

SKIP NOVAK

IT'S THE END OF AN ERA, AS SKIP HANDS OVER
THE KEYS TO *PELAGIC AUSTRALIS*

P*elagic Australis* is sold. You read that right. On 17 May *Pelagic Australis* was handed over to Greenpeace International in Cape Town and is currently on her way to the Netherlands with skipper Chris, mate Sophie and a Greenpeace crew of three.

The send-off was a carnival affair for the seller (second happiest day of a boat owner's life...) and the buyer (the first...) complete with Zulu dancers cavorting on the foredeck thanks to Greenpeace South Africa. This was a one-on-one transaction with no brokers involved. DIY, just the way I like things.

Greenpeace seldom divulges specific campaign plans going forward but we can say she will be undergoing a refit in the Netherlands, making 'green-tech' modifications and running a competition for a new name. Then she goes into campaign service. So, remember the shape and configuration of *Pelagic Australis* as a likeness may suddenly appear on the horizon or maybe the AIS (or not!). Rest assured she will no doubt pop up in the media at some point soon, decorated in her rainbow colours.

This was of course a major decision, but not a difficult one. The negotiation began over six months ago while I was desperately conjuring up a southern charter season based from Cape Town. When Greenpeace contacted me and said they needed a small vessel with a lifting keel and rudder for 'close quarter campaigning', I had an epiphany.

I had no intention of selling *Pelagic Australis*, not least of all as I had a full book of clients from our normal season with nowhere to go, that I was in the process of rolling over 2021/22. This was a dilemma to be solved.

But given my age, the vessel's age and not least of all the ongoing Covid story where uncertainty continues through 2021 and on into 2022, it was the right thing to do, certainly from a financial perspective.

Or in other words, the writing was on the bulkhead.

After 20 years filled with memories and the casts of characters we have hosted, the timing was right to pass her on to begin a new chapter – and what better home

than Greenpeace for this venerable expedition vessel.

Many people have asked, "Was this difficult emotionally to part with *Pelagic Australis*?" And, "Aren't you sentimentally attached?" You might make a case in this regard for the original *Pelagic*, which launched a dream way back in 1987 and still awaits me on the hard in Maine for future arctic adventures. But for *Pelagic Australis*, not at all. She is metal, wood and fibre (mostly metal). The memories I have are well filed. To steal a phrase, she was, for me, a 'taxi to the snowline'.

The good news though is I have almost seamlessly gone from one situation to another (the story of my life, various friends remind me). I have just rejoined, after a six month hiatus, the new Tony Castro-designed *Pelagic 77*, *Vinson of Antarctica*. She arrived in my old 'home port' of the

Hamble on 15 May. I'd not seen her since October on my last visit to KM Yachts in Holland before retreating to family in Cape Town for another lockdown. In the interim

I've have been working on the fit out and sea trials with KM and our sailing crew on WhatsApp and Zoom. Frustrating? For sure. We already have a long list of minor modifications for when she returns to KM Yachts in September, but nothing substantial so far. Safe to say, 90% of those could have been dealt with had I been on site as was planned. In any event she is up and running awaiting her first big gale and a taste of ice, which will tell if she really is fit for purpose (see our full feature on page 40).

By the time this column piece goes to print we should be in Svalbard on a month's long science charter with a German university group of geologists. After a visit to the shipyard in September for warranty and modifications she sails south to Port Stanley for a science charter to South Georgia and the Antarctic Peninsula.

Vinson of Antarctica is a collaboration with my Chilean colleague Nicolas Ibanez and will, to a great extent, take up where *Pelagic Australis* left off. Our charter focus will be more weighted to science, film and educational projects of high value, but we will also be accommodating, when possible, our usual guests wishing to visit places of high latitudes. ■

'For *Pelagic Australis* the writing was on the bulkhead'

