



NEW RECRUITS: Surveyor Brett Thomas scans the hull of an ex-military vessel. — Picture by Peter Stoop

## Cluster pushing for a shift in sands

A NEWCASTLE group wants to use ex-military boats to dredge Swansea Channel and create sandbanks for surfing.

The Hunter Surf Industry Cluster was loaned three boats, no longer required by the military, by Defence Minister Brendan Nelson.

The boats were used for more than 40 years in Australian military operations to push barges into place for river crossings.

One of the boats has been scanned using a laser, with the resulting three-dimensional digi-



CHANGE: Swansea Channel is part of a new dredging plan.

tal images to be used in getting approval for the boats' use.

The nine-metre-long boats had new engines fitted in 1992.

Project manager Robert

Sirasch, of Belmont, believes the cluster's plan could lead to cheaper dredging.

Mr Sirasch identified Swansea Channel and Old Bar Beach or Harrington Beach, Taree, as areas where the dredging plan could be used.

The boats would shift and shape sand by pushing a barge with a plough underneath.

He said the boats could also be used to drag sand onto eroded beaches.

"This is a national initiative," Mr Sirasch said.