appeal to schools, residents, citizens and tourists, whether they are divers or not. Come and join the fun!