

Restoration group needs help to make a Catalina fly

- [The Australian](#) September 11, 2015 12:00AM
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A Catalina conducts training exercises during World War II. *Source:* News Corp Australia

It has soaked up more than \$1 million and countless hours of work but an ambitious long-running project to restore a 1945 Catalina to flying condition is under a cloud unless it can find a new generation of patrons and sponsors.

The Catalina Flying Memorial bought the 1945 model PBY6A Catalina, which had been converted into a Portuguese bushfire water-bomber, for \$US330,000 and ferried it to Sydney's Bankstown Airport in December, 2008.

Since then, more than \$1m has been spent removing fire-fighting equipment, replacing the engines and propellers, cutting out rust and refurbishing landing gear.

CFML officials say the plane has been restored to 21st century standards but they need \$85,000 to get the aircraft, registered as VH-CAT, a permit to fly.

There is also a matter of \$650,000 owed to creditors.

A major problem, according to 91-year-old CFML founder and chairman Philip Dulhunty, is that the registered charity's founding partners and key volunteers have died. They included Neville Kennard, Nancy Bird, Richard Kingsland and Graeme White.

This has left much of the burden on Mr Dulhunty's family company, leaving the Sydney-based restoration group to hunt for a government grant or major commercial sponsor.

"We're doing everything that's absolutely necessary to make the plane first class, better than it ever was when it was brand new, and it's costing a lot of money," Mr Dulhunty said. "We're looking for a corporate sponsor, something like the Westpac helicopter."

Mr Dulhunty has already pitched the flying boat to several sponsors and said the intention was for the Catalina to tour Australia visiting the wartime bases from which it once operated. These included Broome and Nedlands in Western Australia, Lake Boga in Victoria; Rose Bay, Rathmines and Port Stephens in NSW; Bowen, Brisbane and Cairns in Queensland; and Darwin in the Northern Territory.

The aim is to get an unlimited Warbird operating certificate that would allow the Catalina to take passengers on adventure flights.

Donations to the group are tax deductible and Mr Dulhunty said it would provide a high-profile platform for a big sponsor.

"It's most photogenic when its operating off the water, or anywhere even, and we've been asked by the TV stations and the main newspapers to let them know whenever we're going to be operating because they want to be there," he said.

"There's spray and water everywhere, it's a very interesting thing, and it would be on TV so you would get a lot of very good PR coverage for the sponsor."

The group is also looking at participating in the Sydney to Hobart yacht race in recognition of the role of Catalinas in reporting the position of yachts and plans to offer it for search and rescue operations similar to those carried out in World War II.

Work still to be done on the Catalina includes painting it black, repairing a fuel leak, replacing some fuselage sheeting and installing seats from a DC-3.

"The Cats were built for quantity during the war not quality so much," Mr Dulhunty said. "So we've been able to do it with modern methods and materials so it will really last for donkey's years."

The Catalina was a key player in World War II as a long-range reconnaissance plane and for search and rescue. They also played an important role in re-establishing air links with Britain and other parts of the world through Qantas.

The 5652km Qantas flight across the Indian Ocean was the longest non-stop regular passenger flight ever attempted and celestial navigation was used to maintain radio silence in enemy held territories. Those who completed the trip, which took between 28 and 32 hours flying at about 200km/h, became members of the Secret Order of the Double Sunrise.

A documentary of the VH-CAT restoration, *CAT Club*, is being made by writer and television producer Robert Cockburn, who wants to pitch the documentary to major television networks as the Catalina got closer to flying again. He is looking for film finance to employ a professional editor to go through more than 20 hours of footage.

Extracted from:

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/business/aviation/restoration-group-needs-help-to-make-a-catalina-fly/story-e6frg95x-1227521638461>

On 23/10/15 at 10:56:16