

A whale of a film deal



Mosman filmmaker Stephen Van Mil will bring Tim Winton's novel *Shallows* to the screen.

Picture: DANIELLE BUTTERS

KATE CRAWFORD

MOSMAN filmmaker Stephen Van Mil has got the green light from actor Mel Gibson's film company to co-produce a film based on Tim Winton's novel *Shallows*.

Van Mil announced this week that he had been in talks with Tim Winton in early December and Winton was keen to see the film go ahead.

Van Mil said he was delighted to have secured the rights to the book and also to secure a commitment from Gibson's film company Icon Productions to co-produce the project.

The film company is already backing Van Mil's first feature film based on Robert Drewe's novel *The Drowner* which is due to begin filming this year.

“It's a wonderful family storyline encompassing the beginning and end of whaling in Australia. The novel is based on fact wrapped with a mystical story.”

Van Mil said Australian actor Simon Baker, from the hit television series *The Mentalist*, had bought the rights to Winton's novel *Breath* and a television series was about to go to air based on Winton's epic novel *Cloudstreet*.

“However, *Shallows* fits in well with my interest in whale conser-

vation,” he said. “It's a wonderful family storyline encompassing the beginning and end of whaling in Australia.”

“The novel is based on fact wrapped around with a beautifully mystical story.”

Shallows, which won the Miles Franklin Award in 1984, centres on the battle between conservationists and whalers and is set in Western Australia in the 1830s and 1970s.

Van Mil has made a number of wildlife documentaries and says he plans to extend (with Winton's approval) the book's narrative to include current conservation efforts by anti-whaling groups like Sea Shepherd.

Van Mil, a former veterinary surgeon on the lower North Shore, met Mel Gibson when the actor narrated Van Mil's documentary *The Last Trimate*.