



Captain Peter McGovern has been appointed CEO of the VRCA in Geelong.



New navigation beacons have been installed along Corio Bay's shipping lanes.

A path to the port

Geelong's shipping lanes have become safer and more efficient with the complete installation of 77 new high-tech beacons, say its traffic control bosses.

The new steel-piled beacons with solar powered lights and navigation aids have been installed in Corio Bay at a cost of \$7 million and, according to the Victorian Regional Channels Authority, will maximise access for commercial shipping and minimise risk for all channel users.

Geelong now has 1,200 ship movements every year in and out of the port with increasing trade volumes.

The VRCA has just completed 3 years in business after being set up in Geelong in 2004

The Authority was established in Geelong as the first government business entity to be headquartered in regional Victoria in many years. In addition to its role and responsibilities managing the Geelong commercial shipping channels and port waters, the VRCA has a mandate to contribute extensively to the broader development of the Port of Geelong and, most importantly, to work with the business community on projects which advance local and regional economic and business growth

The VRCA has also now got a new management team in place to take the organisation forward.

Captain Peter McGovern, who has been with the Authority since its inception, has been appointed CEO and Kas Szakiel is the new Commercial Manager

The VRCA's inaugural Chairman, local businessman Michael Dowling was recently reappointed to the Board for another term.

The main role that the VRCA provides is accurate information for shipping using or intending on using its shipping lanes.

"We maintain the depths and make sure they're absolutely guaranteed," said McGovern. "We also provide lights and the beacons so that people can see where the channels are.

"We provide advice in terms of the tides and wind and weather. We provide control, in a sense that there is a control office which is manned 24 hours a day."



McGovern explained that the Geelong VRCA looks after channels that go up to Point Richards - as the crow flies about 12 nautical miles, but in terms of the channels about 16 to 18 nautical miles.

The VRCA is run by a small team of six but one that is increasingly aware that it has to prove its worth - rather than being a given.

That includes involving itself in the most important regional business organizations - the Chamber of Commerce, Geelong Manufacturing Council and the Committee for Geelong - so they are part of the debate on the future of their area and proactively setting up education programs for everyone from school students to business leaders.

It's also in line with a range of measures to devolve responsibilities back to Geelong, which included the appointment of Dilip Abraham as Geelong's own harbourmaster. In the past the harbourmaster for Geelong would have been the Melbourne Harbourmaster with an inevitable dilution of interest.

McGovern says the new navigation aids are increasingly necessary because larger ships are entering the bay.

"The Geelong channels are long and the ships we have now are big. The channels originally were designed for a super tanker of 24,000 tonnes dead weight. The biggest ship we get in here now is 124,000 tonnes. Five times before.

"The channels are not quite at their design limit, but pretty close to the design limit. We have to give the people who navigate the ships the best possible channel with the least risk."

McGovern said that a ship can take 2-3 hours to navigate the 18 miles of lanes and weather and tides can change rapidly in the bay.

"The man bringing the ship in needs to know that he can start the channel transit with confidence and that it will be carried out safely to the end."

McGovern said that the VRCA has just begun a project looking at historical data of tide, environmental pressure and other factors to see if there's a correlation between those factors and seasonal trends.