

An Oral History
of the Tasmanian
Seafood Industry



VOLUME 2
SOUTH

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ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book was compiled by the Tasmanian Seafood Industry using information collected during interviews conducted as part of the TSIC project “Oral history of the Tasmanian seafood industry” and other available online and shared resources.

The content of this book focussed on stories and information relevant to the greater Hobart region, and south, including Storm Bay and the D’Entrecasteaux Channel. Some stories may be from other regions, however, they provide context in the Oral History story telling of this book.

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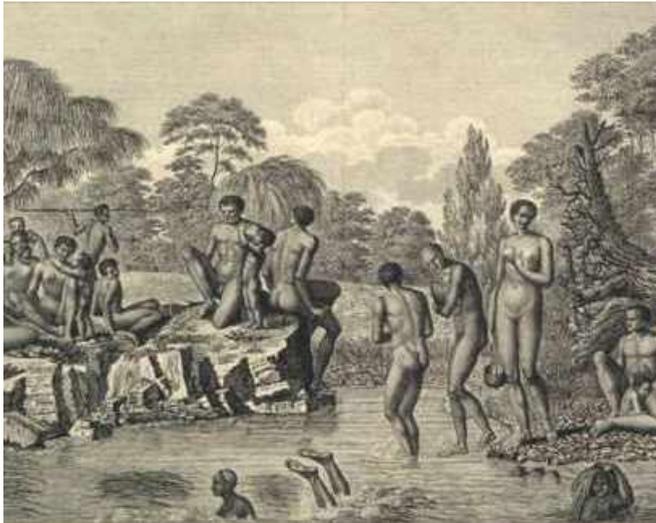
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1 | Indigenous Culture

The Aboriginal Tasmanians (Tasmanian: Palawa) first arrived in Tasmania (then a peninsula of Australia) around 40,000 years ago. The Tasmanian Aboriginal population was cut off from the Australian mainland by rising sea levels c. 6,000 BC. They were entirely isolated from the rest of the human race for 8,000 years until British contact and then colonisation in 1803.

Shellfish (oysters) and crustaceans (crayfish) were an important dietary item of the Aboriginal population, and the task of collecting seafood was reserved for women.

Early explorers noted the skill and ease in which Aboriginal women dived for and collected crayfish from shallow waters.



A depiction of Aboriginal life at time of colonisation

Bryan Denny is a modern day, proud indigenous commercial fisher who has not lost sight of his ancestor's respect for and reliance on the sea.

'I've always been proud of my indigenous heritage. My ancestors actually farmed the ocean. There's middens around the west coast that are 50 metres high, they look just like sand dunes from a distance'.

'Sea Country was a prime source of food for indigenous mobs 1000's of years ago and they looked after it for 40 odd thousand years'.

I actually look at myself as one of those indigenous custodians of Sea Country. I encourage everyone to take a bit of care and responsibility, and actually look after the fish, put the undersized ones back on the bottom properly and treat them with care'.

'To me it is not a financial thing, it's because I love being on and under the water'.



Bryan Denny, indigenous commercial abalone and commercial dive fisher

2 | Early European explorers and British Colonisation of Hobart

There are many written accounts of early European explorers conducting fishing activities within Tasmanian waters.

In January 1793, whilst anchored in Recherche Bay in far Southern Tasmania, Joseph Raoul, who was quartermaster of one of the two ships under French explorer Antoine Raymond Joseph de Bruni d'Entrecasteaux's command, provided an informative account of the rock lobster populations on hard rocky reefs.

'At one place about a hundred rock lobsters were taken by means of a kind of net made up of three circles and some rods, the whole thing being in the form of a barrel. The fish entered the two ends, and by this method they could be captured and later removed'.

In the next passage, Raoul describes the abundance of rock lobsters.

'We set baited lines to take other kinds of fish, as many as twenty and sometimes more of the larger quantity that are bottom dwellers; but they are found only near a rocky bottom and associated with or among the large seaweed which a part of these bays are filled. From the moment our fishermen began to catch these rock lobsters with their lines, they had no chance of catching all other species of fish, for they hadn't time to take the bait'.



Bruni D'Entrecasteaux's exploration vessels the Recherche and Esperance.

During the d'Entrecasteaux's five weeks on anchor in the Recherche Bay area, the northern extensions of Storm Bay were explored, with the western extension found to be a mouth of a river which received the name Rivière du Nord. It was renamed the Derwent River a few months later by the next visitor to the area, Captain John Hayes in the ships Duke of Clarence and Duchess.

The first European settlement in Tasmania began in 1803 as a military camp at Risdon Cove on the Eastern shores of the Derwent River, amid British concerns over the presence of French explorers.

3 | Reverend Robert Knopwood's diaries

As chaplain in the navy, Robert Knopwood was appointed to Colonel Collin's expedition which, after failure of the Port Phillip settlement, landed on the site of Hobart on 19 February 1804. Upon arrival, Captain Collins moved the camp at Risdon Cove to a better location at the present site of Hobart at Sullivans Cove. The city was initially known as Hobart Town or Hobarton, and was named after Lord Hobart, the British secretary of state for war and the colonies.

Reverend Knopwood's diaries from 1805 – 1808 provide descriptions of his early subsistence or recreational fishing pursuits in the Derwent River, many of which were from his cottage at Risdon Cove to the North of Hobart.

Saturday 13 March 1805

'am at home all the morn upon Business. This Morn I married Mr. Clark the Head Masoner to Mary Ginnins free people. At 2 pm I took my boat and went a Fishing and had a very great success'

Wednesday 24 March 1805

'am Early this Morn My Man Killed 3 Kangaroos – I went out afishing and caught some very large rock codd. I slept their again.

Saturday 11 May 1805

*'am at 11 I went down the river in my boat aFishing Caught a Parrot fish
Rock Cod and others returned home at 5 pm'.*

Saturday 18 May 1805

*'am at 12 I went afishing and caught 38 Rock Cod, some very large and 5
Perch and some Flat heads in all about 60 Fish and returned home at 5 pm to
dinner'.*

Tuesday 21 May 1805

*'at 11 I went out afishing and caught a very large Crayfish, the first that was
taken in this Colony which I gave to His Honor the Lt. Gov. on my return
home to dinner late in the eve rain and wind'.*

Wednesday 29 May 1805

*'am at home 2 pm I went out afishing and caught some very fine pirsch. Rock
Cod and a Crafish. Retuned late to dinner'.*

Friday 31 May 1805

*'am at 12 I went in my boat afishing and caught a Crayfish weight 6 lbs. came
home to dinner'.*

4| Hobart Docks in Pictures



The Hobart wharves c. 1869 showing a portion of Ferry Dock and Franklin Pier, with the paddle steamer P.S. Collation beside the wharf.



Hobart Wharves in 1903 from Waterman's Ferry looking towards the New Wharf. The first scallops would have been caught in the waters visible off the end of the wharf area.



Fishing boats entering Constitution Dock in 1954

What could be the first ever fish processing punt in Hobart docks,
1937





View of a fishing boat from Victoria dock 1972



View across Victoria Docks today

5 | Couta fishing with Ross Wisby

In the 1900s, barracouta, otherwise known as couta, were a staple diet for Tasmanians, and a key target species for a growing number of commercial fishers.

Ross Wisby recounted his early experience catching couta during the early 1950s.

‘I went couta’ing with dad on the Wenona. She was only a 32 foot wooden fishing boat. I would have been about six I reckon. That was the backbone of what we used to do. We used to go craying, but as soon as a couta poked his head up we thought bugger that craying. As dad and I used to say, crayfishing was just stinky old boats. They had no freezers, used to have their bait all salted down. As soon as you went near them they just stunk’.

The traditional method for catching couta was to use a long fishing pole, however, this method was replaced by a handline.

‘I never had poles, just lining. Dad used to [use poles to catch couta]. Many a time I’ve been fishing with him and when I first started they did use the poles. You’d be sitting down for’ard cooking breakfast or something. Next thing a couta would come down and land in the frypan. Scales everywhere’.

‘The first year I went fishing by myself, I bought the [fishing vessel] Kalua and dad had the Spring Bay, and between us from February to half way through May we caught 6,000 dozen couta. And the only reason we slowed down then was that [the processing factory] Safcol used to have a couple of days a week off. 6,000 dozen all by hand. I think they were worth \$2 a dozen, a lot of money in those days’.

Ross's wife Susan sold the couta at the dock in Hobart and got enough money to buy their first block of land.

‘The Kalua was 28 foot. [One trip] there was myself and my brother Mark, we were down at Partridge Island [in the southern D’Entrecasteaux Channel] and Dad was in the Spring Bay. We laid all our couta we caught in the morning... I think it was about 90 dozen. And dad took them up. By the time he got back we had another load, which made it up to 152 dozen that Mark and I had caught for the day, just off Partridge Island’.

Ross also recalled the demise of the couta fishery.‘

The couta stopped biting. They blamed the Russian trawlers with their sonar and all that sort of thing. But just a cycle I guess. Then Safcol went out of canning them, so there wasn't a market.’



Couta 1929 Fowler - CSIRO



Unloading Coua early 1945s



6 | Scallop Fishing

In the early parts of the twentieth century scalloping was undertaken from rowing or sailing boats and by using small dredges in the vicinity of the Hobart Docks, Rose Bay and as far north as New Town Bay.

By 1905 the internal combustion engine allowed the full-scale exploitation of scallop resources, and stocks in the Derwent were dwindling. This resulted in the Commissioner of Fisheries, Mr P Seager imposing the first fisheries closure in 1908, when scalloping in the Derwent was ‘discontinued to allow beds to recuperate’.

By the early 1920s the few boats that were scalloping moved into the upper D’Entrecasteaux Channel and by the 1950s, the fleet had grown.

In an interview with Ross Wisby, he recalled his grandfather’s stories of what could only be the origins of the Tasmanian scallop fishery.

‘My grandfather started scalloping, he was one of the first. And he told me where they first started was up under Parliament House in Hobart. They caught them all down through the Channel. I don’t know, there was up to 100 boats in the channel.’

‘When I first started I used to go with dad as a kid and there were just boats everywhere. Well then, you’d just get 30 or 40 bags a day and go in every day and back out the next morning.

‘There used to be caravans parked all up and down Kettering Road. And the splitters, they used to come every year for two or three months. All the jetties had little shops on them, selling the scallops’.

Jim Bridge and his family spent a lifetime in the seafood industry, and has been involved in many fisheries from barracouta to crayfish and scale fish to scallops. He recalled the expansion of the scallop fishery in the D’Entrecasteaux Channel.

‘We went scalloping in 1953, when scallops seemed to be getting more and more plentiful in the D’Entrecasteaux Channel. Each year they seemed to be continuing to increase in numbers with the lip dredging. Many more boats came into the industry from as far north as Triabunna till it was up to about 80 or 90 boats operating in the winter months in the D’Entrecasteaux Channel and all doing very well.’

‘Then in about 1958 or ’59 a sputnik dredge, a dangerous sort of a dredge, was introduced from overseas and this had a pressure plate on the top of it and a lip on it with three inch steel teeth that was adjustable up or down between sledge runners. Steel sledge runners, like the blade of a plane that could be adjusted to cut into the sand and the surface of the bottom. Boats had to get twice as much power to tow them in the D’Entrecasteaux Channel and... in about two and a half years the population of scallops was almost wiped out.’







7 | Rock Lobster

Today, rock lobster, or crayfish as they are known in Tasmania, can fetch very high beach prices, with individual lobsters selling for in excess of \$100 per kg at certain times of the year. But crayfish have not always been a delicacy.

In his document, *The development and management of the Tasmanian spiny rock lobster fishery 1803 – 1985*, well known fisheries historian Anthony (Tony) Harrison says '[During the] late 1800's an average sized crayfish was worth 2 cents to the fisherman and it was common for them to be used as bait to catch striped trumpeter'.

Reflecting on the rock lobster fishery in the late 1940s early 1950's, Arthur 'Dood' Pike recollected 'we got a very low price for them, 5 pence a pound. This would equate to about 12 cents a kilogram at today's rate'.

Crayfishers largely rely on traditional hand-woven wooden craypots, however, some steel and mesh pots are also used in the modern fishery.

Before 1926, the traditional tool for catching rock lobster was the hoop net, or cray ring as it was known locally. Cray pots were first used in Tasmanian waters around 1880, but the local fishers quickly stopped using them, believing they 'depleted crayfish beds'.

Victorian fishermen reintroduced craypots in Tasmanian waters around 1902. Fisheries regulators immediately banned their use. However, some Victorian and local fishers continued to illegally use cane pots. This created significant angst amongst local fishers.

In response, police actively sought out illegal ‘cray-potters’, however, Tony Harrison describes two incidents that sparked considerable debate:

- While investigating the illegal use of craypots near Binalong Bay in NE Tasmania, police shot and killed the skipper of the Myrtle Burgess. There was considerable public sympathy for the Burgess family.
- Shortly after, in an attempt to apprehend the skipper of the cray vessel Dauntless for illegally potting off St Helens Point [also in the NE], shots were fired. The police sergeant Tom Challenger was subsequently injured when thrown off the boat and into a dinghy tied alongside the vessel.

The debate culminated in several Government commissioned reports, which ultimately led to the legalisation of craypots in Tasmanian waters in 1926. Around the same time, further regulation decreased the legal length of crayfish by 0.25 inch (6.35mm) to 4.5 inches (115mm) along the carapace; and prohibited the sale of female crayfish carrying eggs.

Well known fishing identity, the late Bern Cuthbertson adds ‘They also bought in a 25 pot limit in 1926. And [the regulators] said if they were going to bring in pots, we will close the Derwent River, Norfolk Bay and the [D’Entrecasteaux] Channel to fishermen taking crays with pots.

Those who knew Bern would also know he was not shy of telling a fishing story or two. In an oral history interview conducted by TSIC, Bern talked about the establishment of a closed area in Storm Bay.

‘They closed from Dennes Point, it was Kelly’s Point once, that whole area from there down to Cape Queen Elizabeth. Was closed to the take of any sort of fish in that area. Only out to the sand’.

‘Anyway, they decided to open it. And by that time I had the vessel called the Flying Scud, I was catching crayfish in a big way. She was 78 feet long and she was an old steam tug. Had a Gardner diesel in it, steam had been taken out. We were down Recherche [Bay] waiting to get around [the West Coast]. The weather was bad and we heard it on the radio that [Cape Queen to Dennes Point] was going to be opened the next day. So we got underway and came up here. I think we only had 3 shots with 40 pots and we got 70 score, 24 to the score don’t forget’.

Bern went on to describe the rock lobster fishing technique of the day, which consisted of a number of pots connected to one long line and one surface buoy. ‘We had long lines then, terrible problem with the kelp [tangling around the lines and pots]. And in some clear places we had them coming up with jockeys [crayfish on the outside] all over them and it was a real eye opener to me’. ‘There is no records of [the closure] nowhere. When Tony Harrison was [Director of Fisheries Research] he went through [all the records]. And there are no records of it. I still think they reckon I don’t know what I am talking about. Fortunately Dennis McQueen he doesn’t remember it too well, but he was there with his father. The only other one that would be around then was Robin Sward. He just remembers it. He was only a kid at school. All the others are dead and gone. To think there are no records of it’.

Today’s rock lobster fishery is a new generation of equipment, and a new generation of people, as explained by local Hobart fisher Chris Parker. ‘Technology today has made it so much easier, the recording of information [on plotters]. People only have to sail through your gear now and they put it in their plotter. I just wonder what’s going to happen with some of these new fellas, if they ever lose power and they lose their marks and they lose all that, because they don’t have the practical knowledge of where to go. Because they haven’t been, they haven’t had that practical experience. Technology’s good, don’t you worry about it. But if you haven’t got the basis which it’s all built upon, which is practical experience in the first place, you know? Technology will only get you so far, yeah’.





7 | Abalone

Today, abalone is considered a widely desirable, high quality food. This is vastly different from the 1960s, where half a kilo would cost only 5 cents. Ivan Cleaver recalled working in Sandy Bay, Hobart, but still fishing part time. He used to snorkel for abalone in various locations around greater Hobart and on the SE Coast, especially around Hellfire Bluff.

‘We used to sell the meat not the shells. Snorkel diving first... The abs used to be that thick that you used to just hop over in the water and of course it was very narrow bottom. And you’d have to start flicking them off to make parking space so you could get your knife under them. They’d go right through into the sand. Every rock. We’d bring back probably 50 – 60 kg, just meats. We’d have little piles of shells along the shore’.

Ken Petith started abalone diving in these early days, when equipment was primitive and the fishery was uncontrolled and unorganised.

‘Initially there was so little money in it for us that we dived without compressed air, using snorkels, but abalone was so prolific that there was no problem in earning a living doing it that way’.



Safcol abalone processing

By 1963, people were starting to use compressed air to dive for abalone. Greg Woodham recalled the early technology, or lack of.

‘My father and my brothers were early pioneers in the abalone fishery. My father built his first air compressor. I remember that a high-pressure diving hose wasn’t a thing then, so they started off using a gardening hose. So, it was a very dodgy outfit in the early days’.

Ken Petith also recalled early days diving on compressed air.

‘We started using compressors on the surface and hoses and the amount of difficulties involved in the hoses that were available. We were buying hose from CIG that sank, tangled up in weed and we had to put little buoys on it so it would float. The compressors were converted air paint spraying compressors and not entirely reliable’.

‘The boats we dived from were whatever we could beg, borrow or steal from relatives or from fishermen who weren’t using them and very poor for the job. Like an 18 foot wooden cray dinghy with a 5 horse power petrol simplex motor in it. Doesn’t really hold very many people or cart very many abalone’.

‘We started before 8.00am in the morning and we were still in the water at 8.30pm that night. Bern [Cuthbertson] would go round in a dinghy and pick up abalone, bags of abalone in ex fertilizer, hessian fertilizer bags they were. And he’d pick the bags up out of a truck inner tube floating on the surface with a net suspended from it. In the summer that was bearable and you were working so hard that you provided the heat and we certainly used to eat to make up for it. The amount of food consumed was something incredible you know. None of us got fat, we got thinner and thinner but certainly in later times with the introduction of dry suits and better constructed modern suits with their full bib and brace, that type of equipment has improved enormously and has made life far more comfortable.’ Bern Cuthbertson was involved with all aspects of the Tasmanian abalone industry, including the processing sector.

‘I built a cannery, a fish factory down at Port Esperance for a firm in Melbourne. We were the first ones to tail crays. I thought it was a terrible waste. And we canned scallops, couta and salmon and abalone. We were the first ones to can abalone’.

David Fehre was also involved in the early days of the abalone industry's expansion. He recounts that in 1972, Planet Fisheries were bought out by the Victorian Canning Company, whose primary interest was canning abalone.

'I had about 30 abalone divers working for me at that time. And we had a lot of abalone. I mean Bern [Cuthbertson] would come in with the [fishing vessel] Kathleen Del Mar and he'd have 10, 15, 20 tonne. And Max Marry would come in with perhaps 18 tonne. So we had abalone running out our ears'.

But compressed air and the long hard days of diving took its toll on many pioneer divers and stocks, as recalled by Greg Woodham.

'A typical life of an abalone diver when [I] first started was a 10-year period; they took too many risks and they damaged themselves and not many of them could sustain more than 10 years of that sort of activity. I mean, I've been fortunate, I've been able to do it for four decades.'

'All the virgin fishery is basically gone, so you're relying on an egg production, you know, from seven years past to date. That's the cycle that it takes to get through. So, that you're hoping that you're leaving enough egg production in throughout the fishery to take you through to the next seven years and cycling through. So, yeah, you're relying on a different set of ideologies now to take the fishery into the future and the focus of managing that fishery is much more focussed than what it has been in the past, to ensure that that happens'.

8 | Salmon in the Channel

Salmon farming in Tasmania began during the mid-1980s, and was prompted by a report from the Tasmanian Fisheries Development Authority, which detailed that a salmon farming industry could thrive in Tasmania. Following this, the first fertilised salmon eggs were purchased from New South Wales, which were originally imported in the 1960s from Nova Scotia, Canada. The eggs were destined for the Marine Research Laboratories in Taroona, and the late Trevor Dix was integral in the development of a salmon hatchery at the Taroona laboratories.

‘I had a vision then, primarily because I was a very keen angler in New Zealand, of getting [Atlantic] salmon here. And I knew there were salmon in a couple of the lakes in NSW and they had some in a hatchery in Gaden. I set about finding out about the salmon and ultimately bringing some eggs down to Tasmania. We had then converted the Taroona aquarium from an oyster hatchery into a salmon hatchery and the quarantine people insisted it be a recirculating system. It was a bit primitive but survival was pretty good. In fact, half way through the process a young Norwegian technical grower that was out here and I had to pull the plug on two tanks of salmon [because with the excellent] survival the system couldn’t cope. And we had the choice of having everything die or getting a smaller number through’.

Trevor also recalled the development of the first biofilters at the laboratories. 'In a recirculating system you have to have biofilters. They turn the nitrogen from ammonia through nitrites to nitrate, which isn't toxic, whereas the ammonia is. And I well remember the first biofilter we actually stocked with ping pong balls. [Well known salmon aquaculture identity] Pheroze Jungalwalla had the job of ordering the ping pong ball. It was a humungous number of ping pong balls. He rang the guy up in Sydney because he wanted x cartons of ping pong balls. Nothing happened. So about 3 weeks later I said to Pheroze "you better check up on the ping pong balls". He rang the guy again and [the man in Sydney] said "mate if you had a guy called Pheroze Jungalwalla ring you and want x thousand ping pong balls would you think it was real?" Mick Hortle was involved with the earliest sea trials for growing rainbow trout at Nubeena on the Tasman Peninsula. Mick joined the Taroona laboratory team running the salmon quarantine system at the hatchery in early 1985.

"We were very successful. More successful than anyone anticipated we would be in terms of getting eggs to survive through quarantine. In the end we successfully got 40 or 50 thousand fish through that first quarantine. From those initial 100,000 eggs. And we probably culled 40,000 fish. It far exceeded what anyone thought we would be able to achieve'.

'The first fish went to sea in May 1985, they went to Sykes Cove [in the D'Entrecasteaux Channel], 7 May 1985 I think the date was. We took some down there, and the rest went to an interim holding facility that we built at the Salmon Ponds at Plenty. All in freshwater. They were carried their through the winter until Saltas's first hatchery at Wayatinah had enough of a setup that they could actually take the fish from Plenty. In the spring of that year, fish also went to sea at Dover'.

This preliminary importation and research of salmon paved the way for the industry we know today, where Tassal, Huon Aquaculture and Petuna make up the most valuable seafood sector in Australia.

Darren Leary remembered the early operations of the salmon industry, contrasting them with the more modern industry we know today.

'We used to have compass bearings that we used to run from farm to farm, especially with the Huon River you used to get the night fog that used to come through, but as the farms grew and vessels became bigger then of course technology grew with it and radars became the norm, GPS became the norm' Navigation was not the only [thing] to have been revolutionised with technology, in its infancy the salmon industry was almost entirely manual labour.

'Everything we did was by hand. All the food we had [for the fish] we would carry out, they had hoppers in pens that we would have to pull back on draw cords to fill them up. Now, you know they've got these massive, great big barges that sit alongside with water feed pipes that just regulates the amount of food that goes into the farms and into the pens for growth rates, so it's changed so much. It's very interesting to see how technology has impacted on this.' It is interesting to think that the modern industry we know today was all made possible by the passing of one particular piece of legislation through the Tasmanian Upper House in the early 1980s. Trevor Dix recalled this time. 'The Upper House were debating the salmonid culture and that morning I rang Peter Hodgman and I said "Peter I understand there's a bit of controversy about this Bill. If you need me I will come in and talk to the upper house people. Peter [Hodgman] was leader at the time and I got a message that night that the Bill was pass by 1 [vote]. The salmon industry was almost scuttled at its conception'.

9 | Boat Building

Tasmania has a rich history of boat building, with the D'Entrecasteaux Channel being a hotspot for many new vessels. Some of the most well-known boat builders from the Channel region are Raymond Kemp, Ken Chadwick, Charles McKay, Malcom McKay, John Watson, Rob Crawthorn, Michael Burrows, Benson Edward, H.J. (Jack) Sward and Bert Morris.

The late Raymond (Ray) Kemp was a Master Shipwright, who worked primarily out of his Woodbridge slip. Ray has left behind a legacy of fishing vessels, many of which are still in operation to this day.

One vessel built by Ray Kemp is the Barralee. Built in 1966 as a cray fishing vessel, the boat is still used to this day by well-known fishing identity Chris Parker.

Another one of Ray Kemp's vessels is the Mater Cara, which has operated in a number of commercial fisheries, including the scallop fishery



Robin Sward bagging scallops
aboard the Mater Cara



“Mater Cara” at Ray Kemps

‘Mater Cara’ launching at Ray Kemp’s shipyard 1965

The Storm Bay

The Storm Bay was built for local fishermen, George Bridge in 1925. She is named after the source of the vast schools of Barracouta [couta] and the destination of most fishermen of the early 1900s when they set off each morning from Victoria Dock. She was designed by Alf Blore and built by Percy Coverdale at Battery Point, Tasmania. She is a 54 foot boat, with Blue Gum frames and a hull and decks planked with Huon Pine.

The Bridge family owned Storm Bay from 1925 until 1963. George's grandson Jim Bridge, followed in the family business and fished for 14 years aboard her during the 1940's and 50's.

"I went [full time fishing] in 1947, on the Storm Bay... She was gaff rigged with topsail, fishing took place while the boat drifted under a double reefed mainsail. The 'coutha jig or lure was a piece of white Huon Pine about 6' long, tapered with two big barbless hooks, attached to a linked wire chain, fastened to a 15 foot Sassafras sapling. With no refrigeration, 'Storm Bay' had a wet well made of 4' thick Huon pine'.

'At the time we weren't after crayfish and there was no barracouta in the depths of winter and we used to set gill nets out of a twelve foot dinghy off this 52 foot fishing boat Storm Bay. We used to fish as far up the East Coast as the Friendly Beaches down to the Actean Islands off Southport. We'd do trips of about ten to fourteen days. We'd keep the fish alive in a wet well on the big boat. The dinghy that we used to work the nets off had a wet well. We'd haul the nets, you'd remove the fish carefully from the net to save damaging them, put them in this wet well and then transfer them to the big boat's well until hopefully we had the big boat's well full and then we'd return to town. Then they'd be transferred again to a wet wellled punt in Victoria Dock. From there they'd be retailed to the public."





The Storm Bay



10 | Pacific oysters at Dover

In an interview with pioneer oyster farming Ian Cameron, the founder of the oyster business Cameron of Tasmania, the early days of the modern oyster industry were recalled.

'I firsts got involved in about '74. Dennis Wivell was the only one that was catching spat, up in the Tamar. That was all stick and rack. And of course that failed. So the industry was just getting started, I think it was about 7 or 8 people involved at the time, but no spat. What are we going to do? Where are we going to go? And that went on for a couple a years before we decided we'd get involved in the industry seriously with a hatchery.'

'We did a lot of work in the Tamar, smashing up oysters, trying to get the bloody things to spawn. Which was quite futile at the time. But we didn't know. That was coordinated by Trevor Dix who was Chief for Fisheries Research at the time at Taroona. And Trevor was very much involved and wanted to see the industry go, and he in fact put an awful lot of time into it.

Ian also called early attempts at using long-lines to grow oysters at Dover.

'Harry Shaw [from Sydney] was a mate of mine. Harry was a great enthusiast and probably was the first to look at [oyster] long lines in Australia. He'd looked at oyster growing in Japan and America and was really fascinated by what was going on in... the longline culture. He got involved at Dover in the original [marine farming] lease at Dover. Well he tried to grow oysters there and it wasn't doing any good, so he got involved with mussels.'

'And he came to me and said "Ian I've got these longlines down there are you interested in being involved? I don't know what we're doing, it won't work" I said "yeah we'll have a look". So we took the old barge down and I took my private boat down and we tried to pull these bloody lines and I dunno how many tonnes and tonnes of mussels we got off the bloody things. Which was something that he hadn't expected, so of course then he decided he'd do a bit more with them.'

Ian also talked about technological advancements in oyster culture, as well as the early sales of oysters into the market.

‘We were involved in the original design for trays, oyster trays, and all that sort of thing. That was the original [technology]. Then it became baskets and so forth. Then they were modified by experts rather than us. But a lot of the concepts were ours.’

‘Initially there was no [environmental or food safety] monitoring. There was none in the early days at all. When we were working at Boomer [Bay at Dunalley] and the [oysters] used to go through Margate. They bought the product; that was their worry. And if they didn’t think it was up to scratch they wouldn’t buy it. They did their own tests and if it had red tide they’d reject it’. ‘We tolerated all this no matter what the Safcol [factory at Margate] said. They were really the only people handling it, apart from we used to send a bit into Frank Kennedy at a stall in the Melbourne market’.

Today, the Shellfish Market Access Program (ShellMAP) ensures food safety and market access meet international standards for sale and human consumption.

