

# Dancing the Australian Importation Tango



A crisp autumn morning in Elliott Bay Marina in Seattle, Washington, just days before we cut our dock lines and began our sail toward Australia in 2014.

TOP PHOTO: Trekking the stunning cliffs that etch the coast of southern New South Wales near Bermagui, our favorite fishing village along Australia's south-eastern seaboard.

**W**hen we cut our dock lines in Seattle and began our journey across the Pacific in 2014, we had a lofty end-goal: **Get to Australia...**and stay there for a few years. Twenty courtesy flags had adorned the halyards of our CM440, Red Thread, when we made landfall in New South Wales on Australia's eastern seaboard in November 2016; however, the pieces necessary to achieve our goal of living in Australia had still not fully materialized. We both needed jobs, jobs that were willing to grant us working visas.

We arrived at Coff's Harbour, New South Wales and did the standard clearance dance that ensues each time you enter a new country. We presented our CM440's US Coast Guard documentation, pulled out our passports, and handed over clearance documents from our prior port of call, Noumea, New Caledonia. Australian

Border Force administered the customs and immigration procedures, and the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources managed biosecurity, inspecting our souvenirs, interior hull,



Border Force agents in Coff's Harbour, New South Wales snapped the moment we completed clearance into Australia in late 2016. Having officially completed our voyage across the Pacific, celebratory bubbles were most certainly in order!

**BY JESSIE MACKELPRANG-CARTER & NEIL CARTER • CM440**

and food. Despite crossing our fingers that we'd be calling the land down under home, we cleared in as tourists and expressed our intention to leave... eventually.

Duration of cruising permits varies widely from country-to-country and our experience has been that most nations are very welcoming to yachties; however, the general expectation is that you will not overstay your welcome. In Australia, you can obtain a 12-month cruising permit that may or may not be extended, at the discretion of Border Force. Our hope was that we would be able to stay longer, but we also knew that if we did, the government would want its pound (or ton) of flesh and require us to import her sooner or later.

Bit-by-bit, our goal of staying in Australia became a reality. I accepted a job at a university in Melbourne, Victoria, then Neil got an offer at a company, too; tourist visas morphed into working visas. We sailed the 1,000 nautical miles from Coff's Harbour to



A thousand miles from Coff's Harbour, New South Wales to our new home city, Melbourne, Victoria...a good deal of seamiles that hardly scratched the perimeter of this great continent.

Melbourne and, while still living aboard, rejoined the world of the working in Australia's second-largest city.

#### **Fast forward two years to February 2019.**

We were both happily settled in our jobs, we had our first baby on the way and had moved into a small apartment, and the government had granted us

permanent residence. Roots were taking hold. We had achieved our goal and could no longer feign being a boat in transit.

To import a vessel into Australia, you must pay goods and services tax (GST) and duty, which equate to 10% and 5% of the value of the vessel, respectively. For our CM440, this would be a hefty sum of money, and thinking about it

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made our stomachs queasy. Thanks to the USA-Australia Free Trade Agreement (USFTA), at least our US-built Catalina would not incur the 5% duty. Even if we had decided to sell Red Thread, we would have been required to import her before she could be put on the market. The inevitability of importation loomed large as we worked hard to restock our savings, which had been almost entirely depleted during our 2-year voyage—a worthwhile consequence of cruising in our early 30s—while also trying to reacclimate to the many expenses that come with living ashore.

In February 2019, we received a friendly but stern email from Border Force that lit a fire under our rear ends. The email notified us that we had 30 days to complete importation of Red Thread and if we did not do so within the allotted timeframe “then the vessel may be forfeited.” Eek!!

We knew we needed an up-to-date survey of Red Thread but were uncertain about the subsequent steps we needed to take. Neil did the leg work sifting through governmental and other websites, while I tended to our weeks-old baby. Although you’d imagine that the process would be clearly laid out, we found it surprisingly opaque. We reached out to our Melbourne contacts in the cruising community, but the vast majority of cruising vessels that are imported into Australia come via Queensland. Thus, there was little local knowledge in Victoria, the state that tickles the underbelly of the continent. A couple dozen phone calls later, Neil had figured out how to proceed.

**STEP 1:** Identify a marine surveyor who is a member of the Marine Surveyors Association of Australia ([www.marinesurveyors.net.au](http://www.marinesurveyors.net.au)).

We contacted all of the surveyors listed in Victoria and Tasmania but without success. Either the phone numbers were disconnected or the surveyors were inexperienced in conducting importation surveys and seemed disinterested in the job. We also tried to contact a few surveyors in New South Wales but to no avail. Our frustration level climbed as days passed and we had yet to identify surveyor. We breathed a sigh of relief when we at last reached Simon Lloyd-Parker, a surveyor at Marine Surveyors Australia ([http://](http://marinesurveyorsaustralia.com.au/)



Anchored off Portarlington, Victoria on the Bellarine Peninsula, we enjoy our first sail-away weekend as a family of three with our newborn son and freshly imported CM440.

[marinesurveyorsaustralia.com.au/](http://marinesurveyorsaustralia.com.au/)), who was based in Queensland, 1,100 miles north. Because we could not identify a local surveyor and our timeline was tight, Simon agreed to collaborate with us to complete a photo survey, which we hoped the government would deem sufficient.

Importation fees are based on the value of the vessel at the time of importation. Thus, we intentionally delayed many major refit projects on Red Thread, with the plan of tackling them after importation. This is perhaps the only time that having 13-year-old rigging with 60,000+ nautical miles is beneficial! We sent Simon a PDF file containing more than 80 photos of Red Thread, from bow to stern and all major systems, as well as a 3-page list of all current considerations for her valuation (e.g., age of rigging, state of other systems, condition of sail inventory) with photo proof. We fielded a number of additional questions about Red Thread and provided additional photos at his request. In a matter of days, he sent us the completed survey with what we considered to be a very fair valuation of our CM440.

Given Simon’s wealth of experience importing cruising yachts, in addition to completing our survey, he also outlined the subsequent step to get Red Thread through the importation hoops.

**STEP 2:** Contract with a customs broker who will be accountable for liaising with the government regarding the survey valuation.

Per Simon’s recommendation, we chose to work with Brett Lawrence at Dazmac (<https://www.dazmac.com.au/>).

Brett shepherded the survey through the governmental review process, which involved obtaining official determination of the importation fees we would be required to pay. We then transferred those funds to Dazmac’s escrow account, as the agency served as the payment intermediary, until the government issued final approvals. We were fortunate to work with Simon and Brett, both of whom we would recommend without hesitation to other cruisers who are keen to import their yacht into Australia. They were professional and, thankfully, very prompt in their work.

Ultimately, the process of importing Red Thread into Australia was not terribly complicated and moved quickly once the ball got rolling, but the steps were not clearly laid out anywhere online, which made it stressful, especially as the process coincided with the first few weeks of parenthood! Nonetheless, all of the details came together and were finalized several days before the ominous deadline. On March 30, 2019 our CM440 was officially imported into Australia. The valuation we received was very fair, but the importation fees still felt like a kick in the gut. At the same time, paying them was also a relief. Having Red Thread imported into Australia means we have freedom to sail this great continent as long as we wish and to return here should we so desire after our next voyage to the South Pacific...

*Note. The importation process described in this article is based solely on our experience and should not be considered gospel.*