During 1989 and 1990, Jack Darcey, an oral historian, travelled over 26,800 kilometres around Australia to interview a cross-section of men and women involved in various aspects of the fishing industry.

These memoirs contain valuable and often colourful insights into the development of the industry.

The following people from the State of South Australia tell their stories here.

Bob **Britcher**

Margaret **Buick**

Domenic **Caputo**

Lionel **Carrison**

Giovanni **de Giglio**

Dave **Evans**

Irven **Feast**

Ross **Haldane**

Milton **Hall**

Tom **Holder**

Greg **Howard**

Morrie **Hurrell**

Gunnar **Jensen**

Michael **Koch**

Robert **Lewis**

Ron **Ollrich**

A M **Olsen**

Graham **Rumbelow**

Barry **Schultz** Ben

Simms Dulcie

Smith David

Stanhope

Evelyn **Wallace-Carter**

Neil **Williams**

Contents

Verbatim transcript of an interview with BOB BRITCHER

INTRODUCTION

[first few words not recorded] .... an interview with Mr Bob Britcher of Port Lincoln, South Australia. The interview was conducted by Jack Darcey for Murdoch University's oral history of the Australian fishing industry at Mr Britcher's home on the 19th January, 1990.

Mr Britcher is part-owner and operator of the prawn trawler Nenad working in Spencer's Gulf out of Port Lincoln. Mr Britcher worked as a deckhand and abalone diver before becoming the skipper of the vessel he was eventually to own in partnership. As he relates on the tape, the prawn fishery has been good to him but it is also the case that he recognises its value and adopts a responsible attitude to the industry. He plays an active part in its management.

His account as herein recorded gives a clear understanding of the operation of prawning, its techniques and methods and the marketing and management as well as some of the controversies and problems that attend it. Mr Britcher's valuable contribution to this history is very much appreciated.

There are two sides of one tape and the interview starts at 022 on the revolution counter.

TAPE 1 SIDE A

JD Bob, would you record your full name and date and place of birth please.

BRITCHER My name is Robert Alan Britcher. I'm aged 43 years old and I was born in Adelaide on the 4th July, 1946 at Medindie

JD Thank you. Were you from a fishing background?

BRITCHER No. No fishing at all in our family at all.

JD Until you came into it?

BRITCHER Till I came into it, yeah. My father was a mechanic, motor mechanic.

JD How did it come about then that you came into fishing?

BRITCHER Oh years and years ago when I was about to leave school I wanted to join the Navy and coming from a fairly religious background, the Navy was no place for their son so in the end I ended up being a fitter and turner. So then when I came to Lincoln I was transferred from Adelaide to Crystal Brook in an apprenticeship [and] did the last six months in Port Lincoln. Then when I came to Lincoln and saw all these fishing boats all around the place, I thought, "This is the place where I want to be" and I thought it was quite an exciting life, seeing all these guys come in, big brawny guys come in you know with tuna up to the gunwhales; plenty of money in their pockets and it was quite an exciting life.

So when I finished my apprenticeship I think I lasted about two weeks and snatched it and got a job on a boat called the **Almonter** which was on the slip at the time. [I] Just went down and asked the guy; never knew anything about it at all; never been to sea in my life before. So the owner of the boat was a guy by the name of Mike Boobras, who in the olden days was called "the Salmon King". [a] Very, very good fisherman. Of course I didn't know straight away I'd hit one of the best boats in the fleet.

JD That was a tuna boat?

BRITCHER Yeah tuna and salmon. So then next thing he said to me, "Can you cook"? and I said, "Course I can cook" [laughs] so my first trip was a salmon trip out to a place called Sir Joseph Banks which is a group of islands about 30 mile from Lincoln. They soon found out I wasn't very good at cooking [laughs] so I lasted [at] cooking for about two or three weeks. He saw that I was quite good mechanically because of my father being a mechanic and that and I was a fitter and turner. So [I] ended up getting the job as basically offsider to the engineer plus the deckie.

So then I was with that boat for something like four years. Off and on I spent two years there. Then left there and went down [to] Kangaroo Island abalone diving [with] some of the ab boys and I was down there for six months. Then [I] came back to Lincoln and got a job then back on the **Almonter** again. So I spent four years with the **Almonter** and left the Almonter and went on a boat called the **Corina Gee** which was owned by a fishing family here, the Gibsons, Anthony and Charlie Gibson and the old man. So that was a 94 footer; quite a big boat. I already had my engineer's ticket to go on there as an engineer so I went on that boat there for another three years. Then Deanco Lukin was going to buy the boat off the Gibsons and not liking Deanco very well as far as how he treated his crew. Because I'd been in good company before I thought, "No, I'm not gonna work for Deanco" so I left the boat and went back to my trade for three months. Well, going back to the trade after being on the, I just felt that I was just a fish out of water.

So I lasted about three or four months there and I guy came up to me by the name of Ross Edwards and said, "How'd you like to skipper my boat"? I hadn't had a skipper's ticket; I had [an] engineer's ticket but I had quite a few years, seven years, at sea. Of course they promise you the world and you take it with a pinch of salt but he invited me up to his house and said, "Well, you can skipper my boat" and do this and do that. Within three months I had my skipper's ticket; sat for it and I was skippering the boat.

So I skippered that prawn boat the **Nenad**. That's how I first got into prawn fishing and I skippered that boat for four years and that was from 1974. I basically started fishing [in] '68 and then worked seven years tuna fishing and in 1974 ended up prawning. Never done prawning before in my life but basically knew how to net mend and all that which was part of the stipulation that you got a job on a boat [that] you knew especially net mending. So anyway got a job with Ross Edwards and the skipper on that boat was a bloke by the name of Jock Montgomery and I worked under Jock

there for about six months I think it was and then ended up skippering the boat. I skippered the boat from 1974 to 1979 and there were four partners in two boats and **Nenad** which I was skippering and a boat called the **Pacific Queen**.

So eventually they were wanting to sell one boat because two of the partners wanted out, mainly because of their family commitments and they were away from home all the time. In those days prawning was a 365 day a year job. You worked all year round. You come home when you felt like it. You come home when the moon or all the catches were down or the weather was too rough. So after skippering it for four or five years, four years, ended up it came up for sale and I couldn't go it alone 'cause they wanted something like $400,000.00 for the boat. So the guy who was on the **Pacific Queen** which is a sister boat that they owned.... We got our heads together and decided that we would try and go it together. So eventually after a lot of hassles with banks and solicitors and all that and patience from the people who owned it and were looking after us, we eventually got the boat in 1979 and my partner Martel Rickoff and myself have now owned the boat ten years.

JD And that's still the boat you have?

BRITCHER Yeah. Still the boat we have. It's been very good to us. So I've been in partnership now ten years with Martel and we both skipper it off and on. We're always on the boat but the fishing has changed. Since 1979 fishing became not a gentleman's game, but [it] became more... what's the word.... realistic that we didn't go out in rough weather. We were starting to manage it.... '79 was basically the year they started bringing management. It was the first year they brought in winter closure which was July, August, September, October and we'd start fishing late October, November, December then January, February, March, April May and June.

Then the next year in about '80 they started bringing in moon closures where we worked up to fifteen, sixteen days a month and we knocked off on the full moon. From then on the thing's progressed down now to something like 80 days a year. We're still basically turning over the same amount of money. The prices have gone up. The catches are down but the prices have held up, the monetary side, the same so it's looking quite good. People say, "Well gee, you don't work any more"; but when you turn around and look at the tuna industry and look at our industry, our industry is still very viable.

With a good management.... I'm on the management committee myself. I've been on it three years. I'm the liaison officer at sea who has contact with the Fisheries Department on matters of fishing. So I've been quite involved with the fishing and I believe that we've got one of the best fisheries in the world as far as management and if we look after it we've got a good future.

JD How many boats in your particular fishery, Bob?

BRITCHER 39 boats in this fishery. There's' two boats up the west coast but we don't count them in our Spencer Gulf fishery. There's 39 license holders. I'd say 20% would be owner/operator. The others have skippers on them and my partner and me have always owner/operated our own boat so we have a good knowledge of what's going on. [we're] Always at sea so we can see it first hand. We're only just lately just starting to take a little bit of time off before Christmas, taking month about but up until then we were both very heavily involved in it.

JD Do you fish all over the Gulf?

BRITCHER We're allowed to fish from.... The nursery area is basically from north of Whyalla, Port Pirie and then south of that right down to what they call Wedge Island and the Groups [unclear] Island, that's our area. There are certain nursery areas and that that we're not allowed to fish but basically we have the whole area of Spencer Gulf.

JD Bob, could you tell us a bit more about your boat that you've had now for, someone who's been skippering and owning [it] for ten years?

BRITCHER Right. The vessel we've got now is called **Nenad**. The name originally came from the guy who built the boat called Tony Franoff and his eldest son was called Nenad Franoff so hence he named it after his eldest son. A lot of people [who] are Yugoslavs automatically know straight away that it must have been owned by a Yugoslav, hence the name. People think, "Oh it's a funny name for a boat" but you can't change names on boats, it's superstitious.

So it's 65 foot long. It's [of] wooden construction. It was built by Tony Franoff for himself so it was built of very good construction. She's a very solid boat. It's a carbol[?] hull. It's got a V12 GM Detroit motor in it which is 360 horsepower; six cylinder Perkins as an auxiliary and we're classed as what they call a wet boat which means we don't process on board. We have cold brine tanks and as soon as we catch the fish we drop them into this cold brine which is three or four degrees below zero and we unload every three days. So that's the problem we have with being a wet boat against a processing boat where we have to go in every three days and unload. It has it's advantages and disadvantages.

Being a wet boat you could get caught with somebody only offering you X amount of dollars for your fish, where if you've got a frozen product, you can hold back for a better buyer where we have to quit our fish on that day; but fortunately we've been selling to a company here in Lincoln called Australian Bight Fisheries which, over the last ten years, we've been a partner with. Up until, oh two years ago, we decided to go our own way but it's made no difference. We still sell all our fish there. We're just basically an independent seller now. Our fish are unloaded every three days and usually a truck will come around to Wallaroo, Cow or Whyalla and the fish is then brought down to Lincoln and processed here in Lincoln.

JD Are they the ports you put into to....

BRITCHER Yeah. We try and pick a port which is convenient for the truck and at the same time closest to the port of processing. If they've gotta go all the way around to Wallaroo, it's an extra 200 mile from Cow which our fish I think are gonna get knocked around coming home so we try and chose the best port we can but sometimes it's unavoidable. You just have to go for the furtherest port.

JD Do you stay at sea for the three days then?

BRITCHER What actually happens is we go out for about fifteen days a month, not every month, but the fishing months that we do fish we go out for approximately fifteen days which is the best part of the dark of the moon. So we go from the last quarter to the first quarter counting in the dark of the moon. So every three days we unload. We'll trawl at night time. We start usually around about 8.00 o'clock at night and we'll trawl from 8.00 o'clock at night till 6.00 o'clock in the morning. [it] Depends if it's daylight savings, it comes back one hour or forward. So we trawl all night and then when we've finished trawling all night we then clear our gear, clean it up, have

breakfast and then into bed and we're usually in bed from about 10.00 o'clock in the morning and sleep through to about 4.00.

Then every three days we come into port, unload and out again but we stay out to sea all the time. Because of our fishing period now down to something like 80 days a year, it's got to the point now we just can't afford to lose one day. If it is rough, you don't go into port. You basically just drop the anchor where you are, ride it out and if you can get out some time during the night, you'll go.

JD Do you anchor during the day or do you cruise?

BRITCHER Oh we anchor. Our deepest water up there is something like 23 fathoms. That's the deepest part in the Gulf, 23 to 24 fathoms. We usually head in somewhere round about five or six mile in closer to shore. Depends where we are. Sometimes we're only three or four mile off shore. Other times we're twenty odd mile but we usually try and find somewhere where we can get a little bit of comfort and sleep. Our boat is wooden so we don't get the heat. We have air conditioning [and] television. It's quite a modern boat. All the cooking facilities; we can sleep up to seven people on board. It's all the mod cons of home: refrigeration, air conditioning, deep freeze. It's all 240 power. So there's no difference really than home except you're in a lot smaller caravan, you know. You're in a smaller area.

We've had our crew ever since we bought the boat in '79. The only crews that have left us are guys that have gone from our boat to skipper other boats. They've never left because they didn't like the job. We've looked after them pretty good. The guy's we've got on board now.... We've had one for eight years and the other one for about seven. The only way you'd get their jobs is if either they get pensioned off or they die [laughs]. It pays in the long run. We have a very good relationship with our guys. It's a mutual understanding and if we need them they know the urgency that we need them. If we don't need them, we don't call them and they can do their own thing. We get an excellent rapport with them.

JD Do they work only the 80 days that are allowed then?

BRITCHER We work 80 days and then we have somewhere around about a month for maintenance out of the year. Might even run into six weeks; depends on what jobs we're going to do. Usually when we finish fishing we'll have two or three days off and then we'll get back to the boat and clean the boat up. If there's nothing to do, especially in our winter period, we'll tie the boat up. We have a beautiful marina here in Lincoln We tie the boat up and the engineer's a type of guy that will go down every day for four hours and just potter around. He just loves pottering around. So when you say, do they do much maintenance, this guy here, when he gets sick of being home he comes down and does a bit of work on the boat. When we go back fishing you know that the boat is in exactly A1 condition. You don't have to go and check him out or nothing. They're excellent like that.

JD They would get quite a lot of free time, wouldn't they?

BRITCHER Oh yeah. They'd have somewhere around four months a year at least where they'd have free time.

JD Do they take other employment?

BRITCHER Ah.... One guy, our cook come deckhand come anything, he's a guy of around 40 years old, 42 years old and he'll go out to one of the factories out here and

do a bit of slaughtering, you know with the fish; filleting and things like that. The other guy, he's a little bit older and he's sort of a bit more down the track. He just potters around; does a bit of work on the boat, bit of work at home. He's got a caravan. He heads off mostly two or three months a year and has a good holiday touring Australia. The other one's got a family to support too where the older guy, his family is basically grown up.

JD They're all on a share, aren't they?

BRITCHER Yeah. We pay our guys on a share basis; a percentage of the gross turnover. It works out to quite a good wage for 80 days.

JD Is the labour in any way unionised?

BRITCHER No. We have no unions at the moment. It's something we do dread. There are some guys that've actually ripped their crews off and we could stick our necks out to get unionism in here but at the moment we'd be about one of the only places in Australia [which] hasn't got a union in it - thank goodness. If it ever came to that I think a lot of the people would just put their families on. It's an industry that if the union ever got into it, it would absolutely cripple our industry. Say that the unions weren't happy with your boat, they could black ban you on fuel or refuse to unload you. In a situation like we are [with] wet fish, what do we do? We've lost our catch. So we have a good rapport with most of the fishermen. Most of them pull their weight and we have no problems.

JD Perhaps you could put me in the picture as to.... There must be a certain amount of sorting at least on board?

BRITCHER Well what happens is, there's four guys in our boat. There's my partner, myself, an engineer and a cook. I chose that when I was skippering the boat for four years that when my partner came on board and joined us, that he would take over the skippering because I knew every single nut and bolt on the boat. So he basically does most of the skippering and I look after the deck but there's no basic, you know desk boss. I'm just down there just organising things so; the cook is a deckie too, the engineer is a deckie.

So what happens is that when we shoot our gear away at, say 8.00 o'clock at night, we have two nets, we called twin trawlers, and we have boards which are something like three by nine feet, two of them either side and they are lowered into the water with nets on like a big sausage or stocking. Soon as our boards hit the water the pressure of the water opens them up and we shoot them away to say 100 fathoms, depends on what depth you're in to what depth you put out and we'll trawl for 45, 50, 60 minutes. Depends on the area. We've done our areas, or we know our areas very well and we know basically what type of bottom we're going to get. So we'll trawl for say an hour and then when our gear comes up we empty it onto the table. It takes something like seven minutes to lift up, put the gear back on the bottom and trawl again.

So what we do, we check our first shot out. It might take a little bit longer than that because you go down and inspect the table and just see what size fish they are, the quantity. [if there is] A little bit of daylight, you take that in[to] consideration that the catch could be down a little bit because of the daylight 'cause prawns are basically allergic to light. So if it's a good shot you'll turn around or you listen to the radio, to your friends who you work with and they say, "Well I did a bit better" and that or, "I didn't do very good". It usually takes a couple of shots of a night to sort out where

you're actually heading. So you'll do an hour's shot. If it's clean you'll go back over that shot if it's good and you might extend it for ten minutes, so you go back for 70 minutes. So you stretch your shot from three miles to three point two, three point three mile long. If that's quite good and you're still getting the same catch rates, you might turn around and go for 80 minutes. So you stretch your shot out a little bit, or you might go north an extra short or south an extra shot, whichever way you're heading. It takes a couple of shots to basically get your ground to where you're actually fishing and if you're on the best spot.

A catch of something like 1000 pound (we always talk in pounds, I don't know why) but 1000, 1500, 2000 pound is a good night. Anything over 500 kilo is not a bad night. The guys will, when the stuff comes up on the table, there's three of us down there sorting so it takes us.... it depends on how clean it is, fifteen to twenty minutes to sort it. We sort them into baskets, wash them and we don't size them because they just go into these big bags that we keep the prawns in and the factory will do all our sorting for us. If we were a freezer boat it'd take longer than that and usually you have one more extra crew because of the workload.

With our gear fishing good and not [unclear], they've got something like half an hour every shot to sit down, watch TV, have a sleep if they want to. They're allowed to sleep during the night because we get a situation where we might have a shot, we rip a net so we could be up all night mending that net; or we could have some breakdown where if they stay up all night and don't get their sleep or a little bit of a sleep, they could be up all day doing maintenance. So there's no, "Well you're sleeping all night" business. They know their job. They know when they finish a job they can do whatever they like. One might go up in the wheel house for a while and relieve the skipper, or the engineer might go down and mess around down the engine room. With our crew, we don't have to tell them a thing. They know their job.

Sometimes I think we should have all been married to each other. We can nearly read each other's minds because we work together so closely. Well we have a good working relationship with our guys and as I say, we've had them eight, nine years and they knew which side their bread's buttered. So do we and we get on excellently.

JD Your trawl would be close to or even on the bottom, would it?

BRITCHER It's right on the bottom. See what happens is the net has what we call a foot line with a chain on it; something like a three/eight chain. That chain stretches from one board right around the bottom of the net to the other board which holds the net open. So that is stiring the bottom up the whole time. It's not wrecking the bottom because it tends to bounce a little bit but at the same time it's just enough to frighten the prawn to coming off the bottom.

JD Do they live in the sand?

BRITCHER Ah, they bury in the sand. As soon as the moon comes up, if it's a brighter moon, our catches drop off because they're burying in the sand. At certain times of the night when it is dark they'll come out of the sand feeding and things like that. That's when we get our good shots.

JD So if you were on a rocky bottom you'd do quite a lot of gear damage?

BRITCHER Yeah we know our areas pretty well. Depends on how many boats are actually concentrating on that one area to what damage we will do but we know what are sand and what are.... We've got places which we call the stones, so it speaks for

itself. We always pick up stones there. When we talk of stones, it's not a little pebble, it's something like four foot in diameter. In the olden days, when I say the olden days, when [the] prawning industry first started off, we used to catch these stones and dump them up on the bank; but what's happened over the years that we're starting to fish up the bank so now we're catching the stones again and then we go and drop them in shallower water.

There are certain areas that we'll go into that are a little bit new to us that we can do quite a bit of damage. So you've got to weight the pros and cons that if you wreck a net, you know, its $1000.00, $2000.00. Are you gonna catch enough fish to recuperate that loss? We tend to steer clear of any rough area. We're basically self-sufficient now so we don't have to sort of go chasing the big catches. It works out in the long run that we are better off. We haven't got the damage, we don't wreck our gear. You lose one set of chains which are stainless steel on our nets, there's something like $2000.00 so you lose that and there goes your profit for the night.

There are certain areas that we do get into a bit of rubbish but we've been fishing long enough now. We know nearly.... I look at the Gulf like as if there's no water in there at all. I know the bottom so well I reckon I could walk around there and tell you where the rocks are [laughs]. It's got that way that when you look at your sounder you tend to feel that you're standing on the bottom. That's how I imagine it.

JD Do you use sophisticated electronic stuff like Satnav and [unclear]?

BRITCHER Mmm.... It's starting to get into it now. They are getting into.... not Satnav I'm just trying to think of a name [of] this new equipment. It's a plotter that shows you the whole shape of the Gulf. I just can't think of it off hand, what the name of it is but up until now we're only getting something like four or five hours of printout on this.... I'll think of it in a minute what it's called.... printout until about 11.00 o'clock. Then that goes off but when the next satellite goes up we're supposed to get something like a 24 hour call which is basically Satnav and a few other things and it's pin-pointed and it shows you exactly where you go. Coloured sounders have come in. They give you a better definition. Our radars are better. We have a lot better radars but with these new fandangle equipment now you're basically.... you could nearly do away with your radar.

So they're getting more sophisticated. We don't know whether that's killing our industry or not because we can now go over exactly the same shot as we've just been over, where before it was a little bit of guess work. You just went off radar and that could be at two or three tenths. So we're getting so finely tuned now that we can nearly go right over the same shot every single time and there are other equipment that you can also plot other boats of their movements. You see a little bit of concentration happening in one area; you just look on your screen and you can see that so you'll mover over to it but it's a pretty cut throat game.

It's got to a situation now it's not how good at fishing you are, it's how smart you are because in the earlier days you could fish anywhere you like but what happens now is that we're given certain areas that we can fish in and certain areas we can't. During [a] certain time of the year the top end of the Gulf's open and [a] certain time of the year the bottom end of the Gulf's open and the top end's shut. So it's putting everybody into the one paddock and you're just looking for the greenest grass in that paddock. So the element of the best fisherman now has gone out the window. It's the best concentration you can put on that fish in that smaller area so you're looking all the time for the concentration of boats, where they're working. You'll get Joe Blow working alongside you three or four mile away. He'll come over and check you out and

next minute he picks up and goes back where he was and you think, "Well either he's done no good where I am or he's doing better where he was". So you go and check him out and if you come back to where you were [laughs].... You're for ever watching different boats so it's dog eat dog now. You're putting into a very small area.

I can remember one night there my partner, Martel, was listening on the radio and heard someone say "I'm gonna go and check Martel out" and so Martel called up a boat out wider which he knew this other guy that was talking was listening and said, "Is Joe Blow working out alongside you"? He said, "Oh yeah, he's just along side me now". "I heard he just got four pound a minute" so what happened is the boat that was gonna check us out straight away went out to him which put not only four mile but now ten mile between us so then it was too late for him to come and check us out.... [tape ran out at this point].

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

TAPE 1 SIDE B

JD Bob could we talk about markets for the product?

BRITCHER Our marketing side is basically all done by Australian Bight Fisheries. We've been with Australian Bight Fisheries for nearly ten years and we've found that they're the middle of the road market. They've been looking after us and we've looked after them so we've basically stayed in the one camp. We need somebody like that because we don't freeze on board. We're unloading every three days so we can't mess around with the back street boys. We've gotta have somebody that we can rely on when we get a good catch. So we've stuck to Australian Bight Fisheries and we sell 99% of our fish there; sometimes a little bit of home market.

Their market basically is all export. They export to mainly Japan, Spain, little bit to Europe now mainly because of the scares they've had in Russia with the nuclear fallout over there. They feel that Australia is still pretty well free of all that environment and additives in all these fish and that. So we're getting a good market into Europe. Since we've sold out of Bight and gone out on our own we've lost that market as far as the information we're getting from it so we just sell our fish to them and they do our marketing for us. Once they buy them off [us] they're their fish anyway.

Prior to Christmas our market mainly is home market. When I say home market, its [the] Australian market. We cook on board. We sell to them and they sell around Australia because of the demand. We've only got two months' fishing which is November, December and you can count something like twenty days, twenty, 24 days in an area. So then we're either getting a big glut of fish and this is where we can capitalise on our price. Our price is up on [unclear] $2.00 and we can do quite well out of it. This is where we need somebody like Bight that after Christmas when our market, home market, is now there then they've got an overseas market. So we sell our fish to them and they then sell them to Japan, America, Spain have quite a good [market] in Spain, South Africa. [there's] Been a bit of a problem there with South Africa with apartheid and all that. We had quite a good market there.

So 90% of all fish caught out of our Gulf is exported fish. It's known throughout the world, especially Australian Bight Fisheries, as one of the best quality controlled and quality fish in the world.

JD And prices are holding up quite well?

BRITCHER Yeah. We're quite happy with our prices. You hear of guys saying, "Well I got $3.00 better than you" but that was only on certain sized fish and when you work it out, the average, you've done pretty well and we haven't had to go to chase our market. We haven't had to ring up on the boat and see if we're gonna get our cheque. We sell it to one person. They've always been very, very reliable. We're not chasing money. We [unclear] on the boats so it's convenient for us that we don't have to go around [unclear] "I hope Joe Blow comes good with his cheque". We know that we've sold to somebody and we're gonna be getting our cheque within a month. So all those things add up that we're quite happy with our market and who we sell to.

JD It's an Australian company, is it that.... ?

BRITCHER Yeah. Australian Bight Fisheries was started off by a group of fishermen that was not very happy with the single marketing of SAFCOL. SAFCOL had the monopoly here. Raptus started a little bit and then twelve guys got together and started Australian Bight Fishermen['s] Society. It was a co-op until about five years ago and then it was turned into proprietary limited. We all became shareholders.

Up until two years ago there was twelve of us involved in the factory [with] something like six or seven suppliers. The other guys that had sold their boats had got out of the industry but still remained share[holders] in it. So we had a regrouping and we decided to get out of Bight and three of the fishermen still remained in, or two fishermen. The guy that was managing the place, Colin Freeman and a supplier from Western Australia decided then to take over our shares and pay us out. It got down to a four man group in the company which was better than twelve. We still found that since we got out of that nothing's really changed. We still sell there. We're quite happy; price is good and we've got no worries.

JD In your trawling operation, do you bring up much litter, ocean litter?

BRITCHER We did at one stage there but I think even the steamers that go up to Whyalla, Port Pirie, Port Beniath and all those places now are very environmentally conscious of what's going on. We used to get big drums of tar and stuff like this; steel that was thrown over the side or wire rope or something like that but we don't seem to get that much now. Now and then you pick up a little bit of rubbish. I remember two years ago I got a parachute. It was from an Army exercise up at El Alamein that got washed down the Gulf. We very rarely do any damage now through people dumping stuff in the sea.

We've got a system on our own boats now that we [are] all supplied with plastic litter bags heavy duty and we dump our own household rubbish off the boats into them and when we come into port put them into rubbish bins. So we're all getting very environmentally conscious of what's going on with our sea and what damage we can do.

JD Bob, could you talk about the problems facing your industry in the Gulf?

BRITCHER Our major problems are within ourselves, of our management; of line pushing; of guys fishing in illegal waters and stuff like that. That's internally.

Our other major problems are pollution in the water. We're getting boats coming up from overseas up to Port Beniath and all those places. They're going to put a petrochemical plant, they're talking, in the Gulf which would be absolutely disastrous if

any spilt came here. We've got Port Pirie which is the lead smeltering which could leach lead into the water. It's not a problem at the moment but it can be. We've got Whyalla shipyards with iron ore and stuff like that. So we've got to keep a very close eye on what's actually happening there. We're getting boats coming in now with this algae in their ballast. That can be a problem too. I think it's called red.... I'm not quite sure but it's an algae [which] gets into the water and can cause quite a few problems. It could wipe our stock out.

Our other problem is aquaculture. We tend to turn a blind eye to aquaculture: out of sight out of mind. It doesn't happen much in Australia. Overseas it's happening. We do have the upper hand because our fish are of good quality, good size, good taste, where in aquaculture it's a certain size, lacks taste and colour; but there are ways that they can change that within ours by putting additives into the water to change the taste and things like this. European people know that that's whats happening and they tend to sort of lean towards an Australian prawn that hasn't got any of those additives in it but we can't fool ourselves at the same time too that they are affecting our market. There's a few people who've tried it in Australia. Backteria's a big problem with aquaculture but it can take over but we still feel that we have a better quality fish. I was talking about it with [regard to] our own problems, we have guys that are skippering boats and guys that own boats so the guys that own boats always do the right thing as far as working to lines, working to areas and all this business.

The other problem we have is that guys that will work up to a line and go over a line. This is on our management side that we've got to try and sort out better management so that everybody's getting a fair go. It causes problems in our fleet that young kids that are skippering boats feel, "Oh well I can go over the line. The only thing I can lose is my job"; where the owner/operator, if he goes over the line, he loses his licence. That's an internal problem that we've got to try and sort out and try to get a happy medium amongst everybody that everybody's getting their fair share. Because it's being seasonal now, down to something like 80 days a year everybody wants their chop. Boats that are working the line are getting a bit more of their chop than what we are. They're taking the risk but at the same time it's a very hard thing to try and police. As I say, that's an internal problem and we're getting our management down pretty finely tuned.

Lines are a problem because you've got lines here there and on an imaginary line on the water, it's a very hard line to control but we're getting there. We feel we're doing the right thing. Lot of people think we should be working more days. Sometimes we should; sometimes we shouldn't. Up until prior to Christmas we maybe could have worked a few more days and capitalised on our market but at the same time we feel that we'll reap this benefit next year. Our crops will be there. What we haven't got now we'll get next year because we'll let them spawn. While we're not fishing now, it's mainly because of spawn and juvenile prawns.

So we feel we're doing the right thing there and looking at our tuna industry, we can say to ourselves at least we've got an industry for tomorrow, or we still have an industry where[as] the tuna guys don't even know whether they're gonna go to sea or not. So we're very fortunate that we have good management, good rapport with the Fisheries. We are an advisory to the Fisheries. They basically pull the punches but at the same time they will listen to us. So it's been a very good marriage between the Fisheries and the fisherman.

JD Could we get you to speculate really on what lies ahead in the prawning industry in the Gulf?

BRITCHER I think it's a very bright future. If nothing like a disaster happens, like say a petrochemical disaster or some spillage or something happening in the water, we have a very bright future. We are very well managed to the point of being sometimes over managed or over cautious but you can always guarantee that when you go back next year you're gonna come home with something; where in other industries you're not sure of that. Over the last ten years we've never had a bad year. We've had a quiet year and we've all been able to survive and we've had bumpy years but it's always been a good steady fisheries, well managed and a lot of common sense gone into it. We've gone into areas where there are small fish and within one hour we're out of that area. Just by word of mouth through the radio and it's paid off dividends that those fish when we've gone back to them have been twice the size and twice the value so we're only cutting our own throats if we go and catch the fish 'cause we got nothing for them.

JD Bob is there much movement in and out of the industry?

BRITCHER Very small. We've been trying to get another boat. Being in partnership for ten years we still get on well together but we're looking for our independence. So the last three years we've been looking around for a boat but boats are sold to families or into groups or something like this. So it's a very hard industry to get into.

When I first got into it in 1979 we paid $360,000.00 for the boat and that was an enormous price. People said, "You'll have your backs to the wall within twelve months"; but it's paid dividends for us and we're quite happy the way it's turned out. We were bringing in a buy-back system last year that didn't eventuate but the buy-back was going to be 1.2 for your licence, 1.2 million [dollars]. So that's our superannuation. So from $360,000.00 ten years ago to the licence being valued around about 1.2 million, it's been quite a good industry so it speaks for itself. That is, on the increase as far as our values concerned and we still have a good fisheries.

JD Is there political opposition to that buy-back or trade I suppose you could say in licences?

BRITCHER There has been. We've been always looking for transferability. If we got a buy-back system in, transferability went out the window for five years at least. Until the buy-back system had got onto its feet and was running, there was no way that we could transfer unless it was between father and son or family. So we've always been looking for that independence of having transferability. I'm for it myself. I feel that transferability is basically your superannuation; that when you've finished that you've got some item you can sell to some person and you've made a profit out of it.

It's like you having a corner shop that was run down and you've built it up to such a good shop that when you sell it you've made your profit on it. That's your reward and we feel that transferability is basically our reward for what we've put into the industry or taken out of too. So with the buy-back, it was thrown out the window. It's basically been shelved but we know that next time, if we do go into a buy-back, we'll go in it with our eyes open and find out exactly what's going on. We've exhausted every avenue and know exactly what we're up for if it doesn't come about.

JD Bob, we've covered a lot of ground. Is there anything else that you'd like to talk about?

BRITCHER No. I'm very happy with the industry. I can go back ten years and look back to what I was and look back to what I am now and I feel it's been very good to me. I got a little bit panicky in the first days but I can look back now and think that

the moves they made then and I didn't agree with have paid dividend[s] and now I can see it from both sides of the fence. There are guys that come in now into the industry and they've got a big debt over their shoulders. It's a little bit hard to sort of say to them, "Just be patient" but at the same time, if they are patient, they'll still have a good fisheries and their investment.... they'll be rewarded. So I'm very happy with the industry.

JD Obviously you are.

BRITCHER Yeah [laughs].

JD Thanks for this interview Bob. It's been great to talk to you.

BRITCHER My pleasure. Thank you very much.

That is the end of this interview with Mr Bob Britcher, part owner and operator of the prawning trawler Nenad working out of Port Lincoln, South Australia.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW

Verbatim transcript of an interview with MARGARET BUICK

INTRODUCTION

.....with Margaret Buick of Kangaroo Island, South Australia was conducted at Kingscote on Kangaroo Island on the 31st January, 1990 by Jack Darcey from Murdoch University and the Australian Fisheries Research Council as part of the oral history of the Australian Fishing Industry project.

Nigel Buick is a well known Kangaroo Island fisherman and fish processor and exporter. On the day of the interview he was absent from the island on business but fortunately his wife, Margaret, who has worked closely with Nigel over many years agreed to be interviewed in his stead.

In the interview she has given a lucid account of the industry on Kangaroo Island and of her husband's and family's part in it. Margaret Buick is a concerned and competent member of the fishing community on Kangaroo Island and has made an interesting and valuable contribution to this oral history of the industry.

It is pleasing to be able at least in some small measure to thus acknowledge the very considerable input made by women to the fishing industry in South Australia and indeed throughout the whole of Australia.

There is one side of one tape. The interview starts at 021 on the revolution counter.

TAPE 1 SIDE A

JD Margaret would you please record your full name.

BUICK Yes certainly. My name is Margaret Buick.

JD And were you born on Kangaroo Island?

BUICK No, I'm an import to Kangaroo Island. I came from the seaside suburb of Semaphore.

JD In Adelaide?

BUICK Yes, in Adelaide.

JD And how long have you been on the island?

BUICK We came over here 32 years ago. My husband was in the fishing industry, and fishing from Port Adelaide was not the ideal situation because he was away from home so much. There was no home life and we had two young children at the time who

hardly saw their father so the ideal situation was to come and live at Kangaroo Island where he was fishing which is what we did.

JD Margaret, before you married a fisherman, were you or your family involved in the fishing industry at all?

BUICK No, my parents, my father in particular was a carpenter by trade and worked for the Shell Company for a number of years and I left school and was educated at LeFevre School, then went to Port Adelaide High School and from there worked in an office at Cowell Brothers to start with (a timber yard) and then to Alltubes where I worked for a number of years.

JD And when you came to Kangaroo Island you had two children you mentioned and did you have other children after coming here?

BUICK Yes, we had two other children after we came to Kangaroo Island. We had.... a daughter who was our first child and then we had three sons. And two of them were born here on the island.

JD Did any of them show interest in the fishing industry?

BUICK Yes, our eldest son has been a fisherman and still is and our youngest son has taken over the running of our boat named the Lady Buick and our middle son Deon, is a builder by trade. Taking after his grandfather.

JD There must have been a good many problems associated with bringing up a family as the wife of a fisherman and in a fairly remote area such as Kangaroo Island, problems in education and employment and so on. Did you find that?

BUICK Not really. When we first came over we brought over with us a little cooler ice room which was to be for our own purpose, but we finished up buying fish from other people and found that it was a little profitable start, and this grew so we started buying and selling other people's fish. We expanded and built a small factory and this outgrew us as well. We employed some people to begin with and at that time we were having children and they had a lot to do with working in the factory in their younger days. Our daughter was able to matric here and our second son went to St Peters College (he wanted to further his education) and the other boys did their education on the island and went into the fishing industry.

JD Did they get their qualifications to skipper boats here on the island?

BUICK Our eldest son Gavin, he was able to get his licence. That was the time before they brought in all this schooling that they have to do now. Our youngest son went to Maritime College in Tasmania at Beauty Point and he was too young. He went 16/17 and he should have gone when he was 18, but you couldn't get your Skipper's Ticket until you were 19. So he had to defer it one year and then when he was 19 he was able to do it in Adelaide (Port Adelaide). So he finished in Port Adelaide and qualified with his Skipper's Ticket.

JD To come back to yourself again, what do you currently do in the industry? I know you're very active in this processing works that you and your husband conduct, what do you actually do?

BUICK Well, I mentioned earlier that the factory outgrew us in the earlier days and we ended leasing the factory to Safcol and Safcol leased it from us for 23 years. During that time it grew again and we expanded and made it into an export factory. Everything that Safcol required we adhered to for them and it was quite a pleasurable arrangement. Unfortunately the last two years, Safcol ceased to process on the island which meant that there were at least 20 people were put out of work (more or less semi-permanents) and their lease expired in November this last year and we decided that we needed the processing on the island so we went back in as owner operators, and we are running the factory: exporting cray tails to America and re-employing some of the local people. My own personal role: I'm doing all the bookwork so you could say that I'm the secretary here. My husband manages the place and we are getting the support of the fishermen.

JD Margaret, do you handle other sorts of fish beside Crayfish?

BUICK Crayfish would be the main one that comes into the factory. We have all the other scale fish as well. We have the hook fishermen that come in with whiting, schnapper, snook, most of the scale fish and some of the net fish. We've been getting a lot of garfish just lately, but lobster mainly.

JD And do you export only the tails - frozen tails?

BUICK Yes, the tails.... A lot of the factories are going in for live export, but we believe that the market this year was not going to be as good on the live and it has proved to be so, so the tailing which is from the green lobster: it's packed snap frozen, graded in different sizes and exported direct to America. We do have the cooked lobster as well and we have distributed that mostly just around in South Australia. Some went to Western Australia at Christmas time but mostly we are tailing.

JD And the scale fish is a local market?

BUICK Yes, we've been getting the scale fish all off through Adelaide. We may have to expand and go to Melbourne a bit later on. The shark in the winter months, there is a different size limit in Victoria to South Australia and that's been a bit of a hard thing to get shark through to Victoria.

JD Could we look at the history of the Buick family? Regrettably Nigel's not available for interviewing, but I'm sure you know a great deal about the family history. Could you outline it for us?

BUICK Well, originally there were two Buicks that came to Australia. There was John Buick and David, and David ended up going to America and inventing the Buick motor car and John Buick was the one most of the island people here descend from. Well Nigel - his side of the family. And I don't know that there was a lot involved in the fishing industry. John Buick I believe, built a boat but apart from that I think they went on the land.

When I first met Nigel, he was (that was back in '52) working on another boat at the time and had just the hull of a 32 foot boat and most of our courting days were spent at Porter's slipway working on his boat. So....

JD Was that the Lady Buick that he was....

BUICK No, that was a boat called Emu Bay. Emu Bay 1. It was 32 foot and he started off in that one. Two years later, he purchased another boat, which he named Emu Bay 2 and it was 42 feet so he was going up the ladder. And then back, I think it was '62 or thereabouts, he built the Lady Buick (I'm not sure on that date) but....

JD Did he actually build it himself, or did he have it built?

BUICK No, no. It was built at Porter's slipway in Port Adelaide (W.G. Porter and Son) and he still goes back there with the boat for slipping purposes and over the years they've become very good friends. But the boat has been a very good sea boat in heavy seas - it's proved itself. And these fishermen all have a love of their boats. I was told when I first met Nigel by an old [fisherman], Mr Haldane from Port Lincoln, that I should know that the boat would always be his first love!

JD Nigel doesn't actually go to sea now I understand. He doesn't run the Lady Buick still?

BUICK No, he was supposed to be semi retired two years ago and he went into local council which took a lot of his time, and our son started at that time to operate the boat as skipper.

Our other son Gavin, had his own boat called the Island Girl and unfortunately that boat, from the time it was purchased (he bought it from [Mr Timperon], a chap down the south east way) he had a lot of trouble with the boat. Originally he just went up for a normal slipping and ended up on the slip for six months. A major refit because the timbers on the outside shell of the boat were rotted and they more or less had to semi rebuild it, which was a lot of expense at the time. After that, major mechanical problems so he lost two seasons not being able to fish fully (in the cray season).

The third year he went out and thought, terrific everything was going to be fine, and he got dumped from a freak wave and cracked it open again, so he lost a lot of time that year. That was another $70,000 worth of repairs. He spent a lot more money on the boat over the years and he was fishing and doing really well and they were off Snug Cove on the north coast of Kangaroo Island, and the boat caught fire at sea. We heard it through the radio system that there was a boat on the north coast in trouble - we didn't know at the time it was Gavin. We heard this through the Wallaroo Radio Base Station phoned us and told us that it was Gavin. He was lucky to get off the boat (him and his crew) and after that he lost his heart in the sea for the next year and now he's just fishing along the coast in a smaller boat just close along the shore, but he's very involved with the oysters on the island. He is managing an oyster lease that's already existing here and we have an application in for our own oyster lease, so I think that is what he will end up doing. He's been in the oyster industry.

JD Nigel was largely involved in cray fishing or rock lobster fishing wasn't he?

BUICK Yes, yes. From the time I met him he was a lobster/ shark fisherman and he worked the boat himself all those years, until his retirement and I think he still likes to get back out on the sea when he gets the chance.

JD It's still a pretty hazardous occupation though, isn't it?

BUICK Yes, I think all the fishermens' wives would all feel the same. We're very glad we have the ship to shore radio and most of the wives have CBs in their home, which is a limited distance that you can hear the boats. If they get down the western end of the island under the cliffs, you can't pick them up, but that radio link is a vital part. We

have base stations. There's one in Kingscote as I mentioned before, the one at Wallaroo, one at Port Lincoln. These base stations call regularly (twice a day) and the boats advise if they're coming in or if they want to order parts for their boats and all that sort of thing and Nigel originally started this up on the island. Mrs Smith ran that radio base station for 17 years and her husband Vern, was the one who was helpful in setting it up originally.

I must mention also that the Adelaide Radio Base Station has been a link with the fishermen for all these years with giving forecasts at regular times in the day, but I believe that this is going to be discontinued and I know a lot of the fishermen are concerned. It's not only the fishing industry, it's all the yachts and the other boats as well that more or less rely on this source as a contact. Somebody has to be there if there's a Mayday and these radio base stations they do a good job, but they're not [24 hours a day].... you can't say that those people just sit by the radio 24 hours a day.

JD Could we have a look at the health of the fishing industry as seen from your perspective, Margaret? Have you noticed any depletion of stock?

BUICK I think this year the fishermen would have had a better start to the season than they've had for probably the last two years. I know last year and the year before, their catches were down, but then the prices were up which one sort of made up for the other. This year the catches have been quite good and the prices have, well we've tried to maintain the prices as best we can, and this largely depends a lot on your American market. You have to regulate what your prices are over there which gives you the price set up for what you can pay here naturally and it fluctuates a little bit, but we've maintained a fairly constant price. The catches I think the fishermen would be quite happy with them up to date.

JD All of the fisheries now are managed pretty well all of them anyway. Are those management policies effective would you say?

BUICK When we first built the factory here for export, we had prawn boats come into the island. We had seven prawn boats to start with and the government reduced them to two. Now those two prawn boats were making a really good living on the island. There was a division between Spencer Gulf fishing and this area down here and the government took out seven prawn boats from the industry and they took the two from Kangaroo Island which made a big difference to the factory here in production as far as throughput goes, plus all the motels and things here on the island. Places were not able to get fresh prawns and they have to get them from Adelaide. That side of it sometimes is a little bit hard to understand as to why they took the two boats from here when they were making a viable living.

Then you've got the south east cray industry. They start a month earlier than what they do here in South Australia (they've got a line) and I can imagine if you put the market gardens for instance, in that same situation and said well that area there can sell their produce a month earlier than you, it just doesn't seem logic, but I know you have to have regulations and the fishermen work through SAFIC. We have our own fishermens' Kingscote Fishermens' Association here on the island and they send representatives and delegates up to these meetings. So we try to keep in contact with departments and work in with them. The Taxation Office is bringing in a pay as you earn system for fishermen which starts in February and I know there's a lot of concern there with the fishermen as far as payroll and work cover and unions and what repercussions they will get from this pay as you earn. That would be one of the major issues at the moment, but is it the concern to the fishermen.

JD Do you feel the government authorities, Fisheries Department, Taxation Department and so on, listen to the fishermens' side of the story through their organisations or do they tend to just go their merry way and take little notice of what the fishermen have to say?

BUICK No I think they do give a hearing, but it's a matter of getting through to the Department and being able to get your voice across which is not always easy. The fishermen are not people that like doing a lot of bookwork. They have fish returns to send in monthly and when they come in from fishing I think most of the wives do their bookwork anyway, but the last thing that they really want to do is sit down and do a lot of technical sort of bookwork. But the only real liaison is through SAFIC or through your own associations.

JD The fishermens' organisations or associations, are well regarded by the fishermen would you say?

BUICK Well I think they're a necessity. If you try to put a message across to any department as an individual, it's much better to come through an association and have everybody agreeing on the same thing rather than one sort of saying one thing and one saying something else. If you get together, discuss it. If you've got a problem you discuss it and work out what's the best way to go about it.

JD Speak with a unified voice?

BUICK That's right.

JD Margaret, what would you say are the major problems facing the fishing industry in Australia today?

BUICK Well I think for the young people trying to get into the industry it's the expense to start with. Just to buy a cray boat, say a reasonable cray boat you'd be looking at $180,000 thereabouts and then the licence is round about $10,000 a pot or $9,500 or something so to buy into the industry.... to buy yourself a boat and a licence say 58 pots, that's $580,000 for the licence plus your boat and I don't think there's too many young people have got that sort of money and to borrow from the banks, with the interest it's just not viable. So that's one of the problems that I can see for the industry.

JD What effect is that having? Is it meaning that young people are not coming into the industry?

BUICK Well, it's stopping them the opportunity. I feel and Nigel as well, that these young people should be given a licence and given the opportunity to go out for a couple of years and prove whether they can run a boat before they have to set out that sort of money.

JD But they buy the licence from other fishermen don't they?

BUICK Yes. You have to buy the licence, but there are legislation for instance with the shark licence, they were divided, we had a B and an A class licence. So if you've got a boat with say a pot licence and a B class licence, if you sell your boat and your licence, that B class licence is then lost (the shark licence) so they only have the boat with the

pots. If you've got an A class licence, then again you can only sell that licence to another A class licence holder and he loses the pots so you lose one or the other.

JD You feel some similar scheme in crayfishing would be effective.

BUICK Well that is in the crayfishing.

JD That's in the crayfishing?

BUICK That is the crayfishing.

JD Sorry I thought you said the shark.

BUICK Yes, if they have a cray licence and a shark licence you can't split them so you can't sell your shark licence to somebody and keep your pots (your pot licence that is). So that's a little bit [of bureaucracy].... one of the legislations that is sort of holding the industry back a little bit I feel. I know why they're doing it, it's to preserve the shark industry. They feel that it could be fished out. They're not issuing any more shark licences for that reason, but you can't transfer your licence. I'm not sure about that actually, I think within a family you can, but you certainly can't sell them.

JD What other problems do you see, Margaret?

BUICK Just the catches of the fish I should say, as long as they are not over fished. I think the fact that the catches this year were up to what they were last year and the amount of whiting in the hook (scale fish) that have been coming through has been fantastic. In fact I believe at the present time, the market they had a real glut over there of fish. So there's not a shortage of whiting or gar I can assure you of that.

JD It would appear that management policies are working to some degree?

BUICK Yes, yes. And we had boats from Adelaide over here fishing as well, so there's been quite a lot of fish brought in.

JD Right, well thank you very much for this interesting interview.

BUICK You're very welcome.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

END OF INTERVIEW

Verbatim transcript of an interview with DOMENIC CAPUTO

INTRODUCTION

Mr Domenic Caputo is a fish processor, wholesaler and retailer of Port Pirie, South Australia. He was interviewed in his office at his processing works in Port Pirie on the 23rd January, 1990 by Jack Darcey from Murdoch University's oral history project on the Australian Fishing Industry.

Mr Caputo's grandfather was the first to recognise the potential of the Port Pirie waters, seeing in them strong similarities with the part of Italy from where he originated. The Caputo family is very well known in Port Pirie. Each generation has retained its contact with the sea and with fishing. People of Italian descent form a large part of the scale fishing community in Port Pirie with most of the fishing families originating in Molfetta on the Adriatic coast.

Mr Caputo makes significant comment on the problem of supply of marine scale fish during the course of his discussion of his family background and the changes that have taken place in the fishery. His contribution to this project is a valuable one that is appreciated.

There is one tape the interview starts at 021 on the revolution counter.

TAPE 1 SIDE A

JD Mr Caputo would you record your full name and date and place of birth please?

CAPUTO Yes, my name is Domenic Renato Caputo, born on the 28th February, 1931 in Port Pirie, South Australia.

JD Your parents came from overseas, did they?

CAPUTO Yes, my parents came both from overseas. From Molfetta.

JD Your family is very well known in this area....

CAPUTO Yes.

JD .... in fact I think your grandfather or was it your great grandfather, was the first Italian to come here and look at fishing.

CAPUTO It was my grandfather, Vito Caputo.

JD And about what year was that that he came?

CAPUTO He came out to Australia in a wheat boat (a ketch they used to call them in those days) in about the 1880s.

JD And I understand he jumped ship?

CAPUTO Yes he did. He did jump ship....

JD Lots of people who were fishermen or became fishermen, seemed to arrive in Australia that way?

CAPUTO Well I don't know a lot of them that did this, but he did do this and he thought that much of the harbour in Port Pirie and the fishing that he thought it was a good place to spend a bit of time.

JD Then he went back to Italy, didn't he?

CAPUTO Yes, he went back to Italy and came back a few years later.

JD And brought his sons did he?

CAPUTO No, he didn't bring them. They eventually found their way out. That was through his brother (that was my father's father) organised that side of it for them to come out. I'm not sure when, but that would have been just after the First World War.

JD And they came to Pirie?

CAPUTO Yes, they definitely came to Pirie.

JD And were they fishing?

CAPUTO Yes, they were all, at one time or another, fishermen. My father included at that stage with three of his brothers in law. Two of them were sons of Vito.

JD So there was quite a large family of Caputo's.

CAPUTO Oh there was. Quite a large family. There was my father and three brothers in law had their families in Port Pirie.

JD All in the fishing industry?

CAPUTO All in the fishing industry yes.

JD And then you came along and you also joined the fishing industry?

CAPUTO I came along and I started fishing myself, with my father at the age of 14. I wanted to leave school to go fishing to help my father and I fished for a couple of years and then we shifted to Sydney to try our business ventures and that didn't eventuate (we were there for a few months). Came back to Port Pirie and tried again after a couple of years. We went to Adelaide and opened up a fish shop which I sort of

ran it. My father was working at Holdens factory and I ran the fish shop for twelve months or so. It wasn't a good proposition so we came back again to Port Pirie and eventually bought the Solly Fish Shop which was a fish business way back in 1951. Was there for two years, then the premises we are in at the moment was for sale, because the people who had it, by the name of Stewie Lockhead (the premises then was called Boat Fittings) had gone through the hoop (let's put it that way) and the opportunity came up to buy and we bought it (that was in '53) and we've been here ever since.

JD Now your business is mainly in the processing and sale of fish is it?

CAPUTO Processing, wholesaling and retail also in Pirie and we wholesale all through Australia.

JD Do you?

CAPUTO New South Wales, Victoria wherever they want it, we send it and also we do buy a lot of our processing work (that is our fish) from Western Australia, Queensland even Tasmania.

JD Do you specialise in any particular type of fish?

CAPUTO Well mostly garfish, whiting, schnapper, silver whiting. They're our main ones, but you do get a lot of cheaper line fish like tommies, mullet and stuff like that which....

JD It's all scale fish?

CAPUTO It's all scale fish, yes.

JD Do you deal with shark at all?

CAPUTO No, we don't deal with shark but we do handle a lot of prawns in the prawning season. We handle quite [a large amount] of prawns, [50 to 80 tonnes a year].

JD And the prawning trawlers unload here?

CAPUTO They unload here and Walleroo, some at Cowell, depending on where they're fishing. A lot of them are unloaded here in Port Pirie.

JD Do you have processing works in those places or do you transport it to you?

CAPUTO No, no we just transport them from there to our processing works here in Port Pirie.

JD And what's your market?

CAPUTO Our market is, as I said, all over Australia. We're not in the export market at this stage. The sale is pretty good. The problem we're finding at the moment is supply of production, mainly in the scale fish line. We find it hard to acquire enough to process.

JD Does that indicate that stocks are being depleted.

CAPUTO Yes. Unfortunately I have to say yes to that question which up until two or three years ago, I always said no to that question, but unfortunately I have to change my tune. That is happening, not only in Port Pirie, all over Australia the stocks of fish that we handle are depleting, yes. Rapidly.

JD Does that mean that there should be more strict management control of the quantity of the fish....

CAPUTO Well I suppose that is not my job to tell the Fisheries how they should do things, but I suppose something in that line has to be very seriously looked at. Especially in some lines of fish in our area here, which is the small garfish, is a hindrance to us at the moment. We just cannot sell it, even if you want to give it away, people don't want it. But there's a lot being caught and the fishermen say how can we catch the big ones without catching the small ones. And it is a problem. There's two things that they can do: change the size of the net or stop, for say a couple of months of the year when they're spawning. Now what's the best answer I don't know and I don't think the Fisheries even no themselves, but something needs to be done.

JD The way the fish are caught, it's netting here is it?

CAPUTO Yes, all of it mostly. The line fishing is only amateur. All professional fishing is all done by net [and set lines for schnapper are often used].

JD Do you think there's a problem between the amateur and professional fishermen in the catch each side takes? In other words is the take by the amateurs interfering with the catches from the professionals?

CAPUTO I doubt it very much. The catch that the amateurs, which I say are all caught with a line, I very much think that it would not interfere with the professional fishing. No.

JD Is there any friction between the two groups?

CAPUTO Oh there's always that, but not the extent that it used to be once upon a time. No, not a lot. Not in this town of Port Pirie or the surrounding areas, I don't think I've heard that much going on about it.

JD What about the problem with pollution? Is there a pollution problem in this part of the Spencer Gulf?

CAPUTO I cannot answer that question. I don't think so. I haven't seen any disfigured fish that much, to say that there could be a pollution problem. I don't think so.

JD Could I ask you to compare the prices that the fishermen were getting when you first came into fishing as compared with present day prices?

CAPUTO Yes. It'd be a pretty hard question to answer regarding what it was (I can't remember that far back) but we're talking say a shilling a pound for whiting (that's King George Whiting which is our expensive fish - our top fish) and this last season we're paying for the same fish whole (out of the water) $8 per kilo. Sometimes in the Adelaide market it's brought up to $10 per kilo.

I remember my father always telling me (that's before my time), boatloads of garfish or boatloads of whiting and snook even, that before we, the processors came along, fish was sold whole, (it wasn't filleted) they'd send it along to the market. They'd have to have their own boxes, put ice on them, pay the freight to get them to Adelaide and then they would get an account to pay for expenses because they were sold and couldn't make a profit, so on top of that they had to pay expenses. So that was how hard it was in those days to make a living. Then the processing came into it, filleting the fish which has helped the fishermen no such end. I mean they just.... they have sold their fish ever since. The prices have varied. Naturally, there's big gluts of fish and the prices have probably halved at times, because of the quantity but this has not happened in the last two or three years.

JD Do you negotiate with the individual fishing boats? Do they sort of fish for you?

CAPUTO Yes. We have two buyers in Port Pirie and we sort of keep our noses out of each other's business. We've got half a dozen boats and he's got half a dozen boats that he handles (they're not our boats, but we buy from there) and that way we keep the boats happy and give them the best price we can to compare with the Adelaide market.

Just to give you a comparison of when my father was fishing in his prime, say round about his 35 years of age, and it was close to the Depression time. He worked a full season, which is six months of the year, and when he worked his accounts out he had enough money to buy my mother a cooking pot to do the cooking with. That's what he earnt for the full season. Whereas today, I can't mention figures, but some of the fishermen are doing pretty well.

JD That's a colourful comparison.

Can we talk about boats and gear in the early days, as compared with present day?

CAPUTO In the early days up until twelve, fifteen years ago, they used the slow boat (the 20 foot or the 18 foot) with a Blaxland twin or a Chapman pup motor. Some had a Simplex diesel, they who had a bit more money would have a Simplex diesel which was a big thing in those days, but I can't go back that far. My father tells me before those days, they were just a sail - no motor. So today, all these are all speed boats. Speed boat crafts and they can travel at 30 miles an hour wherever they go. They go out in the morning and come back at night. Whereas before, they used to go out and stay out for a full week. Fill up their ice box and then come home with their catch.

JD And nowadays it's just....

CAPUTO Now it's out in the morning and home at night.

JD Have methods changed?

CAPUTO Methods have definitely changed, yes. Once upon a time the net fishing was done with a set net. They used to set it and they couldn't drag the net and the fish had to go and find the net. Today, it's all.... the net has to be dragged so that you will get every fish that's in the middle of that net. Methods have definitely changed. Catching more fish but whether it's better for the industry, well that's not for me to say, I can't answer that question.

JD What about the competition from overseas, imports of fish? That must be a problem to....

CAPUTO Well, it has always been a problem as far as our selling our local product. Not in the last four or five years really, because there's not enough of our local product to go round, but until then we were getting a lot of headaches because we could not sell the quantities that we could handle then. Today the quantities are not there so it's not as bad, but the problem is still slightly there. Not in as big a way.

JD Because the price of this frozen fish seems to be lower than the price of the fresh product is that a threat to your industry?

CAPUTO It was in the times when I'm talking about when we had quantities of fish that because of the price difference we could not sell them. But at this stage our price compares favourably with some of that because it's become a lot dearer. Except some of it is as dear as ours if not dearer.

JD There's quite a large Italian/Australian fishing community in Port Pirie. Are there any other migrant groups, say Portuguese or Spanish....?

CAPUTO In the fishing industry?

JD Yes.

CAPUTO No. Mostly Italians and Australians.

JD There's a Slav component in Port Lincoln I think.

CAPUTO There could be, there's a lot of different nationalities of people in Port Lincoln. In the prawning industry there's quite a mixture of different nationalities, but when you talk about the scale fish side, it's mostly Italian and English/Australian fishermen, yes.

JD Anything else you'd like to say about the fishing industry as your involvement in it?

CAPUTO Well it's been good to me. It's been good to my father and myself. In this business at the moment (my father passed away a few years ago) my brother in law, Maurie Mezzino and myself and our sons, Sebastian Mezzino and Tore [Salvatore] Caputo and they'll be left.... Sebastian and Tore will be left to run the business and I suppose in a couple of years time we'll be too old, they won't want us here and we'll be on our way, sort of semi retired or retired whatever. But it's been good to me, I've been quite happy with the fishing industry for me in Port Pirie.

JD Tore will be fourth generation?

CAPUTO He'll be fourth generation, yes.

JD That's an achievement isn't it?

CAPUTO I think so, yes.

JD Thank you very much for this interview.

CAPUTO No worries, Mr Darcey.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

END OF INTERVIEW

Verbatim transcript of an interview with LIONEL CARRISON

INTRODUCTION

This interview with Mr Lionel Carrison of Port MacDonnell in South Australia is part of Murdoch University's oral history of the Australian Fishing Industry. The interview was conducted in Mr Carrison's home in Port MacDonnell on 6th February, 1990. It was recorded by Jack Darcey.

Mr Carrison is a member of a well known and extensive fishing family in this south east part of South Australia. The family have built their own boats over many years and these still remain in service. One figured in the film **Storm Boy**. In this interview Mr Carrison deals with many of the changes that have taken place in the rock lobster fishery and makes thoughtful and concerned comments on the problems currently facing that industry. Problems in management, in pollution, in conservation of the resource and costs and pressures on fishermen are commented upon.

On this tape Mr Carrison makes a significant contribution to this history of the Australian fishing industry from the point of view of a practicing professional. There are two sides of one tape. His interview starts at 022 on the revolution counter.

TAPE 1 SIDE A

JD Lionel would you please record your full name and date and place of birth.

CARRISON Yes. It's Lionel Allan Carrison and I was born in Mt Gambier on the 21st February, 1934.

JD The name Carrison is a very well known name here and particularly in fishing. How far back do you know about your family?

CARRISON Well I know of my father's brothers, from what he's told me. I remember some of them. I remember.... probably as far back as I can remember would be about 1938, '39 just before the War. After the War there was really only dad and probably, there was another uncle that used to be a policeman that came back here and became a fisherman.

JD When did the family first come to this south east region?

CARRISON Oh that's a hard question. My grandmother came from Denmark. My grandfather I think [came] from Port Fairy but I can't tell you the dates. It would have been probably in the early 1900s.

JD Did you spend all your early years here in Port MacDonnell or Mt Gambier?

CARRISON I've always lived in Port MacDonnell; never anywhere else.

JD When you left school, did you go straight into the fishing industry?

CARRISON No, when I left school I was an apprentice baker. We had a bakery in Port MacDonnell in those days. I spent about four years there, I suppose until, I had a problem with the flour - the dust in the air. From there I worked for the local District Council. I drove a truck.

JD Did you finish your time as a baker?

CARRISON No, I didn't. It got to the stage, it was the doctor's advice that I didn't go on and I don't really know how much longer I had to go but I sort of, I could do everything that had to be done. I could probably still do it, you know. We didn't have machinery in those days. It was all done by hand.

JD Yes. Did you like that trade?

CARRISON Yes I did. I did.

JD How then did you come to come into fishing?

CARRISON Well dad worked on the Council before the War and on weekends he used to fish, as his brothers did with him, but usually from a dinghy just along the coastline, in close, in good weather. In those days there wasn't a market for crayfish. There was a local fish monger, Ned Williams. He wasn't a fisherman, he was a fish buyer and he would say to dad, "Oh I'd like a bag of crays for the weekend" and dad would go and catch him a bag of crays. That was all they could use and I think they used to get ten shillings for the bag.

JD Did your father also catch scale fish?

CARRISON Yes; not so much as a commercial thing. Oh I suppose he sold them to the same chap. With a set net they would catch salmon, mullet, tommy rough and they had little spots along the coast they would go to. In the very early days they used to go in a horse and cart. Of course there was nobody much about in those days. They were pretty remote and only had little tracks along the coast. There again that was limited too. They could only catch what this chap could sell for them.

JD They would take the net out in a dinghy and run it around a school of fish. Was that....

CARRISON Yes or.... It was set net not a hauling net. Yes they'd set it or you'd find a school of fish, you'd see them in the dark, hear them and run the net around them and you'd just catch what you could use or what could be used and come home.

JD So you started off then with your father?

CARRISON Well I did really, I suppose. I used to go with him a lot of times when he fished in the bay at Port MacDonnell. I didn't go away much at night time with him down the coast but I've always been involved with boats; always been with a dinghy in

the port. It was open in those days (before the breakwater), and we used to set the nets just out in front of home purely as a pastime I suppose [laughs].

JD And you continued to work for the Council?

CARRISON Oh yes, I worked there for I suppose about four years. This was of course after the War and when dad came back (he was in the Airforce) and when he came back he worked for the Department of Lands. He cleared the scrub at Eight Mile Creek. In his spare time he built his first fishing boat which was about 31 foot long; a boat called **the Tern**. Then when the work at Eight Mile Creek sort of finished he went fishing full time in that vessel.

JD Did he build the boat himself?

CARRISON Yes, He built it in a shed.

JD In the back yard sort of thing?

CARRISON That's right.

JD Good boat?

CARRISON It was a good boat. It was the old type of boat. It was built from a plan and it had a centre board and it was rigged properly for sail. It had a bowsprit and it would sail. I believe that it ended up at Goolwa. It was the boat they used in the film **Storm Boy**. So it's probably still around and had a lot of changes to the top part of it over the years. They've changed a lot since then; since that boat was built, you know the design has changed.

JD Did you have a motor in it?

CARRISON Yes it had a motor. It had one of the first marine motors that became available I suppose. It was a BMC made in England. It was a petrol-kerosene, six cylinder motor with a marine gearbox. We used to run it just on petrol and wouldn't worry about the kerosene. There were quite a lot of them around at the time. They were the type of motor that was available. Before that they used to use old car engines like Rugby fours and those sort of things which were pretty primitive but they were better than just sailing.

JD Well that boat would have enabled you to go a bit further afield than just off the beach?

CARRISON Yes, that's right. Dad had a relative [who] used to be the harbour master and the post master. I remember him pretty well because he sort of taught me quite a lot about fishing while dad was away at the War. He had a boat. It was called **the Joan Ellen**. Originally it didn't have a motor. You just had to sail it. It had a centre plate and if the wind died away you had to row it home. It was about 25-26 foot and dad, I think, put the first motor in that so it sort of went on from there. That was going back to before motors were put in those sorts of boats.

There again it was pointless catching a lot of crayfish because there wasn't any market for them but they would just go out into five or six fathoms of water, a mile, couple of mile off shore and they'd catch all the crayfish they wanted.

JD And you finally took over that boat from your father, did you?

CARRISON No, no. Originally I didn't go fishing with dad. He had a cousin of mine that went with him and then he had his brother-in-law that fished with him. Like all things I suppose at the time, nobody was sure what was going to happen with the industry, whether it was going to be good or whether it was going to be bad. I think while I had a job with the council they said, "Oh well you know what you're doing there". You know fishing could go any way. Actually it was quite some years after that I finally gave up working for the council and went fishing full-time.

JD And acquired a boat of your own?

CARRISON No, no. I went with dad and we fished for.... I'm not sure now, two or three years. It doesn't matter and then my brother came with us. So then there were the three of us. It was a family thing and what we did, we built another boat.

JD Again yourself [unclear]?

CARRISON Dad was the boat builder and it was quite different to the original one. Where the original **Tern** was an open boat with an open cockpit, this one was fully decked and it had a wheel house on the stern. It still had a mast and we did have a sail for it but we never ever used it. This time we had a diesel motor instead of a petrol motor.

JD What size vessel was that?

CARRISON This one was about 32 foot and of course having a wheel house on it, we had a radio and we had an echo sounder. On the first boat we built, being open, when the weather was rough you held a bag up to get out of the spray. In fact the compass wasn't even fixed. It was in a box and if it looked like being foggy you got the compass out and set it down by the engine box to steer home. So the second one was quite a big improvement over the first one. This boat was called **the Alert**.

JD About what year would that have been that you acquired that second boat? The mid-'50s or before then?

CARRISON Yes it would have to be in the '50s. I can't remember exactly how many years we had **the Tern** but it would have been in the '50s because we had **the Alert** until about 1966 and then we built the boat we've got now - **the Kingfisher**.

JD So you've been very involved with three family boats?

CARRISON Umm. Yes we built them in the back yard and....

JD The latest one as well?

CARRISON Yes the latest one; the latest one is the one we've got now. It was launched in '66.... 24 year old now.

JD Still going well obviously?

CARRISON Well it looks much the same now as when we built it, but there again this was different again because the wheel house was foreward this time. We did away with a mast and sail. Most of the boats wouldn't sail anyway because of the type of

rudder we used with engine power. They're a balanced rudder and they don't work very well with sail.

JD Was it a planked boat?

CARRISON Yes. They're all planked. Built out of meranti which is rather soft but is an extremely stable sort of a timber. It doesn't move much. It doesn't, when you pull it out of the water, it doesn't dry up and crack up. It bruises very easily but apart from that, it's very good; a lot of people don't like it but it is, we've proven over the years because the second boat we built **the Alert**, it was only sold some months ago from this port and went down to King Island I think. That was built out of the same timber and it was still going well.

JD In the years that you've been involved, you'd have seen lots of changes in the boats obviously but also in the gear and methods, would you?

CARRISON Yes. There's been a lot of changes in boats. Probably the biggest change in gear is polyethylene rope or synthetic rope. We used to use sisal and not very often manilla; mainly sisal. [it] Used to be tarred or rot proofed. It was [an] inch and a half; [an] inch and a quarter rope which was quite heavy and of course the glass floats which had to be put in a rope mesh basket to hold them. Of course all these things rotted. If you weren't very careful it would break and you'd lose your pot. Then the Japanese brought out polyethylene rope. That was a big thing. It's still just as good now. Nothing seems to have changed much with it. There is polyethylene, polypropalene They're very similar but you didn't need the diameter. You didn't need the size to get the strength. Of course the floats changed too because they're all plastic or synthetic so you don't have broken floats.

JD Did you used to pull the pots by hand?

CARRISON I didn't but dad.... Before the War they used to. They didn't have very many of course. Where they finished the water wasn't very deep. Just after the War when they started fishing in earnest I suppose, we started fitting winches to the boats so you just put the rope on the winch and it pulled the pot for you.

JD Do the fishermen in these parts make their own pots?

CARRISON We always used to. We had no alternative because you couldn't buy them but nowdays they are available commercially. There are people at South End that make them. They will make them to order. They will make them I think to any design you want. Perhaps we've got lazy but over the last few years we feel, well the time and effort you put into making them; by the time you buy all the material and do it all, you can buy them for about the same price. So most people buy their pots nowdays. Probably some still make them but....

JD Are they a slatted pot or are they [unclear]

CARRISON No these are a steel frame covered with wire netting, either wire netting or stainless steel netting with a steel mesh bottom. They're quite different to Western Australian pots anyway.

JD Lionel, you'd have also seen a lot of changes in prices and marketing arrangements and handling of the catch, I imagine?

CARRISON Yes there has been. That's probably another one of the biggest changes. When I first started we were getting, I think it was one and eight a pound for the crayfish. I remember they got to five shillings and we thought that was a massive price for a pound of crayfish. They were always put into ordinary bags in those days. You'd catch them and take them out of the pots and put them straight into bags and when your bag was full you sewed it up and stacked it away. You weren't terribly far from home so they weren't out of the water terribly long.

I can remember one boat coming into the port one afternoon with twenty bags of crayfish and they'd probably got them out of 40 pots. This was the sort of quantities that you could catch. As we had to go further away and you were at sea longer, the vessels were fitted with or had wells put in them, which is a compartment where you have salt water flowing in and out. Apart from keeping the fish alive for any length of time, we started putting them in the well as we caught them and then just taking them out just prior to coming back to the moorings. That way your fish were in top condition when you brought them home. Probably the weight was up a bit too because they didn't drain out. That's probably what most people do nowdays. If they don't have a well in the boat they have wash tanks and they have a pump that pumps water into the tank and it overflows and runs out. They keep their catch fresh and alive that way.

Of course the other thing that's changed is the price. As I said, I started off at one and eight a pound and now this season we ended up at $20.00 a kilo which is a big jump. That's all very well of course but the catch has dropped to a fraction of what it used to be. When I started fishing, if we couldn't catch a bag of crayfish which was about 100 pound out of ten pots, we moved. Nowdays if you could catch that you'd have the world fishing near you. So there's been a big change in the way the catch is handled, the amount of fish you catch and of course the thing that saved it all is the price.

JD Has the number of boats fishing out of Port MacDonnell increased or decreased or stayed about the same over the years?

CARRISON Oh it's increased since the War. There are probably.... just after World War Two finished there were probably, oh seven or eight or nine. No we've got anything up to seventy to eighty. We have boats that actually belong to this port but they fish from little bays a few mile either side of the port. So there are a lot more vessels than there used to be.

JD Do vessels from, say Victoria, Portland, fish in this area?

CARRISON No not from Portland. The Portland boats mainly come to the Victoria/South Australian border and we can only go to that same border. We just have a South Australian licence. There's about thirteen fishermen in this port that do have dual licenses. They have South Australian and Victorian so they can fish either side. There are also vessels using this port that have Victorian licences only.

JD You would have been in the fishery when the restrictions were brought in?

CARRISON Yes. That was I think about 1966. I think that was the year we built the boat we've got now and they froze all new registrations or new licences. Any vessel that was under construction at that time, they allowed in but that was sort of the deadline.

JD Is the industry well managed would you say from your point of view?

CARRISON Not terribly.

JD What are the major problems?

CARRISON Well the Fisheries Department, in my opinion.... the Fisheries Research, probably we have one man who has done it all and we don't get a second opinion and very poor policing.

JD What, because [there are] not enough officers?

CARRISON Well I don't know whether there's not enough. When I started fishing there was always a fish inspector around. We knew him. He sort of knew us. I suppose there weren't so many fishermen either but he always seemed to be around the place. Over the years we've had more inspectors but we see less of them so I don't know. It's a problem.

The Association has tried over the years to get the inspectors to come on the boats, mainly to get the views of the inspectors and for the inspectors to see the problems that we've got. It's all very well for the inspector to go through your catch and find a fish that's perhaps doubtful in size, when you're standing on dry land. You go out on a boat that's jumping all over the oceans and you're trying to measure fish. All these little problems we have. We feel that if the inspectors came with us, they would understand our side of the story and we would perhaps understand theirs and there would be a mutual co-operation.

This is what we can't get. We can't seem to get.... We have a Fisheries Department and a fishery and yet they're not working together and this to me is the sad part.

JD Do the fishermen's organisations make active negotiations with the Department to try and get these problems solved or do they let it lie?

CARRISON Well, we try to. They always have an excuse. You know they said, "Oh the inspectors couldn't come because the vessels only licensed to carry two or three people" and "there wasn't an extra life raft" or "there wasn't a life buoy" or "there wasn't a life jacket" but this year we had the Victorian inspectors come up. They went with all the Victorian licensed fishermen operating from this point and they seemed to get along extremely well together. They found out quite a lot I think. If they come out they can measure the undersized fish. They can see how many spawny fish we catch. They can see how many dead fish.... It's all there for them to see. It won't cost them anything, only their time. So the Victorians proved it can be done if they want to do it. It's just a sad fact of life that the.... We don't even see the inspectors so, well very rarely.

JD Lionel is there a problem with the amateur fishermen in this fishery?

CARRISON I don't believe there is. You'll probably find a lot of other people will tell you otherwise. I've never had anything against amateur fishermen catching fish to eat or for pleasure or for whatever. Admittedly now that they are getting further to sea, they are encroaching on the professionals' grounds. There are so many small vessels available now at reasonable prices [with] outboard motors they can slip in and out very quickly. Of course some of them are, while they're amateurs, they're really professional that don't have licences.

JD They're selling their catch [unclear]?

CARRISON Yes, yeah.

JD Course they don't have the overheads that the professional[s] have, do they?

CARRISON Well you don't have any licence fees and that's a big thing because it's one of the big problems we've got now.

JD Lionel, is there any evidence of pollution in the ocean in your fishery?

CARRISON Well not that we really notice. The worst thing I suppose would be plastic bags, plastic sheet, cardboard, paper seems to disintegrate but plastic doesn't. The other problem that we thought we may have had and we seem to have got around now is that the sewerage outlet from Mt Gambier was only about, oh two, two and a half mile to the west of the port. Everybody was more than concerned that we were going to have problems with contaminated crayfish or abalon[e] and if that had happened, the whole industry would have just folded up over night.

The Japanese, I think as everybody knows, are very conscious of that sort of thing. Anyway after a lot of protests and the Fishermen's Association put a lot of pressure on the Government plus the local council. Even Greenpeace were involved in it. We finally have a treatment works built and operating, so hopefully that part of the problem should go away, or we hope it will. We did have raw sewerage just pouring into the sea. There was, I think, a one kilometre zone around the outlet that nobody was supposed to fish in but fishermen did. Of course there was nothing to stop the fish crawling or swimming out of that zone. Anyway it seems that's all been averted now.

The worst problem probably we've got is the plastic. It's everywhere. You see it floating at sea. You see it all over the beaches. It even blows up into farmers' paddocks and the cows eat it and get into trouble. It really is a problem. It's getting worse instead of better. Fishermen seem to appreciate the problem and most of them bring their empty bait boxes and plastic home. The factories have a wire box arrangement that you can throw everything in, like a rubbish bin. So I suppose it helps but it seems to be small plastic bags, not so much fishing containers.

JD Would it be coming from passing ships, do you think?

CARRISON I don't think [so]. I think it seems to be just every day small plastic bags, perhaps supermarket bags, all that sort of thing. I don't know where it comes from but it's surprising. You walk onto the beach and it's sticking up out of the sand everywhere. You see it floating at sea; not all that much of it but you do see it floating in the water. That seems to be the biggest pollution problem that we have.

JD The conservation of the stock is a matter of concern to everybody, isn't it. What would you feel's the best way of handling that problem?

CARRISON Well everybody probably has their own ideas on it. I said earlier that before the War there were unlimited crayfish available. It's obvious that when you get quite a few boats fishing for them you do take the excess. Probably now we're working on the size. The fish you throw back this year that are under size, you catch next year that are size and so it goes on.

The worst thing, I feel that could have happened to our industry;, happened about six years ago and....

This interview is continued on side B of this tape.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

TAPE 1 SIDE B

CARRISON Probably the worst thing that I.... Well I feel it IS the worst thing that happened in our industry, it happened about six years ago, the Director of Fisheries opened the month of October to fishing. This had always been closed as long as I can remember but it means that we now start the catching season in the middle of the spawning season and to me it's just a disaster. I feel it's just common sense that regardless of what you do, whether it's a farmer or a fisherman, if you don't look after your breeding stock, you're going to ruin the whole industry in the long term. I don't think you have to be a scientist to understand that but unfortunately our Director of Fisheries doesn't understand it, doesn't want to understand it, or thinks he knows otherwise.

JD So is there no closed season at all?

CARRISON Yes there is. They close the season in the end of April for no good reason except the Fisheries Department tell us it's not economic for us to fish. This is the main problem that I feel, or the main thing where the fisheries are wrong. Instead of worrying about their stocks, their fish, looking after those, conserving those and ensuring that they're not being damaged in any way, they're telling fishermen how to run their business, whether you're economic or not. If I want to go to sea, and set pots without bait in them, that's my problem and my affair. I won't catch any fish but it's not hurting the stock and it's not hurting the Fisheries Department but they're the ones that say, "No you can't fish those months. It's not economic".

So we've got a lot of months closed that needn't be closed and that means that the ones that should be closed aren't because they say, "Oh, you've got too many months of the year closed. There's not enough left for fishing". That to me is the problem. If we had, in my opinion, August, September, October closed, now these are the months when the fish have survived the summer, they've survived the winter and they're on the verge of spawning and the whole cycle is coming to an end [and] the Fisheries Department says, "Well away you go in October. Go and get into them". Now because of the pressure on fishermen, the costs and everything else, a lot of those spawny fish aren't returned to the sea. Now most honest fishermen know it and there's nothing done about it. To me that's the worst thing that's ever happened to this industry. I still feel that if you look after your stock, the rest of it will look after itself.

JD Do you feel then that the industry is in some danger of not remaining a viable industry from the point of view of the fisherman?

CARRISON Well I think it is because of the catch rate. Different ports along the coast have different catch rates. We're unfortunate at Port MacDonnell. We have the Victorian border very close so we're limited how far we can go to the east. We have the Continental Shelf which is about two hours' steaming or about twelve to sixteen miles off our coast, off our shore. So we're limited how far we can go to sea. On the western side we have Carpenters Rocks. We have South End [and] other ports that

come towards us. So we're locked into a little corner. So you have a lot of boats fishing over a small piece of ground. It just seems that the fish need all the protection they can get and we don't give it to them.

JD Anything else that you'd like to talk about Lionel?

CARRISON Well [laughs] I suppose there's a lot of things. One of the biggest problems we have is the cost; the cost involved. We've just had a buy back scheme pushed onto us. Admittedly they had a vote in the southern zone and the vote was 119 for and 114 against which was hardly a massive majority but the Fisheries Department wanted it. They were very clever in doing it because they made it seem as if the fishermen wanted it. They told us lots of stories that it would be an investment; that the boats that left the industry, the remaining vessels would catch those fish so each pot would be.... They even gave us the figures how much extra we would catch in each pot and how much it would be worth to us and everything else. Of course this is a lot of nonsense because there's more to fishing than statistical theory. You have to be a bit lucky. You have to have a bit of knowledge. You have to do the right thing at the right time.

The result of that, each fisherman now has to pay $100 for every pot that he fishes per year just to finance it. The result is the industry owes about five million dollars. So we're getting ourselves in the red. Individual fishermen may have had a problem. They may have owed money to banks and that sort of thing but that was individuals and the careful fishermen usually didn't. They didn't overstep what they could earn. They didn't over capitalise. In a lot of ports this has happened. Some places, they've found good patches of fish and they've caught more fish than really has been good for them because all of a sudden they had so much money they bought big boats, big engines and then when the fish petered out it was an expensive thing to run these engines. The careful fisherman that fished within his limits has had to pay for all this. These are some of the things that we've got to put up with. Even now, before this buy back is even paid for we had the President of SAFIC the other week on radio saying something else will have to be done. You know, perhaps another buy back when this one's finished and so it goes on. So it doesn't give you much encouragement because as fast as you get yourself out of one lot of trouble they out another lot onto us.

If the Fisheries [Department] would look after the resource and if they would police it there would be, I think, a good living in it for nearly everybody. There would ALWAYS be somebody that doesn't make a go of it like in all businesses [there's] always somebody that doesn't make a go of it. There's always somebody you can't help or it doesn't work for but for the majority of fishermen, given the protection to the resource and just the general looking after, I'm sure that the industry would go on for a lot of years. Really that's what a lot of the older fishermen are on about. Really it's the young ones that should be really on about it because they're the ones that have to stay in it. You know some of us are getting to the stage where another eight, ten years, we'll have to retire. So really the young ones should be jumping up and down but it's very difficult.

We found out through this buy back scheme.... we went to Adelaide and we approached Government members to protest and we did all sorts of things and they even had a select committee. I was one of the ones that went and sat there and gave evidence. Really it didn't matter how much sense you made. It didn't matter anything because they'd made up their mind beforehand. In fact all they could say was, "Oh we had a select committee" and it was all pre-determined. So this is the part that's

worrying when you present facts to the Government Departments and they completely ignore it. I guess it's the way things are nowdays.

JD Lots of problems, Lionel?

CARRISON Yes, lots of problems. Fishing is a way of life I suppose. I mean we all get heartedly sick of it; the early mornings, the rough weather. Then there's the other side; the nice weather, the days you get good catches and you're not sort of working for anybody. You're your own boss. It's something that I suppose a lot of people like doing. Everybody moans and groans though but things have changed and changed a lot. Equipment wise.... I can remember we used to have a piece of iron, or it was half an old smoke bomb with grease or lard on the bottom, we used to drop overboard to pick up a bit of bottom, whether it was sand or whether it was coral. Well then we had an electronic echo sounder that worked with paper and drew a graph at the bottom for us. Now we've got a colour echo sounder [which] looks a bit like a television screen. It shows you all the bottom in colours. We have radios. The latest thing is satellite navigators (GPS) which are probably detrimental to the fishing industry or to the resource because it will take you back within 30 feet of where you were last year. You can isolate or pin-point little rocks and ledges.

Modern technology has really helped, but on the other hand if we hadn't have had that technology, perhaps the resource may have been in a better condition than it is or then again, perhaps we really needed it to keep on going. It's just debatable and I suppose everybody has their ideas about that.

JD Right well thank you very much. Thanks for this interview. It's been good to talk to you.

CARRISON Right. It was a pleasure.

JD That is the end of this interview with Mr Lionel Carrison, fisherman of Port MacDonnell, South Australia.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW

Verbatim transcript of an interview with GIOVANNI DE GIGLIO

INTRODUCTION

This interview with Mr Giovanni de Giglio of Port Pirie was conducted by Jack Darcey for Murdoch University's oral history of the Australian Fishing Industry on the 23rd January, 1990 at Mr de Giglio's home in Port Pirie, South Australia.

Mr de Giglio is a marine scale fisherman who has fished in these waters for most of his working life, having started fishing with his father who is also a fisherman here.

In this tape he makes interesting comparisons between the boats and fishing methods, the prices obtained by fishermen and the number of boats engaged in the industry nowadays as compared with earlier times. His story is mostly of a fishery in decline. On the tape he makes suggestions towards its survival.

There is one tape. The interview starts at 023 on the revolution counter.

TAPE 1 SIDE A

JD Could you record your full name and your date and place of birth please?

DeGIGLIO My name is Giovanni de Giglio.

JD And the date of birth?

DeGIGLIO 28th February, 1928. I was born at Port Adelaide.

JD You are of Italian extraction I presume?

DeGIGLIO Yes, my parents came here in 1921 and with.... there was one child - my eldest brother which is Vic. My father was engaged in fishing at Port Adelaide. In the winter months and the summer months when fishing was very quiet, he was engaged with a cousin of his, delivering ice cream in the Adelaide area.

JD Were they fishermen in Italy?

DeGIGLIO Yes definitely. My great-grandfather was a fisherman. My grandfather and even my dad, they used to go over in these trawler boats, but mainly sailing trawler boats, and go to near Africa or near the Yugoslav coast and come home every week, or sometimes in Africa they'd be home every month or so. At the age of about nine or ten years old, they used to go sailing for fishing.

JD And how did you come to go into the fishing industry?

DeGIGLIO At the time you see, my dad moved to Port Pirie and the family we had.... I had two brothers and two sisters, and at the time my dad was interned during the War, and when I was fourteen I got a job at a men's store in Port Pirie. I worked there for two years then when my dad came out of the internment camp, well naturally being a fisherman, he took on fishing and the three of us all went fishing. There was a brother of mine, who was in the Army during the War, and we started fishing from there. But previously to that I used to go fishing when I was nine or ten years old on my school holidays, and even in the winter times when I had an odd day off, at the weekend, I'd go fishing with them.

JD Did I understand you to say your brother was in the Australian Army and yet your father was interned?

DeGIGLIO That's right. My brother was in the Australian Army and my dad was interned. Yes.

JD Seems strange now, doesn't it?

DeGIGLIO Isn't it!

JD It must have been pretty tough times for the family?

DeGIGLIO Oh yes, it was those days. Yes. We were lucky because my dad was a good worker, but there were a lot of families there which had to go on rations and so forth, but we didn't miss much.

JD When you came into the fishing industry then, it was in this Port Pirie area - and what were you fishing for?

DeGIGLIO I came in the fishing industry in Port Pirie area. I was at the age of sixteen. We were fishing mainly for scale fish. We'd go to Frankland Harbour for five or six months of the year, but would come back to Pirie every week or so (every ten days) mainly catching snook and schnapper. We had a 26 foot boat and also we had a 19 foot boat.

JD And what did you do with the catch? Was it sold locally?

DeGIGLIO The fish were brought to Port Pirie. Those days I think it would be about 600 kilos of snook a week on average, roughly, and a couple of hundred kilos of schnapper, and I can remember getting about two shillings a pound for schnapper and three shillings a dozen for snook. The snook were good sized snook and snook were averaging roughly half a pound.

JD And what would a fisherman get nowadays for that sort of fish?

DeGIGLIO For that sort of catch nowadays, well, the schnapper are averaging roughly $4 per kg and snook are roughly $2 per kg. That catch I reckon would be roughly about eighteen hundred dollars.

JD And do you net or are you line fishermen?

DeGIGLIO Years ago we used to just line fish five months of the year, from November to March and all the rest was net fishing mainly around the Port Pirie area or Whyalla area.

JD And what were your boats like in the earlier times?

DeGIGLIO Oh my dad had a 26 foot motor launch which he brought from Port Adelaide. Had a nice chest which would hold 600 kilos and we had a small boat, a dinghy about 16 foot - net dinghy.

JD Have the methods or the boat's gear, have they changed much over the years?

DeGIGLIO Oh the methods have changed really considerably a lot, because today we've got these fast boats that do 25 knots an hour. The nets we have are different nets to what we used to use. Netting we used to straight shoot, well now we ring shoot in a bit deeper water with the regulations. And you can go to one place and no fish there and about ten minutes you go somewhere else which you couldn't do that years ago.

JD Do you have any trouble selling the catch?

DeGIGLIO No not today. Not nowadays. There's no trouble selling fish, no. The price might vary. The price will go down if there's a bit of a glut on, but then the price.... to get it up it's very hard because the buyers they know, you see. They know the price. They drop the price and it takes a while for the price to go up.

JD There seems to be an increased demand for fish in the Australian market. Is that your experience?

DeGIGLIO Yes, definitely in the Australian market if they're filleted fish, because Australians, they like filleted fish. Well, the Europeans they go for mainly the whole fish.

JD But Australians rather prefer...

DeGIGLIO Oh the Australians they've got to have their filleted fish!

JD Is there any evidence of the quantity of fish reducing?

DeGIGLIO Yes, today there's.... we've been fishing at Cowell for about 40 years and you notice every year the stocks have reduced considerably. Yes.

JD It's quite marked, is it?

DeGIGLIO Yes, yes. Quite. It's going backwards all the time.

JD Are there about the same number of fishermen in the industry or is it....?

DeGIGLIO No, no. There's only.... Today there wouldn't be a quarter of the fishing fleet. Where years ago there was about 100 fishing boats here, today there'd be about ten at Port Pirie.

JD [exclamation]

DeGIGLIO Yes, that's all. Ten boats fishing.

JD And is it reducing year by year?

DeGIGLIO Yes, it is reducing. All the older people are getting out and there's no young ones taking it on because....

JD Why?

DeGIGLIO The reason why is because the fish stocks are getting low and for any young one to take it on, well, he's got to outlay a lot of money. Firstly, he's got to buy a licence which costs roughly $30,000 and he can only line fish with that licence, and then he's got to work hard to survive which around Port Pirie area, there's no.... You couldn't earn a living just by line fishing. You've got to go to the west coast and then you've got to work hard and have the experience.

JD Is there a problem of pollution in the waters around here?

DeGIGLIO No. There's no polluted areas around this area that I know of. No.

JD What about the competition from frozen fish from overseas? Is that a worry to fishermen?

DeGIGLIO Yes, I think the competition now is getting.... where they've got these deep water fish which years ago, was a bit easy to.... oh well, tommy ruff and snook you see. Well the price of those hasn't risen for years because they've got all these deep water fish and they freeze them. They're filleted and frozen and they're boneless fish and the Australian.... as long as it's a boneless fish, well they'll eat anything - even if it's shark!

JD Yes, it's quite popular, isn't it?

DeGIGLIO Oh the gummy shark, you see, once it's fried, there's no bones, well it's good.

JD They tell me that the catch of sharks is reducing too?

DeGIGLIO Oh yes, all fish. Crayfish - all fish have reduced considerably.

JD Does that mean that the management of the industry needs to be tightened up, do you think?

DeGIGLIO No, I think the reason for the stocks to increase again would be to close the netting season while the fish are spawning (which is from November to January) and that way, I reckon the stocks will increase quite considerably.

JD There's no closed season now?

DeGIGLIO There isn't any closed season now, because those times of the year, well there's a lot of amateurs netting. Well we go to Lucky Bay and there's about ten nets on the beach every day. They've all got these four-wheel drives and God knows where

they go and net fish, you see. Well, two dozen each a day, well that's a few fish [unclear]

JD Amateurs are allowed to use a net?

DeGIGLIO They're allowed to use one length of net which is 70 metres. Yes.

JD Do you think the amateur is taking a large proportion of the available fish?

DeGIGLIO Oh yes, he's reducing it a fair bit. Yes, because they can go netting, they can do line fishing. All right they've got a quota on schnapper and whiting, but they've got no quota on snook and garfish or anything like that and there are thousands of recreation fishermen.

JD Are there quotas operating for professional fishermen?

DeGIGLIO No, we've got no quotas, no. It's only in the winter time like a schnapper quota for netting schnapper, it's only a....

JD But there's a regulation as to the size of the net?

DeGIGLIO Oh yes, there's a regulation to the size of the net and the size of the fish, yes.

JD What are some of the other fisheries on this York Peninsula, John? You're scale fishing largely. There is some prawning too, I understand.

DeGIGLIO Yes, there is prawning which.... I think the prawning has damaged the scale fishing industry because schnapper and all the fish used to feed on prawns, but they don't only catch prawns, they catch crabs, they catch squids (small squid) and they catch fish which in time, has made.... you've seen the results that come about it.

JD There's quite an Italian based community in Port Pirie in the fishing industry, isn't there?

DeGIGLIO Yes.

JD Has been for a long time.

DeGIGLIO Years ago, say since 1940 to 1950, or even before that, there's quite a few Italians fishing. There'd be about a hundred or more, but today there's.... I think there's only about five Italians fishing that I know of. Five or six at the most.

JD Are there are other fishing communities down the coast that have a lot of Italians in?

DeGIGLIO No, no. They've turned into other businesses and working men but I think they've seen the writing on the wall. In 1950 well, quite a few here went wharfing - joined the waterside workers, which they've done all right out of that. Quite a few moved to Adelaide. I reckon about a quarter of the population moved to Adelaide for the fishermen.

JD John, are there any other migrants groups, like Portuguese or Spanish, in fishing along this coast?

DeGIGLIO No, around this area there isn't any, not in the Spencer Gulf coast. Not that I know of. No.

JD Anything else that you'd like to comment on in regard to fishing generally, or in regard to this fishery here?

DeGIGLIO Oh my comments are that I'd like to see not for myself because I've only got another three or four years to go) that the netting season be closed from beginning of November to the end of January because that is the time when the fish spawn, you see. And I reckon that way, their stocks would keep on going. Well, they won't improve, they'd keep on going as they are today. That's the only thing that I can see which would keep the fishing industry going, but the way it is now, well, I reckon in ten years time.... I suppose it would be the price which would keep them going you see, but the trouble is the expenses now. Petrol is getting dearer and the machinery is getting dearer and your boats are dearer and you've got to get the return you see, to do any good out of it. But that's what I can see fishing.... if they don't.... I reckon that'd be the only solution to close the areas.... netting season for three months of the year and just continue like that. And I reckon that way, their stocks will decrease a little bit, but not the way they're going today. The way it's going today, I reckon ten years time, it's going to be very bad because I can see it at Lucky Bay, the last three or four years. We're going backwards all the time you see. We've got to work very hard to make a living over there.

JD John, do the fishermen, through their organisation, discuss these things with the Department?

DeGIGLIO Well the fishermen, mainly the fishermen in the organisation are net fishermen. Well now, the last year or so they've found a schnapper ground which they all get a quid out of it for about a couple of months of the year, and I think if they looked into that, they would agree to close the netting season. That's my opinion.

JD All right. Anything else you'd like to say?

DeGIGLIO Oh well, it's.... oh I've think I've said the lot.

JD Well, thank you very much for this interview, John.

DeGIGLIO Pleasure.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

END OF INTERVIEW

Verbatim transcript of an interview with DAVE EVANS

INTRODUCTION

Though born in Western Australia Dave Evans has lived almost all his life, now of some 74 years, in the Coorong of South Australia. After service in the AIF during World War Two, Dave returned to Coorong fishing for mulloway. In the 1960s he was prevailed upon to join the South Australian Fisheries Department and for the last four years before his retirement was Acting Chief Inspector of that Department.

On this tape he gives an excellent account of the life of a Coorong fisherman before and after the War years and the methods he used in fishing, the transporting of the catch and marketing it. For some years Dave Evans was the skipper of Fisheries Department vessels and until recently was actively involved in the fish tagging programme. He was a meticulous record keeper and a thoughtful member of the fisheries management team. He is highly regarded by his fellow fishermen and by his colleagues in the Fisheries Department.

The interview was conducted by Jack Darcey for Murdoch University and the Australian Fisheries Research Council in Mr Evans' home in Victor Harbour, South Australia on the 1st February, 1990. There are two sides of one tape. The interview starts at 022 on the revolution counter.

TAPE 1 SIDE A

JD Mr Evans, could you give your full name and date and place of birth please?

EVANS Yes. It's David Evans and I was born in Subiaco, Western Australia on the 4th January, 1916.

JD How did you come to be back in South Australia then?

EVANS Well my parents were farmers. They were originally Goolwa people and they moved over to Western Australia and they were farming at a place called Watheroo. Unfortunately my father met an untimely death at the age of 33 and mum naturally sold out and came back to Goolwa, her native home town.

JD So you were brought up in the Coorong area were you?

EVANS I was virtually brought up in the Coorong. My grandfather on my mother's side was a fisherman and I had also seven uncles who were fishermen and my mother re-married and my stepfather was also a fisherman.

JD All in the Coorong?

EVANS All in the Coorong, yes.

JD And all landing their catch at Goolwa, was it?

EVANS All landed their catch at Goolwa and then transported them to Adelaide, yes.

JD And you followed suit then?

EVANS Yes. Right from when I could first swim. Then I was allowed to take a dinghy out and run a net.

JD And when you left school you went straight into fishing, did you?

EVANS For the first twelve months or so after I left school I went to work for a farmer because my mother always said that that should have been my occupation, on the land, but I had different ideas. I had a bachelor uncle who took me under his wing and I went with him fishing and continued in the fishing until 1966 when I left the fishing and went into the Fisheries Department. I couldn't beat them so I joined them.

JD [Laughs] After you started fishing Dave, you ultimately acquired your own boat of course?

EVANS Yes. For the first.... from 1932 until 1940 or [the] end of 1939 when I enlisted, I was using my stepfather's boat. Whilst I was overseas unfortunately he sold that so then when I came back I had to purchase my own boat and go under my own steam.

JD Did you serve in the AIF?

EVANS Yes I was in the 2/10 Infantry Battalion. Unfortunately I was wounded twice but not seriously.

JD And so when you were discharged you bought your own boat and went fishing on your own account?

EVANS That's right, yes.

JD Still in the Coorong and landing the catch at Goolwa?

EVANS At Goolwa, yes, yes.

JD And you continued in that occupation until you left to join the Fisheries Department?

EVANS In 1966, yes.

JD What moved you to join the Fisheries Department?

EVANS Well I was the leading supplier of mulloway into the SAFCOL market in Adelaide and the then Director of Fisheries, he was very interested to get my knowledge and so forth. He said to me one night at a meeting, "You ever thought about joining the Fisheries Department"? Well at that time I laughed but after twelve

months thinking about it and by this time I was established, on my feet. Whilst you're fishing I spent that much time away from home, I thought well if I joined the Fisheries Department at least I'd have a bit more [time] home with my wife.

JD So that was the main reason?

EVANS That was the main reason and as far as the Fisheries Department are concerned, they wanted my knowledge.

JD Dave, could you describe the sort of life that a fishermen led when you were fishing?

EVANS Yes. It wasn't all easy by any means. For instance, I would leave home on the 23rd of June (not one year but a number of years), on the 23rd of June and I wouldn't spend one night home in my place until the 23rd of December. That was brought about then [because] on the 23rd of December the market would close in Adelaide for several days over the Christmas break so there was no point in catching fish. The 23rd June was because by the time you got your gear set and caught your fish and transported them to Adelaide then it would be into the new financial year.

JD You would leave port and then camp, would you, every night?

EVANS Yes. We camped aboard the boat.

JD Lived on board?

EVANS You lived on board the boat, yes. Oh yes.

JD What size boat was it?

EVANS Well from 22 foot to 30 foot. I had various boats but in that range. That was virtually the range it was in the Goolwa area in those days. Oh we were quite comfortable on board. Course there was no TV. We had a wireless; that was something.

JD Did you fish alone or did you have a crew?

EVANS For the last seventeen years I fished with another partner. I took him on [and] at the time I said I wanted him for about six weeks just to help me over a busy period. Seventeen years later we were still together. Then after I joined the Department, he continued fishing for four years and then I talked him into joining the Department too and he's just retired too.

JD Was it a netting method that you used, was it?

EVANS Yes. It was mainly netting. There were only about three months of the year, not every year, that we would go hooking down at the Murray mouth but it was mainly netting, yes.

JD And the main species caught was mulloway?

EVANS That's right. It was mulloway and bream. There were mullet; there were mullet fishermen there too but I didn't worry the mullet fishermen at all. This is why I got on so well with so many other fishermen because we weren't opposition. One

would tell the other when they heard mulloway of a night time somewhere, they'd tell me. If I heard a lot of mullet somewhere I'd tell them the mullet fishermen and this made for a good relationship. We weren't opposition; we were but we weren't. [Laughs].

JD How did you keep the catch [fresh]?

EVANS Well in the early days it was a pretty primitive method. As soon as you got them you'd get the guts out. That's the important thing of it. Then you'd spread them out on your deck with a wet hessian over and then a dry hessian over the top of that. If it was during the summertime you'd also put up a little bit of a, like a tent, over the top to allow the draft to go through. They'd last there four days without any trouble at all. At the end of four days I defy you to tell me which fish I'd just put there that morning or which was four days old.

JD What, at the end of four days you'd have to take them into.... [market]?

EVANS Into the market, yes. That's right. Well in the early days, transport was train. Well it used to take about three hours at the quickest for a train to reach Adelaide. Well in the early days there was no ice even so we did get quite a few fish condemned in the early days but then from about the mid 30s on ice used to help preserve [them]. Even in those days it had to be sent out from Adelaide. There was no local ice product at all. Well it'd come out in chaff bags, two blocks in a bag of saw dust. Well a lot of times it'd come by goods train and it'd depend on how long it took the goods train to get out to Goolwa, how much ice remained. Lots of times it was just wet saw dust in the bag. [laughs] It's true.

JD When it got to Adelaide it was auctioned, was it?

EVANS Yes. It was all auctioned there, yes.

JD And it was sold to local buyers in Adelaide, was it?

EVANS Yeah. That was the method of it. Well then a chap by the name of Edwin Daw & Sons ran the market for a good number of years and it wasn't till about 1950 that SAFCOL (the South Australian Fishermen's Co-op) bought Daw out and then we all became shareholders in it. So it was quite good then. That put me on my feet, or helped put me on my feet because the profits were coming back to me.

JD And then later on SAFCOL became a company, didn't it?

EVANS Yes. That became a company and oh I think they've amalgamated with other people and all that. I'm not a member now.

JD I don't think they operate in South Australia now, do they?

EVANS No, I don't think so but I'm not certain of that. I'm no longer a member. It's about six years [since] I sold my shares.

JD Dave, we've talked about the way the fish were caught and handled in early days. What do they do now, the people still in the industry?

EVANS Well I personally can't see any of these younger fishermen, which they mostly are now, making ends meet. This is why in the eyes of the Fisheries Department, they

think that the fish are becoming scarcer but I don't think that for one minute. It's only the method, the know-how has gone out of the industry. There's young fellows that are operating today; they've all gone in for speed boats with high powered outboard motors. They run down about 4.00 o'clock in the afternoon and set some nets then come home to mum; get up 7.00 o'clock or something next morning, go down and run their nets and come home again.

Well that's all very good but it doesn't make the living. There's so much that you learn by being out on the job of a night time, particularly with mulloway because they've got a habit of coming to the surface of a night and they'll crack and so forth. It gives you an idea of what class of fish is about so therefore then you know what type of gear to set out and in which direction they're travelling. See it's no use hearing fish here today and think you're gonna catch them there tomorrow because they'll be five mile or something further on. Cause that's about how far fish travel. A mulloway travels about five miles in 24 hours, unless there's gales or something like that on, well then they get scattered far and wide but generally speaking that's my observations. It's happened many a time that I've been coming home with a patch of fish, say a tonne or two tonne.

We used to try and control the market a little bit by not putting more than about two tonne in at any one time. Numerous times I've seen another patch on my way back but I'd just make a mental note of where that is and then I can add on [laughs] about two and a half to three mile. Next day I don't even get up the mast. We used to travel round up the mast spotting and I wouldn't get up the mast until I got two or three mile up and invariably. I wouldn't be up more than ten minutes or so and I'd spot them because I'd worked out how far they would be in twelve hours from when I previously saw them.

JD Were they good size schools that you caught?

EVANS Well nine tonnes, 314 pound in one school's the biggest I've landed. I've seen bigger schools but they've usually been outside the mouth that haven't come in the mouth and therefore we couldn't get at them.

JD These schools, are they all mature fish or are they a mixture of immature and older fish?

EVANS No, usually they stick pretty well in the same class. They might all be, say five pound or they might all be fifteen pound, or they might all be 40 pound but they do seem.... you'd just get the odd mixture, one mixed up in them, but usually they are of the one class.

JD And you feel that there's no depletion of stock, not with the mulloway anyway?

EVANS No I don't think for one minute. I know by the little sorties I do now and the number of fish I catch for the limited amount of gear that I've got now and I still do alright.

JD Is there a pollution problem at all in the Coorong?

EVANS Yes, there is. This was brought about by man again [laughs]. The southern lagoon is virtually wiped out from a fishing point of view now. In case you don't

realise, the Coorong is divided up into two sectors; there's the northern zone, that's the one that joins onto the mouth and goes up for the first 40 mile.

JD That's the mouth of the Murray River?

EVANS The mouth, where the Murray empties out into the sea. That goes up to what they call 'the needles' and then over a series of flats and then it gets up into the southern lagoon which is another 30 miles long. Well one time that used to be real good mullet fishing in the winter time. When the higher water was on the mullet would work up over the flats but then the man altered the drainage system of the fresh water that used to drain in into the Coorong and now that all goes down to the south east out down Port MacDonald way down there.

The Coorong has become too saline. I can't give you the exact figures of what it is now but it's quite a few degrees saltier than the sea. It's affected not only the fishing, the fish don't tolerate it and the bird life has gone too. That has brought about, I say the bird life because all your weeds and all that have died and your growth around the shore and in turn it affects the wild life.

JD What about recreational fishermen, Dave? Do they affect the commercial fishery?

EVANS No not at all. There was nobody [who] was more anti-amateur than what Dave Evans was when I was a fisherman; when they first started to come in force. There's always been a certain number but it wasn't until the '50's that they really came down there in droves. I was very anti them in those place[s] but I soon learned that I could tolerate them, that they didn't have very much bearing on me whatsoever.

For instance, you might be just working your way round to have a shot at a patch of fish; you've spotted a patch of fish and you're maneuvering your boat round to get into position and a speed boat'd come hurtling along. Well you'd think that'd be the end of them but no it doesn't. All the fish would do was dive deeper. They might be up within the first three feet of the surface, and they might drop down another four or five feet down but I could still see them. Other than that it had no bearing on them at all. The older slower boat with the inboard motors, whether it was a two cylinder or one cylinder with a bigger propeller that used to thud around in the water, that had more bearing on them. That would disperse them. The speedboat, where it was going at [a] faster rate like that had virtually no bearing on it at all. So I soon became good cobbers with all those chaps too.

JD You feel it was the sound of the propeller that was....

EVANS Yes. The sound of the propeller's got the biggest bearing on it. When we were fishing ourselves, we lost a lot of fish in the early stage. In the very early days we used to row our nets around. Well we soon progressed and learned from that and then we'd start towing them around with a motor-boat. Well that's where we lost a lot of patches in the early days because we'd come up onto a patch and the fish'd start moving the same pace as you would so immediately you opened up your motor, gave it more power, and that increased your revs and so it also increased the revs of the fish. They took off at your speed or greater and you'd lose them.

So we soon found that if that happened it was better to turn away from the fish altogether for 300 or 400 yards and come up at a faster speed and you altered your revs when you were 300 or 400 yards away from the school of fish and that had no bearing on them and then come up at a faster speed. It didn't matter how fast. It

didn't worry them at all as long as there wasn't a sudden alteration of the revs. [unclear].

JD There's a lot of knowledge that you can only gain by practical experience isn't there?

EVANS Yes, that's right. Yes it is.

JD Dave, when you became a fisheries officer, it must have been a big change in your relationship with your fellow fishermen. How did they accept you as an officer?

EVANS Oh [they were] very good. No, I was very lucky. It was [because of] my experience behind me that I was accepted by all and sundry. I didn't have [trouble with] any of them. They used to say, "Thank Christ I got somebody that knows what he's talking about." No, I was accepted and it made my job a lot easier too. I found a lot of things that weren't quite right and I used to talk to them, rather than book them.

JD Yeah. Would you like to give your views on the way that a fishery is managed? Is it effective?

EVANS Well it is up until a point. The Fisheries Department can only manage it with what knowledge they've got at their disposal. Unfortunately, and I say unfortunately because a lot of that isn't correct that they get. The fishermen today have to submit monthly returns showing what gear they use, where they caught the fish and what else have you and what weight of fish they caught. Unfortunately that isn't the correct return. I don't know of any fisherman that puts in a correct return; number one taxation.

JD As one would more or less expect?

EVANS Yeah. [laughs] Oh that's right too, yes. So the Fisheries Department are up against it a little bit. Then also with their methods, the know-how, the old hands are all passed on and there's none of us, we're all too mean to have passed much of this information on to these young fellows. If you do, they don't take any notice of you. There again, the catch rate that they do catch is nowhere near to what I'm of the opinion that they could still be. Then that looks bad from the Fisheries Department's concern. They [are] concerned that it's a declining thing and they don't take into fact that the know-how is not there; the gear is not there today.

JD Dave, you'd perhaps agree that there's a different sort of person [who] comes into fishing now than in your day?

EVANS Oh, yes entirely different altogether. See in my day nine out of ten of us young fellows that came in came from fishing families. Well that's all gone today. See back in my early days there was about 60 fishermen operating out of Goolwa. Today there's not six. That's the difference. That's the difference how it's gone off. I think today there's somewhere about 45 licensed fishermen in the Lakes in Coorong which includes Goolwa, Meningie, Narrung and around. There's not many of those [who] have come from fishing families. There are still one or two fishing families but they're up in Meningie and that now and I can't talk on what their catch rates are; no idea.

JD The transferability of licences Dave, has that had an effect on the fishing?

EVANS Yes it has. It's had a big effect on it because some of those older fishermen would still [have] been going if there hadn't been a transferability of licence. See today they get about, oh somewhere about $13,000 for a licence in the lakes and Coorong. In fact I think some of them go up higher but that's about an average what they're getting. Some of the older fishermen would have still been going. They [think] oh here's $13,000.00 just been handed out on a plate and they accept it. Well it's the young fellow that's gone in for it. A lot of them have borrowed money from the bank and how the duce they can ever make do, I don't know, no.

JD What would you think about the industry's future then? Is it a healthy future that you're looking at or are the prospects not so good?

EVANS Well I can't see the prospect is really good and I can see, probably not in my time, but it will become an amateur's paradise. I think all professional netting will be cut out in the Coorong. I think the amateurs will win. They wouldn't have won all the time I was fishing but I can see it coming, yes.

JD Do the amateurs use nets?

EVANS Yes. They're all very limited now though. Yes they've got it down virtually.... It's almost impossible for an amateur to use a net and catch a mulloway. All he can catch is mullet if he sticks rigidly to what he can do but I don't care how good the inspection staff is, they'd never fleece it properly because it's such a long expanse and you've got 70 mile of it, of waterways to fleece. Most of the netting is done at night time and it would be very remote for an inspector to run under some of the nets [laughs].

JD Dave you were the skipper of the Fisheries' vessel, or one of them for a while, weren't you?

EVANS Yes.

JD Would you like to talk about that?

EVANS Yes. I started off.... We got the first fast boat we had.... the Fisheries Department had an old boat that could do about, oh seven knots or something. Well then we got one that could do 30. Well I was the first skipper of that. That was powered by outboards. Then we used that for about three years. I did 650 hours in those three years so I did a fair bit of patrol work. Then we went up bigger and in 1973 we had a new vessel, a 48 footer built in Western Australia and I went over and brought her back, sailed her back to.... after doing the preliminary run in. She was built at Fremantle and after running up 50 hours and having the motor serviced and all that, then I sailed her back home here without any worries or troubles; no troubles at all.

Well since then we've gone on. The Police Department have got that vessel now because we found that was just a little bit too big for what we want and now they're down to around the 25-30 footers fast boats and this seems the ideal thing for what they want because they've got more people capable of handling them than they have the bigger craft.

JD Yes. Do those patrol boats patrol the whole of the South Australian area or do they [unclear] different places?

EVANS Yes, from the Victorian border to the Western Australian border. In fact when I was in the Department I was also an inspector, had the powers of an inspector for Victoria and also for Western Australia. So that if it became a borderline case, they couldn't just run over the border and laugh at me. I could follow them over and intercept them [laughs].

JD Dave, you went on in the Department, didn't you, to bigger and bigger things?

EVANS Yes. I was the first assistant senior inspector in the Department. They created....

This interview is continued on side B of this tape.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

TAPE 1 SIDE B

JD We were talking about your subsequent career in the Department, Dave.

EVANS Yes. Well I started as a Grade 1 first and I was stationed at Ceduna which is one of the outposts in South Australia. Then I came back as the skipper of a patrol boat. I was three and a half years at that job because I had the qualifications. Then they created a new position in the Department, the assistant senior inspector and I happened to be fortunate enough to get that. So I was the first assistant senior inspector in the Department. I carried it on for about four years until the senior inspector, well he didn't retire but he went on sick leave. Then I acted as the senior inspector for the next four years until I retired.

JD So you got to the top in the Department?

EVANS Yes, in the Department, yes. I was very lucky. Luck came my way. I put it that way [laughter].

JD Since you've retired, what are your interests now?

EVANS I'm still very interested in fishing. I still have a permit for the Fisheries Department. Whilst I was in the Fisheries Department I started a tagging programme on mulloway because I felt that mulloway was a little known fish. There wasn't enough known about it. We all had our ideas as to how long it took them to grow certain lengths and all this type of thing but I had nothing scientific to back me up. So with the help of the Department, or with the approval of the Department, I started the tagging programme and that was in 1979. I didn't retire until 1981.

Well then I carried on with the permit from the Department to carry on the tagging programme for mulloway and bream. It was included then. I've still got that permit. The last two years the Department virtually wound up the tagging programme. They've now felt that they'd spent as much money as they could afford to spend on that one particular fish and they had to move further afield but I've still got all the tagging gear and so forth to carry on.

JD And you still do a bit of fishing?

EVANS And I still do a bit of fishing, yes. About once a week I go out and I have fish seven nights a week for tea [laughs].

JD Dave, you also do a bit of writing, don't you?

EVANS Yes. I've always been a great one for.... When I was a professional fisherman, for the last fifteen years I kept diaries and they were invaluable to me because it proved to me, or I seemed to learn that there is a pattern [which] came out of mulloway; what time they moved in, which way they travelled and which side of the Coorong they moved up and moved up on one side and then later in a certain time of the year they moved down on the other side. It would all help me in being able to catch them.

It was through these diaries that told me these things, at what time of the year they'd start to move in and what class of fish would move in. See if the 25-30 pounders where you want a seven or eight inch mesh was to move in, it's no use having five inch nets out cause you wouldn't catch any. This is the value of the diaries. I used to have them on the boat and of a night time for something [to do], there was no TV. I'd lay back and read all these diaries up. There was no doubt [that] there was a pattern came out of it. Since I've left the Department I still keep my diaries.

JD Good [unclear].

EVANS I could tell you every fish I've caught since I've left the Department and where I've given them away. Yes. Last year there was only 40 different people I gave fish to. The year before that there was 50. [laughter].

JD Dave, anything else that you'd like to have recorded on this tape before we finish?

EVANS Oh, not really.

JD Any outstanding people that you can recall?

EVANS Yes. There were some fishermen that.... there's an old chap, he originated from Malang to Goolway, a chap [by the name] of Dick Woodrow. He to me was a model fisherman. I learned more from that man than I did from all my.... from my stepfather or from my uncles, [with] all due respect to one uncle. This chap by the name of Dick Woodrow., he was an outstanding fisherman. I used to watch him and [in] fact for four years we amalgamated during the hauling season with Dick Woodrow. And it was during that period also that I learned a lot more. He didn't have to repeat it cause I never forgot anything he told me because he was such a model fisherman.

JD Is he still alive?

EVANS He's still alive. He's 90 now, 91 I think this year. I went up to his 90th birthday last year. In fact I still just hang a fish on his gate odd nights when I'm not there. I do too. [laughs].

JD Good. Well look Dave, thank you very much. It's been a fascinating talk.

EVANS That's alright, yeah. Good.

That is the end of this interview with Mr Dave Evans, Coorong fisherman and fisheries officer in the Department of Fisheries in South Australia.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW

Verbatim transcript of an interview with IRVEN FEAST

[Introduction on side B of tape]

INTRODUCTION

This interview with Mr Irven Eric (Dud) Feast, retired fisherman and farmer of Port MacDonnell in South Australia was recorded by Jack Darcey for Murdoch University's oral history of the Australian Fishing Industry. The interview was recorded in Mr Feast's home on the 6th February 1990.

Mr Feast was a fisherman on this south east coast of South Australia for some 60 years and fished for both rock lobster and scale fish. In the interview he makes interesting comments on fishing methods, changes in technology and problems currently confronting the industry. He also speaks about ship wrecks and accidents and the Port MacDonnell life boat service of which he was a member.

Towards the end of the interview he makes interesting observations on some overseas fisheries, notably the catching of rock lobster using helicopters in New Zealand. Still hale and hearty at 84 years of age, Mr Feast is an articulate and colourful interviewee whose story contributes much to this project.

There are two sides of one tape. The interview starts at 022 on the revolution counter.

TAPE 1 SIDE A

JD Could you tell me your full name.

FEAST Irven Eric (Dud) Feast.

JD And where were you born?

FEAST Port MacDonnell.

JD And how long ago?

FEAST September 1st, 1905.

JD So you're 85 years old?

FEAST Hardly [laughs].

JD Almost. [laughter] Did you live in Port MacDonnell all your life?

FEAST Been here all my life. Only time.... I've been overseas a few times but only on holiday and I've been here ever since.

JD Your family have been in this area for a long time, haven't they?

FEAST Yes. Come in the late 1850s.

JD And were they involved in fishing?

FEAST No, no. Actually wool washing or fell mongering; washing wool in the creeks and taking the wool of skins and packing the hides up and washing the wool and sending that away.

JD Was your father a fisherman?

FEAST No. He fished with me in latter years, especially in the Depression but he worked with my grandad at the woolwash. The wool here was washed and was sent away by the steamers, the trading steamers and sailing ships; sailing ships in the early days. Wool would come from the stations around the area in bullock wagons [as] far up as Naracoorte to here and it was washed and put on the ships and much of that wool went direct from the sailing ship here to England, consigned from here to England.

In latter years the ports closed up. The railway line came from Portland and connected to Mt Gambier. Well therefore wool those days went to the wool stores in Melbourne, was sold by auction and the port closed up because there was nothing for the steamers to bring. [it was] Steamers those days but sailing ships and my grandad told me, he had seen as many as seven sailing ships here; three at the moorings and the others used to shelter down in a place called Jimmy Fyphes' Bay till there was room for moorings and to be unloaded, or loaded. In 1914, as I said, the railway closed up and the shipping was finished and then actually Port MacDonnell was finished. It was a thriving port in the early days. The second biggest tonnage in South Australia was Port MacDonnell, second to Port Adelaide for tonnage. That all had to be lightered from the ship side to the jetty and then brought down the jetty in trucks and then transported inland. That's the goods coming by horse and wagon and bullocks in the early days, to as far up as Naracoorte The line only came to Naracoorte in those days. That'd be the line from Adelaide.

JD You were educated here?

FEAST Yes, at the local school.

JD What did you do after you left school?

FEAST I left school when I was twelve. After the Port had closed up and so on there was nothing left here so dad took up a bit of land at a place called.... well the old Green Point Station. That was bought by the Government, a large station and much of it was sold but the old homestead and 1,000 acres was left vacant. By that time the rabbits had come here in millions, bred up and [in]filtrated down in the south east from inland and naturally the place was eaten out and nobody would take it up. So at last they reduced the rent and also the improvements. The improvements.... there was a house on it, an old house and a good wool shed and fences were out of order. It'd been twelve years unallotted so therefore it was cut down to the improvements on it. That included the whole house and the bit of fencing and the good wool shed. The

improvements were sold to dad for 60 pound. That was included in the rent of course. There was five years you had at half rent and then it was on the closer settlement, 99 years lease and the rent doubled and we went on from there but I well remember that one year our wool, we had thirteen bales and it brought 108 pound. The rent of the property at that time was 105 pound so therefore dad with mum and his seven kiddies (six boys and one girl) never had much money.

Well I left school at twelve years of age and went down to help him and we trapped rabbits and caught fish in the summer, rabbits in the winter. I helped rear the family by being down with my father but the fact was.... We went on from there and I stopped there for 35 years until I got married. Actually I was married in 1934 and I was there quite a number of years after. My wife and I both worked there but living in Port MacDonnell. We had to travel [by] horse and cart [on] Monday morning and home Saturday afternoon. To get a few extra bob we used to grow oaten hay and cut it up with a chaff cutter. Each Saturday dad and I had one cart and one horse and dad in the other, we'd cart home and supply the hotels, the two hotels and the people that were selling meat. They'd buy a couple of bags of chaff and the police station.... [we] tendered to sell chaff to the Police Department. Those days the bag of chaff was one [shilling] and six [pence]. I can tell you we had some very cold rides in a horse and cart; twelve miles with the chaff of a Saturday afternoon. You'd just have time to have a wash and get to the dance. Dances then were a shilling and probably if you had a lady friend [laughs] it'd cost you two bob (my mother would give me two bob).

JD So when did you start fishing then?

FEAST Oh we were fishing all the time, dad and I in the summer time with dinghies; catching crays and hawking the crays round Ob Flat, Yahl, Mt Gambier, sometimes Moorak.

JD You used to take a horse and cart into Mt Gambier?

FEAST A horse and cart, yes. You'd go to the suburbs. That was say out [the] east end or west end. That was the poorest living place of the town and two-thirds of them had no money. If you had crays, you knew you had fish, you'd have to get rid of them that day. No such things as freezers. Well if they had no money you'd give them one [laughs].

JD Did you line fish?

FEAST Line and net; in latter years net. We learned after that that you could catch snapper. By the way, in the '20s and the early '30s the snapper was that prolific here you could get 50 or 60 or 100 snapper anywhere you liked. The whole bother was you couldn't sell them. See there were people in Port MacDonnell, the Carrisons were great fishermen and the Williams and us at Green Point, twelve miles away. We'd have to get up early to get round Ob Flat, Yahl, or Gambier before the ones from Port MacDonnell got up. With the snapper, well they left the Gulf. See snapper was always in Spencer's Gulf there and that supplied Adelaide and you'd get very few snapper here but for some unknown reason, it's never been found out, [why] they came here in millions. They sort of must have bred somewhere. They came as little ones, four to six inches long and then they stopped either about ten years till they got up to seven or eight pounds weight, or you'd get odd bigger ones. The snapper then gradually petered out and they never ever returned, not in any quantity.

Here locally in Port MacDonnell it'd be nothing to see a couple of chaps, two or three lots with the hauling nets, especially in the summer time when the visitor was here.

One time Port Mac was a great place for visitors, especially with the Wimmera farmers. They would come down after harvest and every house'd be full. Even my mother used to let the two front rooms of our house for a pound a week and others let houses and rooms. They'd be full. Well they would eat a lot of snapper and it was a great thing to see them down of a night lining the beach seeing the people haul these nets in full of snapper.

JD It was a beach fishery, was it?

FEAST Yes. You would just go out with a flat bottom boat, go out round about, oh 50 yards out. Your net would be about 50 yards long with two ropes; a rope each end you see and as you pull each end you'd close it in near the beach and your fish would be in a bag. Snapper, oh well when they were thick, they were thick but they gradually died out. You could go up the jetty and catch eight or ten snapper of a night and things like that but you'd go up there a month now.... Well you could go a year and you'd never get your snapper but that was the early days and they petered out but dad and I used to catch crays and snapper. Then gradually, as we caught the rabbits, we could run a few more sheep and also a few cattle. Then we gradually, with the fish money and the wool got better.

That year that I told you about the wool, that was one of the years where, well there was a flop in wool prices and in latter years after.... Well you remember in the, I think it was the '40s that the wool went up to a pound a pound. Well things were different then. We gradually purchased more land until such time.... Then in the meantime I had two brothers. They came down, that's prior to the War, and helped on the farm. Well dad had three to help: fencing, shearing (did our own shearing), marking calves. Did everything ourselves. Also fishing in the summer so we progressed wonderfully, the Feast family. Well then the War came and three brothers went to the War and my only sister, I had five brothers. [there were] seven in our family, six boys and one girl. She went nursing and I don't know how it came about, but she nursed Lady Blamey [laughs] during the War. So I don't know how she got to be nursing her. However that was beside the point. We gradually went on and the boys came back. Course then dad was getting older and I was married with a young family. Then dad decided to wack the land up amongst myself and the other brothers. We all got a share and dad and mum lived on in Port Mac as dad had all his life.

By the way, my mother, she was born at Allendale and was more or less a local girl. My dad died at 84 and my mother at 88 and they're laid to rest in the Bay Cemetery where their fathers and mothers are. So we had a fairly good history of the Feasts as far as Port MacDonnell was concerned. Well there's quite a number here now. Dad's father had two boys. Well dad had six sons and the other brother had four. Unfortunately one of them got drowned at sea fishing and another one, he died young. They all had boys so there's quite a number of Feasts here. In fact more Feasts than famine [laughter].

JD And you continued fishing in the summer?

FEAST Yeah. We continued fishing in the summer, right through but during the War I was the only son with dad and my wife did as much work as I did cooking for the shearers and cooking for us. She could help brand the sheep and press the wool. She was quite good and naturally we got on well. The wife and I got on well and we did alright, as far as having plenty of work all the time [laughs].

JD You started off in dinghies?

FEAST Yeah. We started in dinghies with the fishing. Now the dinghies that we had [were] flat bottomed boats. You could get one built for about three pound and the timber never cost you much and somebody'd knock a flattie up. Well then after that we got a couple of keel boats and fishing with a horse and cart, you'd go to the beach you see. A keel boat [was] twelve foot six with about a four foot six beam. Good boats. When the snapper was thick, well we'd fish, line fishing in each. Dad'd have one and I'd have another.

There would always be a competition to see who caught the most but in later years we just used the net, one boat and a net. We found we could catch more with a net. It was rocky ground. You couldn't haul as I was telling you about the hauling.... [you would] go round with a net [with] the two ropes to pull it in. We would use a set net and splash; go round in a circle from shore to shore you see and out to the sea, round about three chain round with 120 yard net. You'd give a few splashes and you'd get the fish that way.

At that stage, it was before the War, there was a fish shop started in Mt Gambier and that chap, we supplied him and then he would buy all our surplus to send to Adelaide. He was the first one to put a freezer in. A chap named Gray. He happened to be a league football umpire in Adelaide. He came in and he used to do the umpiring here as well. A good umpire and he sold our fish. We sold to him and he sold them in Adelaide and we had a good market for our fish and did well with the dingies. Well then when the War came there was very little fishing. Dad and I did a little bit. [we had] No time [and] no energy. Well you had to work the property with the boys away and [there] wasn't much fishing then but after the War the fishing started in earnest in Port Mac.

There was a chap named Harford, Leo B. Harford, an American. He came from Robe. He'd started a small factory in Robe by taking the tails from the crayfish, freezing the tails and sending them to America and he was doing that at Beachport. He came here to see if he could get any crayfish. Well at that time there was only three boats in the bay. When I say boats, I had a 35 footer and Clarie Hammond had a 26 and [a] chap named Roy Williams who left the Airforce, he built a boat (38 feet) and there was three boats here fishing. Those days you could only catch as many as you could sell. Well when Harford came we thought it was wonderful. He would come with a truck and pick them up and you'd have to put them in a cage to keep them alive for a few days. He'd pick them up and take them down and process them at Beachport.... I'm wrong, it was Robe instead of Beachport. That's where he had his small factory, Robe. Well then he could see that we were catching as many or more fish than they were down there so he decided to start a factory here. He closed the Robe factory and he came here; lived here and the boats gradually came.

The Kingston boats came here. The Robe boats came here and fished and more boats came by people buying the boats from in Victoria. See in Victoria around Portland and Port Fairy it was mostly coota fishing. There were crayfishing but it was mostly coota fishing and these old boats were brought here with car engines and it wasn't long before we had seven or eight boats and then the next year twelve or fifteen boats and at the present day we've got 84 registered boats here fishing in Port MacDonnell. All on crayfish and that's how it progressed.

JD Did the catches stay up or did they decline with so many boats fishing; the number of bags that you got each day?

FEAST Oh actually what happened [is] with the number of boats it took about 30 years more or less to get the catches down. At the start we could catch as many crays as you could pull the pots up. See we'd fish with fourteen or sixteen or twenty pots

and you get eight or ten or fifteen bags. Well then as the boats came you had to go further afield and you would put out more pots. There was no limit of pots those days and to be funny some of the fishermen, they put two lots of pots out. What I mean, instead of using 30 or 40 which they could work properly, bait and pull in the day and bag your fish which took quite a bit of time, they decided they would double the pots [and] they'd catch double the fish.

Well naturally they found that they just couldn't work them. Well then if it became rough weather they had double the amount of pots out there which would be caught. You're still catching fish because in those days the ordinary swimming fish, the leather jackets and the parrot fish and all sorts of fish. Fish that we've never seen was going in the pots. Well the crayfish would catch.... There'd be crays in there. They would eat them or go into get one to eat. Well naturally when you never went out, those pots that weren't being worked and making use of the crays that went in were being killed and naturally by having the greater number of pots, you were doing just as much harm as people that were catching them and taking them out. They were selling them and making a living but actually the octopus would get in the pots and kill all the crays and all you'd have is a pot full of shells. So therefore it was bad and that soon finished. They couldn't work their pots so they had to learn to fish with the pots that they could work and work properly.

That made a lot of difference but as they got along the fishermen tried to get a closed season to keep the industry alive. At that time there was only one month closed season and that was July. You could only [have] a month's closed season for females, for one month. You could catch females and bucks for eleven months but twelve months you could catch the buck crayfish but not the female. You had to throw them back.

JD So you would have been in the industry when the new Act was proclaimed which restricted the....

FEAST Oh I was in the industry very much so in reference to getting a closed season. There was local fishermen here that, we'll say the Feasts and the Williams and the Carrisons and the Perrymans that had been fishing here, shore fishing like I told you about before with the dinghies and so on. Well they knew the value of the fishing industry as to make a living but the blow-ins as I call them that just got a licence to catch crayfish and not worry about the industry.... The locals more or less wanted to preserve it so that their kiddies could have crays later on and also make a living themself and others make a living. They decided and petitioned the Government to make a closed season of three months. We wanted six but we thought, to be fair or not to bring it too much on the Government, we'll ask for three months.

Well after a lot of harping over, well say oh anything from three to seven or eight or ten years, we couldn't get the Government to decide whether to make a closed season. They did alter it a little bit but that was of little value to the fish because it wasn't enough; although most of the fishermen in those days, they never had the good solid boats. They were mostly second hand boats with car engines and very unreliable as far as engine power goes with a second hand car engine. Most of those boats carried a sail those days. If the engine went bung you could sail in them or somebody would tow you home. Although I will say, I was only ever towed home once in all my fishing career. A good boat and good gear's the motto for any fisherman. Accidents do happen and that day when I got towed home, the tail shaft broke so there was no help then. I had a 35 footer with very little canvas and just couldn't sail her. The boat wouldn't sail anyway but however, that's later on when the good boats came and when I had the boat with the big diesel. Well now I would say that Port

MacDonnell's got a fishing fleet as good as you would see anywhere. All fine, practically a new fleet we'll say, eight to ten to fifteen years old with all powerful engines. The safety of the crew and the such like is much better than in the early days that I had and the others had with their old car engines and the old second hand boats.

JD This coast has always been a very dangerous coast for vessels.

FEAST As you say, this coast has been a dangerous coast. It's been the most open and dangerous coast I would say anywhere along this area. There may be places in other [areas] but I don't think anything could be worse than this. It was open sea. The ocean roll comes in direct from the South Pole; comes in several hundreds and hundreds of fathoms (depth) of water until it hits the reef which the nearest part off Cape Northumberland is eleven mile out. It hits the reef and rises out of hundreds of fathoms up to sixty five fathoms and from that eleven mile in, it's still shallower. Well these big rollers roll in until they hit this shallow water. They break and it's the most dangerous coast that I know of along here: Cape Northumberland, Cape Banks, further down towards Robe.

When the fishing first started, between here and Kingston there was nine fishermen's deaths in eighteen months which proved that some of the fishermen never had, well say sea knowledge or bad boats or something like that but you must have a knowledge of the sea.

JD You were involved with the life boat, weren't you?

FEAST Yes, yes. My first boat I had was the old Port MacDonnell life boat, **the Undaunted** which was built in 1908 by the South Australian Government for lifesaving work in reference to wrecks and so on. Well when the Depression came in the '30s the South Australian Government sold all their life saving apparatus at the dangerous ports along the coast. Here we had a 35 foot life boat, only rowed. It wasn't powered by an engine, it was rowed by twelve rowers and naturally two masts, a four mast and a missen[?] and two sails with a jib as well. That was used in sea rescue, that's wrecks and so on. Actually in my time I was a member of the crew and we practised once every three months and got ten shillings a day for the practise which took about four hours.

This interview continues on side B of this tape.

TAPE 1 SIDE B

[NOTE: Mr Feast discussed the history and use of the Life Saving Service and also the wreck of the **Aeolas** which unfortunately, due to technical difficulties, was not recorded on this tape].

FEAST We never worked at the **Aeolas** because all the crew was ashore. They came ashore in a fog on a beautiful day. My dad that was a member of the crew and he went down and he said one of the finest sights he saw was that ship laying over on the reef with all the sails set just full of a light northerly breeze. She laid there until, naturally when the seas come, they smash up her but all the crew was ashore when the rocket apparatus went down. The life boat also went down but they came ashore in the ship's boat. This coast had a wonderful.... well a very bad record I'll call it of wrecks. We had about 36 wrecks along here over the years. Some [were] bad with drownings and so

on. I suppose **the Admella** was the worst one here. That was a ship that was wrecked at Carpenter's Rocks, or we call it Cape Banks. I think it had 107 on. I'm only thinking this. I know there was only twenty four saved after seven days. Our light house keeper, we have a light house at Cape Northumberland here and that was put there in 1859 and the wreck was 1859. The lighthouse keeper there, a chap by the name of Ben Germein and he patched the ship's life boat. They had another boat [which] came ashore. They tried to get ashore but they got drowned coming in in it. He patched that up and he brought one ashore [for] which he got a Humane Society Medal for, Ben Germein. Also later on he rescued three off a sailing ship **John Omerod** that capsized off Cape Northumberland. He rowed in a whale boat which the light house keeper had moored near the light and he rescued three. Ben Germein's name is commemorated by a plaque of a seat right on Cape Northumberland [to] commemorate his deeds in rescuing the people wrecked in those early days.

JD To come to more present day happenings at sea, are there still many accidents among the fishing fleet for example?

FEAST No. As I mentioned before about the early days of the fishing with those deaths or drownings at sea, luckily over the years, and I could say with a rough guess, over the last 25 I'll say, that's only a guess, we've only had one fisherman drowned, a chap named Ashby. He was a young fellow and he came here, took a boat away and well he got drowned before he.... He took it down to Carpenter's Rocks and he got drowned. Well there was two drowned; he had a passenger with him that day. Two drowned on that day.

It was the only drowning accident actually of the fishing fleet but there was a chap here, oh he was a.... well I'll say a foreigner. I just can't tell you where he came from but he used to fish round Cape Northumberland in a small boat, a row boat. He was told a hundred times but you couldn't tell him that he'd have a watery grave but he still kept.... but finally he got drowned. That's the only two that I know but he actually was only a dinghy fisherman, not a.... I don't think he was even a registered or a licensed fisherman but he got drowned, although he used to fish. That's about the only two bad accidents.

There has been.... Oh another one that fell overboard and got rescued and different things like that. There's been several boats smashed up and so on but luckily no more drownings. That's in our fishing fleet I'm talking about.

JD Yes. Dud how long ago did you leave fishing?

FEAST [pause] Well now, I'm 84. It'd be anything, ten to twelve years anyway since I finished. I used to go out with the lad when he had his boat, you see, or when he was working it, but me fishing.... I fished for, we can say twelve till seventy two. That's 60 years.

JD So you don't fish at all now but you still work on the land?

FEAST Oh I've still got a little bit of land. Yeah, I don't fish at all now and my son doesn't fish now, although he fished with me for, what since he left school till he got a boat of his own. He doesn't fish. He uses my land which I had. I had up to 1700 acres and mostly bought.... Well bought with fish money you see, coupled with the fishing. I only used to fish three months a year. I may have fished four some years. I generally start at Christmas and knock off after Easter and I could make a nice little packet. Coupled with the wool stock and that I was doing well. My dad always learned me,

"Don't make too much money. Don't get too big". It's good advice up to a point. It's no good dying with a pot of money, which I won't do [laughs].

Well I don't know whether I can tell you any more on that line [laughs]. But the fishing, I like the fishing. I'd be out on the sea there now if I was capable. I can still do a day's work and still shear a sheep and so on if I want to and kill a sheep to eat and so on, but what I mean, you got to be agile on a boat. You've gotta have your sea legs and you gotta have your wits and you've gotta have good eyesight. Eyesight means that.... You see in the olden days we had no facilities. We had a compass. That's about all and you had your compass and your head. That's how you found your pots. Well now with echo sounders you find the depth. We find it with a lead weight hollowed out on the bottom, fill it full of tallow or fat and drop that in. If it came up sandy, you know it was sand [and] you wouldn't set your pots. If it come up rough with weed on it or disfigured (the fat), you'd know you were on rock; well down would go your pots and that's where the crays would be. Well then you'd find that patch of crays and you'd work your pots, we'll say either way, in or out or sideways, east or west until you struck sand [and] no crays; well you knew you were off that patch. That's how we found the crayfish, although they never took much finding 'cause out here is very, very rocky ground and the crays were prolific Now it's all echo sounder and even coloured echo sounders to tell you the colour of the weed and the colour of the bottom. It's all radar and the different gadgets that you can set your pots out of the sight of land or even a fog, you can go out now and find your pots.

Fishing now is different altogether and in my opinion it's the mechanical side of fishing and the number of fishermen that's fishing is depleting the fish to the stage where we'll be fished out in other words. The same as other fish, the trawling fish and the likes of that that's getting fished out in different parts of Australia. You must take some out and you must breed some to put them back and if you take the breeding fish and don't have closed seasons, well the fishing industry's finished and all you've got to do is buy a tin of fresh herrings [laughs].

JD Right. Well look thanks very much for all of that Dud.

FEAST Well I could give you a lot more but you reckon you got enough?

JD I think we probably have. Thank you very much.

FEAST I know they'll cut it down if you've got to go around Australia, they'd want a place as big as this to put the history in [laughter]. I've been around every fishing port in Australia, as I tell you, bar that bit. I've talked to fishermen everywhere and I've been.... That's why we're.... Well it wasn't why, but one of the main things I went to England [for]....

Bogg, the Director of Fisheries in South Australia.... I went to England in 1960 [which was] my first trip and I wanted to see the fishing industry in England and he arranged for me, with the Director of Fisheries in London.... Can't think of that bloke's name, but anyhow he was a pommy but he talked like an Aussie so he must have been somewhere amongst the Aussies. He arranged for me, with a chaffeur, a lady chaffeur and a Naval Commander Quick, an ex-Naval man, he was the inspector along the eastern coast from, what do you call it.... Yarmouth, right along the coast right up to as far as.... Well he never went as far as Aberdeen. He went up as far as Grimsby [and] Hull and I travelled with him for several days and visited all the fishing aboard the trawlers. Never went to sea with them, aboard them and with the fish inspectors at the different fish places. I learned a lot of the trawling and the types of fish and there's the inshore trawlers, the offshore and the distance one. Now the distance trawlers

there were going 2,000 miles up the top of Norway, mechanically with their gadgets that they had in the bridge and they could go within a mile of where they caught the fish the trip before. To see the amount of fish that comes into Hull and Grimbsy, you'd wonder what they do with them. The fishing industry is an ex-agriculture in England. To see the fishing industry it's marvellous and you get a lot of knowledge by travelling.

I also went to New Zealand and the two inspectors that were here in Australia from Cronulla which was [pause].... They came to Cronulla.... but anyhow I looked him up in the Victorian University in Auckland and he gave me an introduction to nearly all the fishing ports and the fishermen at different ports. I saw the fishing industry in New Zealand, which was a big one; especially on crayfish. Out along the fjords on the South Island on the sou-west side and also out at, oh the islands.... I can't think of the name, (Chatam) 400 mile south east where they were catching the crays there with aeroplanes. What do you call them, not aeroplanes.... helicopters.

I gave a helicopter driver a ride in from the airport into Wanganuai and he told me the history of how they were catching them. They could take a pot out and set in the places where boats couldn't get for the rough seas and pick it up and take it straight to the factory and take another one out. They were large pots catching five and six bags, what we call wheat bags of crays in each.... cages they call them. That's how they're catching [crays]. Oh, I nearly had the name of that Island. I saw the supply ship, I went down on the supply ship that went out. They were taking the Maori women out, the wives of some of the fishermen out there and the tucker and even taking fowls out, these Maori women, sitting on the deck of this little ship that went 400 mile out it was to these islands where they were catching fish but the trawling there was just in its infancy when I started there. The biggest bother there was they couldn't seem to get rid of the fish, the number of fish they'd catch. Now much of that trawling fish from New Zealand comes here as bait for this crayfish, comes to this port. Well I would say 80% of that bait used here now is bait from New Zealand which is the rubbish that they catch on the trawlers. A lot of it's quite good fish, we would say, but they don't seem to have the sales; not when I was there, or could learn.

I've seen the fishing in lots of places but I'll still stick to a few crays at Port Mac and I will when it comes to eating one. I'm still good at that [laughter]. That's when I finish [unclear] [laughter].

JD Right. Thank you very much.

FEAST I could give you a lot more but I think we've covered it fairly well from the start to the finish.

JD I think so.

FEAST That's if you reckon but anyhow they'll only put that much in their.... because if you're gonna go round Australia they'll never print it all.

JD Thanks Dud.

That is the end of this interview with Mr Irven Feast, commonly known as Dud Feast, of Port MacDonnell, South Australia.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW

Disclaimer

Verbatim transcript of an interview with ROSS HALDANE

INTRODUCTION

Ross Haldane is a member of a prominent fishing family in Port Lincoln, South Australia. His father and uncles and their families came from Victoria on the vessel they themselves had built and initiated the tuna fishery out of Port Lincoln. Ross became an architect but also has had first hand experience as a fisherman. He has retained his involvement with the family fishing interests and is secretary of an influential organisation in the South Australian fishing industry.

On this tape which ranges over many of the fisheries in South Australia he refers particularly to fishing out of Port Lincoln and especially to the tuna and prawning industries. He also discusses the economics and management of fishing as well as labour relationships and the philosophical under-pining of the industry.

The interview was conducted in Mr Haldane's office at the Lincoln Cove Marina by Jack Darcey for Murdoch University as part of the oral history of [the] Australian Fishing Industry being produced by that University. The interruptions evident on the tape and the abrupt ending are regretted but were unavoidable.

Mr Haldane is an articulate and knowledgeable contributor to the project and his input given under difficult circumstances as it was, is appreciated. There are two sides of one tape.

TAPE 1 SIDE A

JD Would you record your full name and date and place of birth please.

HALDANE Ross Hamilton Haldane. I was born in Port Fairy [on] 28/7/47.

JD You are a member of a very well known fishing family in South Australia. Could you outline the history of your family's involvement in fishing?

HALDANE I'm one of the three sons of a larger family that had three sons. The Haldane family started fishing in Port Fairy during the Depression. They were fishing for couta out of couta boats there. The grandfather had originally come from Scotland, Glyde, and he was a ship builder there. He was involved in building the royal yachts for the Czars and sultans. Anyway he came to Australia and then they ended up in Port Ferry and he was the harbour master there at the lighthouse on Griffin Island.

During the Depression my father had trained as a carpenter and of course was put off work and his two younger brothers, by then they were thirteen and fifteen, they'd gone fishing. Then my father went fishing for couta From the couta fishing they then, because they had this ship building skill, built larger boats and developed into cray and

shark and then during the War one of their boats was confiscated and they ended up with another boat and they were involved in the shark liver trade for the vitamin A.

That virtually gave them the kick off to dream of the tuna fishery and the initial dream of that started with a friend of theirs who was involved in the CSIRO. They were doing a lot of aerial reconnaissance in the convoys during the War and they came back with photographs of these schools of fish. This triggered my father's imagination and he'd read a lot about the west coast tuna fishermen in America and they got some plans and started to build an 84 foot tuna clipper. From there they'd identified two major areas of these fish. One was off Triabunna in Tasmania and the other one was in the Bight. During the process of building the boat they were still shark fishing but by that time the price of shark liver had collapsed and so they ran into a bit of money troubles.

At that stage they approached the Tasmanian Government and South Australian Government and the South Australian Government were the only government that came to the party and lent them, I think it was, 36,000 pound at the time with the condition that they start their operations in South Australian waters not Tasmanian. As history's transpired, the schools of fish off Tasmania were mackerel not tuna and the South Australian site was obviously a better location and history's shown that.

The boat that they built, and my father and three brothers built them themselves, took seven years to built. It was a bit of an undertaking but they were doing it part-time basically while they were still fishing. It was only in the last year that they went virtually full-time on the boat. So in 1951, November I think, the whole family left Port Fairy and came on the fishing boat to Lincoln.

JD Was that **the Tecoma**?

HALDANE That was **the Tecoma**, yeah.

JD The same **Tecoma** that's in the marina now?

HALDANE Yes. So we left Port Fairy with all the family on board. We had cats and dogs and there was nineteen aboard the boat with all our furniture and everything. [we] Came up to Adelaide and then, I think we got to Lincoln in early January of that year 'cause we had to pick up heaps of stuff. As a kid I can remember we had to walk up to the new houses. The Government had built some Commission houses for us and so the three families were housed in the houses. It's interesting, in later years that was the starting off point for a lot of the other fishing families that came to the town. That's in a marked contrast to some of the mansions that they now live in so most of the wealthy families had had pretty humble beginnings.

My own personal involvement from then on was just as a kid watching dad go fishing etc and we used to go out fishing in the holidays. The tuna fishery progressed then. It had a pretty bumpy start. It was a failure to start off with because they were using purseseining: cotton nets, no power blocks etc. The initial fishery was a failure because of the method they were using. They were using purseseining with old cotton nets and the method had almost been abandoned by the Americans. It was alright in sheltered bays but not out in open waters. It was never going to succeed.

So from there they reverted back to shark fishing to get a bit of money together and to keep the operation going. Things were pretty meagre in virtually the first three

years. Also [they] concentrated heavily on salmon fishing along northern Kangaroo Island and in a lot of the islands and beaches of Spencer Gulf.

JD That was beach fishing?

HALDANE That was beach fishing, yes; seine fishing for salmon. It really wasn't until the summer of '56 after approaches to the then Liberal Premier Tom Platford that the fishery (virtually Government capital again) was able to import some American expertise in the form of two brothers - the Janguards. It's [that] interesting these two brothers had a very similar history to our own family; that they were a Swedish family and they'd gone to Seattle, worked their way down the west coast, and again on the same fisheries, in the shark fishery during the War, and then on the purse seine, the early pursesein. Then they were into tuna clippers. It was their expertise that virtually kicked the fishery off. They were able to identify some good areas to start fishing and also the methods of keeping live bait alive, the pumps, the flushing systems etc are virtually the same that they use in the fleet today. That investment was a timely one and it really kicked the fishery off.

JD Did they recommend purseseining or poling?

HALDANE No they were all poling at that stage and that was the method. You really didn't have the nylon nets or the power blocks hadn't come into play by that stage so nobody was looking at purseseining in these open waters. It just couldn't be done. It wasn't really until virtually the late '70s that purseseining was tried again in Lincoln and then it virtually was a failure for the first three years until they developed the method of chuming up the tuna and then shooting them around. That was the method in the end that worked.

The problem with the Australian tuna industry or tuna fishery is that we've got no thermo cline in the water so the fish can dive to any depth; whereas in tropical regions there's at thermo cline through the water and that virtually puts a ceiling or a floor in the ocean without one being [there]. The initial Australian tuna industry again didn't get going (this is the purseseining fishing) until they imported some expertise from Santiago and the Yugoslav community at that stage brought out some of their fellow countrymen from Santiago and that again had pulled them out of the mire there.

JD In recent times there's some long lining going on too?

HALDANE Long lining for tuna but it's much more scattered and there's long lining on the east coast of Australia and long lining on the west but the long lining on this southern coast is still restricted to the Japanese who virtually under their quota system are coming in and taking some tuna. Again in the last year they've concentrated off Tassie too. The tuna fishery in Australia is based on juvenile fish and it's based on fish that come from the Java Sea into Western Australian and then up into the head of the Bight. They're leaving our fishery at say three year olds to five year olds. It's not a long line fishery. It's a purse seine or pole fishery.

Many of the local fishermen who've been involved in this fishery believe that it still should have remained a pole fishery, virtually a low capture fishery or a fishery that allowed escapement. The purseseining method has proved to be a little bit too efficient and there's some scientists [who] believe that the fishery could be in danger because of that.

JD Yes. The quotas have been dramatically cut, haven't they?

HALDANE Well initially the quotas were set at 14,000 tonne and there was two objects behind it. It was to produce a rationalisation of a fleet. People were given a percentage of the catch or a tonne quota so one boat might have got 300 tonne. The idea was that he would then buy somebody else's 200 tonne, end up with 500 tonne and you'd have one unit out of the fishery and at the same time protect the fishery itself. What's happened is that quota has now, through not being fixed low enough initially, it's just gradually got back and would now [be] 4,500 tonne. The number of boats at Lincoln at one stage had 50 tuna boats. We're now this year in '90 looking at, oh there wouldn't be ten tuna boats operating. It's a tragic situation.

Again in terms of history, my father documented quite early on in the early '60s.... He was calling for management in the fishery, a rationale behind it.

What occurred is that the traditional fishery that had been developed from say '56 to the mid-60s was based on local waters around Port Lincoln and the Continental Shelf south of Coffin's Bay or slightly west of Coffin's Bay to Kangaroo Island. It wasn't until the mid-60s that the boats, through the use of spotter aircraft, pushed west. What they virtually did when they pushed west is got into a younger year class and the boats were working up at the reefs in the head of the Bight. The fishermen then knew they were doing the wrong thing. They were catching very small fish and that's when the warning bells should have been sounded and many people did sound those warning bells but nobody was listening.

JD It's not only the southern blue fin tuna that's caught, is it?

HALDANE That's the predominant one. You're looking at periods when we do get striped tuna and there have been some years we've got albacore but the blue fin has been the fish that have under pinned. That's the major fishery. The others are very spasmodic It's not a dominant fishery at all.

JD Our market for tuna is very much a Japanese market, isn't it?

HALDANE Yes. It's interesting [that] the Japanese started long lining in the mid-50s; a very similar time to our fishery starting. Most of their fish was taken back to Japan and then exported to America as canned tuna. That fishery peaked at about 60,000 tonne. That fishery is now at 8,000 tonne so there's been dramatic drops in that but the big difference is the development of the raw fish segment of that market and now the blue fin comprises the creme de la creme of the raw fish.

JD That's the sushimi, is it?

HALDANE That's the sushimi. There's all sorts of prices you get for that but the fishery here started looking at sushimi in the early '70s. It really wasn't until Deanco Lukin['s] involvement in the late '70s that that sushimi market got going again. Basically the Japanese were running out of their own supplies and were looking for other sources. The Australian home fishery has got a problem in that its fish are not the desired size. You're looking at a larger fish coming from colder waters with a higher fat content. That's the preferred composition. The fish we catch here are a lower grade. Certainly the fishermen receive higher prices than they would if they had canned those fish but it's not anywhere the magnitude of the Japanese premium that they pay for their own ocean caught.

JD Our fishermen, with this sushimi, sell to the Japanese processing boats at sea I believe?

HALDANE Yeah. It's very integrated. The two fleets work very close together and it certainly.... it's quite organised. There's an integration of the two fleets and as I said, Japanese tuna fishermen have been visiting Port Lincoln since the early '70s which is twenty years. That's quite a while.... to the extent that they now own farms around the district and they're quite integrated within the community.

JD Is there any sort of evidence of a conflict of interests between the Japanese and the Australian fishermen?

HALDANE There's certainly statements that the Japanese cartel are not paying the appropriate dollar received but the Japanese are not fishing for the fish. They're only trans-shipping and so it's a bit like comparing a fisherman with a truck driver. They're not actually out there fighting over a school of fish so in that sense there's almost been no conflict at all. It's quite a harmonious relationship between the two groups. It's excellent.

JD Ross, would you talk about the management of the industry.

HALDANE Yes. Management now is a word used in all fields of fishing. Everybody's a fisheries manager. The background behind this drive into management came from a group of people that were, and my father was one of those.... He'd seen about four fisheries. He'd been involved in the couta fishery; he was involved in the shark fishery; involved in the salmon fishery and then the tuna and then he was involved in the prawn fishery. When the prawn industry first got established in South Australia it was under the threat of a collapsing tuna fishery. The tuna fishery had gone from 8000 tonne to 2000 tonne in a year when they had their maximum number of boats. So you had a lot of boat building [which] had happened the year before. A lot of people had come to Lincoln with big expectations and then in 1968 the fishery collapsed. Just at that time a couple of the local fishermen had been doing some work with the western king prawn and they'd found them up in Spencer Gulf in the shallow areas which was contrary to what was happening on the east coast of Australia. East coast king prawns were always in water deeper than 24 fathom. Here they were discovered in the shallow water. So virtually the almost near financially broke tuna fishermen were forced to go prawning.

There was a couple of key people. People had been talking about limited entry and Western Australia had just put its regimes into its rock lobster fishery. The then Director of Fisheries, Mick Olsen and my father, and I can't remember the other chap [were the key people]. Mick Olsen was a very strong man and very committed to management and virtually single handedly set up fishing acts and fishing regulations that allowed them to restrict the number of boats entering the prawn fishery. It wasn't until the late '70s whereafter various pressures and various lobby groups etc that the final number of boats entering the prawn fishery was pegged at 39. So there you had the rock lobster [which] was pegged at a number. You had the prawn industry pegged and history's shown that South Australia from then on, almost all its fisheries were limited. Unfortunately the tuna rejected this management concept and adopted a bit more of a gungho approach, mainly I think because the Commonwealth Government were involved and their record in fisheries management, even to this day, is a bit suspect.

The management of the fisheries, that's the key thing I'd like to talk about. Once the fishery, and I'll talk about the prawn fishery now, once the prawn fishery's numbers were pegged at 39, then that allowed that group of fishermen who were almost to a man ex-tuna fishermen.... They'd come from a fishery that had collapsed. They were a mixture of the Yugoslav community and the resident Australian community and they

were able to do quite well in the prawn fishery. There were some regulations that in any endeavour to get decision making within the fishery, was always thwarted by the various directors of fishery. They would never make decisions. They could never come to grips with this concept that fishing was a little bit like farming. You had to make decisions.

It wasn't until we had a particularly poor fisheries director who couldn't make a decision in 1978 when the Government had decreed that our areas north, up into our spawning areas, were allowed to be trawled. Prior to that the fishermen had always argued over, "I want this little bit closed" and "Don't close that bit". There was always this constant bickering over it etc. The then director, in his sort of muddley way, made such a terribly bad decision that everybody was united behind not letting that decision go. So within four days that area was closed by voluntary closure. It was very interesting the method by which that occurred. Prior to that we'd always had a poaching problem wherever we put a line. So at the meeting we set up and we said, well we're not gonna have a vote on where the closure will be or where the closure won't be. What we said is, if we have a closure, and it will be there, will you be the first one to break it? So we got each individual skipper to stand up and say, "If that's where it is, I won't be the first one to break it". This undertaking was made on the condition that if one boat went in, there was no closure; they're all allowed to go in. So it was a gentlemen's agreement with an honour system but the moment the honour was broken then everybody could go in. The good fishermen or the honest fishermen were getting sick and tired of standing back and watching the poachers. Under this arrangement the second that the poacher went in they were all in. So that worked and from that system we then set up a management structure through our Fishermen's Association. We set up board structures; virtually to today where the Spencer Gulf prawn fishery is said to be one of the best managed fisheries in the world.

We're looking at management structures now where we can alter or change the fishing pattern within twelve years We have a fishing committee at sea who've got real executive power. They can actually make decisions. The ultimate decision does still lie with the Government and with the Director of Fisheries but certainly the fishermen have got the power and they've got the desire to run the fisheries. The system has worked quite well. It hasn't been all plain sailing. We've had good years and bad years within the prawn fleet. We've had our knockers and we've had our supporters but the prawns have proved to be quite an easy fish to manage because of their short growing period. What it says is that an animal that grows quickly again is easy to manage. When it comes to a fish like the tuna, it means when you manage that you have to manage it so much harder. You can't be as lax whereas there's been many instances in the prawning [where] we've actually made mistakes to prove points. We've actually said, OK you clots, if you want to go and do that, we'll let you do it, knowing that it was gonna be a small set back and knowing that once that had been achieved, we only learn by our mistakes and then we could go on to the next point.

JD A couple of questions in regard to prawning, Ross. Are the licences saleable?

HALDANE They are. In South Australian waters, all licenceses are transferable or saleable bar the net, scale fishering licenses. [the] Reason behind that is that there's a rationalisation programme going ahead in that fishery and also I think partly because of the conflict between the recreational sector. Net fishermen are not looked upon as society's best citizens. They come into nice secluded bays and wrap all these lovely fish that the amateur was going to catch. I myself personally wouldn't want to be one [laughs]. Makes life a bit hard.

Certainly they're saleable and the background behind that saleability, that was achieved through negotiations with government. Interestingly enough, our licences at one stage weren't saleable. It wasn't until the Government started charging us higher licence fees for our fishing licenses that in those negotiations, one of the conditions that we paid a licence fee [was] that we would be guaranteed this transferability because the South Australian Labour Government have always wanted to take that transferability away. They've looked upon it as a burden to the industry where it prevented the young person entering the fishery and also may have prevented.... It put a capital burden into it. A prawn boat for instance might cost half a million dollars in the equipment and then you might pay one million dollars for the licence. Their argument was that that licence was an extra million dollars that that industry didn't have to bear.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

TAPE 1 SIDE B

HALDANE [first few words not recorded] .... sought to take away this sort of debt burden from the industry. The industry looked upon it as a natural method where any wealth that was generated within that fishery could be transferred from one generation to the other. Exactly the same as farming, mining shares, units in the city. We felt that, yes by removing that million dollars, we'd be all the more profitable individually but there was no orderly method of transferring a fishing unit that had a lot of wealth potential and then just sort of giving it away to somebody else. So we sought the same right as the rest of the community has. If they have something of value and another person wants it, they buy it.

What it's meant is that returns within the fishing industry have, in say the accounting sector, always been looked at at say from 20-30%. That's the sort of returns you needed to get within this industry to make it viable. Because in the prawns, the history of that fishery has been quite constant and it's been a good earner, the returns to capital in that fishery are now approaching 5% or very similar to agriculture land. It's indicative of what people are prepared to pay for long term security on their money where as prior to that [as] I say, fishing was 20-30%. No doubt that changes within fisheries where you have fluctuations in prices etc but the fishing industry is a new industry where people are just learning how to cope with the value of the fishing unit. Again like farming, when you have boom years in farming you find all the younger sons or the younger entrants all want to buy bigger farms etc. The dads are advising them in 1942 there was collapses and in the fishing industry we haven't got [a] long enough history in it to learn the economics of it. So we've seen recently the collapses in the trawl industry in south east trawl and the revival of the orange rough. People don't know where the prices of these particular fisheries lay.

JD Is it likely do you think to have the effect of, rather than having owner/skippers on boats, you're going to have company boats?

HALDANE My own opinion on that is that it's the company integration concept. Unfortunately the fishing unit is such an isolated unit within itself that the individual fisherman at sea will always be able to out perform the company operator type skipper. Every fleet will have a mixture of both I think but the overheads within the company operation get so great that they can't operate. It depends. Some fisheries are more suited to company operation than others. The prawn fishery is more suited to company operation. It's a simpler fishery. It's a fishery that's [had] all the problems

sorted out. It's not a high low catch fishery where one gun fisherman can out perform the others four to one. So I think it will vary from fishery to fishery.

JD Our prawning industry here.... is the product exported or is it a local market they're meeting?

HALDANE It varies depending on season. You've got in the pre-Christmas period, most of it is cooked on board the boats and exported to the southern Australian market and some into Sydney. In our autumn season it's certainly into.... Japan's our dominant market. Also in Japan it's dominant in one small area. It's not Japan overall. It's to a small area in Japan. That's the vulnerability of our market. That's changing slightly now where we're getting involved more into France and Spain. Into the tourism areas in that area.

JD There was a downturn in price for prawns last year, I believe?

HALDANE Yes. That was not reflected in our prices. This year we got record prices for western king because we're operating again in that small market in Japan and we're a small fishery. We're looking at 1600 tonne and we're able to, relative to the other fisheries, perform a lot better. Other years that has reversed itself but certainly this year we weren't affected as much.

It must be remembered that the prawn downturn that occurred this year resulted from the big banana catch in northern Australia and again this is where management comes into it. We as a committee in our Spencer Gulf Prawn Fishery sat down and discussed the possibility of the inpact of the banana fishery on our prices. Some of our members felt that we should go fishing early to get in before the banana collapse. Others said that we should wait longer and let that work through the market and then we work through it. In the end we decided to delay our fishing slightly (it was only by about eight days) but certainly wait until the fever of the northern fishery worked through the system a bit.

In retrospect, we haven't fully analysed that but certainly we demonstrated that we had the ability to make those decisions. The northern prawn fishery should have realised that they were in trouble. They had almost no pre-season sales of prawns. Again, personally if I was the manager of the fishery, I would have possibly opted for a slower start; try and get some fish going. All fisheries, or those sorts of fisheries in Australia, must get not management orientated in terms of the limited entry, management orientated in terms of the way they harvest their fish. You have to have total control over the harvesting. That doesn't mean to say you get Billy to go to that patch of prawns and Tom to go the other. What it means is you control the whole fleet and you're able to control the basic thrust of your capturing. Until they do that they're really wasting a resource.

JD Ross, do you see aquaculture as a threat in prawning?

HALDANE The aquaculture industry will have its own set of problems and my own assessment of it, although this year aquaculture is responsible for weakening the price, the growth in the world market should be large enough to soak up the increase in the aquaculture. Aquaculture concentrates, or has concentrated on the smaller prawn section.

JD Ross, would you like to talk a little about crew - stability, training, difficulty of getting suitable people, career structures and that sort of think?

HALDANE Crew's an interesting topic, and again going back in history when our family first came to the town, nobody wanted to know a fisherman. It wasn't until again the mid-60s when fishermen looked as though they were sort of making money, we had approaches from the local doctor or the local professional person; he was looking for a career for his son. Certainly fishing in this town is looked upon as a career and has been for a number of years. The sons of those professional people are now some of the leading skippers in our fleet and a few of them own their own boats. So that path has occurred. That training scheme was the hard knocks and bumps training scheme. You hopped on a boat, you became a deckie and worked your way from there.

Within our own prawn fishery we've got a career structure, or not a career structure so much but certainly we place an amount of importance on crew and skippers. Nearly all our prawn boats are skippered as opposed to owner/operated and the structure that we've established there is that the crew, or through their skippers' representative, have a seat on the board of management of our fishery. That's been in place since the mid-70s. Unfortunately it is not seen by the crew as a thing they hold dear. We virtually have to drag them along to get involved in the whole thing but I think as time goes on and as that management structure becomes more of an intrical part then the crew are involved at the management level.

In terms of training, teaching crew to do various physical actions, in South Australia anyway it's through the Fishing Industry Training Council that that occurs but what usually happens.... Any skipper or any young person that's got a bit of sting in them, they tend to take themselves to Tasmania for a period to the College or they'll follow that path. They'll certainly broaden their base by going on other types of fishing boats out of season, out of our prawn season. They might go on the fishing trawlers out in the Bight or down off Tassie. Some of them are attracted to that.

It's interesting [that] Port Lincoln, up until say the mid-80s, was always an attractor of fishermen. We used to have a big influx of young people to go on the tuna boats. That's all finished now and Port Lincoln has now become an exporter of fishermen. We're now seeing fishing families based in Lincoln with the bread owner, he might work up in Guam. He might work off Tasmania on their orange rough. He might work up, not so much, in the Northern Territory because that prawn season there tends to clash with the one here. Anybody with skill [who] would travel that far would normally have a job here. My children attend a local school and the number of fathers that are earning their fishing income outside Port Lincoln is quite high. That's indicative of a shrinking fishery in terms of the tuna fishery and similar migrations occurred out of Hull and Aberdeen and those sort of ports when the English fishery changed so dramatically.

The traditional fisheries of abalone and cray have been very stable in terms of their employment but they've tended to attract the younger people and so there's a flow through from.... it used to be tuna. It would be virtually the fishing industrial cannon fodder (I call them). The ones that survive that ordeal would then go on to prawning which is far more stable and attracts a markedly stable workforce. They're nearly all married. All [have] got homes in the town and people stay on boats for ten or twelve years at a time. It's very stable unlike the northern prawn fishery which is much more volatile. So if you're looking at Lincoln as a port, it was once described to me from a chap fishing in the northern prawn fishery, he described it as the most professional fishing port in Australia. People actually went fishing here for a profession and I think that's reflected in the way the industry is looked upon in the town in terms of the institutions, the banking institutions and the various things around the place.

JD The crew members are paid in the form of a share of the profits?

HALDANE Not share of profits; share of catch. In the crayfishing it's a percentage of the catch. Prawns, it's a percentage of the catch. Abalone, it's slightly different because you've got a diver and a person who works up top and also they've got a relief diver situation but again it's shared in what they catch. The tuna has been per tonne, so much a tonne caught. Slight problem with that in terms of the way our work cover or our workers compensation laws, how they relate to that. A person fishing for so much a kilo is seen to be more akin to a worker. He doesn't share in the profit or loss. He only shares in the bulk and so most boats have reverted to a share of dollars caught. Most of the arrangements made in this port are verbal, or have been for a long time. With new legislation etc that's tended to fade because accountants and lawyers seem to look upon the fishing industry as one with a bit of spare cash and so therefore attracted to it.... recommending to their clients that they should do this and should do that. The whole system is still an honour system.

One of the examples of how that system was disturbed would have been the incident out in the Bight last year where shots were fired and nets were ripped up where it was perceived that somebody was breaking the unwritten law of not interfering with somebody else's fish. So the industry's still got a lot of those things and it needs to have that to operate. It can't operate a lot of the time on legislation because it just doesn't cater for it.

JD It's always been a pretty demanding and even hazardous industry. Are there many accidents?

HALDANE Again it's interesting to look at the various fisheries. The high accident rate in this port occurred in the early days of the tuna fishery. The total number killed now reaches I think about 35. In the early '60s two boats of seven men were lost completely and at one stage I think it was more dangerous to go fishing in this port than it was to go to Vietnam. That's changed slightly with bigger boats but still losses have occurred out of a port; losses down off in Eden with local families; losses out in the Bight. There will be losses in the trawl fishery in the Bight. That's my opinion.

The trawl fishery in Spencer Gulf has been remarkable that it hasn't produced a major accident since '68. That's almost in twenty years. For a fishery that operates at night; operates trawl winches, it's remarkable that that hasn't occurred. There's several factors that contribute to that. The quality of the boats in this fleet would be unsurpassed in Australia in terms of their maintenance level and the long tenure that the crew have and so therefore their higher skill base would have contributed to that but it's still quite remarkable that people just haven fallen over board.

The last one to be lost was lost off a cray boat this year. So you know, losses will continue. It's a dangerous occupation and that needs to be reflected in the sort of rewards that the men receive. It's also an industry that is just now showing up the long term effects, the warn discs on the backs. Certainly in the abalone industry that's well documented, the problems that those men will have.

JD Is that circulatory problems?

HALDANE Oh, that's the bonecrosis and the problems with diving too long. I'm not totally familiar with the exact problems but I know that they're old men by the time they're 45, physically anyway. With the advent of better survey requirements and

certainly the disappearance of the tuna fleet, the old wooden tuna fleet that had been allowed to run down, would have increased the safety factor now.

JD The vessels are pretty closely supervised, are they not?

HALDANE They do a survey every two years and I'm not quite sure whether that's a contributing factor to less losses or the natural advent of radars, better communications, better weather or better understanding of how to fish a particular fishery in the weather. Sometimes boats would run to port in adverse weather when it's been found that it was much probably better to stay out at sea and ride it out in those particular circumstances.

I remember as a young kid going to high school listening to the.... had a little crystal radio set that I used to listen to and in one particular case I listened to this boat on the 6.00 o'clock sked and they always used to say they were coming into port with so many tonne of tuna. The boat gave its tonnes that it had on board; fourteen tonne I think. There was a windy night and so on windy nights I used to sort of do my homework and then sit up and listen to the boats talking afterwards. There was no more heard from the boat and in the morning on the sked the boat didn't respond. There were seven men lost in that boat so that boat was just overwhelmed. That was boats pre-radar. They were approaching a shore, Cape Catastrophe, West Point, which has only just had a light on it I think quite recently. When the family first came here there was no light on the major western approaches to Port Lincoln.

In that case, that was seven men lost and they were all young men, young twenty year olds. Then the following year there was another seven lost. There were three more in New South Wales and various smatterings but we haven't had a major loss within the port in recent times. It's been men falling overboard etc but we haven't had the big loss. My suspicions are that that's going to occur in the trawl, in the Bight trawl fishery. Although they're bigger boats, they're potential for problems. They've already sunk about three of them in the orange rough fisheries. The nature of the fisheries is that they get big catches of 40, 60 tonne and they can be overwhelmed quite easily. It's actually worse than the tuna situation where they used to overload them quite extensively but those days are gone now.

JD Is there any evidence of an increasing number of women coming into the industry?

HALDANE No. We've had some influx of younger women who have married husbands in the northern prawn fishery and then returned back to Port Lincoln but within the practising fishery, there's almost no evidence of it. There's a few of them but I think in southern Australia our conditions are just a little bit harsher. Although the boats are getting better and the living conditions on board are better, it's not seen as a career path for women. It's just one of those things I think. Not that the industry here is dominated by a macho sort of set. Lincoln is very different in the way it operates its fisheries in terms of its social life. You don't necessarily go to the front bar of the local hotel to find the fishermen. That's most probably he least likely place you'd find them. In Port Lincoln they are certainly in other places. They're members of local clubs and much more.... not the stereo type that you would imagine on the east coast of Australia. The bare footed fisherman doesn't exist in Port Lincoln as such.

JD Right, well thank you for all that. Is there anything else you'd like to record on this tape Ross before we finish?

HALDANE Mainly the historical part.... I'm still a young man, I'm only 42. I see the fishing industry developing in many different ways. The field I'm more interested in is

in the concept of managing our resources, not to much in a conservation sense. I think conservation will occur anyway. The big hurdle we have to overcome is in the method by which we make our decisions in conserving. We can set out all sorts of really nice things of what to do but unless we can make the decisions to make it happen, the fishing industry won't change all that much in the way it goes out and kills fish.

In the killing of fish I prefer the word "harvesting". We've gotta get a lot smarter with our current foreign debt problems. We really in the industry can't afford to import Detroit diesels, Cummin's diesels, JRC radars etc. Many of our fishing industries should be super efficient, total little money earners and the problem there is that the governments of our day are only just now coming to grips with the concept of millionaire fishermen.

As I've described earlier, in the late '60s the then Labour Government were the big supporters of fisheries management under the pretext of raising the living standards of impoverished fishermen. That was their desire. We were seen as an underprivileged group. That succeeded their expectations by their wildest dreams and now almost the reverse occurs. Politicians see fishermen as millionaires living in castles. To address our current balance of payment problems and become more efficient we've really got to extend that more. Not necessarily make fishermen richer for richness sake but make the industry more capital productive; not have the burden of extra engines just because politicians think that it's a good idea to employ fishermen. Any fishery should have the minimum number of fishermen employed in it as any car factory, cordial factory or anything you like.... should endeavour to be more efficient. That's something that governments are now only just.... gonna have to come to grips with.

It wasn't all that long ago that labour governments in South Australia were proposing to increase the number of fishing boats or licenses in our particular fishery because it would sort of somehow spread the wealth a little bit better. Governments have discovered a better way of doing that [which] is increasing the licensing fees. So there's always gonna be this continuing battle to increase the license fees and to siphon off the wealth that's coming from our fisheries. The trouble with that is it tends to make the fishermen a wary lot. I call it the robber baron syndrome. In the 1600s or prior to then no peasant in his right mind put on an air of wealth because if he did the robber baron would come over the hill and knock him off. So the peasant learned that the best way of survival was sort of a mild form of poverty, certainly not trappings of wealth. Again it really wasn't until the merchant class became an intrical part of the commercial bits in Europe that wealth was allowed to be displayed. The fishing industry is very similar to that.

We could put in management structures and efficiency programmes into our fishing fleets that would be huge producers of wealth but public opinion or politicians opinion won't allow us to do that. The key to it is in establishing stronger property rights within the industry and that can be done, it is happening via licenses etc. [some words not recorded?] Fishing will be looked upon like farming. Our right to fish will be very similar. Governments still think that it's a common property resource and they've still got this common property mentality. Again, looking back into the sixteenth century etc, once we got away from the concept of common land and started giving everybody, all groups, the right of ownership or sole access, then efficiency's gonna be brought into the industry. So when we look into the future, that's whats gonna happen. Governments are actually heading the other way. They're preventing [tape ran out at this point].

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW

Disclaimer

Verbatim transcript of an interview with MILTON HALL

INTRODUCTION

This is an interview with Mr Milton Hall of Beachport, South Australia. It is part of Murdoch University's oral history of the Australian Fishing Industry and the interview was conducted by Jack Darcey in Mr Hall's home in Beachport on the 3rd February, 1990.

Mr Hall was originally a rock lobster fisherman in this part of South Australia and was prominent in the establishment and management of the South East Professional Fishermen's Association, having served both as secretary and president for many years. He was also a member of the Rock Lobster Advisory Committee which had the onerous task of advising Government on the necessary reduction of effort if the industry was to survive.

Mr Hall left fishing for some years but has now returned to it and is one of four men licensed to fish Lake George for scale fish. His report of his career in fishing and in the management of the rock lobstery fishery is comprehensive and fair minded and is a valuable contribution to the history of the industry in the south east part of South Australia.

There is one side of one tape. The interview starts at 021 on the revolution counter.

TAPE 1 SIDE A

JD Would you please record your full name, date and place of birth.

HALL My name is Milton Ivo Hall. I was born in Geelong in Victoria on the 19th of the 11th, 1932.

JD Where did you spend your early years?

HALL I went to school at Ballarat in Victoria and then at the age of fourteen I came to Beachport. On the 19th November on my birthday I arrived in Beachport in 1947. I went fishing then with a chap by the name of Reg Hawker and Jim McClaren on a boat called the **Jennifer** which was powered.... It was about a 36 footer and it was powered with an old petrol kerosene Kalbin engine which we used to have a lot of trouble starting of a morning with wet plugs and what have you. We were only working about 40 odd cray pots; 45 pots at the most and we used to double lift and get anything up to eighteen, twenty bags (that's hundred pound bags) of crays per day.

I stayed with Reg Hawker and Jim McLaren for eighteen months to two years and then I took another job with another chap fishing. His name was Jim Glasbrook on a vessel

called the **Yvonne**. I stayed with him for a period of two years I suppose and then the last job I had was with a man by the name of Bill Morgan who is still alive. He is over 80 years of age and he was a crayfisherman here for many years. Then in 1956 I purchased my first vessel which was a 26 foot boat I bought at Queenscliff in Victoria and sailed it back here to Beach Port and then I moved to Robe where I started fishing there. Then from 1956 till '66, I think, I had that boat. Then I bought a larger vessel called the **Sandra Kay** and I fished out of Robe until 1969.

Then in 1969 I sold out my interest in the fishing industry. I sold for $17,000 and I went into the hotel business in New South Wales. Just as a comparison in today's values, that vessel that I sold in 1969 for $17,000 would be worth in the vicinity of $250,000 to $300,000; possibly more.

JD That's just the vessel or the vessel and the licence?

HALL That is the vessel and the licence and the pots too, like the equipment but it just gives you some comparison how they have increased in value. Then I came back after being in the hotel business, came back to Beachport and I have been fishing in Lake George which is an inland waterway, [in] Lake George for mullet and salmon and flounder for the last seven years [in a] sort of semi-retirement way. I've slowed up a lot to what I used to be but I enjoy the life and that's what I'm doing at present.

JD You would have been in the rock lobster industry before the introduction of restrictions?

HALL Yes. In the years prior to the restrictions being brought in everybody was increasing in effort. I was one that was working 150 units (cray pot units) and we spoke about these things [with] some of the fishermen and we felt there was too much effort going into the industry and it was time that something was done. At that time I was secretary of the Robe Professional Fishermen's Association and we decided to meet delegates from various ports in the south east from Port McDonald, South End, Beachport, Robe and Kingston and form the South Eastern Professional Fishermen's Association which we did. We met at Jense's Hotel in Mt Gambier back in '67. I'm not sure of the date on this but it was in '67 sometimes and the South Eastern Fishermen's Association was formed. Then at a later date Carpenter's Rocks joined us and we decided, through the Government, through mainly at the time a Mr A.M. Olsen [who] was the Director of Fisheries for South Australia. He was in agreeance that we form some type of committee to bring in [the] reduction of fishing effort.

Well a committee was formed and it was called the Crayfish Industry Advisory Committee. It consisted of Mr Olsen as chairman, myself, Mr M.J. Crigliana, Mr R.M. Guy, Mr B.K. Perryman, T.O. Wilkinson, K.A. Winkle and the secretary, B.W. Rundle. The first meeting [was] held at the Somerset Hotel in Millicent on the 24th November, 1962. From there various meetings were held. Perhaps two to three times a year we used to meet and the meetings used to go late into the night and perhaps two to three days [were spent] discussing various limitations and restrictions that should be brought in to try and conserve the industry. Through these meetings and consequently the meetings that followed, the restrictions that are in force at the moment were brought in to be law.

There has been many changes over the years since I resigned from the Advisory Committee. They've had such a thing going now as a buy back scheme where the boat owners put money into a scheme where the idea was to purchase 40 vessels out of the industry so to reduce the pot numbers. Well that has been finalised and finished. Some of the younger fishermen may have dates and the amounts of money that were

involved. Seeing that I am not in the crayfishing industry at the moment, I am not familiar with the cost involved.

As far as the effort, I think the reduction in the effort that we made in the earlier years did have some bearing on the industry being stabilised to the extent that everybody was catching pretty well the same amount of fish per year but it did not solve the problem of the grounds still being over fished. It is my opinion that what would have conserved the crayfishing grounds and the industry in South Australia in a more productive type of or.... Oh it's hard for me to explain but what it needed was, in my honest opinion, that the size of the crayfish should have been lifted from a three and seven-eight inch carapus[?] measurement. It should have gone up to be the same as Victoria to four inch and four and a quarter on the carapus measurement so that it would have at least the female crayfish another two seasons to be able to have berries[?] and to spawn and it would give an extra two seasons of breeding. Restrictions are alright if they are policed but you must have stock to reproduce the young crays for the future generations to be able to catch.

In some comparison from memory, when I first started fishing it was nothing to get, well 2,000 pound which was roughly a thousand kilo, twelve hundred kilo a day out of the 45 pots. Most boats were doing the same thing and then it would drop back to 400 kilo perhaps and we would think it was a bad day but a good day now, well in comparison with the vessels that are working well from 50, 60 up to 80 pots is the limit, the maximum number of pots any vessel can work now. If they get, well 75, 80 perhaps 100 kilo a day they think that they have had a real good day. Probably they have had a good day because the price that we were receiving back in the days in 1947/48, we were getting sixpence halfpenny a pound which is five and a half cents you could say in today's money.

I think the going price today is round $14.50 a kilo last season. In the 1989 season I think they were up to round $16, $17, perhaps $18 so naturally you don't have to catch as many fish with the big price. Then again the cost of operating has become much greater where in my early day.... Well the first vessel I purchased I paid 750 pound for. That same vessel today, if you went to purchase you'd probably be looking at $30,000 or $40,000. There are boats fishing on the south eastern coast here that are worth $300,000. Well you have to catch a lot more fish. They are using a lot more fuel; anything up [to] ten, twelve gallons an hour. In our day if you used a gallon an hour of fuel you'd be wanting to know if there was something wrong with the boat if you used any more. Speed is the thing now days. In our day we never used to hurry. We used to sail a lot. We were never in a hurry to get home or to get anywhere. [in] Certain conditions we wouldn't fish the weather that they are fishing now.

It's a young man's job at this stage and the pressure to fish harder with a limited season. They've only got six months to fish where we used to fish for ten or eleven months of the year. There was only the one month of closed fishing. That was October, a total closure and we never seemed to be in a hurry because you could fish August, September, weather permitting and you could always get a few bob in that way but with the limited season that's on now, they seemed to be fishing very harder, much harder. They are a different generation of fishermen anyway. They are more modern. They have satellite navigation. They have two way radio. They've got coloured echo sounders. They have all the modern aids [such as] radar. They've got automatic pilots. We never had any of that. We had an old box compass and we used to be able to find our gear. Admittedly we didn't fish quite as far away but we still used to fish what we called "the deep" in later months in the year but, well we might go to

45, 50 fathom at the deepest. Well now they're fishing the Shelf anything up to 140 fathom.

JD Milton because of the great cost of getting started in the industry now, do you think that's changing the kind of younger man that comes into fishing?

HALL Yes although there are a lot of young chaps that their fathers have been fishermen before them and unless the father is prepared to hand the vessel over and the licence, some of these young lads that have been born and bred to the fishing industry, I can see having to leave it because with the high cost involved to purchase a licence and the interest rates [on] money to borrow, those lads that would make quite good fishermen may never ever get into the industry as I say, unless their father hands down the vessel to them. Not like in my day. Well as I said, 700 pounds I paid for my first vessel. Well I saved my money up and I didn't have to borrow any money when I bought my first boat. I paid cash for it but a young lad now days to save, perhaps $300,000, $400,000, he's got no hope. He's got to go and he's got to have a deposit. Somewhere along the line he's got to raise that money. He's got to borrow it even through the Development Banks or the State Banks that do arrange finance. What I've noticed is there are people that are coming into the industry that have been in other business and what have you and have money and they will get into the industry and they will take over [with] a fisherman with them - perhaps one of the sons that hasn't been in a position to be able to buy a vessel. They will put them on for a skipper and work for two or three years with the skipper and then get their time up to get their ticket so that then they can take the vessel on.

It is a shame in one way that the younger ones haven't had the opportunity to get into the fishing industry perhaps like some of us older ones that did get in. My first crayfishing licence with boat registration [and] everything used to only cost one pound. Well what's a pound now, about $2 or something; where I think the going rate for the average licence now is, well $3,000 or $4,000, $5,000 plus, on an average ..... I wouldn't like to say exactly but they're paying roughly $6,000 a year to the buy back scheme which goes on for five, six years until the money's been raised for these 40 boats that have been taken out of the industry but no way could I see a young man that's been even working on a boat as a deckhand with good money, earning good money, that he would be in the position to be able to borrow $300,000 or $400,000 unless he has got help from his family or some other means.

JD Milton after some time in the rock lobster industry you then left fishing and you went into the hotel business but then you came back to fishing and you're now fishing the lakes. Would you like to talk about that fishery?

HALL Yes. I left the fishing industry because I felt that I'd had a fair go at it and I'd saved some money and we went into the hotel business. Fishing was still in my blood I suppose but I stayed in the hotel business for quite some years and then we eventually came back to Beachport and I took my old vessel; bought my old vessel back or [was] in the throws of buying my old vessel back and I had a bad illness. I contracted cancer and I was off work and we had to give up buying the vessel back. A lot of money had changed. I only sold for seventeen and it was going to cost me about $55,000 to buy back in and anyway that's all water under the bridge.

After a period of four or five years I then commenced fishing in Lake George which is inland waters. I fished for mullet and salmon and flounder with two and three quarter or seven centimetre nets for the mullet and five and a half, six inch net which is equivalent to thirteen mil size nets for the flounder. When I did six or seven year ago when I first obtained my licence, I was allowed to work 1250 metres a net and then

the Fisheries Department in their wisdom, they decided that the four professionals which were in the lake would be reduced to 600 metres of net which I'm working at the moment. It is only a very small fishery. There is no closed season. It's quite a good life and I can see.... My licence at the moment is not transferable or none of the chaps that are in the lake. It's just as we go by the way and pass away, our licence will become null and void. The time will come when there will be no professional fishermen fishing in Lake George but I feel.... and I'm enjoying my life out in my twilight years and that's what I'll be doing till the day that I can't sort of get around and do any more fishing.

JD I understand that you're one of four professionals fishing the lake. What about amateurs?

HALL Yes it is an [unclear]? recreational waters. There would be.... Well over the Christmas period here for the six weeks that we've had with the tourists' influx into the town there has been anything up to 35 or 40 boats a morning fishing the lake and they are licensed amateurs. They're allowed to use two 75 metre nets per person. There is no restriction on the number of persons that are allowed in the vessel so therefore some of the recreational fishermen, they would be working as much net as I am. If there's a family of a chap and his wife and two young lads or two daughters and they all hold a recreational licence, they're entitled to 150 metres of net each and four times that makes up my quota of nets.

The Fisheries Department of South Australia has frozen all amateur licences; has been for the last two or three years. Nobody can get an amateur licence at the moment. It's only the ones that are in force. I don't know how long they will leave the licences frozen but that's one thing that I feel a little bit strongly about because there are quite a few people, young people, that are coming on and they can't get a licence to go fishing.

JD Professionally you mean?

HALL No, as amateurs. Like to even go and set a net or what have you or craypots in the sea. I feel it only encourages those people that are deprived of the right to pay their $20 and legally go and catch a feed of fish; that they do it at night and it's only encouraging people to be dishonest because let's face facts. Everybody is entitled to a chop of the cherry sort of thing because it is a common commodity, the waters. Nobody owns the waters and I feel that if anybody's allowed to go and fish with professional gear, that everybody should be entitled to. Perhaps not [with] quite the amount of net that they have but perhaps 50, 60 metres of net should be enough for an amateur to get a feed of fish. That's what the name of the game is. To be an amateur and classed as an amateur, all he requires is a feed of fish for his family and to perhaps put a few in his fridge but not to work the quantity gear that some of them are doing.

JD Would you say some of them are selling the catch that....

HALL Oh yes, yeah. It's fairly well known that that does happen. The Fisheries Department do make prosecutions. They've been pretty hard on the abalone poachers at the present time and there are convictions round our area here where they catch the odd amateur selling. I wouldn't say that it's the majority of them. It's always like the one rotten apple in the case. That's all you need but it does go on.

JD Milton do you think the Fisheries Department has enough resources in terms of say inspectors to control the fishery adequately?

HALL No well I've always said I think the best means of policing.... and we've asked for this for years; I asked for this when I was on the advisory committee that there be a resident inspector based.... If we had a resident inspector in say, Port McDonald, one at Beachport and I believe there is one at Kingston. I think there is a recent one there but if we had one stationed in each port, well you'd have to include Robe too, if we had Port McDonald, Beachport, Robe and Kingston which is four inspectors, just their presence is a deterrent to people breaking the law. Instead of that we've got Fisheries Department officers in Mt Gambier. Well they have to travel the eighteen or twenty mile to the closest place before they can even start policing it.

I think for money wise and everything it would be a bigger saving for the Department if they had one resident inspector. If they were gonna have a big blitz, if they knew somebody was breaking the law and they wanted to get a pinch, well it's only 30 mile for that inspector to travel from one port to the next if you have two of them. There's a resident policeman in most of the towns anyway so that gives them an extra hand. No I think the Fisheries Department in South Australia is grossly under staffed in field people - men out in the field. There's plenty in the office I think in Adelaide but not enough in the field.

JD You were the President of the Professional Fishermen's Association here in the south east for some time, weren't you?

HALL Yes. Well what happened.... With the South Eastern Fishermen's Association, every twelve months a president and secretary were selected from either.... Well we took it in turns from each port so it was rotated round the ports. I was the foundation secretary and then after a period of, oh five or six years it rotated around and then I was elected president of the South Eastern Fishermen's Association. I was president of the Robe Fishermen's Association for many years and also president down there. We worked together pretty well. No [they were] a good mob of fellows those days. They still are today but in the initial stages of bringing in the restrictions they were a pretty genuine sort of mob of fellows.

JD Would you say the Department takes note of what the fishermen say very much?

HALL Well I can only speak on my dealings when I was on the advisory committee and mixed up with the Fishermen's Association. Yes, they did listen and the respective governments that we did have, whether it was labor or liberal, it didn't matter, they took.... We were there in an advisory capacity and they listened and they did everything that we asked. Mr Olsen was a real good director. He was the only one that I ever had any dealings with. I never had any dealings with Mr Stevens or Mr Lewis, our present day inspector but yes the Department did listen and implemented those restrictions that we recommended to the Government to bring in the restrictions.

JD So the industry generally has been pretty well managed, you feel?

HALL Oh I think so, yeah. There are things that.... Well you can never please everybody but what was done, it was pretty drastic measures there at times. I think what was done, it benefited the majority. It might have hurt one or two people but, yes it's benefited the whole industry.

JD What would you say the prospects are for the future? Is it rosey or a bit grim?

HALL [pause] Well I don't think it's what you could call rosey. I think it's rather grim unless there's something unforeseen [which] happens. I can't see the fishing.... It's sort of stabilised itself at X number of kilos per season off the ground if they get a bad year and they have a good one but I can't see, unless something is done, that it will improve. I think it'll stay as it is and then of course that all depends on whether they have a good season or not on the money side of it. With the American markets, [if it is] good and the prices are up, well they have a good season. They all talk about how many crays they catch but what governs whether it's a good or bad season is the money - the price. If you can catch a couple of hundred bags and if the price is good well you've had a good season. If you catch 200 bags and the price is down, it's a bad season. That's what it amounts to.

JD What about scale fish?

HALL Well there's not a lot of scale fishing done around here. It's only the lake and there are a couple of drop line boats and a couple of shark boats working out of there but this is not the home of the scale fish. It's more up the west coast and round Adelaide.

JD Thank you Milton. It's been interesting to talk to you.

That is the end of this interview with Mr Milton Hall of Beachport, South Australia.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

END OF INTERVIEW

Verbatim transcript of an interview with TOM HOLDER

INTRODUCTION

This is an interview with Mr Tom Holder, prawning trawler operator, of Ceduna on South Australia's west coast. Mr Holder has been engaged in various forms of fishing in South Australia for some twenty odd years. He is a pioneer of the west coast prawning industry and currently operates one of the three trawlers working in that fishery.

In his recorded interview Mr Holder raises a number of issues of widespread interest and consequence in the fishing industry. These including management of the industry and licences and their transferability, employment of labour and prices and markets, among other topics. With several sons also involved in fishing it is clear that Mr Holder and his family have a very considerable stake in the industry. He is a successful fisherman whose userous[?] of a special significance in the west coast of South Australia prawning industry, but also in the Australian fishing industry generally.

The interview was conducted by Jack Darcey in Ceduna for Murdoch University and the Australian Fishing Industry Research Council on the 16th January, 1990. There is one tape of two sides and the interview commences at 023 on the revolution counter.

TAPE 1 SIDE A

JD Mr Holder would you record your full name and date and place of birth please.

HOLDER Thomas Edward Holder. I was born in Port Lincoln Hospital on 23rd February, 1941.

JD Were you from a fishing background?

HOLDER No. My father was a farmer. His father was a miner. He came out from Wales. He's a Welshman.

JD Where were you farming?

HOLDER Dad had a farm at a place called Tooligie Hills which is in about the middle of Eyre Peninsula and then I left school to work on that farm. He sold that about twelve months after I left school and we bought a farm outside Port Lincoln where I worked the next four years. Then I went working for the South Australian Railways when I got married. I married at twenty years old. I worked there, I don't know, about six months. Then I went to work for Caltex Oil and I worked there for six years. Went working for an engineering firm called Ivan Cowlie. Worked there for twelve months and then I've been fishing since then.

JD How did you come to get into fishing?

HOLDER Well while I was working, or just prior to working for Ivan Cowlie, my sister married a local fisherman from Coffins Bay called Graham Hurrell. I'd known Graham for a few years and we were good friends and he being a rather ambitious young fellow, wanted to get his own boat to work so he approached my father and he bought a boat which he then gave Graham the job of skippering and I got a job with Graham as a deckhand.

I worked with Graham I think, two and a half years it was, and got the opportunity to purchase my own boat. The type of fishing we were engaged in in them days was crayfishing and sharking. I actually started in the fishing industry in South Australia about twelve months after the implementation of the first limited entry licences which applied in South Australia in the cray industry.

JD Can you remember what year that was, approximately?

HOLDER Well it would have been twenty probably, 21-22 years ago. My wife would know but she's unfortunately not here. The manner in which I was able to purchase my own boat was by an old gentleman who wished to get out of the industry and sell his boat. His boat was a very run-down, old, pretty horrible little boat [laughs], but it was affordable so I took a gamble and he actually financed me to purchase the boat at 3% interest [laughs]. It's just gone on from there. We kept that boat for two years, two or three, two years I think it was, and I made sufficient out of it in the two years to buy a boat that was half built which was called the **Tornado**. My nickname was Tornado Tom in them days 'cause I used to work some pretty horrible weather in a horrible little boat.

We stayed crayfishing, sharking in that boat for, what was it, four years I think. Then the South Australian Government called for applications for experimental ministerial permits to ascertain the potential of establishing a permanent prawn fishery on the west coast and in the Investigator Straits area. I applied for the Investigator Straits because in them days it was foreseen as a gold mine but my boat was two inches too long for the criteria so they give me the Ceduna area which in the first instance, my licence was restricted to fish Ceduna.

JD Prawns only?

HOLDER Yes, prawns only. I had to surrender my cray licence which was then held in abeyance until such a time as the Government decided which or what they were going to do; whether it was going to be a viable situation or not.

JD Just before we go off the crayfish, could I ask you, did you purchase the licence from the previous owner?

HOLDER Yes, yes. The boat was an authorised boat. It was 27 foot long, this is **Diane** the initial boat. It was 27 foot long. It had a 37 pot licence but the whole unit with licence cost me $6,000.00 which in them days was, you know, a reasonable sum but is still very much cheaper than what you'd pay for a licence now. The value of craypots now in the industry in South Australia is around about $10,000.00 in the northern zone. I think they're about $3,500.00 per pot in the southern zone.

JD How many pots per foot of boat?

HOLDER Well in the northern zone the pot quota on a boat is a pot per foot plus ten but I believe that that criteria has been altered now, bearing in mind you know, it's quite a few years since I've been in the cray industry. I think they're allowed to purchase up to 60 pots now per boat, but I'm not 100% sure of that.

JD Anyway to come back to your major interest now which is prawning, you mentioned how you'd come to get into the prawning industry on an experimental basis and you've stayed in that industry ever since?

HOLDER Yeah. The initial permit, it was a ministerial permit. It was called an experimental trawl permit which allowed me to trawl for fish and prawns for sale. There was certain gear restrictions etc applied to me; the gear restrictions being that I had to use prawn type equipment, you know, no more than two inch mesh in my net or no less sort of thing etc. It was basically a ministerial prawn permit but to make it possibly more viable they allowed me to sell any by-products which we had the right to do on our permit right through until, it'd be probably four or five years now we've had an actual licence and in the licence we're not allowed to sell any by-product except for squid, octopus and scallops. The reason for this is our permit or our licences are a special licence that are granted to fishermen in South Australia which allows them to fish with a trawl net under, I think, seventeen fathoms as laid down for anybody else. So therefore, to ensure that unscrupulous operators don't use this permit to catch inshore marine scale fish, we are not allowed to sell the fish that we take in the process.

JD So what do you do, thrown them back?

HOLDER Well we're allowed to keep, per trip, there's an amateur bag limit or no more than fifteen of any species over, any unlisted species. This is purely at the discretion of the Minister and the Director of Fisheries. If it is abused, the privilege will be withdrawn. Our boat that we're operating now is a 55 foot wooden boat. We had a.... just become the smallest boat in the west coast fishery.

The South Australian prawn fishery is divided into three zones; the St Vincent's Gulf zone which has got a boat size limitation of 50 foot and there's the Spencer Gulf prawn fishery which has got a boat size limit of 65 feet and there is the west coast prawn fishery which has got a boat size limitation of 65 feet. The St Vincent's Gulf boats are limited to, I think it's 250 horse power maximum. We are limited, both Spencer's Gulf and west coast to 365. There's I think it's ten or eleven boats, it might be twelve boats in St Vincent's Gulf. Yeah, I think it could be twelve. They're in the throes of a buy-back; or the buy-back is finished but they're now in the throes of trying to pay the bill because the money was loaned to them by the State Government or the Federal Government, whichever body lends the money and they, the fishermen, have got to pay it back over a period of years. I believe they've had several.... that the loans have been put off several times because of poor yields.

The Spencer's Gulf fishery currently supports 39 boats. They were talking of a buy-back last year but they fishermen give it the thumbs down. Our fishery here is limited to three boats. At this stage of the game we don't want to know nothing about buy-backs [laughs]. We're about on the same level as other fisheries in the State with regards of catch.

JD What prawn do you catch?

HOLDER We catch only western king prawns. They're the only commercial species anywhere in South Australia.

JD And how far off shore do you fish?

HOLDER Um, around the Ceduna area the fatherest we travel is about three hours which is about 25,30 miles, nautical miles. That's down the coast so we're only.... basically the fatherest we go from the shore anywhere would be over ten miles.

JD So you're not at sea for long periods?

HOLDER My personal boat, we do day trips. We unload every morning. We're what they call a wet boat. There's not many of us left in the State now. The reason we unload daily is because the fish that we sell, well our fish, 90% of them are cooked and they're sold on the Melbourne market which is a fairly discriminatory market. To obtain a good price and good quality prawns we unload daily. It causes a bit of inconvenience as much as we don't get a lot of sleep daily. By the time we unload and clean the boat up its round about 11.00 o'clock and we've usually got to fire up and go to sea again by about 5.00 or 6.00, but it yields a better price and as my boat hasn't got freezing capability on board; wet fish don't come up very good after they've been kept for one or more days, especially cooking them.

JD Was your boat purpose built?

HOLDER It was purposely built as a prawn trawler, initially to fish in Ballina. The boat was built in Ballina.

JD That's in South Australia?

HOLDER New South Wales. It's eleven years old I think, yeah, eleven years old. It was built to actually fish out of Ballina as a prawn trawler. I'm the third owner. The first owner went bankrupt on it. The second owner bought it to put it into the Investigator Straits prawn fishery in South Australia. That fishery collapsed through over exploitation. He also had to sell the boat.

I bought the boat and I've since then upgraded it; put new trawl gear on and rebuilt the main motor, put a power plant etc. on it, new radar and pilots and generally put it up to fairly good condition but it is now becoming outdated because of the fact that we're only 55 foot. Our horse power is low in comparison to the other two boats and trawling is really a matter of who covers the most ground up to the Point. We unfortunately cannot cover as much ground as the other boats now so our catch consequently has dropped in comparison to theirs.

JD Is there any sort of quota that operates in prawns?

HOLDER Not in South Australia. We're restricted to the number of hours we're allowed to trawl in the fishery irrespective of where the fishery is. In the west coast it's basically [a] number of hours we're allowed to trawl. I think 3,500 hours per year. We can to the point, or in the past, to the point we have been able to decide when and where we wanted to do those 3,500 hours.

JD So it's not a seasonal....

HOLDER Yeah it is becoming more seasonal. Like in the last couple of years we've had more management applied to us up here where there's areas that we're not allowed to touch because at certain times of the year, because of spawning. There's areas that we're not allowed to fish fullstop because they're classified as juvenile areas. We have seasonal closures. Like Ceduna is basically a summer fishery. Venus Bay is basically.... which is the two main areas we fish, Ceduna and Venus, is a winter fishery.

JD Yet they're quite close together.... [unclear]

HOLDER Yeah, the reason we say Ceduna is a summer fishery is it's a big area of suitable trawl ground with not a very big recruitment area. The only time you get the prawns in the areas where you can get them in good quantities is when they're going in or out to the various inshore activities. So it's basically the summer. Most of South Australia produces the most prawns in the summertime.

JD Is weather a problem? Does it stop you getting out often?

HOLDER Yeah. Weather up here on the west coast is quite a problem because we get summer sea breezes. Summer is the worst time. We can get a wind up here that'll go sometimes for two or three weeks in anything up to 40 or 50 knots. Some nights it's impossible to fish. Spencer's Gulf, their activities are curtailed down to about 80 days per year that they're allowed to fish and they have maybe a month's fishing run then they might give the fish a spell for a month and then another month's run and so forth. So they are basically forced, one would say, by the number [of] days they're allowed to fish, to fishing every available day when there's an opening time on.

The same occurs in St Vincent's Gulf. They're even, because of the collapse of St Vincent's Gulf over a period of time till the buy-back, they are severely restricted over there. They're only allowed about 60 days I think a year. So every day available to them is very much, they've got to be fished. I do believe St Vincent's Gulf have a system set up whereby if the weather is too bad they agree not to fish and they get another night from the Fisheries Department.

The management of the St Vincent's and Spencer's Gulf is very closely monitored by the Fisheries Department and the fishermen with a joint liaison committee with is called Spencer's Gulf Prawn Management Committee. Where you've got the west coast, Spencer's Gulf and west coast, [it's called the] West Coast Prawn Management Subcommittee which I'm a representative on. I believe they have a prawn management committee for St Vincent's Gulf whereby sampling is done by the fishermen with Departmental personnel on. The boats are usually hired by the Association; paid by the Association. The Association uses the sale of the catch to pay for the hire of the vessels. Any excess is generated income through the sampling and surveying.

In the past there's been quite a large amount of money put into the Fisheries Department in the form of a computer set-up for stock management control. The main aim of the management is of course to continue [unclear] as a fishery and to get optimum yield, optimum value, so therefore they base their management practises on obtaining the maximum size. This is reasonably easy to do within the Gulfs because it's just like a big gulf which they can fence off anywhere down the Gulf.

Up here it's not quite so easy because these prawns are caught in the ocean. There's no Gulfs here to catch them as they go down. It's more so in Ceduna than Venus Bay which makes Ceduna more of a summer fishery than Venus because if you don't catch them when they're either going in or out of the Bay to do their spawning etc, you

simply don't get them. The area's so vast here. There's something like probably a thousand square miles of suitable prawn bottom adjacent to this Bay here and they just disperse all over it. You'll catch prawns anywhere across that suitable area but half a dozen prawns an hour, which nobody can operate on. Venus Bay, they seem to have a.... they go down the coast and congregate over an hour that is fishable and we simply fish out to the edge of the prawns and fish back in and so forth. It's much more available, the prawns are in Venus in the winter than up here at Ceduna and a much better size.

JD Tom, could we have a look at crewing the vessels. How many crew does your....

HOLDER Well my boat works a skipper and two deckhands. I've skippered my boat up till two years ago. In the early days when I first come up here when it was purely an experimental fishery and yields weren't very high, I used to work with one deck hand. I had a smaller boat than I've got now. It was a 45 foot boat. Initially we were, worked what's called single rigging which is just towing one net. It was designated Commonwealth waters at Venus Bay. It was open slather there and there wasn't an awful lot of future in the prawn fishery up here.

I concentrated me main effort here in Ceduna. There was another boat licensed to fish here as well as me but his operation folded up within about eighteen months of me coming up here 'cause of poor catches so in the early days we used to just work one deck hand. I had two outside of the family and ever since then I've employed my eldest son and in the later days when the Commonwealth Government stepped in and proclaimed the areas at Venus Bay and it become a limited entry fishery. Then there was more future in it and we went to a bigger boat and I employ a further deckhand.

One of the other boats, **the Limnos** which is owned by Con Paul I believe, employs four of them. They've each got a skipper and three deckies. Karl Olsen, he's just launched a new boat. He used to have a 55 foot wooden boat similar to mine and he used to employ three deckhands and himself skippering it. I would assume that he would be employing four on his new boat. That boat is set up as a processor boat. **The Limnos** is set up as a processor boat. When they're fishing Venus Bay (**the Limnos** owns a factory at Venus Bay), they process their own fish ashore so they don't use their facilities at all. Up till now, we have unloaded daily to the factory. From here Ceduna sends a truck down so **the Beaver** has been a wet boat also and unloaded daily. I believe, even though he's got processing facilities on board, he still intends to keep (on is new boat), he still intends to keep doing day trips until he gets it all, you know, sorted out.

Probably [laughs] circumstances will force me to go into a bigger boat because of lack of competitiveness. I'm looking at a boat now but not a new boat. It's just a matter of whether I want to take the jump or not.

JD Just to finish off the question of crewing, are the crews readily available?

HOLDER In the prawn industry we regularly get letters from kids, people asking for jobs. It is, in South Australia, the Cinderella fishery of the fishing industry probably. Crews make quite good money for the days worked. We average, what is it, around about 110 to 120 days a year and the normal crew's income for that would between $30,000.00 and $40,000.00, that's on my boat.

JD That's gross of course.

HOLDER Gross, yes. They have to provide a percentage of the stores and fuel, you know, in comparison to the percent their paid [for] fish.

JD So it wouldn't be difficult to keep crew?

HOLDER Crew don't change. When I was crayfishing we used to go through seven or eight deck hands a year in the cray season because of the circumstances involved in craying. My boat used to be at sea every day except for Christmas and New Year for the first six months of the cray season. People don't want to work like that. Prawn fishing is a totally different ball game. We average ten to twelve days a month. We're home, when we're working at Ceduna, every day. It's night work. You become very tired during the fishing period but it's still not a bad job. It's a dry job. You don't get wet or it's not dirty. There's no fish to process or anything.

It's a good job and crews don't change hands because most of the crews you get are first.... like I've employed a lot of kids through me years; not because they're cheap but to give them the opportunity. Most of them are dropouts from school or people in menial jobs and it's a far better life-style and income than they could probably get ashore. Although incomes ashore are catching up with incomes off the boats because we're not getting the increases in value of our product in line with what the increases are occurring, I suppose you'd say, in opportunities ashore.

JD Have you had much experience with employment of women in the industry?

HOLDER Oh, we don't.... There's not many women employed on boats in South Australia. There's a few but not many, mainly because I suppose in the past not many of the boats have been geared up for employment of women. You know, like for instance my boat is a traditional east coast day wet prawn trawler that has one forecastle, four bunks, one toilet and shower. You know, it becomes.... it's alright here for us when we're working at Ceduna where we're out tonight and in tomorrow morning but for the last twelve months my eldest son has been skippering the boat and his wife has been working as a deck hand. Well when they're working at Venus Bay they attempt to rent a shack if there's one available rather than try and live on the boat with the other deckhand.

Some of the boats, well most of the boats in Port Lincoln now have gone to the processor type boats which have got suitable accommodation for both sexes like separate cabins etc but my vessel hasn't. I have employed several girls over the years as deck hands. I find that all of them are extremely good at sorting prawns but because of their, purely their physical build, they are not quite as capable of doing the hard menial work like lifting boxes of prawns around and fleeting trawl gear etc. as what men are. I've never chased employing women or discouraged employing women but I keep an open mind either way.

JD That [would] probably be more appropriate on a processing boat?

HOLDER On a processing boat, like there's a lot of women employed on the prawn trawlers up north. From what I can gather a lot of them are in the position of cook. They have the necessary accommodation on the vessel to be able to employ women. A lot of them are [a] husband and wife combination. It's a different fishery to the fishery that I'm engaged in. Like they can be at sea for a couple of months at a time.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

TAPE 1 SIDE B

HOLDER [first words not recorded].... moral standards have changed in that life time and it's now quite acceptable to employ women.

JD As you say they're quite a few of them employed in the northern prawnery and even as skippers I believe.

HOLDER Yeah, there's a lot of them got skippers tickets but I'm not sure how many'd actually be skippers. I know George Raptas has got at least one girl driving his boat but she's a fairly tough cookie, so....

JD Tom could we turn to some of the problems in the industry. For example, what about pollution?

HOLDER Well we don't suffer from much pollution up here because there's nothing industrial around us. There is or has been a problem in the past in the shark fishery but not as industrial pollution. It's a naturally accumulated mercury. The problem that has arose has been that some sharks have been found to have over acceptable levels of pollution. It started as a result of a industrial pollution scare in Japan where quite a few people died and had also sorts of terrible looking children etc, but that was in an area that was adjacent to a paper mill that was discharging copious quantities of industrial mercury.

In South Australia, as far as I know, there isn't any great problem with industrial pollution. There's certainly nothing here on the west coast because it's not an industrial area. There is, from time to time in the paper about sewerage pollution off the beaches of Adelaide and undoubtedly there would possibly be some pollution in the Gulf because it's got a major capital city alongside of it, but to my knowledge it's no great problem as of this day.

JD What about litter at sea, plastic bands and things?

HOLDER Well, once again it doesn't affect us up here because we're only a small community. We drag up rubbish from time to time because where we trawl out off of Ceduna, we're right in the middle of a shipping lane and there is some garbage discarded off vessels, you know, wine bottles etc etc, coke cans, plastic bags, but most of those have got an octopus or something living in them. You know, it's providing a habitat. Undoubtedly pollution is a problem when you've got a density of population but adjacent to capital cities, yes I think there is a problem with pollution but I don't foresee it as any great problem in my area because of the sparseness of the coastline and the population, you know.

JD What about depletion of stock? Is there any evidence of that?

HOLDER Well there is and there isn't. Here on the west coast, we're only limited to three boats. In the past there was a severe depletion of stock but it's always been.... The prawn fishery of South Australia ever since its first discovery and development, has been a managed fishery except for the west coast which in the initial stages was a managed fishery. A fishing company seen fit to challenge the State Government's right to administer the management policies on the west coast and the fishing company won it's argument so it then become a Commonwealth fishery open to anybody that had a Commonwealth licence which resulted in the Venus Bay area being severely over-

exploited in up to about.... be probably five or six years ago they brought in a management policy. The areas were proclaimed waters and limited to three vessels which, because of my history of fishing in the area, was one that obtained a licence.

JD And stocks are holding up since?

HOLDER Yeah, we have good and bad years. We have some years when our catches are down, some years when they're up. Like for instance, this year at Venus Bay this winter, we had quite a reasonable winter. We possibly never got many more tonnes than we normally get but we got them over a shorter period of time.

Up till now the Ceduna season hasn't been very flash but it doesn't cause us no great concern at the moment; but we are becoming more efficient. Like when the fishery first become managed there was two 45, one 50 foot, one 50 foot double rig boat and one 42 foot single rig boat. In them days the maximum size was 55 feet anywhere in South Australia. Since then I've bought a 55 foot boat which, when I bought the thing, the maximum size was 55. Karl Olsen went from a 42 foot boat to a 55 foot boat. Then they changed the boat size to 65 feet so Con Paul sold his 50 foot boat and went to a 65 foot boat. Right now launched in Adelaide is another 65 foot boat and I would have to be honest and say I'm contemplating changing my boat to be competitive. So we're going to have to watch stocks fairly closely.

There is an ongoing research programme just being implemented now with the Department which we've got to contribute an amount of the funds to carry out the research. At this stage it's for stock monitoring and juvenile settlement areas and reproduction etc. It's envisaged to be initially a two year research programme. Whether it will continue or not will depend on how it goes because of the isolation of the area and the officers from the Department living in Adelaide and uncertainty of the weather conditions up here, it becomes rather a hard sort of a programme to continue. It's already had parts of it cancelled because of weather conditions and isolation etc.

JD Could I ask you, are you concerned about the inroads, or possible inroads of aquaculture products?

HOLDER Yeah, it is a big concern to all Australian prawn fishermen because of the cheapness of the product and the very rapid expansion of it. Like, I've got figures here somewhere but, just of the top of me head, the production in Taiwan has gone from 200 tonne per year to, I think it's 20,000 tonne or something in a matter of four or five years. Most third world countries now have got in place aquaculture programmes of some description or other. A lot of them are very successfully aquaculturing prawns because of their.... Most of the third world countries are in tropic temperate zones. Most third world countries have an excess of cheap labour and both of those tend to be able to [unclear] produce very cheap prawns.

Like we're producing here in Ceduna what we'd call a small to medium class of prawn which is an ideal aquaculture economically viable size to produce in aquaculture. They're marketing prawns landed in Australia, probably for $7.00 or $8.00 a kilo, tops $10.00.

JD They're exporting to Australia?

HOLDER Yeah, that's the processed product; frozen in little packs and freezed. We've got to get at least $10.00 a kilo to be viable. Oh when I say to be viable, you know, to make a reasonable return for our investment. So, yes it is a bit of a concern. There is a national body just in the throws of developing now to try and market a prawn mark

like the wool mark etc. in Australia and put the emphasis on pollution free sea caught prawns or fresh sea caught prawns.

There is definitely to a connoisseur of prawns a difference between aquacultured prawn and a prawn caught in the wild. Aquacultured prawns tend to have more of a muddy, tasteless taste. The species that is most commonly aquacultured as far as I can ascertain (in the Asian area) is what they call the black tiger. In China there's a white prawn very similar to our banana prawns which in the export situation our western king prawns are classified as a white prawn. So it is quite a worry to us, yes.

JD Are the boats that you speak of in the prawning industry, are they owner/operated or are they company boats?

HOLDER Well, depending on their actual situation, but most of them would be, you know, west coast fish processors or something like that but they would be private companies like the farmer has or the.... I myself work in a partnership with my wife. There's quite a few people work that way and most of the prawn boats in South Australia would be owned by individuals or the company would be owned by individuals.

JD But they are Australian owned?

HOLDER Oh yes, yes. I do believe that there is one that's got an American owning the thing, but whether he's an Australian resident or not.... This is only hearsay, but definitely predominantly in the prawning industry, they're South Australian owned boats.

JD Does that apply in processing too?

HOLDER I would think so. We don't have no problem with.... Well there's obviously overseas investment in most industries in Australia but our particular processors that I sell too, which is Harry Paul, they are Greek immigrants but they are Australian citizens. It's a real family concern. Harry Paul owns the factory. His nephew and brother-in-law run the factory and you know, it's like a typical ethnic situation; but they're quite good people to sell to.

JD So there's no great worries about the inflow of overseas capital?

HOLDER Not like it is in say the Western Australian rock lobster fishery where there's a very real danger of overseas capital influencing prices etc.

JD What do you see as the future for the prawning industry in these parts?

HOLDER Well I can see it as a very stable industry. As I said, it has it's ups and downs but the capital or cash flow is such that you can usually weather the ups and downs. The capital investment hasn't been a burden up till now but with the introduction of new boats with heavy debt, like a prawn boat that's just been launched, it would have to have a price tag of around $1m; that's a processor boat, or possibly even better you know with the interest rates situation like it is and that.

I can see pressure being put onto the fishery by over investment but unfortunately if you wish to remain competitive, you've got to do it and wooden boats age and the

skills in building wooden boats that was there 100 years ago aren't there nowdays, you know. They're built to the cost.

JD Is the industry persisting with wooden boats here?

HOLDER No, no. There's still a few wooden boats floating around but most or all new boats built in South Australia now would be probably 90% or 95% of steel. I don't really [think] I can honestly say I know of any wooden boat builder still operating except for doing boat maintenance.

JD Tom, just before we finish, is there anything else that you'd like to comment on and have recorded on this tape?

HOLDER Oh, not really. Like everybody else in Australia, interest rates concern us. I feel that in South Australia we have a reasonable association with the Department. Management of the prawn fishery is a joint effort between the Department and the fisherman. We have a very good input into it through our management committees.

It does concern me personally a little bit, the fact that the Federal Government is stopping access to the new trawl fishery in the Bight and allowing overseas large factory boats to go out there when they're banning access to Australian fishermen. I think that's wrong. I believe that they're selling the fish stocks to overseas interests for large short term gains, but then I don't know the whole story. That's just only my personal opinion.

What is a worry to us, and it should be a worry to all fishermen, is these talks all the time of resource rents. We at the moment pay a licence fee of some $16,500.00 to the Government every year and this seems to be going right across the board.

The area that does concern me and should concern all fishermen is the trend of governments now to recover all moneys spent within any sort of area like the Harbours Board for argument's sake. Where I notice now that we're going to be paying the full cost of administering of the Department, the Fisheries Department, it's the same. You know we're currently, or up till last year, we were paying over 115% of the cost of administering our industry. When we protested about that to get the fee dropped we were told that the balance was a resource rent for the privilege of catching these fish while other people, Australian citizens, are being banned access to it. Maybe it's a fair way of looking at it, or maybe it isn't but for us, we feel a little bit different.

The recovery of costs: We feel quite strongly that there should be some attempt to recover some of the costs of administration of the Fisheries Department at least from the amateur sector because they obtain the greatest benefit of the Department. Amateur fishermen far outweight professional fishermen around Australia and if it wasn't for the Department there, there just would not be the professional or amateur fishermen left because of people without necessary laws and whatever the police resource.... there'd be no resource there. It's only human nature.

But no, you know, I've been as I said fishing for 22 years. I am a fisherman first and foremost because it's a way of life that I enjoy. I've got two of my sons engaged in fishing. One drives my boat, the other one is operating his own vessel as a crab fisherman in Adelaide, out of Port Adelaide. So it's a way of life and it's quite a rewarding way of life.

JD And not one you'd like to get out of?

HOLDER No, there's no way. You know, like our licence at the moment is non-transferable, that's for the west coast prawn fishermen except to immediate family. In other words we can't sell our licence. The value that's put on a licence in Port Lincoln at the moment is $1.2m. If our licence was transferable, that valuable would probably be able to apply to our licence because we're in round about the same income area, but we've been.... At this stage we're not allowed to sell so there's no value on the licence but I'm 48 years old and I don't think $1.2m would satisfy me for the rest of my life. Besides that, what would I do with meself? So, as I say, it's a way of life and most fishermen look upon fishing as a way of life, like a farmer.

JD Just could I ask you, do you know why the difference between fishing and the transfer of licences here as compared with other places in the State? Some are transferable outside the family, others are not. Why the difference?

HOLDER Government policy plus when the St Vincent's Gulf prawn fishery collapsed a lot of the problem was through over-exploitation and over-capitalisation. If you're gonna pay a $1.2m licence, cost of the licence, it's definitely gonna tend to over-capitalisation of the industry. When they had Professor Coates from Canada over here to do a report on the St Vincent's Gulf prawn fishery, one of his recommendations were that saleability of licences or transfer [unclear] was definitely a no no. The current Government took it up. They've selected parts of the report that they so wish to. We're, I believe, in the process of getting transferability. I'm not a hundred percent sure of that. We obviously feel that we've been selected out but our licences have only changed from permits to licences in the life of this government and their policy is non-transferability. So that's why we haven't got a transferable licence at this stage.

I did surrender a totally saleable and transferable pro. licence that [if it] was on the market today was probably worth $370,000.00.

JD When you surrendered that it wasn't saleable?

HOLDER Yeah, it was always saleable. My cray licence was always saleable but I had to surrender that when they give me a prawn licence. When I initially got the permit the cray licence was just put to one side and held in abeyance until both the Minister and myself decided the future of this. I always had the option of going out of the prawning industry back to crayfishing while I had a permit. [it's] Just [that] the Minister had the right to withdraw my permit on the expiry of it at any time but we've now got what's called an authorisation and at this stage it's not transferable.

It concerns me in as much that we've been singled out, or we feel we've been singled out, outside of the other prawn fishermen of this State, but in the other context it doesn't really concern me because we're very much a family business. I've got sons that are working prawning and sons that are coming on so whatever the fishery remains a viable enterprise then we aren't interested in selling out. Mind you, option [unclear] of being able to sell out if something catastrophic was to happen to the industry is, you know, the licence does add value to the sale of the boat.

JD Yes indeed. Tom thank you very much for that interview. It was excellent.

HOLDER OK.

That is the end of this interview with Mr Tom Holder, prawning trawler operator of Ceduna, South Australia. The interview was conducted by Jack Darcey in Mr Holder's home at Ceduna on the 16th January, 1990.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW

Verbatim transcript of an interview with GREG HOWARD

INTRODUCTION

This tape is a record of Mr Greg Howard's account of the shark fishery in south eastern Australian waters. The interview was conducted in a motel room in Mt Gambier in South Australia by Jack Darcey for Murdoch University's oral history of the Australian Fishing Industry on the 5th February, 1990.

Mr Howard represents many of the shark fishermen in this area who are concerned for the well-being of their industry and whose livelihood depends upon its continuation. The interview is brief but captures something of the character of the Australian shark fishermen. It deserves to be listened to with respect.

There is one tape. The interview starts at 021 on the revolution counter.

TAPE 1 SIDE A

JD Would you please record your full name.

HOWARD Gregory Howard.

JD And your date of birth Greg.

HOWARD May the 31st, 1949.

JD And where were you born?

HOWARD Mt Gambier.

JD And have you lived your whole life in this area, in the south east?

HOWARD Yes. Yeah, all my life.

JD And was your father fishing?

HOWARD Yeah. He'd fished for, oh, many years up until he died which was twenty odd years ago but he was a cray fisherman, shark fisherman right up till then.

JD Out of Port McDonnell?

HOWARD Yeah, Port McDonnell.

JD And that's where you fish from now?

HOWARD I started my career in Port McDonnell but I've since then moved to Robe. [I] Live in Mt Gambier but fish from Robe.

JD What, you go out for periods of time? You don't go every day?

HOWARD No, no. We go camping. We go away for oh, eight, ten days at a time and do our week's trip and then come home and [have] a few days off and then venture out again.

JD Do you do any other fishing besides shark fishing?

HOWARD No. No I've just stuck mainly now to shark fishing.

JD And did you start off in shark?

HOWARD Oh years ago started off with my uncle craying and sharking which was combined then. Then later on went into my own boat and then into another boat and just go mainly sharking now and don't touch crays at all.

JD Yeah. Do you have any crew with you?

HOWARD Yeah. I have two crews on the deck.

JD And what size boat do you run?

HOWARD I've got a 60 foot steel boat.

JD Yeah and what method do you use for catching shark?

HOWARD We use a method which was the long lines, the hooks and also with the nets.

JD So you use both long lining and hook and netting?

HOWARD Yeah. Yeah use the both of them.

JD What, you set the nets at night do you?

HOWARD No you can set.... Oh all depends what time, you know, you get to your grounds where you want to go. Could be any time. Set them, leave them down for five, six hours then pull them. If you get fish, reset them and leave them down for the same time again or if you get plenty of fish, you just re-pull them again after three or four hours and continue to keep doing that.

JD Right and how long out did you say?

HOWARD Oh, eight to ten days.

JD Eight to ten days at a time, yes. Whereabouts do you fish?

HOWARD Oh mainly anywhere from, oh Kangaroo Island and we fish back to Tasmania.

JD How far off shore do you go?

HOWARD Oh that all depends, you know. You've got different shots where you normally go and sometimes you can be fishing a mile off the shore, half a mile, anything out to the Shelf (Continental Shelf).

JD Yeah which varies of course, does it?

HOWARD Yeah, yeah.

JD What kind of sharks do you catch?

HOWARD Ah you've got the school shark; the snapper shark and then you've got the gummys and the whiskeries. They are about the three main ones that you catch around here. You catch a few of the other dog sharks and that which aren't much value to you.

JD There is a market however for.... other than the ones that you've mentioned?

HOWARD Yeah, yeah. There's a good market for it. It's a good fish specially down in Victoria which is, you know, pays the best price [any]where for that type of fish so [it's] very good eating.

JD Yeah. What do you do? You must catch a lot of other fish as well as shark in your netting?

HOWARD Yeah also you'll catch crayfish in your nets, especially if you set over that type of bottom. You'll get snapper. There's morwong, teraki, stinger rays. Oh there's anything. Whatever swims through into the net gets caught and that's it so, you know, it's a bit of a death trap for them.

JD Yes. Do you sell those fish?

HOWARD Yeah, yeah, You can mix scale fish and that. You can bring them in. You're quite legal to sell those.

JD Greg, when you bring the catch ashore, how do you sell it?

HOWARD Now we've got a bloke from Mt Gambier. The [unclear] factory and that. He'll come down, he'll pick the fish up and weigh them and then take them back to his factory where they'll be all filleted and boxed and he'll distribute them out then around his fish shops. He's got his own local markets and other markets in Victoria and that and he'll dispose of them wherever he can.

JD Do you gut the fish at sea?

HOWARD Yes. We gut the fish, head them and gut them as we call it and then put them down into the brine rooms to keep cold and that so they don't go off.

JD Right and have the numbers of shark caught declined or have they stayed about the same?

HOWARD No over the years I think it's like anything. You keep working on and working on and you've got to knock them around a fair bit. With the nets and that they seem to fish a lot more [unclear] than what the hooks do. The thing is with them, when you lose nets too, like they stay on the bottom as we call shadow fish. They keep fishing and fishing and nobody knows really how long they keep fishing but they're still there so it makes it very hard to sort of stop the nets from fishing; where[as] with hooks and that you find once a bait's gone off a hook, that's the end of it. Yeah I think over the years you'd find.... and I think everybody would agree to that that the fish are definitely fading away to what they were years ago.

JD Are prices staying up?

HOWARD No. Price is fairly funny really. It's up one year and it's down the next and the fishermen just seem to find that with all the costs and everything the way things are going up and that and the price of fish are coming down it's pretty hard to sort of keep up with it all really.

JD Do many of the fishermen leave the industry?

HOWARD Oh yes. Since the last three years there's been a lot of fishermen who have sold their licences to other "A" class fishermen and got out of it because they couldn't make a go of it.

JD What about the question of pollution? That's a pretty contentious issue isn't it?

HOWARD Yeah. With the mercury situation and that there was a big stink over that a few years back but when you look around with eggs and bread and even the crayfish I think you'll find there's less in shark than what there is [in] those other products so I think it's a bit of a battle but, you know as I said before, it's a good eating fish and that. To get that sort [of] amount of mercury in your body and that you'd have to eat a heck of a lot of shark to get that.

JD Do you notice much litter in the ocean?

HOWARD Oh, yeah. We see a fair bit of stuff, you know, floating around and that. A lot of steamers and that dump a lot of timber and that over the side and drums which I suppose in time, they would sink and that but yeah at times you do see that. I [would] honestly say that over the last couple of years I would say there's less and less though. It seems to be pretty good. You'll get the odd one that'll drop a bit over.

JD Greg, do you ever take a shark that has a plastic band caught around it?

HOWARD No. Well I've never in my time of fishing any rate. I have never caught a shark with a band around it like that so no, actually it's not too bad. I don't know of anybody else that has. The only think that we've caught shark is where there's a hook been left in it and it's broke away from the line or a net where it's gone through a net and the mesh has grown in it over the years as the shark's got bigger.

JD What about the management of the industry? Do you think the authorities listen to the fishermen's side of the story enough?

HOWARD Yeah I think they've done as much as they could. They've listened to everybody's views on it but it's very hard for them to sort of give a decision with the three States, neither of them agreeing with the other State. It makes it very hard to all get together and work it all out. In South Australia and that they reckon that we take the big fish which are the breeders and in Victoria and Tasmania we say they take the little ones which a gummy doesn't start to produce until he's eight to twelve years old before he can start producing young ones.

JD The Commonwealth's also involved, is it?

HOWARD Yeah the Commonwealth. They're trying to look after the industry which is a lot of rules and regulations over the last four years and that. They've been changing things and that to try and better things to get the stock back up to 82. At this stage I think everything's holding pretty good but to get back to 82 I think you're trying to wind the clock back.

JD Do the fish migrate? Do they move around the coast or do they tend to stay in the one place?

HOWARD No. Shark, they've got a head and a tail. They go up and they come back down and no they move around quite a lot.

JD Is there a closed season?

HOWARD No. On the shark there's just [a] full twelve months. You can just fish all year round so there's no closed season on the shark.

JD And there's no quota?

HOWARD No, not at this stage. It's been talked about having a quota but at this stage, no.

JD So the only way the effort is restricted is by the size of nets? Is that right?

HOWARD Well mostly the people in South Australia use a seven inch mesh where in Tasmania and Victoria, they use a six inch. Some of the people I think in Tasmania use an eight inch up on the top but down around the bottom and that, they use six so yeah. I don't think it's a net size that's sort of doing it.

JD What about the length of the nets?

HOWARD Yeah well the length of the nets there until this new law came through in Canberra, was unlimited. You could use what you wanted. Since this new law's come in, well "A" class people [have] six nets. They had the option of buying another "A" class out to build their nets up to ten. Now the ones that wanted [to], just stayed on their six. They also had a "B" class licence which wasn't transferable with five nets. As far as I know, they're gonna take more nets off to try and bring the catch quota down or to get it up over the years. I don't know what they're gonna come up with next to be quite honest. Everything's up in the air at the moment and just the way they talk

and that, they'll keep taking them off, the nets off people and to make them build back up.

JD Does the same rule apply in Victoria and Tasmania?

HOWARD Yeah. That's the three States are all combined. The shark fishery is run throughout the three States so what law goes in one State goes for the rest.

JD Are you restricted in the number of hooks that you can have on your line?

HOWARD Well the hook side of it is just coming up for review. That's still in Canberra. That's up in the air at the moment. As far as I know at this stage, the hooks are 1500 per vessel and I don't know what laws they're gonna bring in when that new one comes in.

JD Greg, what other problems confront the industry?

[pause]

Greg, would you say that policing of the regulations is adequate?

HOWARD Yeah well I can't speak for the other two States but in South Australia and that the Fisheries people from here and that seem to be doing their job quite well. As far as measuring nets, which they've just received this new device in measuring nets, I think doing it that way they're going to cut out for over netting and yeah, I could say their job they're doing quite well at this stage.

JD How would you suggest then the effort in the shark industry should be reduced?

HOWARD Oh well [a] lot of people won't agree with it on this one but the only way that you're gonna reduce it all is to get rid of the nets out of the water and go back to the old method of the hooks. It's just as simple as that. It's been known from years and years ago that you could go out and you could catch quite a good catch on the hooks and that but over the years with the nets its ruined a lot of good fishing places.

JD So the situation is that something must be done if the industry is to survive?

HOWARD Yeah I agree with that. There's something got to be done. It's a bit hard on the people that sort of spend a lot of money in the industry to sort of phase them out and say well nets and that, they're out and that's it type thing. I think they'd have to really sit down and do a bit of thinking about it 'cause you couldn't see all the people lose all their money that they've put into the industry but to look after the industry, yeah you'd certainly have to really sit down and do something about it.

JD Good. Thank you very much. Anything else that you'd like to add before we finish?

HOWARD No not really. I think I've said about all I could say to help you. I just hope that everything goes well for you.

JD Thanks very much Greg. Thank you.

That is the end of this interview with Mr Greg Howard, shark fisherman of Mt Gambier.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

END OF INTERVIEW

Disclaimer

Verbatim transcript of an interview with MORRIE HURRELL

INTRODUCTION

This is an interview with Mr Morrie Hurrell of Coffin Bay on the west coast of the Eyre Peninsula in South Australia.

Mr Hurrell, who is almost 85 years of age, spent almost the whole of a long working lifetime in various fisheries in this area. In addition to marine scale fishing, he was at times also engaged in shark fishing, beach fishing for salmon, crayfishing and oyster farming. He is a member of a very well known family in the Coffin Bay area. Four of his sons have been fishermen.

In this interview Mr Hurrell expresses concern about the depletion of stock in the various fisheries, about the inroads of recreational fishing effort and the apparent lack of supervision of amateur fishermen by government.

The interview was conducted in Mr Hurrell's home at Coffin Bay on the 17th of January, 1990 by Jack Darcey for the Murdoch University's oral history of the Australian fishing industry.

There is one side of one tape. The interview starts at 022 on the revolution counter.

TAPE 1 SIDE A

JD Mr Hurrell, could you record your full name please.

HURRELL Morrie Charles Thomas Hurrell.

JD Thank you. Where were you born, Morrie?

HURRELL Sheringa, west coast, 80 mile north of Port Lincoln.

JD Right. What year was that?

HURRELL 1905.

JD 1905 ah! Were your family in the fishing game?

HURRELL No. Not.... Me father wasn't in the fishing game but I had four sons in the fishing game.

JD But your father was, what, farming?

HURRELL Oh, me father was similar to what I am myself. He could do.... a jack of all trades. He used to [work for] road contractors and blacksmiths and all this sort of thing.

JD Was he Australian born?

HURRELL Yes.

JD And was his father Australian?

HURRELL No, his father came from England.

JD You've got four sons in the fishing industry. Any brothers?

HURRELL Not now. I used to have one brother. He'd dead. He died.

JD What did you do before you came into fishing?

HURRELL Oh, well not very much because I came into the fishing game when I was only about seventeen or eighteen years of age. I did work for a greengrocer and I worked for a tinsmith and [laughs] I done a few jobs with a chap carpentering on a building and [unclear] beekeeping for a while. I had all sorts of jobs but they didn't last very long.

JD How did it come about that you went fishing?

HURRELL Well me father and mother was.... Father was manager on Spilsby Island out from Port Lincoln and he wanted some help out there. The Island was owned by a chap called W.B. White, the Harbour Master at Port Lincoln. He wanted assistance out there so he said to me, he said, "I want you out on the Island to give me a hand out there". So I stopped there for about twelve months and he was always out of smokes and [laughs] he only seen a boat once in three months. You had honey in your tea because there was no sugar and all this caper. I got jack of it. I said to Dad, I said, "I'm leaving". So one of the fishermen said to me, "Well, I'll give you a job on me boat". I said "That'll do me". So that's how I started off fishing.

JD Right. And then you got your own boat later on?

HURRELL Well actually for the first two or three years I was working with this other chap for three years. After I left him then I went on as skipper on other boats and then I leased boats. I didn't actually buy a boat of me own until around about 1937.

JD What sort of fishing were you doing?

HURRELL All whiting fish in those days.

JD And was it line fishing or netting?

HURRELL All line fishing apart from occasionally we used to shoot the net when the weather was bad and we couldn't line fish. We might shoot the little net just to keep

things going. Actually we weren't really net fishing professionally. The only time I went net fishing professionally was when we was netting salmon for the cannery.

JD Was that beach fishery or from the boat.

HURRELL Yeap.

JD Beach?

HURRELL Yeap. Beach fishing. We had a big dingy which we used to work from the beach.

JD The whiting that you used to catch, what was the market for those? Where did you sell them?

HURRELL All our whiting went to Melbourne. People by the same of Borocks, Hill & Sons and Charlie Hill. There was a market in Adelaide there, it was Dawe's Market, but he wasn't a very satisfactory market at all. Very few fishermen ever sent to Dawe in Adelaide. All our whiting went to Melbourne.

JD How were they transported Morrie?

HURRELL From here they were transported by truck to Port Lincoln and they were put aboard **the Menapa**.

JD That was a vessel trading to.... [unclear]

HURRELL .... [unclear] Port Lincoln there to Port Adelaide on the boat. Then they was iced in Port Adelaide and put on **the Melbourne Express** and sent to Melbourne.

JD They weren't iced here, they were....

HURRELL They were in Port Adelaide, not here in Lincoln. They went from here in the raw. They went in the cool room on **the Minuter**, at least. They had a cool room and they used to carry there but they weren't iced until they got to Port Adelaide.

JD Can you remember what sort of prices you got for your product?

HURRELL Ah, yes [laughs]. Down as low as eighteen pence a dozen, not a pound, a dozen. They generally averaged around two and six to three shillings a dozen. In the winter time they'd go up to perhaps eight shillings a dozen but in the summer time when the fish were plentiful well they were very cheap. Then of course things were different in those days. You didn't want a lot of money.

JD Costs were much smaller weren't they, Morrie? Yes, sure. What other fishing enterprises were you engaged in Morrie?

HURRELL Well I was fishing for shark for three or four years and then I let the shark go. Shark were very poor. To finish, the livers of the shark would bring more than what the shark would. The flesh of the shark wasn't worth saving really. You could throw the shark away and just keep the livers. So I gave that away and I went crayfishing. Yeah and I was crayfishing for quite a few years until I retired.

JD Did you start shark and crayfishing and the scale fishing before the days of licences and limited entries and that sort of thing?

HURRELL Um, no well there was licences out for fishing when I first started but then after I started, then we got licences for crayfishing and shark fishing. They come in in the later years but before that there's always been a licence, as long as I can remember, for fishing.

JD Yeah. Whereabouts did you do the shark fishing?

HURRELL All out from Coffin's Bay, outside out in the deep water.

JD What about the crayfish?

HURRELL Yeah. Also outside the Coffin's Bay.

JD Did you get good prices for the crayfish?

HURRELL Yes but I couldn't just tell you off hand now what they really were, but back in those days, yes they were quite a good price.

JD Were they exported in those days?

HURRELL Yeah, the tails were exported but not the bodies. They used to tail the crayfish and then they used to sell the bodies locally. Anything small they didn't used to worry about but any decent bodies was all sold locally. You could buy that very cheap. They'd only interested in the tails of the crays and they used to go to America and different places overseas.

JD Was there a processing works near here?

HURRELL Yeah, Port Lincoln.

JD So your catch would go from Coffin Bay to Port Lincoln by road truck?

HURRELL Yes that's right, yeah.

JD You'd have seen a lot of changes in the various fisheries during your years in the game?

HURRELL Oh yes, yes. There's been a lot of changes alright but not too many of them for the better. In my opinion the Fisheries Department is very weak. They don't seem to worry about their professional fishermen who've been fishing for years and years. They get all the information from amateurs that had no experience whatsoever. They seem to take notice of them and they don't seem to be interested in men that's had a lot of experience.

JD Are you a member of the Fishermen's Associations?

HURRELL I was a member of the Fishermen's Association, yes.

JD Did you find then that the Department was not very understanding of the fishermen? That's still the case you feel, is it?

HURRELL No they weren't very understanding because they never interviewed the fishermen really. The fishermen used to have meetings and invite the fishing inspector along but they'd only be once in a blue moon and nothing'd ever come from it. You'd never hear anything more about it. In the later years I think now some of these bigger associations there, they got more say today than what we had back in my time. I think now that some of the bigger organisations do get a little bit better hearing.

JD Yes. Now they're big enterprises nowdays, aren't they?

HURRELL That's right.

JD Morrie, were you ever involved in tuna fishing?

HURRELL No.

JD Did it operate here in Coffin Bay at all?

HURRELL Yes.

JD Did tuna fishing take place in this area?

HURRELL There was only one boat in this area that actually went for the tuna. That was poling. He caught quite a few tuna outside but he wasn't really successful.

JD You also were involved in the oyster industry, weren't you?

HURRELL Yes. I was interested in oysters. I was in the oyster company at Coffin Bay for quite a few years. There was the ten of us in the company. We had too many dead heads in the company really and [laughs] too many chiefs and not enough indians to do the work. Only about three years ago we sold out.

JD Coffin Bay is still well known for oysters, isn't it?

HURRELL Oh yes, yes. The local oysters, they haven't been very plentiful because they don't allow any dredging or anything in now. My personal view is, I said to one of the inspectors a few years ago, that if they was to grant only a couple or three licenses and have it restricted, I think that the oysters would come back again because they'd cultivate the bottom and keep the bottom clean and give the oysters a chance to come back. There are still oysters here and one oyster throws out thousands and thousands of spawns. In the hatcheries there where they breed the spawn, they only put half a dozen female oysters into a bin and a couple of males and they get all the spawn they want - millions. So there's any amount of oysters here to spawn but the trouble is the bottom and the growth is too dirty and the young spat won't take. It's got to be absolutely clean otherwise it won't take.

JD That oyster that you were involved with, was [it] the mud oyster? Was that its [name]?

HURRELL No. The oyster that we was involved in here was the Japanese oyster, ostrea gigas. The mud oyster is a very poor, living oyster but these Japanese oysters, ostrea gigas, they'll stop out of water for, oh couple of months; as long as they're not

out in the sun but in the shade and that they're.... One of the fish inspectors had one on his desk. I forget what he said now, for six weeks or more and [it was] still alive.

JD Still alive?

HURRELL They were very hardy oysters but our local mud oysters, they won't live long at all.

JD Morrie, with your very extensive experience in the fishing industry in many branches of the fishing industry, you have come across a lot of the problems that confront fishing generally in Australia.

HURRELL Oh yes [laughs].

JD What would you say the main ones are?

HURRELL Problems?

JD Yes. Is it marketing? Is it depletion of stock? Is it pollution?

HURRELL Oh well I think most of the problems arise through not being policed properly. The Department's not doing enough to help to maintain the different fisheries and this sort of thing. I think it's their.... Well I think that they are starting to do a little bit more about it now but the main problem two years ago was lack of administration.

JD What about things like depletion of stock? I believe the catches are not nearly as great as they once were?

HURRELL No. Well that's quite understandable. With these big trawling nets that they use in the Bay and all our small whiting and tommy ruffs and all the rest of them. When I came to Coffin's Bay first you could row along the shore anywhere and you'd be rowing through hundreds of dozens of small fish. Today you can row along there and you wouldn't see a fish. Not hundreds of dozens. You wouldn't see one fish. It's been depleted through being over fished. With the bag limit that we put on them was OK, I was one that was in the fishing of putting this bag limit on but back in those days there was very few people coming into the Bay fishing. When we put on 30 fish per person which was reasonable but now the boats, they take out four or five people and each one can catch 30 fish per person. They're coming in with quantities of fish.

JD That's the amateur fishermen?

HURRELL Yeah. I'm talking about the recreational fishermen now - amateurs and this sort of thing. Another thing is that we're lacking in fish inspectors. The Bay is not policed and there's still hundreds of dozens of undersized fish being taken out of the Bays. Today you've got to catch a lot. There are still plenty of undersized fish that are not grown to maturity and they're not getting up to the spawning stages. They're caught too soon. Then one thing that should be done which we tried to do, oh 40 years ago, we tried to put the measurement of whiting up from eleven inches which was the legal measurement.

We tried to put it up to twelve inches and the Fishery Department wouldn't have a bar of it. Now if they had of done that back when we wanted it done, you'd have fish that's reaching maturity to spawn, but now they're not. They're too small and they're not

spawning. A few bigger ones that are spawning.... Cause each fish is the same as an oyster. They have thousands and thousands of eggs but then you've got all the other varieties of fish living on this too. Actually it's the same as plankton. Most of your small fish and that all live on plankton. Part of the plankton was the eggs. These oysters here in Coffin Bay, a lot of these drones that they're talking about.... Oyster farms shouldn't be in Coffin Bay all the time because they're eating the feed of the fish. That's a lot of hooey. They are helping to feed the fish but these stupid cows don't know anything about fishing they don't know any better; but they're trying to pump it down the public's neck which is wrong.

JD There's a need for more research, isn't there?

HURRELL Oh yes, yeah. Definitely.

JD Morrie, you were involved with the shark fishery for a while, weren't you?

HURRELL Yeah.

JD How have numbers held up in shark?

HURRELL Well actually shark is a migrating fish and sharks migrate for thousands of miles as far as this in concerned. All fish, salmon and all your fish which migrate, migrate because they're looking for food. In certain times of the year they get the food in different areas. So therefore they come back to these areas each year looking for their food. So actually sharks, sometimes if the food is not around the sharks are not either. So when you get a good season and there's plenty of food for them, well then they have a good season with the sharks but they are migrating, they're not just local fish.

JD So what [unclear] any noticeable drop off in numbers caught?

HURRELL Well actually I haven't been interested in the latter years. It certainly has dropped off, yes but at times they have good catches. It all depends when the sharks are running. When they're running they do all right. It's the same with crayfish and this. When they're running you have a good season and if they don't run well you don't get a good season.

JD Anything else that you'd like to say on this tape about the fishing industry Morrie?

HURRELL Well, [pause] No.

JD How do you see the future of the industry? Rosey or not?

HURRELL Well no. I think the future of the fishing is gonna get worse without a lot more research and make a lot more restrictions. If they're under the present restrictions, well they've gotta get scarcer. Mater of fact I wrote in the paper here a few years ago that they ought to start taking photos of whiting, otherwise they won't know what a whiting is in years to come; and they won't!

JD So it sounds a fairly grim sort of future for fishing?

HURRELL Yeah, its grim alright [laughs]. Oh we have a lot of controversy now and the cockle....

We have two chappies here cockling and we got a good few. People were against anything that's done in the water away from Coffin's Bay and they're causing a lot of strife. They say that, oh I'll show you one of me rakes, [unclear] a cockle rake what we use. These people say that these two men are dredging cockles. They're not dredging cockles at all. They're only using the cockle rake because when the tide is high you can't go down and scratch them with your hands. You don't want to scratch them with your fingers. I'll show you the rake directly. They're causing a lot of trouble, they were over this cockle business. A chappy in the paper wrote..... there's a letter about it again in the paper today but he just doesn't know what he's talking about. They're talking about closing certain area's of Coffin's Bay for breeding. There's cockles all over Coffin's Bay. There's a place where you can go down and shovel them in with your hands. I seen a bloke the other day shovelling.... One bloke holding the bag open and he's shovelling them in with his hands. There's cockles all over the place and a lot of cockles out in the deep water where you can't get them if you want them anyway. So we don't need any more restrictions on cockles.

JD Morrie is there any abalone fishing in this area?

HURRELL Not in the Bays no. Outside of Coffin's Bay area, yes there's s terrible lot of abalones caught out in the outside coast but not on the inside. There's mostly all shallow water in the Coffin's Bay areas. The bigger majority is sand. It's not reefs and ledges and all this sort of thing where the abalone will stick to but there's any amount of them caught out in the deep water.

JD What about prawning?

HURRELL There are prawns here but not commercially. They wouldn't allow them to prawn anyhow but they're people go out there with hob nets and they get a feed of prawns if they want them. There's quite a few prawns around the Bay but not to be worth commercially....

JD Are they the western king prawn?

HURRELL Yes.

JD Is there a scallop fishery at all in this area?

HURRELL Yes. Now that's another thing too that's being over-fished. They've only been scallop fishing in the Bay. They did have a patch outside and the Department let too many boats in there and they cleaned it up and had to leave it and then they wouldn't grant them licences again to dredge there; but inside the bay now there's a couple of chappies here got licence(s) and they're catching a terrible lot of scallops down the Bay.

JD Catching or dredging for them or....

HURRELL No they're using the aqua-lung diving gear. They're diving for them. There's only shallow water; it'd only be around about, oh three fathom of water. They're diving for them. They're bringing in bags and bags but there's no restriction on them. Even the amateurs is allowed to go out there. I've seen amateurs coming in with seven bags of scallops one day. They go back the next day and catch another seven if they wannna.

JD Do they sell them?

HURRELL Yeah, well they're not supposed to but they do.

JD You wouldn't eat seven bags would you?

HURRELL [laughs] Oh no. But that is something that should be restricted but there's gonna come a time if they don't soon restrict it well they just won't get any scallops. I don't know how long it takes them to grow but it should be restricted.

JD Morrie, are there any other fisheries that happen in this area that we haven't talked about?

HURRELL Yeah, the crabbing. Yeah there's one boat started off crabbing and he takes his crabs to Melbourne. They're all sold in Melbourne. Then he's doing alright but now the Department has given permits to amateurs more or less that shouldn't be - business people and all this sort of thing and I believe now that there's, oh eight or ten boats out there part time crabbing and all this sort of thing so, where all the crabs are gonna come from; I don't know much about them because they haven't been in this field crabbing for long. It's only a new industry just started. I knew there was plenty of these crabs here. They're not the blue crab. They're what they call the sand crab but I think they're better eating than the blue crab myself.

JD Do they grow to a good size?

HURRELL Yeah, fair size, yeah, and they're always full of meat. But the time, when they go soft, they're scarce [of] the meat. The chappy that started off, stops working for a couple of months while they're soft, they stop working but all these other blokes down there, they won't stop so they're selling stuff that's not first class. So that helps mess your market up a little bit. I think the Department is very weak in granting these permits to these people.

JD Morrie, anything else that we ought to have on tape.

HURRELL Oh I don't know. There's nothing that I can think of just at the moment. While you're asking questions I can answer them but [laughs] to go back and think of all these sort of things....

JD Tell you one thing you might be able to enlighten me on. The boats, are they built locally or in Adelaide or where do they come from?

HURRELL Locally.

JD The boats that are used.

HURRELL Yeah, they're all registered by the Marine & Harbours.

JD Is there a boat building industry on this coast?

HURRELL Oh yeah, yes. They've got one in Port Lincoln. I think there's another one.... Of course BHP they had a big boat building place in Whyalla but they make fair size boats in Port Lincoln now, tuna boats and things like that there.

JD Right, well thank you very much for that interview.

HURRELL Yeah, well I hope it's satisfactory.

JD Been interesting to talk to you. Thank you.

HURRELL Cause, I'm getting a little bit old now to remember a lot of things but when you get talking about it, things come back to you again and so. Yeah when you can sit down like we are now and talk about different things and you ask different questions well it'll come back and you can talk about these sort of things.

JD I'm glad you talked on this tape. It's good to have it. Thank you.

That is the end of this interview with Mr Morrie Hurrell, retired fisherman of Coffin Bay, South Australia.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

END OF INTERVIEW

Verbatim transcript of an interview with GUNNAR JENSEN

INTRODUCTION

This interview with Mr Gunnar Jensen of Port Lincoln, South Australia, was conducted by Jack Darcey for Murdoch University's oral history of the Australian fishing industry project.

Mr Jensen was a seafarer on a Danish vessel before entering Australia and eventually being granted permanent resident status. He came to Port Lincoln and worked as a deckhand before acquiring his own fishing boat. He has in turn been shark fishing, rock lobster fishing, tuna fishing, prawning and again rock lobster fishing and has worked in other States as well as in South Australia. Mr Jensen is a highly respected fisherman. He has been active in fishermen's organisations, on advisory committees and in establishing sea rescue facilities. He has also been involved in processing.

He now lives in retirement at his home over looking Boston Bay, Port Lincoln where this linterview was recorded on the 20th January, 1990. On this tape he presents an intelligent and balanced account of many aspects of fishing in the area. He has wide practical experience of the industry and relates his story from the viewpoint of a very knowledgeable owner/operator.

There are two sides of one tape. The interview starts at 021 on the revolution counter.

TAPE 1 SIDE A

JD Mr Jensen would you please record your full name and date and place of birth.

JENSEN My name is Gunnar Johannes Jensen and I was born in Denmark in 1929 on the 30th April.

JD When did you come out to Australia?

JENSEN I came in 1951.

JD Did your whole family come out?

JENSEN No I was the only one. Actually I was a runaway sailor and the ship left without me on purpose in 1951 and that's how I got here.

JD Was this in Port Lincoln?

JENSEN No. I left the ship in Melbourne and initially I just wanted to have a little look around and take another ship out again a few weeks later but somehow I'm still here.

JD You'd have been a pretty young man then, about what, in your early '20s?

JENSEN In my early '20s, yes and I was about 22 I think at the time.

JD Yeah. Did you get into trouble with the authorities?

JENSEN Not really because I was together with another friend and he could speak a little bit of English. That was a great help so we got off the ship in Melbourne and he said, "Oh in Australia we have this funny thing" he said "They call it States. It's not just one country. We have States". He said, "What we'll do, we'll go to another State, give ourselves up and then we haven't done anything wrong in that State and [the] other State, because we've left, they'll say we've gone so they won't worry too much either. We'll try that". So that's what we did.

JD And you got away with it?

JENSEN Yes. We went to the Police Station in Mt Gambier and said, "We're two sailors. The boat left without us". He asked where and we said, "In Victoria". "Oh" he said, "I don't know what to do with this. I never had that situation before" [laughs]. So he said, "Well do you want some work"? We said, "Yes" so he arranged for some work for us and he said, "Come in once a week and I'll see if I can find out what to do with fellows like you". We were there for several weeks and we got no answer and finally we travelled to Adelaide and hunted up the Immigration Department to see what was gonna happen. Eventually they said, "Well, we don't know, we'll have to see". Eventually we got our papers. We could remain as long as we want. So the system worked those days.

JD Yes. I don't know that it would nowdays.

JENSEN Not necessarily, no, but those days it did.

JD Your English is very good. How did you learn English so well?

JENSEN Well I had, what 38 years practise at it. In the beginning I used to go to evening classes in Adelaide in the University. I could read English long before I could speak it or write it. I could read newspapers but nobody could understand what I was saying. This is just how I learned it.

JD Were you involved, or was your family seafarers, were they?

JENSEN No. They were farmers in Europe but I did some fishing in the North Sea before I came out here.

JD And how did you come to get into the fishing industry here?

JENSEN Well I heard about the big money that was being made. I was working for a little while in a factory in Adelaide but that didn't suit me. So I came to Port Lincoln and got a job here fishing and been here more or less since.

JD Yes. That would have been in the early 1950s?

JENSEN That was in about '52 or so.

JD Yes. What sort of fishery did you come into?

JENSEN Well the first few years is all shark fishing with hooks and we fished all the year round for sharks up and down the coast.

JD Did you have any trouble getting a job in the shark fishery?

JENSEN No. No trouble, no.

JD And you were a deck hand were you?

JENSEN I was a deck hand for starters

JD And whereabouts did you say you fished for shark along the coast?

JENSEN Well anywhere from Kangaroo Island to Fowlers Bay right up the far west.

JD Was that netting or....

JENSEN No. It was all with hooks; fixed hooks on a long line.

JD Shark was pretty prevalent then?

JENSEN Oh there was lots of sharks. They [were] easy to catch but prices weren't always so good of course in those days. We had the problem of transport to Melbourne to the markets and it was not always the best price we got from the buyers. Still is the case today I suppose fishermen would claim.

JD Yes, I suppose. After having spent some time in the shark fishing industry, what did you do then?

JENSEN I went into lobster fishing or cray fishing they call it now. My first boat was a 28 footer. We worked without echo sounders. It was all with lead line and a bit of grease on the bottom of the lead to see whether it was rock or sand and fishing close in along the shores: Port Lincoln, Coffins Bay, Venus Bay and so forth.

JD You were still a crew member?

JENSEN No. Then I bought my own little boat about a 28 footer and I would have been I suppose 25 years old at that time.

JD Did you operate that boat on your own or did you have someone.... [unclear]

JENSEN No I had a crew member with me, a young man.

JD Could you describe something more about the method of catching crays in this area?

JENSEN Well we used what we called a cray pot. We usually call it [a] beehive type of cray pot.

JD Is it made of cane or....

JENSEN No. It's made out of steel rods with wire mesh around it and a neck up the top which is either plastic or cane around the top and a weld mesh bottom. We put them down with the bait inside them and....

JD What sort of bait do you use?

JENSEN Well here we use virtually any type of bait; anything we can get hold of. The best bait we reckon is salmon. We use salmon. We use any sort of rubbish fish that gets into the pot. We cut them up for bait and leather jackets or rock cod or anything like that we use for bait.

JD Do you use hocks from the abattoir?

JENSEN We never used them in South Australia, no. We used to have an abattoir here but we could always get enough fish. Sometimes we'd buy it. Most of the time we'd buy our bait.

JD About how far off shore would you fish?

JENSEN Well in the small boat we wouldn't go more than say ten, twenty, ten fifteen mile off shore in the small boat. We had no echo sounder in the beginning. Later on of course we got echo sounders and radar. By the time we got that well we could find our pots a long way out to sea again.

JD And in bigger boats?

JENSEN Oh yes, bigger boats. I finished up with a 51 footer steel boat. That was a big cray boat those days.

JD Yes. Did your pots have escape hatches or holes?

JENSEN They didn't those days, no. There was no sort of legislation or control on what type of pots we used. It was later introduced that only a certain number was allowed which was controlled by the Fishery Department but in the beginning you could have as many as you wanted; [there was] no limit.

JD Was there a limit on the size of cray that you could take?

JENSEN Oh yes. There always has been a limit on the size.... [unclear]

JD Was that respected by the fishermen or did they take, as we call them "cackers" in Western Australia?

JENSEN Well it [was] respected in the sense that the buyers wouldn't take them so that made a very, very easy way of controlling it.

JD What type of crayfish is it? It's southern....

JENSEN It's the southern rock lobster, yes. Slightly different to the Western Australian one; not very much. Slightly bigger on an average.

JD Yes. Is it a different colour?

JENSEN No. I don't think so. We don't have here what you call the white cray. We have a light coloured one but he's not white like the Western Australian ones.

JD Yeah. The West Australian white it is. It's not totally white is it, really?

JENSEN No, no.

JD Where was your market then for the crays?

JENSEN Well the market was locally. SAFCOL was one of the main ones which is South Australian Fisherman's Co-Operative. I was a foundation member of that when it started here in Port Lincoln. They would receive the crays, cook them and sell them and later on of course export them; just the tail of them. In the beginning it was all just cooking them [and] sending them to Melbourne and Sydney, the bigger cities.

JD Yes. After spending some time then in the crayfishing industry you moved over to tuna. Is that right?

JENSEN Yes. The boat I had at the time was only 51 foot. That's small in tuna terms. It's a big cray boat and I was tuna fishing for a couple of years with her. After that, prawn fishing started and I moved into that.

JD When you were tuna fishing, you were fishing in the Bight were you?

JENSEN Yes from Port Lincoln up here we would go, oh round about 100, 150 miles away from Port Lincoln. That'd be the maximum distance those days.

JD Were you poling or....

JENSEN Yes. It was all poling methods, yes. There were no purse seiners then.

JD It boomed here didn't it, for some years?

JENSEN Yes. It was good. I was a deckhand for a while just to learn the game and we used to go to a place called Rocky Island which was the main area at the time. We could often load up, say 40 tonne of tuna in about four hours and that's real exciting fishing. All poling; the whole lot.

JD Yes. At what point then did you leave tuna fishing?

JENSEN I left tuna fishing and went into prawn fishing which had just started here. I was in prawn fishing for several years till finally the night work interfered with my health and I gave it away.

JD Yes. Did you leave tuna fishing because of the quotas that were imposed?

JENSEN No that wasn't the reason. It was [that I was] actually financially better of prawn fishing. There was no quota those days.

JD No. So you left the tuna fishing before the quota system was introduced?

JENSEN Yes.

JD The introduction of quotas into tuna made a dramatic difference here, didn't it, in the number of boats operating in the tuna industry?

JENSEN Yeah well the boats are so much more efficient nowdays. They have electronic equipment. They can find them much better. They have aeroplanes to find them. They now have big nets and shoot them out and get 100 tonne in a shoot and things like that. In my day it was all pole fishing and there was none of that, so now it's much more efficient.

JD So then you went into prawning and where were you prawning? In the Gulf?

JENSEN I started off actually out of Venus Bay which is a small place about 100 mile west from here. We were allocated zones for prawning in the early stages and I was in that zone from Coffins Bay, west of Ceduna type of thing. We worked mainly out of Venus Bay. Later on we got permission to go in the Gulfs and I fished in the Gulfs after that.

JD How many years did you stay in the prawning?

JENSEN I may [have] been in it four or five years I think, in the prawn game.

JD Yes. With your own boat?

JENSEN With my own boat, yes.

JD And then what did you do after that?

JENSEN After that I bought a small boat to do a bit of part time fishing and one of the easiest fishing of the lot, to my way of fishing, is crayfishing. So I went back into crayfishing for another three or four years till oh about two or three years ago I sold it and sold out. Now I've just got a dinghy and I row the grandchildren around in that.

JD Gunnar in this fishery, this crayfishing industry here in Port Lincoln, are there closed seasons?

JENSEN Yes we have for many years closed seasons. The season here starts on the 1st November and goes through to the 31st May but there's no quota system as such but there is a pot limit with a limited entry into the fishery.

JD And what is the pot limit?

JENSEN Well the pot limit, it's freed up recently but it was originally one pot per foot [of] boat plus ten foot of crew. That was the original [limit]. Since it's been freed up, and now there's a limit, a maximum limit of 65 pots per boat.

JD Regardless of size?

JENSEN Regardless of size of [the] boat, yes. They are transferable. In other words the boats [pots?] can transfer from one boat to another but the maximum they can have is 65 pots.

JD Does the licence go with the boat or with the fisherman?

JENSEN No it goes with.... the licence goes with the fisherman, yes.

JD What about the supervision of the industry by the Fisheries Department? Is it pretty close?

JENSEN It is pretty close. We have local fishery inspectors here. They go to sea and occasionally they hop on a boat and watch you and make sure you don't have any extra pots. When the catch comes in they go to the factories and inspect the fish for size and also if there's any good spawn in them. It is not illegal to take them of course.

JD Yes. Do the fishermen accept that readily or are they resentful of it?

JENSEN Well they have learnt to accept it over the years. In the beginning of course they didn't think they needed anybody to tell them what to do but they realise it now, that management is necessary. It's a good thing for them.

JD For the long term interest of the industry?

JENSEN Oh yes, yes.

JD How many boats would fish in the crayfishing industry from Port Lincoln?

JENSEN I haven't got the exact figures but I think it was round about 40 crayboats here, in this area. Some operate out of small ports and on the coast. The majority operates out of Port Lincoln.

JD What would be an average size of catch? I presume it would vary throughout.... [unclear]

JENSEN That varies greatly from boat to boat. If you have your full 65 pots, you could expect anything. We're talking bags here, bags of crayfish, anything between 200 and 400 bags for a season. That's with one or two crew member[s] on board as well.

JD These are the southern rock lobster and they're exported largely I understand?

JENSEN Yes. I think the majority of them would be exported. Without an export market there would be a very poor fishery. Some are exported. The [unclear] [tailor?] are exported mainly to America. Some cooked crays go to Japan and lately we've started live export to Asia and some even goes to Europe now alive. They have developed techniques whereby they can actually chill them down in chilled water and when they take them out they are in a.... ah how can I put it.... in a slowed down metabolism. Kept cold they can actually last for up to 48 hours, no problem, alive.

JD Are the fish chilled on board the vessels or when they get ashore?

JENSEN No. It's all done ashore. It is very critical how it's done. It can't be done on the boats. They must be gently slowed down, cooled down and then they must be packed exactly right with the right temperatures, otherwise they'll die.

JD Do the boats here have the facility to keep the crayfish alive?

JENSEN Yes they all have that because working out of here there are very few day boats, what we call day boats that come home every day. Most of them have either tanks where they circulate seawater through or the old fashioned well which is holes in the bottom of a section of the boat and that keeps them alive.

JD So that they stay at sea for some days at a time?

JENSEN Oh yes hear it's quite common to stay here for a week or eight to ten days at sea on a trip because we actually go a fair distance from Port Lincoln to fish for crayfish. You can't catch any within 25 miles of Port Lincoln; no commercial quantities. After that it starts. Boats from here travel to Kangaroo Island or 100 mile, 150 mile the other way west and some anchor at islands night time. Others put just an anchor down on rope and hang down, just hang out in the middle, anchor until they get enough to come home with.

JD There'd be usually the skipper and, what two crew?

JENSEN Skipper and one; the bigger boats have two men but most of them with just [the] skipper and one man.

JD Some of the boats then would be fishing in quite deep water?

JENSEN Yes. They have tried it here up to 100 fathoms but they don't seem to get many crayfish after 70 fathoms but anywhere between from here to the Continental Shelf into the shore [there] is likely to be crayfish if there's [a] rock bottom. We don't catch any on sand here.

JD No. And your market is Japan mostly for the cooked and live cray and the USA for the tails? Is that right?

JENSEN Well Japan and Asia, Hong Kong, Singapore etc. Not all Japan because it depends on where you get the best price. That's where they go. The market changed. Lately Europe has come in a bit but it's a difficult market because of their European Economic Block and their import tariffs [which] makes it difficult to compete and send them to Europe.

JD Could we talk about the management of the industry in terms of the Department of Fisheries and the fishermen's organisations and the co-operation between the two?

JENSEN There is fairly good co-operation between fishermen and fishery management at the moment. Fishermen do assist the Fishery Department in taking programme[s]. All catches are recorded in log books which has got to be kept on a daily basis. Location[s] have got to be given, how much they catch and how many pots go in the water. That data is processed by the Fishery Department.

Management otherwise is by joint.... their committees, their management committees which make recommendations to the Minister. Those management committees consist of fishermen and Departmental officers. That's being going on for many, many years.

JD You yourself served on an advisory committee, didn't you?

JENSEN Not so much in crayfishing. I was on an advisory committee in prawn fishing but I have been involved with local cray committees like Crayfishermen's Association

etc. I've been secretary and so forth of that several times. It's not a very popular job [laughs].

JD Yes in many fields it's not the most popular job. Do the fishermen, individual fishermen, support their organisations pretty well or do they not [unclear]

JENSEN Yes. I think you could say we've got about.... You never have 100%. There's always somebody who bucks the system but generally speaking I think there used to be 75/80% of fishermen [who] belong to fishermen organisations which is still the majority.

JD You were also very prominent in establishing a sea rescue organisation?

JENSEN Yes. I got roped into that job [laughs]. I went to a public meeting where.... What happened [is] a fisherman got lost at sea and it took a long time for somebody to come and look for him. He fell overboard from a boat and naturally fishermen wanted some better system than the one that existed at the time which was call up the Airforce and it took many, many hours before they got there. So in the end we finally got the State Government [to] pay for the first hour of the local aircraft and we were happy with that because, especially in this area where we have fish spotters.... They can spot things very, very easily in the sea. This is their profession, spotting things that are unusual in the sea. After that well we've been quite happy. If they're not found within the first hour well usually it's much more serious and you need the Navy or Airforce or somebody to look.

JD Are there many accidents at sea?

JENSEN No. Generally speaking I'd say no, I don't think so. We have had a few people lost over the years but [laughs] nothing like if you talk about road accidents or anything like that. I'd actually say fishing would be a very safe occupation.

JD It seems to have become safer over the years, doesn't it?

JENSEN Oh yes. Boats are bigger, better. Communication[s] are much better. Everybody has radios. Some have some they can ring up their wife and talk to her daily. There are listening watches 24 hours a day so if somebody gets in trouble well they can usually contact somebody more or less immediately.

JD And the boats are surveyed regularly?

JENSEN Very strictly in South Australia. The Marine & Harbours, they survey the boat every two years; they've gotta be surveyed. Not only the hull, [but] the machinery, all the safety equipment, flares, life jackets etc. They've all gotta be inspected and passed by Marine & Harbours so nowdays boats are very safe.

JD Yes. Could we turn to processing. You were involved in a factory I understand for some years?

JENSEN Yes [laughs]. We like most fishermen were dissatisfied with the prices we got of course so a group of us of fourteen fishermen, we formed a factory in 1974 and this was mainly to process prawns at the time. I was a member of that and I was chairman of it for a couple of years and there I got quite an insight into what it's like to be the

fish processor: The cost and the problems and so forth. The factory's still going today but I'm not involved in it any more.

JD Did processing boats ever operate here? Freezer boats, in crayfishing?

JENSEN Not in crayfish, no, no. The boats are too small. No they never operated here. They come into the nearest unloading point and then they are shipped by truck to the factory.

JD Could we look at some of the problems facing the industry generally, but more particularly the crayfishing industry: Is there any evidence for example of depletion of stock?

JENSEN In South Australia it's near enough to status quo. The catch rate has not gone up or down now for several years and it's more or less the perfect system in that the catches are steady. There are of course some years [that] are a little bit better than others. Maybe the weather pattern has something to do with that but generally speaking, with the management that is here at the moment, it's very, very satisfactory.

JD Does that apply to the other fisheries? What about shark fishing?

JENSEN [laughs] Shark fishing is still unresolved. That is a very difficult one in that you have several States. You have the three southern States: Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia. It's very difficult to get bureaucrats to agree to a management plan. That's been going on for years. Stocks are going down. There's no doubt that that but just as to how and when the final management plan would be implemented, it's a bit difficult to say. They have started by reducing the number of nets available. That's in already but a final plan, well [I] don't know when that'll come out.

JD Is pollution a problem in this area?

JENSEN Not generally speaking. I would say no. We don't have big industrial towns or factories in this area and we have very little pollution problem. A little bit around the big cities, bit of sewerage effluent but nothing that affects deep water fishing.

JD What about litter in the sea; plastic bags and drink cans?

JENSEN Yes. There's a little bit of it but not a great deal really. There again it's around the bigger population centres, Adelaide and so forth. Around here we don't have any problems really.

JD Is the price that the fisherman gets for his crayfish pretty stable or does it vary?

JENSEN No. The price varies considerably and the main influence on that of course is the export market and the dollar up or down. That is probably the main reason for why prices fluctuate so widely.

JD The transferability of licences, or you could say the saleability of them. They I understand, can be sold here as well as in Western Australia. About what would a licence cost a person getting into the crayfishing industry now?

JENSEN The licence itself, there's no such thing as a price on it actually but there is a price on....

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

TAPE 1 SIDE B

JD Would you comment on the transferability of licences in the crayfishing industry nowdays.

JENSEN Licences can be transferred but not so much licences, more pot allocations can be transferred. Transferability of them can go from boat to boat but if a person wants to buy into a cray licence, he has to be approved by the Department. He's gotta be a fit and proper person but the actual pots can be transferred from boat to boat.

JD What would it cost a person to set up now in crayfishing?

JENSEN Well we talk about.... The minimum you can have is 25 pots; that's the minimum on a licence and from there on you buy pots from whoever wants to sell some. The pot price for a cray pot, a licence, would vary from about $6000.00 to $8000.00 or $9000.00 per pot to buy it, to purchase it. So if you have 50 pots, well it's a lot of money that's needed plus a boat. You've gotta also have a boat as well so it can easily cost a quarter of a million to go in and buy a nice outfit for crayfishing.

JD Do boats nowdays.... are they mainly fibreglass or....

JENSEN Yes. More and more they go over to fibreglass or aluminium. Aluminium boats of course are maintenance free and there's no rust problems and the same goes for fibreglass. The wooden boats are dying out gradually. They're not being built so much any more.

JD Are the boats built here in Port Lincoln?

JENSEN Yes. We have got two or three boat builders here but there again it depends where they can get the best price. They may buy them from elsewhere, not necessarily Port Lincoln.

JD Whyalla and....

JENSEN No, more Western Australia or Queensland, Victoria, where they build fishing boats. Whyalla doesn't actually build many fishing boats. They were more into the bigger type of boats.

JD Tuna boats?

JENSEN Yes. They have built a tuna boat but tuna boats are usually built in Port Adelaide or Port Lincoln. We build quite a lot of boats here now.

JD Before we finish Gunnar, is there anything else that you'd like to comment on about the fishing industry generally or about crayfishing, about the fishing from Port Lincoln or from South Australia generally or Australia generally?

JENSEN For smaller periods of time I fished in Queensland; I fished in South Australia but I still prefer South Australia. I may be a little bit biased there.

JD If you had your time again, would you come into fishing?

JENSEN Yes. I think I would. It was very hard work in the early days but it's the type of life that suits me and as I said I was fishing before I came here on merchant ships so most of my life has been spent on the water.

JD Do you ever regret having jumped ship in Melbourne?

JENSEN Not really. I was free to leave any time I wanted to but I couldn't actually sort of find a better place. Where I came from, there wasn't much room for expansion. No I don't think I could think of a better place, really.

JD And you've established a family here now?

JENSEN Yes. I'm married. I've got three daughters [and] three grand daughters. I'm doing quite well. I've got my own house.

JD And a beautiful spot.

JENSEN Oh I've got to see the water when I wake up in the morning, yes.

JD Well look thank you very much for this interview. It's been very, very interesting to talk to you. Thank you.

JENSEN You're welcome.

That is the end of this interview with Mr Gunnar Jensen of Port Lincoln in South Australia.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW

Verbatim transcript of an interview with MICHAEL KOCH

INTRODUCTION

Mike Koch is the longest serving Fisheries Officer in the South Australian Fisheries Department. Currently he is in charge of the Victor Harbour area, but he has served in every area of the State and has an extensive knowledge of all its fisheries. He has been involved also in the training of officers, in research and in the establishment of helicopter surveillance. He sees his role as very much an educative one, though it is also necessarily the enforcement of regulations governing the industry.

Mike Koch is a responsible officer. His approach to his duties is intelligent, perceptive, balanced and fair-minded. As a Fisheries Officer he has made - and is still making - a very considerable contribution to the well-being of the fisheries of South Australia, and thus to all those who are dependent upon them. In telling his story, which he does particularly well, he has given an excellent insight into the fishing industry and its management and problems. He also tells something of the problems faced by the Fisheries Officers and their families.

The interview is conducted by Jack Darcey for Murdoch University's Oral History of the Australian Fishing Industry, in Mr Koch's office in Victor Harbour on the 2nd of January, 1990. There are two tapes each of two sides and the interview starts at 022 on the revolution counter.

TAPE 1 SIDE A

JD Mike, would you please record your full name, date and place of birth?

KOCH Michael John Koch, 25th of May, 1945, and I was born at Maylands, Adelaide, South Australia.

JD Thank you. Did you have a background in fishing? Were any of your family fishermen?

KOCH No, my father in fact was a dentist. The closest I'd ever been to fishing as a child was my grandfather used to occasionally - or my grandfather and my uncles - used to own a fishnet, and occasionally they would either visit us, or we would go with them down to the beach and net a few fish on the beach. So apart from living on the foreshore in Adelaide, right on the beach in effect as a child, that was about the closest as a child to every being involved in fishing. As a teenager I actually - well my grandfather gave me his split-cane rod and an old reel, and I went down the jetty a few times and thought I could fish. But up until I joined the Department the total

number of fish I'd caught was two Tommy Ruffs and one Leatherjacket, [laughs] and so my knowledge of fishing was virtually zilch.

JD What did you do after you left school?

KOCH As I was leaving school, I had always been keen to go out on to the land I suppose. My grandparents lived in the country. My great-grandparents had been involved on the land, and so I think I was keen to go farming, either as a jackaroo.... That's what my ambition was, and I think that was only motivated by the fact that I like the outdoors. I didn't particularly like being indoors so to speak. So on leaving school - or prior to leaving - I started hunting around all the stock and station agents looking for work as a jackaroo. Another option I explored was getting work on the then developing mineral search mainly with the Department of Mines. I thought that perhaps working for an oil company or something like that, outback, and searching around, would be appealing. I wasn't successful.

At the beginning of the school year, my father said to me that I either got a job or I went back to school. So then I pulled out all stops and went flat out for anything. I started touring around all the Government Departments, going from one to the other. I got the phone book out and started at "A" and started working through and as it happened, I went into the Department of Agriculture to enquire about a cadetship, because they ran cadetships for various studies - vet science and stuff like that. Made enquires there only to find I was too late, that they'd do their interviews sort of mid-way.... well, two thirds of the way through the year. And as I was leaving the Department of Agriculture, there was an office adjacent to the receptionist's room which had a sign sticking out that said "Fisheries and Game Department". So I sauntered in there and a gentleman at the desk.... I asked him if there were any jobs and he said, "No, we don't take on staff. The positions are all full." So I did the customary thing and said, "Well can I leave my name and address and if something comes up will you write?" They said, "Oh yes, we'll do that."

So I went from there to the Department of Mines and to the Electricity Trust and various other places without success. I went around to the employment office and registered there as unemployed, and sort of headed for home. As it happened as I arrived home, there was a telegram turned up from the employment office saying that there was a job, and I was to present myself the next morning at a place in Grote Street actually. So I went into this - it was a place called City Supplies - I went in there and they required a storeman for their workshop, and so I thought well, it's a job. So I went in there as a storeman.

The following May, three months later, a letter turned up in the mail from the Fisheries and Game advising that there was a vacancy and I was invited to make an application. So, of course, I decided then that that was the job I was going to have. A bit optimistic I suppose, but anyway. I banged out a one page application for the position - about ten lines - and put it in the post. It was about..... that was in May, it was probably in July that I got a letter saying to present myself for an interview, so I went in on the Wednesday afternoon for an interview in the Public Service Board building. I remember the two chaps that did the interview. There was Mr Gard who was the representative of the Public Service Board, and the then Director of Fisheries, Alan Bogg. I walked into the interview room and before I managed to say anything, they said, "You're too young. We only take on chaps that are twenty-one years old or more, but thanks for coming in anyway." So that was it. I got back on my messenger-boy pushbike and rode back to City Supplies.

As I got back there the boss came out to me and said that I had to go back to see this Mr Bogg again. I couldn't work out why, so I got back on my bike and rode back and went in to see him. They said, "Look, we've changed our minds. There's a position for an assistant inspector. We're not quite sure what you're going to do. When can you start?" And I said, "Well, straight away." And he said, "Well, you've got to give a week's notice where you're working so start on Friday week." So eight o'clock they said I had to be at the head office in Gawler Place, be there at eight o'clock in the morning with my bag packed to go to Ceduna. I was to go up there in the back of the landrover and do some work with the fisheries officers up there, although they were called fishing inspectors in Fisheries and Game.

So at eight o'clock on the Friday morning I went in there and I think I was still waiting to go to Ceduna about two years later. I sort of didn't go but..... so I started work and there was a bit of a problem because I was only just seventeen then, and when they did the calculation on the pay, when they broke it down from the adult pay, down to what they pay a junior, it almost worked out that I'd have to pay them to be there. So for the first year my pay was structured on the Clerical Officers' pay, but I was an Assistant Inspector of Fisheries and Game, and that was that I was there.

I think probably the reason I stayed so long is that the job has always - to me anyway - has presented a challenge every day. Every day it's been different. I can't think of any other employment anywhere that offers the same things. I've always said when I found a better job, I'd go. Probably still now, if I did, I would, but that's sort of how it started. I've been there you know, ever since and I'll probably still be there in twenty years' time, I don't know. [laughs].

JD So you started at seventeen?

KOCH Seventeen.

JD You didn't actually go to Ceduna? Where did you start?

KOCH No. Well, I was assigned to assist if you like, the metropolitan based fisheries officers. The staff then..... we had.... there was a Fishing Inspector at Ceduna, there was one in Port Lincoln, one in Millicent and the Yorke Peninsula area was worked from Adelaide. So in Adelaide we had two inspectors there and a Senior Inspector, so we had a staff of what? Six I think it was, I made up number seven. The chap that started the same time as I did, and he was also an assistant, after about - I think it was about twelve months - he transferred over to the then research section which was one officer, a recent graduate from University doing research work and his name was Albert Caton. He's now based in Canberra. He's involved in fisheries still, or the industry.

So I worked..... for the first three years I worked out of our head office, doing inspection work, but also assisting in the clerical function, because our head office was comprised of the Director, Alan Bogg, his secretary, one clerical officer which later expanded to two. So it was a very, very small department, very small, in terms of others anyway. In effect we were just a branch of Agriculture. We also had the wildlife side which was the "Game" side of the Department. In there there was a Senior Wildlife Officer and three wildlife officers who were supposed to be enforcement officers but were more research-orientated. The policing was more or less left to us as inspectors even though they were appointed wardens under the Animals and Birds Protection Act. They didn't involve themselves as much in the policing as we were.

So for the first three years I worked out of the head office and that meant going out into the field working on Yorke Peninsula with the officer who was responsible for that area. Also working the River Murray and doing in fact the area where I am now, the south coast, Lake Alexandrina and the metropolitan coast line. Most of the work then was centred around the supervision of fish sales in Adelaide fishmarket - the central fishmarket. I used to go there just about every morning of the week, except if I was away in the bush somewhere, just overseeing sales, making sure sizes complied with bag limits - sorry closed seasons they complied with. Then working around the metropolitan area..... because we had the main fisheries out of Adelaide were virtually based in the Port River in Barkers Inlet with the fishermen working up sort of along the coast towards Port Wakefield. So it was working amongst the local fishermen.

Then I was assisting our research officer as well, and so each year for a couple or three months - possibly longer - we would go across to the west coast and we'd be based in Port Kenny or Ceduna, sometimes Streaky Bay, involved in tagging Australian whiting. So my duties included assisting the research staff. Additionally we did the wildlife work, so that meant that we'd have to do the duck openings, duck season, check shooters. Check professional shooter, the kangaroo shooters. I used to have to go round the skin stores and stamp the animal skins, kangaroo skins, and also there was a bounty that was paid on these animals, so we had to collect records form prices and so on. So it was diverse in so far that one day you'd be checking fish catches on the wharf and the next day you'd be counting water rat skins or checking kangaroo prices or something like that.

So that was the first three years and then in 1965, I was transferred from Adelaide to Port Lincoln to assist over there, still as an Assistant Inspector. The Port Lincoln officer was Horace Fairbank, his name was, and I was assigned to there. So then I worked out of Port Lincoln, and we policed the area from Whyalla through the Ceduna, or in fact through to the West Australian border, and we were still then doing the wildlife work, so we took over the Nullarbor and all the country north and so on.

At that stage the Department..... the name was changed. I think it was in about 1963 or '64, from Fisheries and Game Department to the Department of Fisheries and Fauna Conservation. So I worked out of Port Lincoln for three years and again, the work was split, probably 60 per cent on fisheries and 40 percent on wildlife, depending..... it was pretty seasonal. The wildlife work would be as the kangaroo shooters got in full flight and in the summer time it would be too hot for them to operate inland, so we would spend our time working the coast. If it was rough on the coast we'd go inland.

So again each day virtually sunrise determined what you were going to do for the rest of the day. Again the work was involved in checking the commercial activity and the recreational activity of the various fishermen. Bearing in mind that to be a fisherman back then, the cost of a fishing licence when I joined the Department, was one pound. Anybody in fact, well anybody could have a fishing licence for one pound a year or ten shillings - or it might have been twelve and six - for a half year. You had to hold a fishing licence if you owned a fishing net, or if you used any commercial gear, but a fishing net was the main thing, and so I think roughly..... but I think in 1962/'63, we issued something like twelve thousand fishing licences. So as far as the record books were concerned, we had twelve thousand commercial fishermen in South Australia.

I do recall that it was at that time our Director - or the Department - attempted to introduce a new Fisheries Act, and that Act was the first - or as far as I know anyway - the first attempt to establish who were the commercial fishermen, who were the non-commercial fishermen. The system of what we called "A" and "B" class fishing licences. An "A" class fishing licence would be issued to only those persons who earned all their

income from fishing, and a "B" class licence would be issued to those who were employed in one form or another, and supplemented their income by fishing. But unfortunately that Act didn't get up and it wasn't until early 1970s that in fact we got that sort of legislation introduced.

So apart from the fact that a commercial fishermen had a boat that had a number on it and was registered with the Department, it was hard to differentiate really between who was commercial and who wasn't. Most of the fisheries were on-shore fisheries. The recreational effort which is probably the thing when I've noticed the greatest change, was restricted to people fishing off jetties and wharves, fishing along the coast off the beaches, off the river banks. Boat fishing was restricted to small row-boats, outboard motors were a scarcity. I mean they weren't something you saw all the time. You didn't usually see recreational fishermen during the week. They were mainly out on the Saturdays and Sundays or holidays. The legislation was perhaps geared towards making it easier for the recreational fishermen to get a fair bit of fish, because although we had size limits in quite a few areas of the State where the recreational fishing was concentrated in in-shore waters, there were bag limits for the number of undersize that people could take. They varied from about..... I think the highest was about 36 - whiting it was applied to mainly - 36 whiting down to about 24 whiting. So if you were fishing in one of those areas well, if you..... Strange as it may seem, those areas were where there was the highest concentration of holiday makers' shacks, so I presume the legislation was brought in so that shack-owners could get a feed of fish.

So the other size limits - we had size limits that applied to all fish - however, it was only fish taken for sale that the size limit applied to. So if you were in effect a non-commercial fisherman, you could take undersized fish, apart from what we called the prescribed species, and they were the Australian whiting, snapper, black bream, mulloway, rock lobster, and the two sharks - gummy shark and school shark. I think originally there may only have been five of them, the shark perhaps were added later on. But so long as you didn't take those fish, under-sized fish, fishing regulations in effect didn't apply to non-commercial fishermen. If you wanted to used a net you had to use a licence but that was no problem. You paid up your pound or whatever, and you got your licence and each year it was renewed. That licence also entitled you to sell fish, so anyone who held a fishing licence and owned a net, could go and catch fish and sell them.

But from my experience, not very many people did actually sell fish to supplement their income. Those who were part time fishermen were genuinely part time, shearers or fencing contractors or farmhands, or something like that. They were people who during the course of time when their normal employment was available, they worked at that, and then when they were seasonally laid off, they would go and do a bit or fishing. But fishing was looked upon as being well..... They were the sort of people who were just not no-hopers, but.....

JD Battlers.

KOCH Battlers, yes. It was a subsistence living. I always recall because my father had a saying when I was going for my jobs, he said, "Look, I worked very hard so you didn't have to become a plumber." I always wish now that he didn't work quite so hard [laughs] and the same as you know..... a fisherman was perhaps one step below a plumber back then. You were a labourer I suppose because let's face it, in the lat '50s, early '60s, there were heaps of jobs around and so to become a fisherman was just not on. Most of the fishermen that I was dealing with then - particularly in Adelaide, working out of Port Adelaide - were predominantly Italians, a smattering of Greeks amongst them, but mainly Italian fishermen, and most of the out-ports were the

same. Port Pirie, the fishing fleet there was made up of Italians. Thevenard was all Greeks, and in fact, until the Greeks went to Thevenard there virtually wasn't a fishery anyway. Port Lincoln in the 60s when I went up to there, I don't recall there was one Italian in that town. The fishermen were all Australians or Norwegian, Swedes whatever, because they were chaps that had jumped ships during the grain carting. But in places like Port Pirie, Port Augusta there was a mixture. Port Augusta was made up of an Australian cum Italian..... some Italians and some Greek fishermen up there. Towns like Port Wakefield, there were a couple of Italian fishermen up in there, but it was a very small fishing community. The main fishermen were Italians.

JD What about around the south east?

KOCH Throughout the south east there was mixture. There were Australians and Italians and I mean, some foreign names, but mainly Australian born I suppose you could say. If you look through the south east, say like in Victor Harbour you had the Rumbelows and they were the main fishing family from here. Kingston, Cape Jaffa, they had mainly Australians. There was Southend, or it used to be called Grey, township of Grey. There was a mixture of Italians and Australians there. They tend to stick in mind though, I suppose because in the '60s we were going through what was then the ills of the fishing industry were the fault of the Italians and the Greeks. We had to have someone avail..... I say "we" but people had to blame something for the fact that fishing was perhaps declining and the easiest thing to blame was some interloper I suppose, an intruder, someone who worked hard. I mean that was the thing I think, that the fishermen who were immigrants were able to see the potential that lay in the waters, and were willing to give it a go.

Australian fishermen were more laid back and sort of only fished to keep one stop in front of the publican I suppose. That's the impression one often got. You'd see the boats go out, they'd get a good haul, they'd come back in they'd tie up and stay in town for three or four days, and you seemed to always find them up at the pub. Whereas the Italians would come in, unload, then go out again - come in, unload, go out. I was able to just sort of see the tail-end of say, for example at Port Pirie, the Spencer Gulf scale fishing fleet out of Port Pirie would be Italians. They had boats that were round about eighteen to twenty foot long, single masted and open boats, decked in fore deck, but principally open. They'd have a fire bucket in there, an old kerosene tine and a few bricks. They used to carry a few mangrove stumps with them, or bits of wood and they would go from Port Pirie and they would drift fish right down the Gulf, almost down to Tumby Bay, and they'd go down as far as Tumby Bay and it could be a distance of probably close to 80 to 100 miles. These fishermen would be out there for three or four or five days, just drifting and fishing. A mattress rolled up..... at night they'd unroll their mattress and lie under the sail whatever.

You wouldn't get..... I mean no-one in his right mind would live like that everybody said. That was their tradition, their fishing, and I suppose that was the way they fished back in the Mediterranean or wherever. They brought their practices out here. They all had their own houses, they all supported extended families as with the Greeks at Thevenard. They all managed to go home once every couple or three years. All their children that were able to went to University and became lawyers or accountants or businessmen.

So they had this..... took their role as being a breadwinner. They were going to give their families the best opportunity they could, and they worked at it and full credit to them. That was much the same with the fishermen at Port Adelaide. They were net fishermen, not line fishermen. They used to go with a..... They'd have a mother ship if you like, which was about anything up to 25 feet long, perhaps 30 foot if it was a big

one. They would trail on behind a string of net dinghies, sometimes one but anything up to three or four. Each dinghy would have on it a bale of mesh net and they had long poles and they used to stake these nets out along mangrove lines, tree lines, all along the edge of the banks and virtually fish the falling tide. Stake their nets out, swing on the end of it and as the tide dropped the fish would come out from the shallows and get meshed in the net and they'd go along and pick them up.

So in Port Adelaide fishermen were mainly..... The main fish they caught were mullet, bream and yellowfin whiting. On occasions they'd get mulloway because they go into the backwaters there. But that was their method of fishing. Port Pirie was much the same. The net fishermen there used to stake out drain-off nets, and perhaps they would still have been fishing that way except that somebody came up with the idea of using the planing hull boat with a ringshot or hauling net. And so the fishing technique changed. That is perhaps when people could see there was money to be made from fishing and so that gave birth to the big investment and going all out to make good money - top money.

JD This interview continues on side B of this tape.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

TAPE 1 SIDE B

KOCH It was probably during the first three years that I was based in our head office in Adelaide that I got my grounding in fishing, and the industry as a whole. I think because we worked..... or I was able to work closely with the fishermen, and I mean by fishermen I'm talking about the Port Adelaide based fishermen, the marine scalers they are now, but they were just scale fishermen. We had rock lobster boats working out of Port Adelaide and so we were involved in doing work actually then. We were measuring lobsters for the..... it was called the Southern Rock Lobster Research Programme - a CSIRO run programme - and so two nights a week during the rock lobster season, I used to go to factories and measure as many rock lobster as possible. Sometimes it would be the total catch that was brought in, sometimes it might be half or whatever, but it would be all night. Ten pm through until about four or five in the morning. When we'd finished measuring, quite often we'd head straight down to the wharf and meet the fishermen coming back in from the night's fishing, and so you'd sit down there and have a coffee with them. Again they were open boats with a fire-bucket in and you'd sit around their little fire and warm your hands and talk.

Also watching them work I learnt from the fishermen things like how to sling a net, mending nets, how nets worked, because apart from wading out with my grandfather's drag-net on the beach, I'd never been involved with anything like that. So I was lucky. I learnt a great deal from those fishermen. I had a lot of respect for them because they were..... I suppose because I showed an interest they were keen to teach, and also I found later on that they were able to learn from me, because surprising..... what was surprising to me is that in the - I think it was about 1968 or somewhere about then - they brought in the requirement for fishing vessels to be surveyed in South Australia. Any vessel over 25 feet in length had to be surveyed and the operator of that vessel had to hold a Skippers Grade II. That was the licence or the endorsement required.

At that stage I was in transit between locations in 1968, so I was working out of Adelaide for a while, and I went down to Port Adelaide and renewed acquaintance with

a lot of the old fishermen that I knew earlier, and in fact found myself teaching them things, how to read a chart and how to read a compass, and how to navigate around Gulf St Vincent, because to pass this Skipper Grade II exam they had to know all about sounds, shapes and lights, tides, charts and channels, and plot courses and everything else. I was amazed when some of the fishermen who had fished these waters probably for 20 or 30 years, when I laid out a chart in front of them and said, "Well, this is a chart of the gulf. This is Port Adelaide and this is where you go fishing," they said, "No, that's not right. I can't work out where anything is." They just couldn't relate, and yet you could go out with them at night, and there were various grounds up along the coast between Port Adelaide and Port Wakefield and they could take you to the same sandhole night after night after night, and yet in effect, there were no marks out there.

I mean I was amazed then. I mean I understand more now about how they found their way around. They were..... the things that always stuck with me was here were these fishermen who would go out in these little boats in the dead of night to places unknown, and full of sandbars and snags and all sorts of things, fish all night and come back in the morning with baskets of fish and they couldn't read a chart, never used a compass in their lives. So I mean that was a great sharing experience.

At the same time, working with our research staff - oh, Albert Caton who was our research section - working with him for three years or so, I got to a greater appreciation and understanding of what we now apply as certain management principles, because to work in the field catching and tagging juvenile fish, searching for the actual eggs before they hatch, trying to work out tide movements and just where the drift could go, and what happens and where the fish are going and so on, even thought I had no scientific background, what I learnt working with him and the subsequent following up of tag returns and fish movements again has been a valuable..... and again I suppose because of my youth I was lucky that I had the opportunity of starting right at the bottom and working through, and having these experiences, and I think that gives me - I like to think anyway, a good understanding of what's been applied today in fisheries management.

The thing is that we started working on the whiting in 1962, tagging quite extensively right through the State, and here in the 1990s we still don't know what's happening. Our Department has put a lot of time and effort into fisheries research, and if after 28 years we can't get answers..... I mean we can certainly give indications but we can't say with all positive and absolute certainty this is exactly what happens. I think again that gives me the advantage of being able to say to people you know, don't be impatient. You can't learn about a fish in three or four years, you can't look at continuing a resource just simply by doing one of two things: either banning nets or stopping fishing all together. It's not that simple. It's a lot more involved. So having had that advantage of working in the research and in the enforcement field, and with the long-standing older fishermen, I feel it was a good grounding. It served me well for the years.

So I went from Adelaide as I said earlier, to Port Lincoln. There I met again the older fishermen with names like Tarry Barry - exotic names - there was Tarry Barry, the Wisemans, Tom Shannon was a line fisherman, Len Sedestrom. Some of the other names I can't recall now, but again these were what we call now marine scale fishermen. They were whiting fishermen predominantly. That was their main fish, because that was the fish of the month - flavour of the month - everybody had to have whiting, not interested in garfish or mullet or snook or snapper or whatever. These fishermen again had small cutters, boats up to about 30 feet in length were the biggest and powered by sail mainly. They had a motor in there, it was..... oh the new

Japanese motors, you know diesels, but they were old motors, Simplex and stuff like that. They used to fish out around the Sir Joseph Banks Group which are the islands out in Spencer Gulf around Thistle Island, Wedge Island, and they'd go out for anything up to ten days. They were well boats, they just had a well in the hull of the boat that water circulated through naturally. It wasn't pumped through or anything like that.

And so again I used to go down when they'd come in and see their sails out at the entrance and say about an hour later that they'd be along side the wharfs. I'd go down and watch them unload and talk with the fishermen about what they're catching, and how they were catching and so on. Then I was still pursuing part of the work in the research section and so I'd - at Port Lincoln I - would measure the whiting that were landed, somewhere between 10 and 25 per cent of the catch if that was possible, and send the details off to Adelaide along with the scale samples, and that type of thing. Doing work also on the rock lobsters and, of course, in 1965, was about when the tuna industry in South Australia started really moving.

We had the Haldanes in Port Lincoln who've been involved in the tuna fishery right from the early '50s. I can remember in fact, in 1955 I went to Port Lincoln with my father in the school holidays, and I remember diving off the net on the back of the **Tacoma**. She was anchored off the town jetty and she was then fitted up for purse seining for tuna, but they hadn't been very successful. It was soon after that that the Haldanes got the - I think their names were the Bellamys - they were from..... Was it Bellamy? I can't quite recall now. They came over from the United States and showed the pole fishing method. So I was transferred to Port Lincoln in March, 1965. I'll never forget because apart from having been there when I was about ten years old, I had no recollection of the place. I'd been there once, travelled through there when we working on the whiting programme on the west coast, and spent I think it was two days in Port Lincoln. So I didn't really know much about the place, but anyway I received my transfer notice, and off I went.

At that stage we didn't have government vehicles in South Australia. We had to use our own private cars. That was fine while I was in Adelaide. I had a series of motor vehicles. I started with a little Vespa scooter, and then I progressed up to a Rover, and then I had a Standard Cadet, and when I got my notice of going to Port Lincoln, my father said he doubted whether the Standard would make it that far. It was a pretty long haul so I invested in a new Volkswagon "Beetle" which was a wise move on my part because then we were paid a shilling a mile to drive our cars; petrol was three shilling and threepence a gallon - the same price as a packet of Alpine cigarettes - so I had a choice between a packet of smokes and a gallon of petrol. The Volkswagon used to do 45 miles to the gallon so I got four pound..... Oh no I forget now, 45 shillings returned whatever, for each three and threepence I put in. I was allowed to do..... ten thousand miles a year was the maximum mileage for the district.

So I went over there with my Beetle and worked out of there with as I said, Horrie Fairbank. In '65 I went there in March. I was taken over on the..... We drove on the Friday - no we didn't, we drove over on the Thursday - the Senior Inspector took me over with one of our new staff who had just started, a chap by the name of Barry Waters. They drove me over there - well escorted me over if you like - saw me arrive safely and drove back to Adelaide on the Friday, and on the Saturday morning my Senior Inspector was found hanged in his backyard. He had committed suicide when he went home. It made a big impression on me because I'd worked very closely with him for three years and he was a..... well as with all the senior officers then that I worked with, blokes that showed a lot of interest in me I suppose, and seeing me do the right thing, because seventeen years old and working in amongst grown men it

was important that I get the right sort of grounding and they did. I mean it was to their credit and they kept me on the straight and narrow.

So I went to Port Lincoln and arrived almost with the rebirth or the development of the tuna fishery. I was in Port Lincoln from 1965 through until early 1968, and during that time, in 1966 it must have been, the following tuna season was when we had the arrival of the Yugoslav fishermen from the east coast. That was the Lukins, the Blaslovs, people like that, and I found myself in the struggle between the Australian and again the immigrant fishermen.

It was really again very interesting. Frightening at times, because as the local fisheries' officer I was required to do the licensing of these fishermen and people like Stan Lukin, Dinko Lukin, Anton Lukin, Laurie Gobin, Sam Saren, Rino Martinovic, all these people were recent arrivals in Australia. They couldn't hold a South Australian fishing licence without a ministerial exemption, because the Fisheries Act then required a fishing licence could only be held by a British subject, and if you weren't a British subject then you could only get a licence with the express exemption by the minister. So each licensing renewal time I had to go down to the wharf armed with the various paper work and all these fishermen had to produce their passports and their entry visas and then, of course, when their five years was up they had to become naturalised Australians, otherwise no licence.

I remember being at the naturalisation ceremonies with the Lukins and various others simply because they could get their fishing licences. It was incredible [laughs]. There was a lot of animosity towards them. It was firmly believed in the fishing community in Port Lincoln by people who surprised me - I thought they would have had more sense than they did - but it was firmly believed that the Yugoslavs had come to Port Lincoln to in effect, rape the fishery. The fishermen who were anti-Yugoslav were pushing to have a strictly controlled season on tuna fishing. The Yugoslavs, of course, like other people who were recent arrivals in the country, they could see the opportunity. Again you paid..... I think fishing licences then might have been five pounds a year. They still weren't very much. Once you paid that licence fee you could fish in any fishery you wanted and so the Yugoslav fishermen came across with their little boats, the **Jadran**, the **Kali** and the **Eagle**, I'll always remember. The **Kali** and the **Eagle**, I think are still in existence. I know the **Eagle** is. It's now called the **Orao**. That was Dinko Lukin's first boat.

They came over in their what are now small boats. They were big then but I remember the arrival of the **New Dolphin** in Port Lincoln and she was the biggest boat that we've ever had there, apart from a boat called the **Sirena Pearl** which was built by Bert Wilson. That was an 84 foot tuna vessel. She was the biggest wooden tuna vessel ever built, but she left Port Lincoln in the early..... it might have been '66, '67. She wasn't there for very long and then he went up to the Gulf of Carpentaria, prawn fishing up there. Anyway the **New Dolphin** arrived, that was Sam Saren's, that was a big boat, and compared to the **Eagle**, the **Kali** and the **Jadran**, she was luxurious. The **Eagle**, **Kali** and **Jadran**, the three Yugoslav boats, the main ones, they had no refrigeration. They used to load up crushed ice before then went to sea. As they'd batten down the hatches they used to throw in a side of lamb or something like that cut up, a crate of lemonade and a couple of crates of claret - red wine. The accommodation, the wheelhouse, had a compass, an echo sounder and that was it.

I always remember they had a thermometer. All the boats had thermometers fitted so they could take water temperatures, external water temperature. Then the foc's'le was just like that, three or four bunks virtually on top of the engine, very, very basic. They were boats that were east coast Danish seiners, and they'd go out and be gone for a

week, ten days. But whenever they came back their decks were awash with fish. By gee they were good and, of course, they broke with traditions. I arrived there in March, '65..... I think they must have come that year. It might have been their first year. The tuna season used to finish round about Easter time, but not as far as the Yugoslavs were concerned. I remember they fished right through until about July, and people in Port Lincoln were hopping mad - or other fishermen anyway, not so much the people that had the businesses - but no, they were hopping mad.

But these guys fished and they fished hard and they used to arrive..... They'd go back east then for the east coast tuna season, and they'd head back round about October, September/October, and then they'd lob back in Port Lincoln just before Christmas. The tuna season didn't used to start until the Tunarama - the long weekend in January - virtually. Not as far as the Yugoslavs were concerned. They would head out the week before Christmas or whatever and come back with fish and so, in effect, they forced everybody to start fishing, as fishing should be. Fish when the fish are there, not sit around and say, "Oh we won't fish until we're ready to fish." So they sort of opened things up.

There was the cannery operating in Port Lincoln, the Safcol cannery, and then there was..... Kraft Foods and brine tanks there, and they used to hold their tuna and road transport it back to Eden to can over there. So I, through having to license all these Yugoslav fishermen and being in effect their only contact other than with their providers and, of course, these blokes were good fishermen, they had money, so people used to charge them the prices that took care of good money. I saw some incredible rip-offs. So I became "the Inspector", and I used to go down there and, of course, we used to issue licences under the Commonwealth Fisheries Act as well. Each crewmen had to hold his own licence so, of course, you would have a pretty high rotation in crews. So at least once a week you'd have to go down on the boats and go through and check everybody's licence.

Of course, on the Yugoslav boats there might only be one person who could speak English and so you would have to seek him out and then start going through the rigours and, of course, being traditionally generous fishermen I suppose, I can recall when I'd go to do the licences, I'd be taken into the wheelhouse, and they'd sit me at the table and if there were six crew, there'd be six pannikins put on the table plus one for me and they'd all be filled up with this red wine [laughs] and, of course I was what age then? '65, yes I was only just twenty years old, going on twenty-one and, of course, you still weren't allowed to drink then under twenty-one in South Australia. They'd say you know, "Mr Inspector, drink." And, of course, you'd know that if you didn't it was in effect, offensive, because having worked with the Italian fishermen in Port Adelaide, they were the same. They'd have their liqueur or whatever, and they'd offer you a swig and so you'd take it out of courtesy. Though not being keen to offend - because I'd heard stories about the **Histachi** and that sort of thing, if they didn't like you, you disappeared over night - so it was important to make the right impression.

So I would sit and on some boats I was cunning enough, I was able to hold on to the pannikin while I did all six licences. Otherwise you'd find yourself having one for each licence, and six pannikins of red wine it was a hell of a job just to climb on the wharf, let alone drive home! I'd have to go home for the rest of the day and sort of vow I'd never go back again. So yes it was "Mr Inspector" would come in and sit down with all his paper work, and go through the licences. I struck up a rapport with them and I think - I like to think - their respect. I didn't treat them any differently to anybody else. I've always firmly believed that as a Fisheries Officer and as a Fisheries Department, every person who is fishing - has a right to equal access. That I can't

withhold information or whatever simply because I didn't like them, or they may not be liked by other people.

So as I said, I spent that time with them, about three years, and when in January, 1968, I was transferred to the south east, I left with some regrets, because as I said, particularly with the Yugoslav fishermen, I had gained their trust and confidence, but also I had - and this is where it was very difficult - the trust and confidence of the Australian fishermen. So quite often I'd be on an Australian boat and they'd be telling me all these terrible tales about what the Yugoslavs were doing, and then I'd go aboard the Yugoslav boat and they'd be telling me all the things that the Australian fishermen were doing. I suppose to sit there and say, "Oooh!" and "Aaah!" and sort of take it all in and be careful not to - and I was considered that I was someone who didn't allow myself to become prejudiced - be careful not to take sides, but to be seen to treat both sides equally.

It put a lot of pressure on because I was expected to side with the Australians and I remember being on the wharf in Port Lincoln watching - I think it was the **Jadran** - unload, and they had on the stove this big stewpan, and in the stewpan they were cooking a confer eel, that they'd got out of a lobster boat. They'd towed it in behind the boat. When they came in to unload the boat this eel was hanging on a rope off the tuna rack behind the boat. There were a lot of tourists around and they were all intrigued by this big eel. So while they were unloading the tuna, which was a pretty messy sort of a job, one of the crew got this eel, cut it up, put in this big pot, put it on the stove, so it was cooking while they were unloading. So we were standing up on the wharf and a few of the other fishermen, and this pot was cooking on the stove. What would happen, they used a mobile crane to unload the trucks, one of these old Blitz wagons with the crane up the front. They'd drop the bucket down, the crew would throw the tuna in manually. Someone would be down in the hold throwing them up on the deck and, of course, given that these were fish kept in ice, they would be all bloody and yuk! The guy on the deck would give them a squirt with the hose and put them into these buckets. They'd then hoist them up on a crane, back the crane up over the truck, empty the bucket and come back.

When the bucket would leave the deck, once this eel was cooked, the fishermen on the deck would go into the wheelhouse, still in all their wet weather gear, dripping scales and blood everywhere. On the tables were these big loaves of bread - the crusty bread that they like - they'd pick up this loaf, break off a lump and then dip it into this stew if you like, in the stove, couple of mouthfuls, dip it again and come back onto the deck still eating their bread, as the bucket came down. I remember standing up on the jetty, and I was actually standing with Hugh Haldane - that was one of the Haldanes, top fishing family in Port Lincoln - and he was absolutely aghast. He said, "Look at these animals! Look at the filth! Look at the way they're eating! It's a disgrace to the industry," he said. "They are bringing the tuna fishery into disgrace. People stand here and watch these people eat like that." He said, "They should be stopped. They should be run out of the country because it's not right that they're allowed to be seen to be like that." [Laughs]

So that was..... perhaps that was one incident that really stuck in my mind. There was this real hatred for the immigrant fishermen and in the 1960s it was the "Hate Yugoslav" time. Prior to that, as I said earlier, it was the Italians and Greeks. If ever there was a problem somewhere it was always the "Dagos". We had stories that the "Dago" fishermen had mincers on board their boat so the under-sized fish that they caught were put through the mincer. They'd have a big bucket of his minced fish that they could take home and then and turn into fish patties and eat. Of course, this would be coming from people who would say, "Look, I know because that's the sort of people

the are." And I'd say, "Well, have you actually seen anyone with one of these mincers?" "Oh no, but this guy down the pub was telling me and he's seen it, and his brother saw it. Somebody else saw it."

Oh course, from where I sat - particularly so in Port Adelaide where I was spending a lot of time on board these boats - I never once saw a mincer. Because I worked with these fishermen, of course, once you get to know them they'd invite you round home, you know. So you'd go round there for a meal or a drink or whatever. It might be one of their children's christenings or celebrating a name day, a wedding or some feast or something. So they'd invite you round because I think two things; one because you were a friend, but also it was their tradition to invite around the policing authority. Whether that was to get on side or whether that was just an acknowledgment of your existence.... I prefer to think that it was because they acknowledged the fact that although you were policing you were also a friend, someone who could be confided in, trusted and so on.

So, of course, I'd been to their houses and never had I eaten fish patties and they just didn't eat that sort of thing. So I to this day, have never seen any evidence of a mincer bolted to the side of a "Dago" fishing boat. The same with the Yugoslavs. It was firmly believed that they fished out of these little boats so that all the money that they made in their fishing, they would sink into gold and other valuables and it was touted about that once they had raped the South Australian tuna fishing industry, they were going to move on to Brazil or Argentina or some other country. That was their primary objective, and when I said, "Oh, that can't be right." "Oh yes it is. A friend of ours he was a deckhand on one of their boats and he heard them talking, see." "Oh right." So, of course, in 1968, as I said I was transferred to Mount Gambier and I mean.....

JD That is the end of this tape. The interview continues on side A of tape two.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B

TAPE 2 SIDE A

KOCH In January, '68, as I said I..... In 1967 I married in January, '67, and then in December '67, my father died. I was the oldest of five children so I still had two younger brothers and sisters who were still at school. I was based in Port Lincoln and I'd applied for this position actually, in the Northern Territory. I got a letter saying that they were most impressed with my application and that they would advise me of a date of an interview to be held in Adelaide. So in due course a letter arrived saying that I was to present myself at Da Costa House in Grenfell Street for an interview; to go in and ask for this particular person.

So I went in to the office and asked for this person, and they said, "Oh yes, we're about ready to start your interview in a few minutes." Then they came out and called me in for the interview. I went into this room and sitting at the desk was the .....I forget his name now, the chap representing the Northern Territory Administration, and the other person conducting the interview was my own Director, Mick Olsen! [Laughs] I thought, "Shit, I've done it now"! I got the surprise and he said, "Good day Mike, sit down." He said, "We're going to do your interview." I said, "Well hang on, what's this?" He said, "Don't be worried," he said, "Win or lose, it makes no difference." He said, "I'm a firm believer in you sell our talents to the highest bidder." He said, "You'll still be Mike Koch, a fishing inspector and that's that."

So I did the interview, and then went back to Port Lincoln. I thought I'd been very clever you see. I'd applied for this position and I'd travelled to Adelaide under my own steam on my day off and all the rest. I was going to get this job and then just shoot through, because that was one stage where I was a bit peeved with the Department of Fisheries. It was because when I was sent to Port Lincoln in 1965, it was for training, and I was told I was going to be there for six months. After a year I wrote back to town and said, "Look, I've done my six months, what are the chances of moving back to Adelaide, because I'm getting married next January, or I'm getting married in a year, and I would like to..... my fiancee lives in Adelaide and I would like to be back in Adelaide," because I used to travel home from Port Lincoln back to Adelaide every weekend, a round trip of just on a thousand miles. It was getting a bit painful financially and also emotionally.

So the Department wrote back to me and said, "Well look, when you were sent to Port Lincoln, there was no mention of you only being there six months. We send our staff out to the country and they stay there for as long as we determine. If you can't cope we suggest you look elsewhere," sort of thing. Plus I wasn't getting on too well with my boss over there. I think that..... I'm not really sure what set it off, but we would go for periods of up to a week without talking to each other. He'd just grunt and I would follow. He would..... As I said earlier, we were responsible for policing the area from Whyalla right through to Ceduna so the whole west coast and all the inland areas. I'd turn up for work say on Tuesday morning at quarter to nine, there'd be no sign of him. I wouldn't see him till Friday and then he'd come in and tell me he'd been off to Cowell or up to Ceduna or across to Buckleboo or somewhere. He just left me in the office twiddling my thumbs.

That's why I suppose I became closely associated with the fishermen because the boss would be away, so I thought well, I've got to do something, so I'd go down the wharf and chat to the tuna boat owners and get them to paint their numbers on, do licences, all that sort of thing. Sort of have to motivate myself. I'm not sure whether he resented me or whether I was just a nuisance, got underfoot, I don't know. We didn't get on too well. In fact we never did really.

Anyway I went for this job in the Northern Territory, and then within the next couple of weeks my father died, and so I pulled out of going to the Northern Territory. I then applied to head office to be moved back to Adelaide on compassionate grounds. My father had died and my mother was left with these other four kids still at home, two still at school. Mick Olsen was the Director then and he said, "Look we don't have any vacancies in the office so to speak, but what we'll do is we'll try and move you closer to Adelaide, so you can be near your family." I thought oh goodo, this will be good.

So a couple of weeks later I got a letter saying that my application for transfer from Port Lincoln had been accepted and that my new headquarters would be Mount Gambier. Oh shit, that can't be right! So I rang up to protest and they said, "Well, you wanted to move closer to Adelaide. Mount Gambier is closer to Adelaide than Port Lincoln." They were dead right! Port Lincoln was 426 road miles from Adelaide and I think Mount Gambier's something like..... it might be 300 [laughs] so it was closer. I couldn't argue. It was that or move out all together.

So okay, Tunarama weekend 1968, I packed my traps and headed for Mount Gambier. Again the..... Oh, that's right, of course, also the problem with Port Lincoln was that the Department had to supply housing for its country officers, but it didn't supply housing for country officers who married whilst they were on a posting so, of course, I couldn't get cheap rental I suppose if you like, so I got shifted to Mount Gambier. My furniture was all loaded up out of the house. The problem we were faced with was that

we didn't have a house to go to in the south east. We left Port Lincoln on the Sunday of the Tunarama and arrived in Millicent that night. Max Fedden was the fisheries officer in Millicent at the time, I used to work with him, and he said, "What are you going to do about a house?" I said, "Well, Tuesday morning, I'll go into Mount Gambier and see the Housing Trust and see if I can get a house." He said, "Well what about your furniture?" I said, "Oh we'll just have to stick it in a shed somewhere."

So we were sitting in the..... what we used to call "Max Fedden Bar", the saloon bar of the Somerset Hotel in Millicent, and Max turned to this bloke sitting nearby. He said, "Hey, you've got plenty of houses," he said. "What about renting the young bloke a house?" This chap turned around and said, "All right." He said, "Send him up in the morning, he can have his pick. There's about eight or ten empty houses up there." I said, "Where?" [Laughs] Max said, "Up at Mount Burr." Mount Burr is a woods and forest settlement up in the hills above Millicent. It was right in amongst the pine trees, I mean you'd think you were in the Alps somewhere. So in the morning my wife and I went up to Mount Burr and we selected a house. So it was a timber-frame home. It was six pounds a week we paid, which included your electricity. We paid two and six a week more than our neighbours because we had a hand-basin in our bathroom, they didn't.

So that was my introductions to the south east. The furniture truck arrived in Millicent and I said, "Right, we're going up to Mount Burr." So we went up there and moved into this house and I started working with Max Fedden in the south east then. Then in..... that was in January, and at Easter time, April, we managed to get a Housing Trust home in Mount Gambier and so I then moved to Mount Gambier to my official headquarters. I was still an Assistant Inspector, so I wasn't suppose to work on my own, and there I was opening up the Mount Gambier office. I worked out of there, with Max or on my own, depending on where we were working. I was responsible for the area from Southend - or Grey as it was called then - Grey through to the Victorian border, and responsible for still the wildlife work from the coast through to the Lameroo railway line, which is up north probably 100 miles I suppose. So I had duck shooters, kangaroo shooters. Also I was appointed as a Victorian Inspector so I worked in with..... Oh they didn't have an officer in Portland then, so I did part of the Victorian coast as well and their wildlife work.

So in May of 1968 my first daughter was born, and then we sort of entered a new era because as my daughter was born, my wife had problems with her leg and it was found that she had a tumour in the bone, called a Ewings tumour then, previously unheard of, very rare. So she was whisked off to Adelaide for treatment, so I was in Mount Gambier and my wife was in Adelaide, so I spent from about July through to December travelling back and forth while she was having operations and all sorts of things. She was in hospital with our daughter as well. Though in December of '68, I again approached the Director, Mick Olsen, and asked if I could be transferred back to Adelaide so my wife could receive treatment.

Again as it happened, there was no vacancies in Adelaide, so I had to just sit it out, and so what I did was..... We were then required to work 150 hours every 28 days and so I'd go down to Mount Gambier, work flat out for ten days at fifteen hours a day. After ten days I'd lock the house up and hop on the train and go to Adelaide for a week or two weeks or whatever. I kept working through and then finally in about July, '69, I was able to transfer back to Adelaide, a position became available. So I went back there so that meant my wife could get treatment, because originally she was given..... they said she might live six months. As it happened she lived longer. So we went back to Adelaide. In that time also in '68, it was November '68, as I was sitting in

Carpenters Rocks, pinching one of the Von Stankey fishermen for taking spawning rock lobsters, there was a phone call to the office of Bob Von Stankey.....

Just a bit on these Von Stankeys: they were most unusual fishermen. As I said earlier it was always said that if Kangaroo Island was Cuba the Von Stankeys would be running guns. I don't think they were really that bad but they were mischievous, there's no question of that. They used to go down there and there was..... I think they had thirteen boats if I remember rightly, and this was in 1968 when we introduced the first managed fisheries regulations in South Australia. There were two sets came then. There was the Control of Rock Lobster Fishing Regulations 1968, and also the abalone fishing controls. The abalone one was sort of forced on us a bit because Victoria introduced licence restrictions for abalone and charged..... I think it was 200 dollars a licence so, of course, the Victorians didn't want to pay that sort of fees, so they all started coming in to South Australia. So Mick Olsen to his credit, he introduced the abalone regulations and to obtain an abalone licence to fish in South Australia, you had to be able to prove that you were fishing for abalone prior to September, 1967. So we effectively shut out the Victorians and established abalone fishery as a recognised fishery.

So 1968, we brought in the control of cray fishing regulations for South Australia. That was when we introduced the requirements that all boats over 25 feet had to be surveyed. So we had in Port Macdonnell I recall, boats that were 26 feet long. Blokes got out chain-saws and cut one foot one inch of the end of them so that they were 24 foot eleven and not 25 feet, to dodge the survey. I don't know, there could even still be a couple of those boats still fishing down there. Port Lincoln was the same. We had a run of boats that had a length of 24 feet eleven and a half inches so they wouldn't have to have a survey. All the Italian fishermen in Port Adelaide who had boats over 25 feet had to suddenly get skippers' tickets and be able to navigate and read charts, and everything else. So it was a big change to the tradition of just getting a boat and going fishing.

So anyway, getting back to Von Stankeys. We used to go down there and try to secrete ourselves in the sandhills because as we'd drive into the town, we'd notice there was a big floodlight on the front of the factory, and that always used to switch on just as we arrived. We made the mistake of mentioning this to one of the fishermen one day. "Oh we know that you know we're coming because they put the light on." "No they wouldn't do that." "Oh yes you do." So they became aware that we were aware of what they were doing. Then they had their "cockatoos" further up the road. A place called Kongarong was one place. You had to go through Kongorong to get into Carpenters Rock, unless you could come down through the scrub tracks from Canunda. So we always arrived and they knew we were coming, and we knew that because quite often I'd be in the factory where they were processing tails for export and, of course, an export premises was inspected periodically by the chaps from DPI, so you'd be in the factory and suddenly there'd be a flurry of activity. They'd be getting hats out of the cupboards and getting the dogs out. They had a water purification plant that used to cost them plenty. That used to be turned on so it would be fresh. All the bait and stuff that was stored in the export freezers would be pulled out and shifted to..... For half an hour it would be absolutely frantic. By the time the DPI inspectors got there the place was spick and span and spotless. One had the idea that they were a little bit dodgy.

So anyway I nabbed on their boats and the skipper with these lobsters that he shouldn't have had, and so I was interviewing him or about to set about interviewing him, because Bob Von Stankey sort of ruled the roost there. He said, "Well, if you're going to interview this bloke," he said, "It's going to be done in my office in my

presence." There wasn't much I could do about it. I was in their patch and they dictated the scene so I walked into the office with this chap and Jack Von Stankey was sitting in there, and we were talking over the pros and cons of what had happened. Their plea was that under-sized crays, as they were called, were in the catch because it was an inexperienced crewman on board and he just threw everything in and didn't really know. Then I was saying, "Well look, it's not for me to judge. I make the report and you can, if you wish, write a supplementary letter to give your story in court." I said, "It's not for me..... I can't make this decision."

The argument was getting pretty hot and just outside the office window were Bill McKracken's chooks and there was a rooster there. And they were all scratching around and clucking and the rooster was crowing. Bob Von Stankey opened the top drawer of his desk and took out his pistol and turned around to the window and went "Bang!" and shot this rooster dead! [Laughs] I mean I must have gone six shades whiter than white I think. I was petrified! knowing full well that if I didn't do my job I'd get the bullet anyway, what the hell!

So I started interviewing this fisherman when the phone rang. Bob Von Stankey sort of you know, we all carried on and answered the phone. "Yes? What? Who? Oh! all right hang on a minute," and he handed the phone to me. He said, "It's a phone call for you." "Oh is it just?" So I timidly said, "Oh yes, Mike Koch speaking." And it was Mick Olsen, my Director. He said, "Oh Mike, just thought I'd ring up and congratulate you. You've just been today promoted to a Grade I Fisheries Officer." [Laughs] I thought I don't believe this. There I am standing there with one of the biggest crooks in the country and my boss has tracked me down through ringing around, and finally found me to tell me that I've suddenly got another two quid a week in my pay and..... [laughs]. So I said, "Well thanks very much, boss. It's good to hear from you. Much appreciated." so after a long time of awaiting as an Assistant Inspector from 1962 through until November, '68 I'd finally made the grade, and I'd applied time and time again for promotion and never been successful. Dave Evans whom you actually interviewed earlier, he piped me for my posting at Ceduna, and so I made it.

So anyway I booked the Von Stankey. In fact he got prosecuted and so I then battled on in the south east. I had to go round and..... because the control of cray fishing regulations stipulated that only full time fishermen could hold a cray fishing licence. Pots were issued depending on the size of the boat so you got one pot per foot on the west coast and on the south east it was one pot per foot plus ten for the boat, and I think it was ten pots per crewman. So the south east fishermen for reasons best known to them, got additional pots over what the boats in the northern zone got, a pot per foot, ten for the boat and it might have been ten for the crew, but only to a maximum of one crewman.

So the task fell upon me to go round and in effect interview each lobster fisherman to determine whether he was a full time or part time fisherman, because the south east lobster fishery is made up of dairy farmers, forestry workers, even a couple of public servants. The policeman at Port Macdonnell had a fishing licence. So we had to weed out all these people that in effect were not full time fishermen and also, of course, start counting pots. If you take a port like Bucks Bay where Von Stankeys were, they had thirteen boats at that stage fishing, and in the season - '67/'68 season - they lost a thousand pots between them. They'd lost the pots. So they had a LOT of rock lobster gear down there. Some boats were working about what the limit turned out to be but others, the Von Stankeys, Fabris and Galli working out of Grey or Southend, they had 200 pots or something they were working. So there were some boats that had big fleets or pots. Suddenly everybody was brought back to this limit and, of couse, you

can imagine what that did to the guys who'd cut a foot off their boats to dodge survey [laughs]. They lost a pot. So they.....

We introduced this control of cray fishing regulations and so on. I was very involved in actually weeding out and determining who should have a licence, who shouldn't, who should appeal. One of the conditions was that you had to be involved in the lobster industry prior to the 1st of September, '67, and if you were having a boat the keel had to have been laid prior to '67.

I remember one bloke, a family by the name of Feast, in Port Macdonnell. They were building a new boat to replace..... I think they had a boat might have been sixteen feet long. They were building a new one about 30 feet long, and they wanted a pot allocation for that boat. They said, "We've laid the keel. It's around at the brother's farm and that." I said, "Oh yes, I'd like to have a look at this keel." Went around there and there was this telegraph pole lying in the weeds [laughs]. This was supposed to be the keel of their new boat. So I said, "It's not on. You won't convince me. If you want to convince the boss well then go for it. I'm not interested. I won't even submit it."

So you know there was sort of little leaks of that. Blokes cuts the end of their boats, people that have been fishing and perhaps not licensed or something started coming out of the woodwork and then. of course, again as the enforcement officer, I was faced with the problem of people dobbing in so to speak, other people. The full time fishermen would say, "Look, there's this bloke fishing out next to me and he's got a job up at the power station. He shouldn't be fishing." I said, "Well, the job he's got at the power station is not full time work, it's only part time. He's casually employed." "Oh no, oh no. I know someone else who works there and he's actually staff." And all this sort of thing. So you were trying to..... I mean it was very difficult to go to the power station and try to determine whether or not that person was a full time employee, because it would be put about if he got dobbed in, the union would jack up and they'd shut down the power station, all sorts of things. It became quite political in a sense.

So that was when..... In the south east when I had my first taste of he power of politics in the fishing industry. It was a year of election there, and I think it was between two..... Des Corcoran was the Labor bloke, and I think it was Cameron, - I don't know if it was Martin Cameron - but anyway the elections were being held while I was there, and it turned out a dead heat. Spot on, dead heat. Max Feddon was the Senior Officer down there, and myself, were at that stage being rather active in amongst the fishing fleet. I would stop Von Stankeys from fishing for a week because they hadn't painted their numbers on their boats properly. They couldn't get the paint to paint the numbers on because J N Taylors had cut off their credit, and so they weren't able to go to sea. They're saying, "Look, if we can go out and catch some crays, we'll get the paint to paint the numbers on." I said, "Look, you've been saying that all season and you still haven't done it. You go to sea and you come back, I'll have to pinch you. I've got no choice."

As it happened Mick Olsen came down for a meeting and they pleaded with him and he said, "Look, he's the local Fishing Inspector. He makes the decision. I'm not going to over-ride what he says." So I thought, "Gee this is all right." [Laughs] "The boss actually acknowledges that I'm doing the right thing," and that was important to me. But also he did the right thing and supported his local officer whereas he could quite easily have said, "Well all right, we'll make an exception." But he didn't so I felt real good.

So anyway there was the election, it was a dead heat. Fedden and myself going around and telling the fishermen, "Get your numbers on or you don't go fishing. Get your pots branded or you don't go fishing." You know, all that sort of thing. We were standing - again in the saloon bar of the Somerset Hotel - and Des Corcoran came in, and he walked over and he said, "Look, there's a by-election on at the moment." He said, "I think it would be a good idea if you pair of bastards went up and checked kangaroo shooters up around Bordertown for about a week." [Laughs] He said, "Because you're likely to tip the balance the wrong way. Get out of town!" I'll never forget that.

So we thought it would probably be prudent just to take a low profile for a while. Corcaran ended up winning the election. That was all okay. So I mean that was my first taste of how politics can..... or how, not so much politics, but how perhaps the actions of a field officer in fisheries can influence political thought. That was the only time I think that I've ever seen the power of the ballot box stand up and be recognised.

So anyway I was down there and was involved in both the fishing and the cray fishing. I had working out of Port Mac was..... No, there were 100 lobster boats out of Port Macdonnell, and there were thirteen Von Stankeys and two outsiders at Bucks Bay, and we had about three boats working out of Blackfellows Caves. So somewhere in the order of about 120 boats I was responsible for, and so it meant a lot of time spent in the factories checking the catches because the rock lobsters caught in the south east of the State were all very marginal and virtually right on the border line for size. So there was a lot of time spent at that, also spent checking up on the net fishing for bait and so on, that was going on. Checking inland waters for trout fishing and then, of course, the duck shooters, kangaroo shooters, wombat shooters, possum shooters and water rat trappers. So that was good.

Well then, as I said, in mid 1969, I was successful in getting transferred back to Adelaide so my wife could have treatment. Then lo and behold towards the end of '69, the Senior Inspector..... "resigned" I think would be the way of putting it. He left under a bit of a cloud and in fact, I think he's still involved in the fishing industry. Murray Mitchell is his name. He left South Australia and went off to New Guinea to work in fisheries up there, and my old boss from Port Lincoln, Horace Fairbank, became the Senior Inspector in Adelaide.

So I applied for the position Grade II in Port Lincoln, which was another promotion and lo and behold was successful. So in 1969 I was sent back to Port Lincoln as the Regional Officer in charge.

JD This interview is continued on side B of this tape.

END OF TAPE 2 SIDE A

TAPE 2 SIDE B

KOCH So I went back to Port Lincoln and it was for my second term, and probably the important thing during that second term was in 1971, they brought in a new Fisheries Act which brought in the really strict management controls that are there now. Again this was under the guidance of Mick Olsen who - as far as I'm concerned anyway - is the greatest thing that ever happened to the South Australian fishing industry. He seemed to have great foresight when we introduced..... because that was when we brought in the control for the prawn fishing, the abalone fishing, rock lobster, the

marine scale and the river reach. Controls were tightened up. That was the new image. The Department also - and there was a division - the wildlife section went off and joined the National Parks and Wildlife Service, and so Fisheries became a separate entity in itself. We've been that way virtually ever since apart from a brief time when we were mixed up with Agriculture.

But in 1969 I went back to Port Lincoln and so took up virtually where I'd left off in the battle between the tuna fishermen. Also, of course, the tuna fishery, was going through a bit of a crisis. Catches were dropping dramatically. There'd been a lot of investment and the returns were bad. So that was when they started scratching round looking for prawns. There's always been talk of prawns being in South Australian waters and, in fact, when I joined the Department in the first three years that I was in Adelaide, I worked on the research vessel called the **Investigator**, which is now a fishing boat out of Victor Harbour called the **Mapua**. But we were catching prawns south of Adelaide and wanted to develop..... Well, the fishermen were interested in developing the prawn fishery but it wasn't economic. Prawns were worth three bob a pound then. You could get them from Sydney by the bagful. Why catch them locally? So it lay dormant until the early '70s.

So then, of course, in the '70s, the prawn fishery started up and all the old hatreds came out again because a lot of the tuna boats went into the prawn fishery. A lot of the boats decided to stay in the prawn fishery exclusively because it was nice and comfortable. It was a bit like farming, you just drove the tractor up and down the paddock all night and pulled into the wharf and you went home. No long stays at sea, no rough weather, no having to catch bait etc. However, the Yugoslavs, God bless them, decided they could work prawns and tuna and so what they did, through the winter they would work on the prawns, come summer time they'd put the prawn nets away and go tuna fishing, and they were successful in both, of course. So naturally the Australian fishermen who had become prawn fishermen got to resent this very much, and they were able to, by one means or another, persuade the government to introduce the policy of owner-operator for the prawn fishery. So that was virtually the beginning of where the controls actually got down to the individuals, where the owner of the boat had to be on the deck, and if he wasn't there the boat didn't fish, and this built up a lot of animosity and severe battles, and one wonders today just what possibly would have been the future of the prawn fishery and the tuna fishery if the owner-operator policy hadn't been introduced.

Probably it saved the prawn fishery because by allowing the boats to be operated by employees it would have meant that big companies - and I cite Raptis for example - could have bought up, or controlled in effect, could have controlled the whole fishery, because we did have what we called the "prawn war" with the Raptis boats in Gulf St Vincent in particular, where the boats came down the from the Gulf of Carpentaria and began trawling in South Australian waters. We had a big constitutional battle over that. So it perhaps saved the fishery and kept it to what it is today where the rewards are based on the effort of.... Well there now are in the fishery, there are company owned boats but I think it saved the prawn fishery. It could quite easily have been fished out or destroyed.

JD The policy was abandoned was it?

KOCH Well, the owner operated policy now only applies in the marine scale fishery and the abalone fisheries, and yes, the reach fishery I suppose you could say. Now that the prawn fishery is..... the boats are owned by companies and they nominate a skipper for the vessel, but the company can only own.... or individuals can only own one boat. You can't have multiple owner ships. Perhaps on paper it's possible through

companies and so on to actually own more, but it's still a one boat industry, or one owner/one boat type of thing, as opposed to say in other fisheries, where a company can own half a dozen boats whatever. So the strict management came in. Originally the prawn fishery started off with zones..... just small blocks right around the coast. So some fishermen caught prawns and did well, others, there was no hope for the others, it was too rough or rock bottom or something.

So there was a weeding out process. Some pulled out, others battled on and eventually the decision was made to just have the two zones: the Spencer Gulf, Gulf St Vincent and the Kangaroo Island prawn fishery, and the west coast prawn fishery, so now we only have three zones. Gulf St Vincent which has got about eleven boats in, Spencer Gulf which has still got virtually the number it started off with, I think it's about 30 actually. I can't recall exactly. We've still got three or four boats on the west coast. And it's stabilised and it's to our credit. I think the Department and Mick Olsen in particular can take a lot of credit for the fishery.

So the tuna fishery was going through the rigours of dying off because there were just low catches. It was touted it was through over-fishing , and I don't think it was so much over-fishing by us but being a multinational, if you like, fishery the impact of one..... the Japanese or the Taiwanese whatever, certainly had a big impact and we contributed to it. But I mean there's still money to be made in it but a lot of money was invested. I mean you look at the Lukins. When I look at what they started off with. I remember Anton Lukin was one of the early tuna fishermen, and he said when we were talking about the future of the fishery he said, "Look, I came into this country with a kitbag and a toothbrush, if I go out with two cases I've done well."

So I mean that was their attitude. There was an opportunity to make money and they did. Stan Lukin. I remember Stan Lukin built the tuna boat **Zora**, he was a prawn fisherman and tuna fishing. Back then you weren't allowed to replace your vessel without prior approval of the Department. Stan Lukin owned a tuna boat called the **Neenad** and he built **Zora**, didn't have permission from us when he built it, arrived in Port Lincoln and announced he was going to transfer the licence across to the **Zora**, and go prawn fishing and tuna fishing, and we said, "No, you've sold the **Neenad**, the licence goes with that boat." So he was effectively thrown out of the prawn fishery for not following procedures. It didn't stop him, I mean he's still the top tuna fisherman. He said, "Well okay, I'll stay tuna fishing." And that year which was a poor year, he caught 400 tons of tuna, nearly the total catch all by himself.

So I mean you know, there were those situations where we had strict control. We controlled the amount of horse power that the boat could have. The fishermen couldn't change boats without our approval first off. We controlled it very, very rigidly. It was hard but it's paid the dividends. I think the same applies now with rock lobster and marine scale. We have very strict controls on them. The big change is I think - where we noticed it most - is on the marine scale fishery, the fin fish. Unfortunately it's impacted from both sides, the commercial and the recreational fishing. As I said, when I began in the 1960s, recreational fishing effort was very minimal. Now it's maximum effort, the amount of money that's been invested by people in their fishing boats and so on, it's incredible. The thing that's always difficult to convey to people is that each year we have a certain number of fish become available. We can't increase that number. In fact it's probably decreasing marginally. Each year there's a certain number become available and there's only that number to be caught, and so when they've been caught, that's it. End of story.

All the fish that our effort is concentrated on are migratory fish, moving up and down the gulfs, we can't make them stay in one place for ever, and so the fact that the fish

move and only go to where the food is, and only go to where the conditions suit them, is a big influence on whether people are successful or not when they go fishing. And yet to a tee everybody says, "Oh no, it's not that. It's because of the bloody nets." You know, it's the net fishermen. I just can't believe it that if they..... I try to get people to sit down and look at a map of the coast and then I say, "Right around that coastline all the commercial net fishermen are restricted to waters of less than five metres deep. If you draw a line around the coastline at the five metre mark, there's a hell of a lot of water that never gets fished. And out in that water are all the adult fish. The net fishermen by virtue of the fact that through pressure they are restricted to the shallows, can only fish in effect, juvenile fish. So the high escape rate from their fishing activity is left in effect to the recreational fisherman. They get the best of the pick.." But they can't see that themselves. It's just incredible.

The fishing effort say with the snapper fish industry is suffering, but again it's because of the tremendous effort that is put into it. People go out and now there's a limit on how many fish can be taken per boat in the snapper fishery, per person. It's not going to stop. All it's done is that the honest people will abide by it. Those that are greedy and dishonest will take no notice of the legislation, but it's an effort to try and hold the quantity of fish that's available for greater accessibility. It's not going to improve the fish stocks. All it's doing is giving everybody a better chance of getting a fish.

I take.... I'm very proud of what we've done in this State in fishing and I'm exceedingly proud of having been part of it. It's been an opportunity to contribute, and I think having had the advantage of working right around the State, because when I was based in Port Lincoln I worked the west coast. I was there from 1969 through until 1975, and from there I went to Port Pirie into Spencer Gulf, and for the two and a half years I was there, I saw the big changes that occurred there in fishing, because again we introduced stricter controls on net fishing. We had a big battle between the net fishermen - both commercial net fishermen and what we called the "B" class, which are part time commercial net fishermen - and the battle between the commercial net fishermen and the prawn fishermen because the effort put on the..... say political sway by the recreational fishermen to stop net fishing was cutting back. I mean the commercial fishermen there lost huge areas of waters they can no longer fish. It's made it increasingly difficult for them to survive.

I was right through that and going to meetings and dealing with the politicians because the "iron triangle" as it's called, the top of Spencer Gulf, is a very sensitive area politically. So one had to be exceedingly careful about what you said, how you reacted to things, but at the same time, you had to recognise the fact that something had to be done, and try to do it in the best interests of the fishermen. That's always been my policy that the commercial fisherman are, if you like, my constituents. It's my duty to see that in effect their interests are looked after, that they aren't penalised by the fact they tend to be individuals. It's very hard to get commercial fishermen together into any sort of cohesive group. They don't like sharing either their good or bad stories because they feel they're going to lose something. And so in a lot of respects we had to stand up on behalf of them, and argue to protect their interests. But at the same time you have to recognise the needs of the recreational fishermen and try and get a balance there. I think I've achieved that.

When I was working in Adelaide, when I left Port Pirie and was transferred to Adelaide to set up a helicopter operation, I was the first officer to work with that, established it all, worked on that for two years. During that period I was involved in the Fishing Industry Advisory Council where Richard Stephens, the then Director, considered my experiences would have some benefit in helping to formulate policy with respect to fishing. And I can recall being there..... The meeting was made up of departmental

representatives and on the other side of the table were the industry, being recreational, commercial and people representing the boating industry, bait suppliers, and fishing tackle suppliers.

On one occasion there, there was a very strong argument to ban netting all together, recreational net fishermen, take nets out of the hands of recreational fishermen. I argued in favour of recreational fishermen having nets, but on the proviso that if it was going to be as it was called, recreational fishing. I've always believed if you're going to be a recreational fisherman that means taking part in the fishery. So if you want to use a fish net and you put it in the water but you stayed there with it. You don't put it out and leave it there for three or four days and come back occasionally to look at it. You participate, and I'm a firm believer that fishing is a participatory sport. To get the benefits from it you get out there and you actually partake. Static fishing by using nets or traps or whatever I don't see as being a recreational fishing activity.

So I think I was successful and I like to think that I contributed to recreational fishermen still being able to use their nets, even though now, as the licence expire they're not being transferred or whatever else. So if someone's got a net and he dies, that's the end of it, the family loses the use of it.

Similarly in the fishing industry we've always maintained this participatory thing, owner operator with licences, transferability and that type of thing. I've always believed that the licence should be transferable. We need to have fishermen. The State can't survive in contributing fish to the national product, or to our own internal use, we have to have fishermen. The industry has to be controlled and closed and so there should be the transferability of licence from one person to the other. I believe it should be that the owner operator, that the person who holds the licence is involved personally in it, because that way there is less chance that he is going to strip out the assets and leave behind an empty shell. And at the same time, he gets a greater understanding of it and feeling of it. I think that's important for the continuation of the stability of the industry.

Probably one area that feels it most is in the marine scale fishery, and the table fish. The licences are transferable there but the net entitlement is lost. Wisely it's been considered that we only need a certain amount of net fishermen to maintain that fishery and so the policy is to reduce the number of nets to that level, not to put it out all together. I think that's important. I agree with it except that it's very hard to make a living as a line fisherman. So in effect what we're doing, we're reducing the over all effort, but there's a risk that we're going to end up with a lot of line fishermen who are going to be forced to have to fish illegally to try and recoup the investment for their licence. Paying 30 or 40 thousand dollars for a licence and then not being able to get back a reasonable return on that is going to possibly force people into doing things they shouldn't do, and by doing that, place their licence in jeopardy. But again the value of the licence is determined by the person who wants to buy it, so perhaps they're paying too much, you know, if they got it a bit cheaper then the pressure wouldn't be on them so much to be forced in to it.

Since being down here in Victor Harbour, and I've only been here just three years. I was back in Adelaide, as I said, I got transferred back there in 1976 to do the helicopter operations. I was then involved in the staff training of our new staff. We introduced a policy of having two men at every station, so we had to take on additional staff. I was involved in running training programmes for those for about six weeks. I then took over the metropolitan inspectorate and worked out of Port Adelaide which encompassed Kangaroo Island as well. I had five staff there.

In 1984, I think it was, my first wife died as a result of the cancer which she had. She'd battled on for seventeen years. So I was left as widower with three children, and then three years ago I met my present wife. I'd actually known her for a couple of years. She was actually a teacher of my son at school, and late in the year, 1986 it was, I was offered if you like, the opportunity of moving to Victor Harbour. Having never been based down here I thought why not take up the challenge? So I came down here, married and moved down here.

Working from here I'm responsible for the Victor Harbour coast, just the bottom end of the metropolitan area, around to all the Coorong, the lakes, and the River Murray. So that I've now completed the full circle. I've now worked in every district in the State. I can with a degree of confidence say I've worked in every fishery, seen every fishery develop. I've just taken part in the re-vamp of the River Murray fishery where through pressure we've had to cut back on commercial fishery up there. There's now only one third of the River Murray will be fished virtually. The other two thirds will be available for recreational fishermen. That again highlights the impact that the recreational fishermen have, and I think that is the future, that recreational fishermen will dictate in effect the future policies for fisheries. Unfortunately the fishing industry isn't big enough to sort of warrant - or to have the influence it should perhaps have - and 300 thousand recreational fishermen up again three thousand commercial fishermen. I mean we have a tough battle.

I think that's where it's important, the role that I'm in. I have to be able to see the needs of the commercial fishermen, and be an instrument in conveying what I consider as those needs through to the administration, and be prepared to support it, working in the field gathering up the evidence of the state of the fishery or whatever. Listening to the fishermen, getting their views, taking that on board and then conveying it to the decision-makers I suppose, in an important attempt at looking after their interests and I suppose insuring their futures, and hopefully their children's futures. I mean there are a lot of sons of fishermen who would like to go fishing and why not? The industry should be able to support them and it should be able to also support a recreational fishery on the side.

I think again this is where the role of the fisheries officer like myself..... I've been lucky. This year sees the completion of 28 years as a fisheries officer. I'll be 45 this year. I suppose that give me another fifteen years in the industry and I would like to think that we are able to keep developing the fishery, that the fisheries officer's role..... I've been lucky, I've grown up and spent a lifetime working in the industry, in an unusual position perhaps as an enforcement officer, but it's important and I've always tried to maintain that I'm not here primarily to enforce the Fisheries Act, I'm here as a conservationist, I'm here as an educator. I'ts important for people to know what's happening with the fish, where the fish are going, why they aren't here or whatever. It's important for me to keep in touch with the industry and the development, not to lose sight of the fact that I have a role in helping the fishermen, that is the commercial fishermen, in developing their techniques in keeping abreast of the new developments, the changes, whatever, and not to see it just as a policing role.

Sure, I have to apprehend offenders and prosecute them. I've been involved in some pretty big busts, abalone poachers, prawn wars, illegal rock lobster fishing. You name it I've been there, but to me that has always been a secondary thing. I go out for sure, looking for offenders. At the same time I'm keeping an eye on what's happening, looking for perhaps environmental changes, algal blooms, birds feeding, strange fish, changes in water current, colour or clarity, and things like that. It's important to - I feel anyway - to be totally absorbed in what you're working in. Not to the point that it rules your life, but I'd like to think that I think like a fisherman, I feel like a fisherman,

I have a vested interest in the future of the fishery, and that I mustn't lose sight of that. As long as there is a fishing industry I've got a job, and my current job is to ensure that there is a fishing industry, be it commercial or recreational. Okay, the pressures might be such that we can no longer support a commercial fishery, so our role then becomes in protecting the recreational side of it.

JD Michael, thanks very much for this interview. It's a good story well told, and through your story you've given us a wonderful run-down and explanation of the fisheries throughout the whole of South Australia. Thank you very much.

KOCH My pleasure.

JD That is the end of this interview with Mike Koch who although only 45 years of age is the longest serving fisheries officer in the South Australian Fisheries Department. He currently serves at Victor Harbour.

END OF TAPE 2 SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW

Verbatim transcript of an interview with ROBERT LEWIS

INTRODUCTION

This is an interview with Mr R.K. Lewis, Director of Fisheries of South Australia. The interview was conducted by Jack Darcey for Murdoch University as part of the oral history of the Australian Fishing Industry project.

In this interview Mr Lewis discusses many of the management considerations that occupy his Department, maintenance of the resource and its exploitation, the responsibility of government, transfer of licenses, ownership rights, technology creep and training of personnel as well as the need for research in its many aspects, [which] are among the most important issues Mr Lewis discusses in the interview.

His comments come from a very substantial background in scientific research and in administration and management. His contribution to the fishing industry in South Australia and to this project are thoughtful and thought provoking. They are deserving of careful consideration.

The interview starts at 021 on the revolution counter. There are two sides of one tape.

TAPE 1 SIDE A

JD Would you please state your full name and title.

LEWIS Robert Keer Lewis and I'm the Director of Fisheries for the South Australian Department of Fisheries.

JD Thank you. How long have you been Director?

LEWIS Since January 1988. My history is that I finished my university degree in 1972 and in January 1973 I joined the Department of Fisheries of South Australia as a research scientist, or research officer in those days it was called, on a three year FIRTA application; that's Fishing Industry Research Trust Account to do work on the population dynamics of southern rock lobsters. After that project finished I was made permanent on the Department of Fisheries in South Australia and then in about 1979 I became Head of the Research Branch in the title called research manager. Then in 1988 I became the Director of Fisheries.

JD Could I ask you to comment on the relative importance of the fishing industry in South Australia in terms of other primary industries?

LEWIS Well the fishing industry is actually divided into two sectors. One is the recreational sector and the other of course is the commercial sector. There are a number of other sub-sectors or groups within each of those. The commercial sector of course produces a value. It's very easy to determine the value. The wharf value is usually what we use as the base data and then you can put a multiplier on that for it's impact into the community. In South Australia the wharf value of production is currently in the order of $110-$120 million dollars per annum of which the major species are western king prawn, southern rock lobster and abalone. There is also a small fishery on the number of marine and scale fish species namely: snapper, whiting, garfish and about half a dozen other species.

The major fisheries, like I said rock lobster, prawns and abalone, are primarily export based and probably in excess of something like 90% of their production goes into international markets. So that is very important of course for the.... So those fisheries do generate considerable revenue which assists in our balance of payments. The corollary of course is that quite frequently we got complaints from sectors of the domestic community who complain that the value of abalone, rock lobster and prawns is too high. I guess they indicate that they would like us to try and somehow legislate or otherwise direct some of that product onto the domestic market but of course that's a very, very difficult thing to do. It really [depends on] where ever the operator's going to go where they can get the best return for it. Of course there's an argument one way or the other which depends which side of the fence you're on.

As far as relative to other commodities such as the agriculture industry, of course our agriculture industry is in total, revenue generated, [and] is significantly greater but the fishing industry is a very significant component of the South Australian economic community.

JD I saw some figures that indicated that something like 1900 boats are registered as fishing boats in South Australia. Is that an approximately....

LEWIS No, it's not quite correct. There's just under 1200 registered commercial operators or licensed boats in South Australia divided into the abalone fishery [in] which there are 35, the prawn fishery [in] which there are 53, the rock lobster fishery which is in order of 300 and are [the] largest fishery, in participation, is the marine scale fishery [in] which there is something over 500 of them.

JD Many of those marine scale boats would be quite small vessels with one operator I presume?

LEWIS One or two operators but the vast majority of them are mall vessels compared to say the prawn trawlers or the rock lobster vessels. Of course one of the ongoing dilemmas of fisheries management is that technology and efficiency increases and like all our fisheries, we've noted that sectors of the marine scale fishery and of the other fishery are gradually upgrading the style of their vessel, their efficiency, their horsepower etc so there is a general.... what we call the technology creep occurring within that fishery but it is because of the, I guess, lower level of technology at the base level, [that] the creep isn't as obvious as occurs in some of the other fisheries, but we have to counteract it.

JD There's concern around the world, isn't there, about the depletion of stock in many fisheries and I don't doubt that that's of concern in South Australia as well?

LEWIS Well of course that's the fundamental objective of our legislation in any fisheries manager, is to ensure that the stocks are maintained and not depleted.

Fishing is basically the exploitation of finite but renewable resources. What we mean by renewable is that they can reproduce themself. It is legitimate to remove some of those resources up to a certain level which is basically biologically determined. If you go beyond that level you will find that the stocks will be removed faster than they can naturally replace themselves. So our role is to ensure, whilst providing access to fish stocks by all the various sectors (recreational [and] commercial), is to ensure that the collective access or the collective effort, the degree of killing or the manner of killing of fish, does not excess what is biologically acceptable.

As I indicated earlier, the dilemma is that if you have a hundred vessels fishing today, or say ten years ago, taking all the biologically acceptable stock, in other words, that could be taken and you've still got a hundred vessels today trying to do the same thing, you are in, probably, trouble because today's vessel, every individual vessel today, will be more efficient, have greater technology on; usually the operators will probably have better skill. You only have to think about satellite navigators, bottom lot colour echo sounders, better hydraulics, better engines, more advanced even fishing gear itself. So what you have to do is adjust to make sure that the total effort or the total degree of killing does not exceed what you were getting ten years ago.

Now the fisheries manager, the easy way of doing that, is we adjust time. So we say, right you have less days fished or less nights fished in the case of a prawn trawler. You just adjust the season. You have more and more tighter closed seasons than open seasons. We've been through that over the last twenty years etc, but you get to a point where you become, you have other effects like distorting marketing. If you can only produce your product in a very, very short period of time but you've got a consumer out there or a market out there that wants your product 300 days a year, well then you're in a bit of trouble.

So after having gone through all the easy ways of adjusting for effort, we now in South Australia have addressed some of the more difficult ways and that is rationalising. That is taking out participants in the fishery and basically fishing in the commercial fishing is an industry which is.... you want each operator to make an economically viable living and they should be allowed to do that the most technologically efficient way possible as long as collectively they don't do damage to the stocks. Just like any other technologically based industry, increased technology usually results in reduced participation. So many of our fisheries, we have actively implemented and brought into being rationalisation programs, or if we haven't actually done it yet, we are very, very seriously talking with industry about doing it.

JD And that rationalisation is done in conjunction with industry?

LEWIS It's always done.... Almost every management decision we make in fisheries, we endeavour to have a full consultation and discussion with industry. You must also recognise that management adjustments can be done for a number of reasons. One is you may have to adjust because your stock is threatened and in some cases we've seen in South Australia and other fisheries in Australia and around the world, stocks will collapse and I'll come back to that one in a minute. The other one is you made your adjustment to increase the economic viability to operators who are in the fishery.

Now just taking those two, there are different approaches which you can afford for each one. In the case of needing to adjust to stop depletion of stocks and stop the fishery from collapsing completely, you may have to make almost unilateral decisions to bring about management arrangements which provide the adequate protection. We would endeavour to try and get full support from the industry in doing that but as I said, our principal objective is, under the Fisheries Act, to ensure that we maintain

stocks. So if we couldn't get the full support or consensus from industry, well then we will still make recommendation to the Government to do what is necessary to ensure that those stocks are maintained.

In the case of the second, where you've got.... looking about putting management arrangements in for increased economic viability, the stocks aren't threatened but by having less participants sharing between the same catch, therefore each one that remains in the industry has a greater return. Then you can afford to say, well it's really industry's decision whether they want a more economically viable fishery which means they have less fishers in the industry, or not. So in those cases we've endeavoured, or where we have rationalised we've waited until industry have said, yes we agree to do it. So there's a different approach to what you're trying to achieve with your rationalisation.

JD Is it the case though that ultimately the decision would rest with the Government for your Department?

LEWIS Well the fisheries are, particularly in Australia and particularly in South Australia [where] it's, enshrined in our legislation, recognised as common property resources because they are not.... It's very difficult to give an allocation of.... buyer mass of fish to an individual and say, that is your buyer mass, you husbandry it, look after it, farm it, etc, mainly because its.... We can do it with modern technology. We could draw lines on water with, you know, satellite navigators etc, but of course someone would also have to tell the fish and many of these species are quite mobile, migrate etc. and they may be in someone's area of responsibility one week and six months later they'd be 100 miles up the coast etc.

So it is generally recognised that in all but very, very few cases, the fish are what we call common property. Therefore we run into the problem of common property resource management in that whilst persons or fishers have access to those stocks, they are not over all responsible for them and therefore you need a custodian to be responsible for them and generally they just give them to the Government of the day. Of course the agents of that government of the day are in South Australia, the South Australian Department of Fisheries to manage those fish stocks. So the fish stocks are owned by the community, their custodian for them is the Government and we are the agents of the Government who provide access to those community resources.

If you go to the strict economic theory of community resources etc, the community may expect to extract a rent for access to those resources and of course that's one of the ongoing debates we have with industry in the form of licence fees. Industry generally recognise or accept that they pay some fee for access to fish resources. Mostly industry considers that they should pay for the costs of management of those resources but of course if you look at the real definition of rent, you don't start extracting rent for the community who own those resources until you have met and equalled your costs of management. We generally find that the fishing industry will accept paying a licence fee up to a justified cost to management. The debate usually occurs if a government of the day wishes to take additional revenue out of the fishery in the form of rent.

JD So currently, do I understand it right, the cost of supervising the fishery is pretty well met by the industry itself [unclear] through its licences, is that true?

LEWIS No, that's not true in South Australia. Currently the government of the day extracts in all licence fees in South Australia relating to fishing, something like 35-50% of its costs of managing those fisheries and [in] their costs we include enforcement,

research and management attributed to this Department. It's interesting to look at the breakup of that 30-50%. That 30-50% means that somewhere 50 and 70% is still contributed by the community in general but if you now disect the 30-50% which comes from the direct users of the fish resource, not the owners of them overall, in South Australia currently 92% of that comes from the commercial sector [in] licence fees and 8% comes from the recreational sector.

If you look at the relative licence fees extracted on a fishery basis against the cost of actually managing those individual fisheries in South Australia, we find that in the case of abalone in the last year or so, they are paying somewhere between 100 to 120% of their costs of research enforcement and management for that particular fishery. So I guess you could say there is a 20% component of rent being extracted out of that fishery.

If you look at our next one, it's prawn fishery. It's in the order of 70-100%. It varies from year to year because our level of enforcement and research can vary from year to year but it's in that order of magnitude. So they're looking at, I guess, in the most optimistic or pessimistic, depends whether you're the industry or the community, they're looking at breaking even on the costs.

Our next one is the rock lobster commercial industry. That's about 35% of what it costs us to manage that fishery. Then we move down to the marine scale fish fishery. We're equating about 15% out of it and interesting enough, the recreational sector or fishery is also in the order of 15%.

Then we get down to some of our smaller, lesser fisheries like our river fisheries on the River Murray and our hakes and curlong [unclear] fishery and we're extracting currently about 4-5%. So you can see.... [unclear].

The question of transfer provisions for licenses.... I'll make an aside here. It's interesting. Everybody talks about transferability. There's no such word. It's a word which is made up by fisheries' managers and scientists and my wife has quite some.... She gets stuck into me quite often about these words like catchability, transferability, all these other fisheries' management words which we make up. I guess if we use them long enough they'll become [an] accepted part of the English language, but anyhow I'll use the word transferability.

Transferability of, or transfer of, licences have always been a long debated point. When fisheries management was in its modern era, (it was first established in South Australia towards the end of the 1960s and the early 1970s) it was envisaged that licenses would not be transferable. This relates back to the common property nature of the resources and people being provided access to exploit those resources for their period of time and then future generations of fishers could exploit those resources as well. Effectively that was very difficult to police because people wouldn't surrender their licenses unless they'd made some sort of behind the scenes deal with a new person who was going to take up that licence.

The thing that the Department of Fisheries, or this Department is concerned about transfers, is the effect on fish stocks and the effect on effort on fish stocks. As soon as we have licence limitation fisheries, in other words we restrict the number of participants who can have access on a commercial basis to our fish stocks, we are producing an asset which generates a value in its own right. Even though technically under the Fisheries Act that value isn't recognised, really it is only just an access to

exploit fish stocks, but of course if there's a limited number of them it generates a value in a free market.

The problem is that when the first generation of fishers under that licensing regime comes in, they generally get their licence for nothing or a very small charge because the industry is generally in its formative stages and is still developing etc. So the first generation of licence holders are able to benefit from the industry through returns for their labour by fishing and they get, you know, they generate income. So while they operate the licence they can usually.... and because it's protected by the limited number of licences and not open numbers, and therefore it's usually economically a fairly lucrative industry.

When they decide to leave the industry of course, that first generation also gets a very large capital gain when they transfer it on to their next generation. That capital gain is really the expected accrued rent of future generations of licence holders. That's the, I guess, the economic jargon for it; but what it means is that the next generation who comes in pays a significant amount of money to get in.

In the case of our prawn licences here in South Australia, that currently is in the order of one to one and a half million dollars and for that significant expenditure they really only make marginal returns on the capital invested. They could probably invest the money in other areas and make a greater return on that money during the life of their licence but of course they're also looking at making a future capital gain themselves when they leave.

The difficulty for fisheries' managers, as I said, is that if a new entrant, or the next generation of licence holder comes in with a very high and significant debt they have to service, there's only one way they can service that debt and that is by killing more fish. Therefore effectively they put more pressure on the fish stocks and they can also put more pressure on fisheries managers because every time a fisheries manager wants to adjust effort by reducing it etc for it to ensure maintenance of stocks, if people have a significant debt loading on them, they may resist that adjustment. We've seen that in many, many cases. During the early periods when licence transfers were introduced into this State, the industry argued quite strongly that what we're saying is not true. I think these days industry, whilst they may not admit it openly, now realise the very significant increase in effort that has occurred in all our fisheries because of transfers.

That doesn't mean to say that the South Australian Department of Fisheries is against transfers per se. We see transfers as another fisheries management tool. We certainly do not support providing transferability just for the sake of providing it so that people can make windfall gains because [of], as I said, the effort implications. If it can be used as a means of adjusting an industry which may be over-exploited or have excess effort in it, well then that's a legitimate use of it. Examples are that you introduce transfers into a fishery but every time a transfer takes place, 10% of the gear allocated is taken away so that you eventually or.... there's some surrender penalty on gear which they can then buy back from within the industry. So eventually you end up again reducing numbers of participants through the ongoing transfer mechanism. So we certainly have indicated to industry and introduced to a number of our industries that type of transfer arrangement, but we also have industries where transferability has been brought in without any sort of compensating effort, adjustment mechanism. We are now having to live with that through the increased effort.

JD Are we seeing then perhaps the end of an era in some of the fisheries in that, whereas once they were owner/operators, now they're tending to be owned by companies and operated by employed staff? Is that the fact?

LEWIS It's not necessarily the fact in South Australia. There certainly is a drift that way and we haven't gone as far as I recognise it has occurred in some other states in Australia but it's a natural tendency for it to drift that way. When you say the end of an era, it's an evolutionary thing. It takes, you know, has taken a long time and it will just continue going. There are a number of reasons why that is happening. One is relating back to the transfer provisions and that it's very difficult for an individual operator to find the, and to get hold of the, capital now to enter the industry so you have to have some sort of corporate backing or arrangements to do it.

The second thing is that despite the theory of common property resources etc, a large majority of the existing fishing industry at any given point in time genuinely believe that they have property rights over the fish stocks. There's a reticence at the end of their working life to lose control of that and so we see many operators trying to basically come off the water but still control the operation from land etc. So there are a number of pressures and issues which are involved there but certainly because of that, the industry is generally seeking a move towards not having to be in an owner/operator mode. In other words people can have the flexibility to control remotely or from land etc.

The interesting thing is what we see is of course.... whilst you've got to be very careful 'cause you can't be half pregnant. What we generally find is that the industry will argue, yes we want to be able to come off the vessel, get rid of the owner/operator, have control but in doing that they also ask us to put safeguards in to make sure that one corporate identity or one sector of the community can't capture a major proportion of the fleet because then they recognise that they may have difficulties in maintaining prices etc. That is happening but industry themselves see the dangers in going too far that way; at least they do in South Australia but of course it's very difficult to.... if you start going that way, to then pull in the reins and stop it going completely.

JD Is a related problem likely to be that [there is an] excessive perhaps inflow of overseas capital into fishing?

LEWIS Well this is just an extension of the same argument. It doesn't matter whether a significant number of the licences are captured by AMP Society or some other large corporate organisation or an overseas investor, say someone who was trying to leave Hong Kong before the turnover to Mainland China. It's just an extension of the same discussion. We have no policy or views about the wider debate about foreign ownership in Australia. I know certain sectors of the community do. So rather than see it as a foreign ownership debate, I see it as an extension of exactly the same debate on whether you are going to maintain small scale, almost family unit type fishing versus corporate ownership.

JD I think the problem is, the concern is that control of the industry may be lost to overseas interests.

LEWIS That's correct and that's what certain sectors of the fishing industry have expressed to us. The corollary of the discussion of course is that one of the things which has hindered some aspects of the fishing industry is the lack of an integrated structure namely from capture to processing to marketing. There are a number of initiatives generated from the other extent. In other words the catching sector who....

many of these people who say they want to come off the boat and put a non-owner operator or skipper on board their vessel, their reasoning or rationale for doing this is that they want to establish new markets or an integrated structure arrangement but they still need control of their vessels to guarantee their product etc.

So it's a very diverse question and it really depends on which end of the spectrum you're looking at. It's something which is not specifically related to fisheries. It's something which the community in general has to discuss in the context of foreign ownership versus Australian ownership versus amalgamation of what generally have been single, almost family operated units onto larger groupings of units. The analogies of course are the corner stores versus the large supermarkets etc and it's a debate which is entirely analogies.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

TAPE 1 SIDE B

JD Would you like to comment on the training aspects of the industry?

LEWIS Well as technology and as the industry itself becomes more sophisticated there obviously is a need for increased training, both to handle the increased technology and sophistication but also of course in other sectors of the community [which] are demanding higher standards relating to areas such as occupational health and safety and sea rescue etc which these days requires greater qualifications to actually go to sea than it would have ten, twenty, 30 years ago. So [it is] incumbent that the necessary training facilities are provided. There are numbers of avenues for that. In South Australia there is our Department of Marine & Harbours through the Technical and Further Education Department [which] provide courses which address the various master class fours and fives and can provide those. We have representing the fishing industry interests....

In training of course we've got the South Australian Fishing Industry Training Council which is doing a very good job within the limited resources available to them. Of course they're linked into a national fishing industry training council. From someone who is actually on the..... is the representative of the Australian Fisheries Council which is a council of ministers [in] South Australia, on the Council of the Australian Maritime College as I'm their representative, I'm very supportive of the role of the Maritime College in providing training opportunities to the commercial fishing industry both in the formal qualifications for, you know, the various types of the masters' tickets etc through to the use of specialist training courses such as the flume[??] tank for the increasing technology, showing industry how they can improve their fuel consumption etc by just improving their gear in the water.

So there are a number of areas of training that need to be addressed and, dare I say, there should be more resources put into that area but I guess in any area of fisheries there should be more resources whether it be research or training.

One [of] the difficulties with the marketing side of it of course is that Australia, I believe, has been somewhat backward in recognising that training and marketing and handling and processing is vital to ensure the high valued commodity markets which we now need today to ensure that our industries are a success. Basically all our fisheries are fully exploited. There may be a few fisheries which can have additional exploitation but certainly all our traditional fisheries are fully exploited so the chances of increased production from these fisheries is very limited. The change of increased

value production is quite substantial by looking at [unclear] markets, developing new markets. I always quote the one that, the southern rock lobster or rock lobster. Traditionally we have been sending our rock lobsters to the American market as a frozen tail where, say you start off with a one kilogram lobster. By the time you tail it you're down to half a kilogram and you get, say $15.00 for it. If you took that very same lobster and sold it on a live market in Asia; first of all you sell the whole kilogram, not just have a kilogram and secondly you get $25.00 a kilo for it.

So they're the types of reasoning and rationale that people should be looking at but to be able to present the commodity or the product in the style, the quality that is demanded by these types of markets, we need to improve our handling techniques, our after capture techniques and processing techniques to get it there.

JD We have not yet in place courses that young people can take to upgrade their skills in processing presumably in marketing and packaging and so on?

LEWIS Widespread, no. The Maritime College has run a couple of small courses and I'm aware that they're looking at developing further courses in this area but it's certainly something which we should pursue more readily.

JD Does the Maritime College serve a different clientele from the TAFE colleges?

LEWIS The Maritime College generally does serve a different clientele. The TAFE is basically providing short courses to give people qualifications to comply with the, I guess, current and ongoing evolving legislation as far as being able to captain a vessel or control a vessel. The Maritime College can do that but it tends to look at more career orientated research where in one aspect of it it takes young people who want to be fishers or you know, commercial fishers and rather than just relying on on-job experience to get experience, you know, on job training to get experience by being on a vessel, they endeavour to provide a broader spectrum as to where the fishing industry sits in, or where fishing sits in the whole of the community etc. That includes touching on aspects of marine biology, oceanography, fish handling, processing, various fishing techniques, not just the ones which they would use. You know, not just.... If you're a rock lobster fisher, not just that but they also get an insight into other types of techniques: trawling, trapping, long lining, drop lining. So the Maritime College is looking at generally in relation to people who are going to participate in the fishing industry, at a broader education so that when they are out there eventually on their own boat fishing etc they have a wider perspective of the industry and where it sits in the community than just sort of, "I'm a rock lobster operator and I pull traps up and down etc".

JD Does the Maritime College require of its students matriculation? Is that the entrance clientele to the Maritime College?

LEWIS No, no. The Maritime College, it does cater for people with matriculation who want to go on and get a degree in fisheries science etc but it also, and that's what its charter requires, it also caters for the industry. It is to service the maritime and fishing industries of Australia. It gives short courses which are, you know compared to the academic standards of other tertiary institutions, less rigorous but it gives short courses for the industry. It gives longer courses for people who are going to make their living in the industry and it can cater for very specialist, almost scientific type, courses. It tries to give the very broad spectrum over the whole, I guess, over the whole group of people who are interested in fisheries, you know, not just active fishermen.

JD Could you talk about some of the problems that are facing the industry in South Australia?

LEWIS Well without a doubt the principal problem facing us and it addresses the principal objective of us and that is to maintain fish stocks. Because the collective demands of all the sectors which want to take fish exceeds the biological supply, we have to allocate the fish resources to various differing sectors. Basically whilst the government of the day says that the commercial sector and say the recreational sector have bona fide access to the stocks and of course with each of those sectors there are a whole range of sub-groups in them, net versus line versus trawlers etc. Well then we have to sort of say, well we'll provide you access under controlled arrangements but collectively we don't want you to take any more fish than this.

There are two ways in which we can do this. One is the more traditional way through what we call input controls and the other way is through output controls. Input controls are by limiting the number of participants, limiting the boat size, limiting the amount of gear they're allocated. It may even limit the horsepower of a vessel, the head line of the nets or the number of traps they can operate. What we're doing there is trying to contain the degree of effort or the amount of effort which the operators individually and therefore collectively, can put on the fishery.

Output controls are generally through one of the various quota arrangements where quota can be based on a global quota where on a given day you open up the season and as soon as that global quota is taken, you shut the fishery down again and it becomes a first come first serve basis. Then you can have individual quotas and of course those individual quotas can be transferable. Basically how quotas work is the scientist will say, of this stock of fish you can take X,000 tonnes and then you allocate that to the people. As long as they don't take in excess of that you don't really worry too much about how they take, as long as it doesn't do environmental or stock damage, you know. Of course the problem in quotas is that you need the scientific data bases on which to make those assessments and also you need scientific data bases on which to make continuing assessments with input controls as well because, as I have said earlier, technology means that the degree or the efficiency of input controls changes over time.

So in this Department, about one-third of the Department's resources are allocated to traditional and some not so traditional fisheries research programmes. The more traditional research programs relate to basic population dynamics where you're looking at the characteristics of individual species or populations. So we've got people working on looking at rock lobsters; people looking at prawn resources; people looking at abalone resources. These scientists, their role is to tell us the basic growth rates, mortality rates, the fishing and natural mortality, the exploitation rates, how they reproduce. From this we determine what the appropriate minimum length is, how much fishing effort a stock can take before it becomes detrimental etc.

We have other people working.... rather than individual species level, we've got them working at the community or eco system levels so we're looking at how species interact with each other and if you impact in this part of that eco system, how it affects down through the trophic levels and the trophic systems. The impact can be either through fishing or through environmental, natural perturbations or could be through of course these days a lot of emphasis is put on pollution, man made or impacts.

As well as that, supporting those types of programs we've got oceanographers who are working on water mass transportation because almost all the species we deal with

have some form of larvae stage and therefore we need to understand the water masses they're in to understand the distribution and how one sub-stock inter-relates with another sub-stock. This is important when we start putting legal minimum lengths; varabing [??] along the coast line if it's the same inter-related sub-stock, well then having different legal minimum lengths may be meaningless etc.

We've got scientists obviously [who] collect a tremendous amount of data and you have to handle that and be able to retrieve it and analyse it. So we've got a large group of people who are basically statisticians, mathematicians, computer programmers and most importantly, mathematical modellers. Their role is to not just look at the fish stocks themselves in the wild, but they actually build up models, interactive models where we can.... mathematically in computer programming, so that we can make predictions as to what if we double the effort here or we reduce the effort there, what would be the result in say, reproductive potential, buyer mass, yield, etc.

We have economists of course. A very important component of fisheries is the economic viability of the commercial industry and also, and one of the things which we're having a great deal of difficulty in coming to grips with or getting a quantitative handle on is, what is the value of a recreational fishery? So we have economists who are looking into those types of questions so we can work out just how viable our industries are, how important the resource is to the community etc.

The newer disciplines which are emerging of course are aquaculture. As I've said previously that basically, except for a few areas in our more traditional fisheries, the chances of increasing the production level is fairly low, that's actually significantly increasing it. Certainly there is opportunity for value production. So if you're looking at increasing production of fish stocks or fish in South Australia, well then of course we're looking at artificial propagation of them in this new emerging industry and it is a emerging in Australia, called aquaculture.

If you're going to aquaculture a species, there are a number of basic things you need. One is you need to know the biology of it. Two: once you've done the biology you should.... It would be preferable you have available or be able to get at relatively cheap cost not having to do huge amounts of cost in R&D, the technology to explore that biology. It would be preferable to have a species which has a simple life cycle. Very few larvae stages because that's the difficult part in getting them through. It [would] also be preferable to have a commodity or species which attracts a high value so therefore you have to produce lower volumes to be economically viable. You could go the other way, have a lower value commodity but if you can produce large volumes of it.... Most importantly you need markets for them and also you need to be able to produce your products when your markets want them and vice versa. In the latitudes which South Australia is, and it's almost semi-temperate, cool temperate, this is important because most of our biological activity with our fish stocks occurs during the summer months and they have.... When I talk about biological activity, I'm talking about things like reproduction and growth etc. So if you were relying on a brood stock requirement throughout the whole year, if you were going to rely on just taking it from fercund or females from the wild, at certain times of the year you would not be able to find them in the status you want.

So a lot of effort and research goes into what we call closing up the system and that is artificially propagating animals or fish out of the normal natural season because that's important because you might want fingerlings to stock a dam in the middle of winter

and that is not the natural time that they'd be available. So you need, as I said, you need to match your availability of product with your markets etc.

You need all those and they're important but the two most important things, I think, current today we need to get aquaculture development going, its sum capital investment which is willing to be recouped on a five to seven year cycle rather than the two, three and maybe even four, but certainly two and three year time frames which most risk capital investors seek. So that's the first thing and we're now beginning to attract that degree of investor into the community.

The other thing we really need is, whilst aquaculture is occurring overseas in many, many countries overseas and has for many, many years, it is still an emerging industry in Australia and we're basically on the beginning of a learning period and we really need the equivalent of about a twenty years' hands on skills base. We're slowly getting that, you know, we're bringing technology and experience into the country but we usually find it's not easy to just translocate the technology and methodology of one species which may be similar to a local species here; just translocate it and find it works. We generally have to adjust and find out the intricacies of our own characteristics of our own species before we can be successful. So there's a lot of work to be done in that area.

JD Your Department is very prominent in research as you have mentioned. Is it co-ordinated with other bodies like the universities and CSIRO and so on - the research that you do?

LEWIS The short answer is yes but of course there's always room for improved co-ordination and it depends which facet of research you're talking about. Certainly the research into the traditional fisheries areas is fairly well coordinated Basically every major fishery has an interstate research group where relevant, you know, which meets regularly. They're talking rock lobster, southern shark, demersal species, molluscs, etc. In addition to that there are a number of sort of peak regional research groups. There's the South Eastern Fisheries Research Committee that meets once a year where the heads of the research from say Tasmania, Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia and the Commonwealth meet to discuss common research interests and co-ordination. There's the Western Fisheries Research Group which has a similar role and there's a Northern Research Group as well. Of course there's also co-ordination at the Standing Committee on Fisheries and the Australian Fisheries Council level. So in those traditional areas it is very well coordinated

In other areas the links are being forged. Certainly within South Australia we work very closely with the universities and with private people such as Kinhill and Aquadeb which are two private companies in the aquacultural world. Some of those are at officer to officer level and some of them are at more formal levels with a more formal nexus between the two.

JD Any other problems in the industry that you'd like to discuss?

LEWIS One other problem I would like to highlight is that, as I indicated before, technology and therefore effort in fisheries is increasing and managers have to make continual adjustments to compensate for that increase in effort. In making management arrangements we endeavour to ensure that the industry itself is an intrical part in the decision making process. In South Australia we have forged very strong links with [unclear] our commercial industry where we have created a large number of liaison committees representing each particular fishery and all management proposals or options are fully discussed with industry and quite rightly, that is the way

we should go because it means that those who are affected most directly by any decision have input into that decision. However we have to be very careful in that generally management decisions are needed to again ensure that the effort does not exceed that which is biologically acceptable because if it is biologically acceptable, that the stocks can be maintained, but consultation with industry takes time.

What generally happens is that as soon as it becomes known to industry that we wish to talk about compensatory changes (usually that means reduction in allocation of gear or participation) and we wish to discuss ways of doing that, we generally find that a large sector of the industry decide to fish harder, to stake their claim or traditional right in the industry. There may be a large number of operators who have either not participated at all in that particular sector of the industry or have only participated to a very small degree but we generally find that a large number of people then start fishing harder to establish a fishing history. What we must remember [is] that these discussions started because we had concern for the biological health of the stocks. The last thing we want happening is while we're debating how we're going to counteract that and provide the necessary safeguards, people putting further pressure on the fishery and we've seen many, many fisheries where what I say is the greatest damage to fish stocks is done actually during the industrial democracy stage. So this is something which fisheries managers must be well aware of and when they're addressing problems, ensure that interim measures are put in so that the real damage to the stocks isn't done during that period.

JD Thank you very much indeed. Before we finish, is there anything else that you'd like to make a final comment on?

LEWIS No, no [unclear].

JD Thank you.

That is the end of this interview with Mr R.K. Lewis, Director of Fisheries in South Australia. The interview was conducted by Jack Darcey in the Director's office in Adelaide on the 26th January, 1990.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW

Verbatim transcript of an interview with RON OLLRICH

INTRODUCTION

This is an interview with Mr Ron Ollrich, rock lobster fisherman of Port MacDonnell, South Australia. The interview was conducted on the 5th February, 1990 in a motel room in Mt Gambier, South Australia for Murdoch University's oral history of the Australian Fishing Industry. The interviewer was Jack Darcey.

Mr Ollrich is a highly experienced rock lobster fisherman and a leading member of the Professional Fishermen's Association. As will be evident from the tape, he is an informed and thoughtful member of the fishing industry who has played an active role in its management. In this interview he details many of the problems confronting the rock lobster fishery in South Australia and suggests strategies for the containment. The general tenure of his account is refreshingly positive. There is substance in what he has to say and he states his case clearly and well.

There are two sides of one tape. The interview starts at 022 on the revolution counter.

TAPE 1 SIDE A

JD Would you please record your full name and date and place of birth.

OLLRICH My name is Ronald Ollrich. I was born at Alberton in South Australia on the 24th June in 1928. At the present time [I am] aged 61 years.

JD Thank you. Was your father a fisherman?

OLLRICH No my father wasn't a fisherman. Actually I didn't come to live in this locality in Mt Gambier until 1961.

JD Where were you brought up then?

OLLRICH Well in a variety of places, mostly centred around the Le Fevre Peninsula in Adelaide until I was nine years old. My father died and I did go and live in the country for eighteen months or so with my mother [who was] keeping house for her youngest brother. When the hostilities commenced in 1939 he joined the Army and we shifted back to Adelaide and came back, still in the Le Fevre Peninsula and lived in Exeter until I married. I still remained on the Peninsula at Semaphore and I sort of transferred from Semaphore to Mt Gambier here in August 1961.

JD What sort of employment did you undertake after you left school?

OLLRICH From the fourth year at high school I joined the Electricity Trust, or the Adelaide Electric Supply Company as it was known then. The Adelaide Electric Supply Company was taken over in 1946 by the Electricity Trust of South Australia and I commenced work at the Osborne Power Station, or there are two power stations. There was Osborne A and Osborne B which I worked in both. Then I came to Mt Gambier and commenced duty at the Mt Gambier Power Station in August 1961.

JD Well how did you get into fishing?

OLLRICH Well I can say I've always been near the sea and as you can appreciate from living on the Le Fevre Peninsula, when I was only a babe in arms, I would imagine only a few months old, I would have been on my uncle's boat which he had. He'd always had a boat, my uncle, and my father when he was alive would go with him. We'd always be on the river of a Sunday at least, or Saturdays as well. So it was I suppose quite natural that when I came here and living close by the sea, well relatively speaking, at Port MacDonnnell, I got a boat and started catching crayfish (well lobster as they're now known) and it just sort of went on from there.

JD What sort of a boat did you start with?

OLLRICH Well I first started out only with a fibreglass dinghy at twelve foot long. Then.... I tell a lie. I started out with a plywood dinghy first up and then went into a fibreglass dinghy which a cousin of mine built. Then I had a, [in] about 1963 I think, a fifteen foot carvel planked boat. Then the next one I think was a twenty foot boat and then that was about 1965 I think. I bought that as an insurance wreck and did it up from there, repaired it. Then the next boat I had about approximately 1972 was a 24 footer which I got from Beachport. Then the next vessel after that was a 33 foot boat and just this last, oh at the commencement of this season, I sort of bought a 40 foot vessel.

JD [laughs] You've certainly had some boats, haven't you?

OLLRICH Oh well. That's the automatic progression in the interests of safety and greater efficiency of course that you tend to go in larger vessels all the time.

JD Ron, how many pots would you have started working?

OLLRICH Well I would have started off with only about twenty pots. I tried to maintain about 30 then and then when the regulations came in in 1967 I then had a twenty foot vessel and because I worked the vessel on my own it meant that the quota of pots that you had.... You had one per foot of length of the vessel and then twenty for the skipper and if you had a crew, twenty for the crew but because I worked the vessel on my own it was only 40 pots [which] was the initial allocation. A bit along the track when they started to amalgamate licences, two other fishermen and myself bought somebody out that had 68 pots on their vessel. Yes that's right, 68. We sort of came out of it with twenty.... I think I got 23 pots from it and the others got 20. Finished up there was about five pots that went down the gurgler. So that meant that because I had a 23 foot or 23 point some odd feet, but I could only qualify for 63 pots on that. That was how I sort of upgraded the licence and the pots.

JD Did you have any trouble getting a licence when licensing came in?

OLLRICH Yes I did. Because of the increasing number of vessels that had taken place there, [the] industry approached the Government to try and restrict and make it a limited entry fishery. So the Government of the day, they appointed a crayfish

advisory committee which was made up of at least two, one locally, Victor Perryman was on it and Ron Guy I think was another one from Carpenter Rocks. Any rate they were ministerial appointees on this committee so they sort of brought in some of the framework of how they would bring in the regulations and the pot numbers and everything else. So it meant that initially they had to sort out who were eligible for a licence.

In those days it was only a matter of paying ten shillings for the licence to sell fish. Well the way in which it was initially done was that you had to go and present yourself to the local fisheries inspector and to prove to him of your participation in the fishery in the past. So of course because I had this other occupation, that presented some difficulty to me. Initially they had refused to endorse the licence that I had but I had to go to Adelaide and see the Director of Fisheries at the time which was Mick Olsen. Then the Minister of Fisheries was a member of the Legislative Council called Ross Story and I had to see him as well and present my case. Any rate it turned out that they agreed and the licence was issued and then I still kept on. In the meantime of course because it was still being deliberated in Adelaide, I continued fishing and when it was endorsed I just sort of carried on.

JD And you carried on your job at the power station as well?

OLLRICH Ah yes. Well it was a shift work job and as I said because of, well I practically all my life prior to that I'd sort of had some involvement with the sea and it was like, as I mentioned, a natural progression to be engaged in fishing. So yes, I did. I kept on fishing as well as the work. I had in mind of course also that with my son coming on that it was something for him, as an occupation for him.

JD Did he take it on?

OLLRICH Ah he did. He did for a matter of eight years or between 1980 and 1988 but he's trying his hand at something else at the moment because of the 52 weeks of the year income rather than the seven month from fishing at the moment.

JD Ron, you'd have seen a lot of changes in the industry, wouldn't you?

OLLRICH Oh yes. I suppose the greatest change would have been the advancement in vessels and in electronics that's come into it. In the early days, in the 1950s, or when I say the early days, that wasn't the earliest but it wasn't until the market developed in America that there came about the sudden increase in numbers of vessels fishing. At the time in Port MacDonnell there were some over 80 vessels fishing and going back on what I said earlier, when it came to licences the initial response in the first years that the Crayfish Advisory Committee had to operate, there were some 320 licences which were granted but with the process of weeding out and everything, in the first year that was reduced to about 297. Since then because of amalgamation of licences and then people selling out and so forth the number came down to about 245 at the commencement of 1984. In 1984 the Government introduced a general reduction in the pot number allocation, a 15% across the board reduction and so that reduced everybody's entitlement by 15%. This of course created a, to some extent, an internal buy back scheme where people, in order to keep their number of pot entitlements, they bought out other licences as they became available and added them to their licence.

This helped reduce the number of vessels again and further, in 1987 a rather controversial scheme was introduced even at the commencement of [the] 1987 season called the rationalisational buy back scheme. Now this meant that licences no longer

became transferable except for family transfers but meant that nobody could buy a licence and if they wanted to sell the only place that they could sell is to the buy back authority which bought the licence off them at a figure of $2,700 per pot on a licence and this scheme of course had to be funded by those remaining in the industry. It meant in order to finance that scheme that a person had to pay each year $100 per pot on their licence. Putting that in the average term.... By this time because of when the scheme was introduced, the constraint on the number of pots on a licence, apart from an upper limit of 80, was withdrawn. So this meant that a person.... Didn't matter about the size of their boat, they couldn't have any more than 80 pots but they could certainly upgrade if they wanted to. So any rate at the commencement of the scheme, the average entitlement per licence was 60. So talking in average terms, each fisherman had to pay $6,000 per year for an expected period of ten years. This was to fund the interest and capital repayments of the people that had sold out.

Any rate, this scheme was to run for two years. Well the number of boats that were bought out was either 40 boats or 2,400 pots. Well it ran into 41 boats and 2,447 pots round about; something like that. It's still in operation. The payments are still continuing but that's what transpired there. So that was the rationalisation scheme but it was controversial because it meant that fishermen have to pay all this themselves. The Government didn't pay anything. Well the unfair part about it as far as the Port MacDonnell Association was concerned was the fact that the economics.... We didn't see the economics in it being able to fund the scheme itself. For instance one of the criteria put up by the Government was that the foregone catch of the vessels that left the industry, that foregone catch would flow to the fishermen remaining who still only had the same number of pots. They said that this would be immediate, that in the history of other buy back schemes that this could even be expected as high a percentage of 90, even perhaps 100% of the foregone catch would go to the fishermen remaining and that that would be a self funding type of thing. On figures that they produced which would be more than enough to pay the buy back payments.

Well this hasn't transpired. Certainly the 41 vessels and the 2,400 odd pots have gone but it still leaves the debt.... the fishermen remaining to have to pay that debt. So this was always the contention that the Port MacDonnell Association who when we held a ballot on it, out of 77 in the membership (licence holders in the Port MacDonnell area) 70 voted against it and only seven voted for it. So you can see it was a highly contentious point.

JD Ron you have been very prominent in the Professional Fishermen's Association in this area. You were secretary for some years and then you are now the president and have been for some time. That's correct isn't it?

OLLRICH Yes. I sort of came into it in 1981. At our AGM I was elected secretary there and I sort of had that role for six years and I've been president.... in my fourth year as president.

JD Well from where you sit in that Association, would you say that the powers that be, the Fisheries Department and the Minister take enough notice of what the fishermen have to say?

OLLRICH Well there is a consultancy process. Really governments have a mind of their own. They quite often go through the motions of consultancy but it doesn't always follow that they take a great deal of notice. I suppose when it suits them they do. They can still ride over [the] industry view if they want to. What can I say.... In my view the unfair part about this buy back scheme was that if you recall back three years ago or four years ago, there was a vine pull scheme by which grape growers,

because there was a glut of grapes on the market, the Commonwealth in association with each State and South Australia was included, they had this scheme whereby if grape growers were willing to pull their vines for a period of five years, they were compensated to pull those vines. That meant that in the end [of] the five year period, they were free to replant the vines if necessary. They were paid for this by both Governments and at no cost to themselves. Now this benefited them in two ways. Because some people took up the option it meant that those that were remaining, because it reduced the quantity of grapes, they got a better price for their grapes. Those that opted for the scheme, they still had the use of their land. They could have grazed stock or anything like that on land. In the end, in the five years they got their land back and they also got their entitlement to grow grapes again. So this buy back scheme which the fishing industry had to adopt is all at the cost of the fishermen and didn't cost the Government one brass razoo.

JD Ron, would you like to comment on the marketing of your catch and the price that you get for the product?

OLLRICH Yes. It's sort of a very complex problem. If you recall, last year the lower prices that we were getting compared with the year previous were attributed to the decline in demand in Japan because of the ailing Emperor there and that put a curb on the festivities of the Japanese people. So that was an excuse for the price drop but when you also look at the fact that at the time the Australian dollar was worth nearly almost 90 cents American and currently is trading at 77 cents or hovering around that mark, the price currently isn't a great deal different to last year. We started off this season that there were no stocks in America because everybody last year, or quite a few of the processors, they geared up for live exports because of the time that it takes to supply the Japanese market. They [were] able to land live crayfish in Japan and that at the time was the better market.

Another problem that we have of course was in Western Australia where for two consecutive years their catch there exceeded 12,000 tonnes, a near record year last year for instance. They supply of course the American market and also the Japanese market. So that brought about that there were more.... and also the reduced demand in Japan and of course the Japanese were quick to seize on that to reduce the price that they paid. Now we have this year of course that the price started off, only just in October at round about $18 a kilo but it got down here a month or so ago to $13. That's just after the week leading up to Christmas. I believe that in Western Australia they're getting about.... The beach price [is] about $17 a kilo. This is the sort of thing that you have to contend with.

Of course the other charges all seem to be indexed. The current thing now days is that everything is indexed to inflation factor. In some instances they even go beyond that so [the] fisherman is no different to any other primary producer. They can't sort of dictate the prices they get for their produce. You've always got a problem there with the price and inflation and government charges. People probably see.... when they hear fishermen get $13 or $15 or $18 a kilo, all they think of is in dollar terms but they don't realise the various costs and infrastructure that it takes, you know, before a vessel even goes to sea, in government costs, buy back payments and everything else. Oh I did a bit of a study here a while back there and with all the fuel costs, bait and everything else you've got to turn over about $20,000 odd before you even begin to earn anything for yourself.

So that's always a problem but currently the emphasis of course is on live cray export. Here again the Japanese are fussy. They only like the red crays which makes it a bit of a problem because quite a few fishermen fish deeper waters and they've got the

specklies or white crays there. The Taiwanese, it doesn't worry them, they take them but the Japanese don't. So you've got some processors now that don't really want the white crays. Really they pay the premium price for the red ones and then only of the smaller variety because there's a bit of a problem with the large ones. The Japanese don't like them and the Americans don't like the large tail size. So all these things compound the problem that fishermen have got to overcome.

JD What about the size of the catch? Is it varying much?

OLLRICH Well I mentioned about the 12,000 tonnes. The long term average in Western Australia is 9,000 tonnes. The last two years there they have exceeded by over 3,000 tonne their long term average. The long term average even in both zones in South Australia is 2,000.... Well, no I'll go back to the southern zone. The seventeen or eighteen year average of that catch is about 1647 tonnes. Now there's been some fluctuations in that. In [the] 1980/81 season for instance there was about 2,230 tonne. That was a good year. Last year the catch was 1430 tonnes around about [in] round figures. The year before that it was, I think it made about the average of 1640. Last year probably would have been one of the worst seasons because of the problems associated with the Japanese market and the health of the Emperor and the lower catch which was also compounded by the rough weather that was experienced in October and November. So you know this all adds, as I mentioned, [to] the problem fishermen have [with] fluctuating incomes but you've still got these basic costs that keep escalating because of the inflation factor.

JD So you've got a situation where the price of the product's down and so is the catch?

OLLRICH Yes. This year [I] don't quite know how it's going to turn out. I wouldn't imagine it would be anything astounding. I'd be surprised if it comes up to the long term average of 1640 tonne. I did also mention about.... I was making comparisons with Western Australia. The northern zone in South Australia which has about 87 vessels, I don't know quite how many pots but they have experienced in the last two years their best ever figures for that zone whereas the southern zone has been declining. Now even with both those zones the catch last year wasn't much better than about 2,000, not quite 2,300 tonnes. So this really poses the question that you've got good seasons in Western Australia for the last two years. You've had increasing catches in the northern zone of South Australia the last two years yet you've had declining catches in the southern zone.

Quite a few people are beginning to wonder whether in fact there's another factor that could be influencing there, affecting the reproductive cycle of the lobster namely whether that is in fact pollution. In Tasmania they have been having reasonable seasons also. The life cycle or the reproductive cycle of the lobster is such that the female strips their eggs in October and November. The larvae or the eggs when they're stripped they're free floating within the sea for a period of about ten months. Goes through about ten or eleven stages of growth and development and it's not until that tenth month that they then become a bottom dwelling lobster. Now in the meantime of course in that ten months including the winter period, they're at the whim of the currents prevailing at the time. It's quite possible of course that although the fecundity of the lobster is such that one large female might have anywhere between 300,000 to 800,000 eggs, what happens in the end of that ten months where those eggs finish? In that period of course they could finish up in the stomach of other fish. They could at the tenth month finish up in hostile territory where they might be 100 or 200 mile out to sea.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

TAPE 1 SIDE B

OLLRICH So any rate at the end of this ten month cycle the larvae could then finish up 200 mile out to sea where an abnormal current has taken them and this of course could be hostile territory. When they do hatch out like that they go to the bottom for dwelling and there may not be the cover on the bottom where they have got to escape predators. So if they finish in hostile territory of course, well you know, they're lost. So it's a very complicated cycle and I know that they've been reproducing for generations but some of it is sort of a bit hit and miss. It's at the whims of the general winter currents and prevailing winds and so forth where they finish up.

Just recently of course it has been an issue with Lake Bonney in South Australia which is the..... Oh well how can you put it? It's the dumping ground for the waste from the paper mill down at Snuggery. The information or the knowledge that came out of the sea investigation into the Wesley Vale Pulp Mill in Tasmania made scientists think of the various dioxins that [were] prevalent in the paper mill waste and caused a lot of concern about putting these dioxins into Bass Strait. Well of course given the fact of the complex life cycle of the larvae, we don't even know and it would be probably impossible to check, but for instance the larvae that came from lobster in Port MacDonnell, their eggs may finish up in Tasmania or conversely the other may be true. So these dioxins and also pesticides as well could affect the reproductive cycle of lobster and kill the larvae. For instance in the southern zone in the south east of South Australia the water shed from western Victoria also flows into the drain system in South Australia. There's about six major drains that [are] along the south east coast from the Glenelg River near Nelson the border, right through to Kingston and the River Murray.

Now if you recall back fifteen, twenty years ago that 245T I think it is and dieldrin and a few other nasties were a recommended thing for spraying pastures and so forth. More often than not just to be sure, they recommended a little over the recommended dose or farmers used over the recommended dose and it meant that when the rains came and the pastures became flooded any excess chemical was leached out of those pastures [and] finished up in the drain system. These drains all finish up and flow into the southern zone which constitutes the southern zone of the lobster resource in South Australia. Now with the information that was gained of the harmful and.... well it even caused genetic defects too, in the Vietnam War with defoliants and pesticides and everything. As I mentioned before there could be.... whether there is some other factor which is preventing the increase in bio-mass of lobster in the southern zone of South Australia when all other fisheries seem to be improving their bio-mass.

JD Do you feel there's a need for more research on the biology of the crayfish?

OLLRICH Oh definitely. South Australia unfortunately [is] a little behind Western Australia. Western Australia are able to predict their level of catches, what they may be, because they take at the recruitment stage of the juveniles, when they become bottom dwelling, they put out traps and they're able to pick from the level of recruitment what they get in these traps of the small lobster when they become bottom dwelling and they can predict with a fair degree of accuracy what the season's going to be like five years ahead which is about the time that it takes to become marketable size lobster. South Australia unfortunately because of.... I'm not sort of blaming the Fisheries Department here because of financial restraint, haven't had that same thing in operation. They're only just beginning to do this because they've now

recently appointed somebody in the southern zone, Bruce Wallner by name. He came actually from Western Australia and they missed the boat last year because they were trying to determine what was the best type of collector to use but they weren't able to get any satisfactory results or get any catch rates. So it won't be until over the next winter period that they'll be able to have any results on which they can make their predictions and that won't be for another five years ahead.

Of course that's one aspect of research of course. The Port MacDonnell Association, as I mentioned, were against the introduction of the buy back scheme because of the cost factor but we put a proposal to the Government and part of the submission before the Select Committee what we wanted to do was for the Government [to] introduce a pilot scheme to see if it was possible to raise lobster through the most difficult stage, their most vulnerable stage. That is from the egg through to the larval stages and through to the bottom dwelling lobster. They have a Marine Research Laboratory at West Beach and it's only just a new one coming into operation. What we presented to the Select Committee was for them to adopt this pilot scheme, see if they could successfully raise the lobster and then release them into the wild which all people seemed to agree. The most difficult stage is the larval stage through to the bottom dwelling. Once you get them through there the mortality rate or the survival rate is fairly good and lobster dwell with one another. They're not carnivorous or they're not cannibalistic towards one another. So if you can increase the bio-mass just by helping the reproductive cycle in that first.... That's what we wanted to see, if they would do that and then if it was successful then to go on further and make it on the larger scale and help to increase the bio-mass of lobster.

JD And how was that received, that suggestion?

OLLRICH Well it was rejected on the cost basis. Who would fund it and everything else you see. They had their minds made up about introducing the buy back scheme and unfortunately the Parliamentary Select Committee didn't endorse it so it wasn't taken up.

JD Ron what other are the major concerns of the rock lobster fishermen?

OLLRICH Well as I mentioned about the pollution, this is one of the main worries. Another one would be because the markets which are being supplied, mainly the Japanese market, are so fussy and particular about the quality of their fish. For instance they don't like taking lobster even with just a horn broken or a leg missing. I think it's up to fishermen and processors to look after their fish and market them in good quality. Now not all boats have got wet wells but the speed hulls, the fibreglass boats and the like, they've all got wet tanks and they can spray the lobster and keep them alive and in good condition when they land them.

The problem then goes on to the processor who, in his own interests, should be looking after them very well. Some processors in fact were paying a little extra, like 50 cents a kilogramme more for fish that didn't have broken legs or feelers missing or anything like that. Of course once they receive them they should be, if they're trying to keep them for live export, that those fish then have to go.... They go into a tank for four days. They keep them two days at normal temperature and then the next two days they lower the temperature of the tank to about four degrees centigrade. This then puts the lobster in a comatose type of condition, slows down their metabolism and they then pack them and pack them in polyurethane boxes and so forth, give them a whiff of oxygen to help them and a chilling type of thing to keep their temperature down and they're shipped and landed in Japan, say in less than 30 hours.

Now at the end of that time they should be coming out of their comatose condition. They're lively; they love to see them kicking around and so forth.

So the lesson that comes out of this of course is for fishermen to look after their catch. Treat them kindly, take them out the pots carefully so they don't break any legs or feelers and that's the only way really in which the fishermen and processors can get the premium price for the fish. Of course this is what industry wants because the problems that you have with all other charges, you're out to get the best price you can for your catch.

JD Ron before we finish, is there anything else that you would like to have recorded on this tape?

OLLRICH Yes. With regard to the problems that are associated with the fisheries, although we have a limited entry fishery and access to the lobster resource.... because in years gone by as fishermen you had access to the shark fishery and even from 1979 we had in the southern zone here access to the tuna resource. Of course tuna stocks, the bio-masses have caused scientists alarm so there's been restrictions placed there. At one stage for instance there was 30 vessels that used to, in the winter time, operate out of Port MacDonell. They'd go out on a daily catch basis and if the conditions were right, go and try and catch tuna. That access has now been withdrawn and that wasn't without some fight that we had to have. As an association we have made representations to the IAC (the Industries Assistant Commission) both in Canberra and Port Lincoln to put our case that we were part and parcel of the fishery.

For some years we had a five tonne endorsement and were able to catch that but because of changing migration patterns and so forth the fish haven't been as prevalent off here as what they were previously. Because the Continental Shelf was close to Port MacDonnell the fish would come in you know, sometimes only three mile off shore and this is how we had.... only by trolling not by any other method. You just trail the jigs out and the fish'd catch those. So that used to act as a supplement to anybody in the lobster fishing. If they had a poor season well they had a type of avenue there whereby they could gain some income.

Of course also the shark fishery. The shark at one time before the, monofilament net came, was traditionally the fishery which rock lobster fishermen would operate in the winter time. Well of course in those days when the shark numbers were greater, you could set, say five or six hundred hooks and some people operating through the winter time would have a diversified fishery which they could operate. Well of course that avenue has been restricted. The specialists fishermen and net fishermen, they've been restricted and shark numbers have reduced. Still haven't gone through all the consultancy procedures and so forth yet whereby the traditional access by lobster fishermen has been decided in the Commonwealth fishery or Canberra. We don't really know just how many hooks that we'll be able to have. We know that it'll only be those that have traditionally done it in the past [who] will be able to continue but whether it will be in a worthwhile number of hooks, is another matter.

Let me say just to start with though that no hook access to any fishery ever depleted or harmed the resource like nets have. So that if the nets had never been introduced, well of course we'd still have a shark fishery which wouldn't be threatened so much as it is now. So I suppose the bottom line in all of this is that we're being restricted back to just a lobster fishery and lobster only. There is perhaps for some, there's the blue eyed trevally [which] offers a little bit of scope in the winter time but even then that's being threatened by the fact of trawlers now gearing up to operate mid-water trawling. Before trawling on the bottom in the areas where the trevally operate, they couldn't

use their nets but now by operating in the mid-water fishery with the nets, this is apparently where the juvenile trevally congregate. The fear is of course that the nets will wipe out the juveniles which will in turn affect the mature adult stock which dwell on the bottom where they can't trawl.

So there seems to be.... every year there's a continuing problem or threat to the industry in which as an Association, people have got to devote a lot of time or make presentations to government departments or looking after the interests of fishermen all the time. Unfortunately it's more or less in some instances beyond the capacity of a practising fisherman to be able to devote the time. So if you then hold or rather employ professional lobbyists and all that, this of course adds to the cost and so it's a difficult battle all told.

JD Ron what's the Commonwealth Government's involvement in your fishery?

OLLRICH Well as far as the lobster fishery goes, in 1987, approximately June 1987, there was enacted in both the Commonwealth and State Parliaments the Offshore Constitutional Settlement. This gave power to the States or the Commonwealth gave to the States the power to administer some of the fishery. For instance, the rock lobster fishery was acceded to the States and the Commonwealth retained control of the tuna and the shark. Well with regard to the rock lobster fishery, we (the Port MacDonnell Association) instituted action in the High Court which challenged the validity of the Offshore Constitutional Settlement. That is, the power that the Commonwealth have. They didn't have the power to transfer validly that power to the State to administer the rock lobster resource. Our aim of course was that if they didn't have that power, that we as fishermen would have been entitled to, as the holders of a Commonwealth boat licence, to fish the waters beyond three mile from the State without the benefit of a State fishing licence.

Now we instituted that action but the judgement came, oh only about five or six weeks prior to Christmas. The hearing was in February of 1989 and it took some time for that judgement to come through but in essence it's a very complicated thing of about 43 pages. Well it stated that the Justices did agree that the Commonwealth did have the power to confer on the States to administer the rock lobster resource so in effect we lost that action. [we] Did expose one or two weaknesses in the legislation and as I understand it, what will happen now is that both the Commonwealth and State Governments will need to amend the Offshore Constitutional Settlement. Part and parcel of this judgement was that there was an area there which constituted the boundary between Victoria and South Australia. There was another Act which was the 1980 Submerged Seas Act or Submerged Lands and Seas Act. That defined the border differently to what the Commonwealth proclaimed in the Offshore Constitutional Settlement which meant that the sea border sloped towards the sou-west from the coast which then took in more territory from South Australia. Because of this anomaly it meant that the Commonwealth realised this, or the Justices pointed this out in their judgement. So in order to overcome this problem the Commonwealth in consultation with South Australia will have to enact amended legislation to tidy up really the anomaly that the Justices pointed out.

So this is just another aspect of I suppose the problems that fishermen have, although of course we instituted the action but it's becoming more and more.... Because of the controls, bureaucrats I suppose as managers of the resource, they are adopting more restrictive legislation which inhibits what fisherman can do and so that's what happens there that fishermen have more or less got to go more and more for legal representation really to keep their rights. The proprietary rights.... The problem with fisheries licences is that in the past they've been insecure. The bureaucrats have said

that they're only a renewable piece of paper each year and they didn't have any value but of course because they are a limited entry arrangement, they do in fact have value but it's only just of late that fishermen are beginning to realise the proprietary rights of their licences. Because the bureaucrats as managers of the resource are bringing in these more restrictive legislation and rules, fishermen are forced to quite often enact legal procedures to safeguard their rights.

JD That can be a very expensive undertaking?

OLLRICH Well yes it can. Especially when you get, as we did in the High Court. What happened there was that each State intervened, sought leave to intervene because it questioned the validity of the Offshore Constitutional Settlement. It meant that every State had their own solicitor general there accompanied by a barrister and then by junior counsel. So collectively if you added up those costs each State I suppose would be costing somewhere in the vicinity of $5,000 a day. Then of course you had the Commonwealth and then we had our own QC and barrister and junior counsel so I shudder to think really what.... The cost could accumulate into some horrific figure. The Abalone Divers' Association of Tasmania, they were also in the Court the same time as we were and their costs were in excess of $100,000.

JD Ron how do you see the future for your industry?

OLLRICH Well we'd like to think that because of the.... Specifically in the southern zone, we have adopted more stringent conditions and taken steps to safeguard the industry more than anywhere else in Australia. For instance in Western Australia you haven't had a pot reduction scheme or only a very minor one. Fifteen percent was applied and of course we've got the rationalisation scheme. The history of Western Australia is that although you get fluctuating catches, by and large the catches in the last two years have been above the long term average. I suppose the ideal situation would be that if you can maintain a sustainable catch rate which is sort of like just reaping the harvest and maintaining the average, well that's probably as far as what.... That would be the ideal.

You've got problems of course with the increasing technology. Fishermen are in some ways very efficient managers. With all these measures, like with the pot reduction or the fifteen percent reduction in pot numbers, fishermen work harder. They would go days that normally they wouldn't go in order to maintain their income and of course the most recent innovation is the global positioning satellite navigator. You've had, well available for the past five years the satellite navigator. Might even be a bit more than five but you've had those but they haven't got the same accuracy as these GPS ones. Now it means that the fisherman, he might go to an area and he's very successful in that area and if he cares to keep records and so forth, he can go back to that same spot and place himself within yards of that spot year after year or day after day. So turning back the clock a few years, you know, if a fisherman was to leave port and he got 30 mile to sea, he'd be out of sight of land, he'd only have compass bearings by which to position himself and dead reckoning on a chart. Now of course colour echo sounders have come into it. You're able to.... The technology just in echo sounders is such that even out in 80 fathoms of water, that's 480 feet of water, echo sounders are that good now you can even see the pot position on the bottom.

So any rate to sum it all up I would say that it would be the hope that with the measures that have been taken we've reduced boats. The effort is increasing because of technology but providing we can keep pollution under control, in twenty years time

keeping the catch within the regeneration limits of the resource, we would hope that the fishery would be still in a sound position.

JD Thank you very much Ron. Thank you for this interview. It's been good to talk to you.

OLLRICH Alright. My pleasure. Thanks.

That is the end of this interview with Mr Ron Ollrich of Port MacDonnell, South Australia.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW

Verbatim transcript of an interview with A M OLSEN

INTRODUCTION

This interview with Mr A M (Mick) Olsen, ex director of the South Australian Fisheries Department was conducted by Jack Darcey in Mr Olsen's home in Adelaide on 29th January, 1990 for Murdoch University and the Australian Fisheries Research Council.

After a distinguished undergraduate and post-graduate university education and having gained experience in other scientific research endeavours, Mr Olsen joined the CSIRO Division of Fisheries, Cronulla, NSW and was transferred to Tasmania in which post he made contacts with fishermen in South Australia, [Victoria and Tasmania] and gained an understanding of fisheries management in those States. He became Director of Fisheries in South Australia and introduced many of the fisheries management policies and techniques that still persist in that State.

The name "Mick" Olsen is well known and highly respected in South Australia whether among fishermen, researchers or administrators. His contribution to the health of the industry in that State is widely and deservedly widely acclaimed. Now retired and living in Adelaide, he retains his interest in the industry and particularly in the biology of species it harvests.

He is one of the greats of the Australian Fishing Industry and his contribution to both the industry and this account of its history is unreservedly acknowledged.

There are two sides of one tape. The interview starts at 021 on the revolution counter.

TAPE 1 SIDE A

JD Mr Olsen would you please record your full name, date and place of birth?

OLSEN Albert Mervyn Olsen, 27th November, 1917 born in Launceston, Tasmania.

JD Thank you, and would you outline your early background: where you went to school, what qualifications you obtained?

OLSEN My secondary education began at the Launceston Technical College between 1930 and 1933 and later I went to the Hobart Technical College from 1936 to 1937 for completion of matriculation requirements. I graduated from University of Tasmania with BSc in 1940. In 1946 I was admitted to the Degree of a Master of Science of the University of Tasmania. I won two University prizes. One for Second Year Science (Sir Phillip Fysh Prize) and the second was the Florence Sprint Prize for Biology during the course (three years) BSc.

JD Having concluded your university studies, where did you work?

OLSEN When I left the university (I had worked my way through university as an assistant in the Biology Department which assisted me to study for my degree), that was my reason for leaving Launceston and going to Hobart. I left Hobart in 1941 to join the Commonwealth Health Department School of Public Health and tropical Medicine, Sydney, as a medical bacteriologist and biochemist.

After I left secondary school in Launceston I was appointed to the position of Laboratory Assistant at the Launceston Commonwealth Health Department Laboratory where I gained experience in medical bacteriology and biochemistry.

I was relieving bacteriologist in Kalgoorlie, Port Pirie and Rockhampton. From 1942 to 1946 I was a bacteriologist/research officer with the CSIRO Division of Food Preservation and Transport at Homebush. I transferred to CSIRO Division of Fisheries at Cronulla, NSW, in 1946, was appointed to Hobart and remained with that Division for seventeen years. In 1963 I resigned to take up the position of Harvesting Manager and Research Biologist with the Alginates of Australia Pty Ltd at Orford, Tasmania. This company was a seaweed harvesting and processing firm, extracting alginate from brown seaweeds. In 1967 I applied for and was appointed to the position of the permanent Head and Director of the Fisheries and Fauna Conservation Department in Adelaide, South Australia.

In 1972, the position was changed to Director of Fisheries and from 1973 to 1975, I was Director of Fisheries Research and Acting Director of Fisheries. The situation was such that the Government advertised for a director because they were probably finding me a little difficult politically in the administration of fisheries management and with having to deal with the clerical (non-scientific) minds of the Public Service Board staff. From 1975 to 1979, the Department of Fisheries was amalgamated (in a "shotgun marriage") with the Department of Agriculture and it became the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. I was appointed the Chief Fisheries Officer. I retired in 1979.

I also forgot to mention earlier, that after joining CSIRO Fisheries, Cronulla as headquarters, I was only there a few months before I transferred to Hobart which became my headquarters for practically the whole of the time I was in CSIRO Fisheries. I operated in Tasmania, Victoria and South Australia so that I did have quite a considerable amount of exposure to the fishermen in South Australia, so when I came to South Australia, as Director, I was no stranger to most of the fishermen.

JD You had also dealt with many varieties of fisheries hadn't you - many different species?

OLSEN Yes, before going to Tasmania I was appointed to work on the life history and the fishery of the school shark which was fished in all three States: South Australia, Victoria and Tasmania. Very little sharking was done in New South Wales. Later I also did diving studies on the scallops as well as working on rock lobsters and assisting with the other investigations of the Division in Tasmania. I had a supervisory interest in such investigations as the Japanese oysters, the Australian salmon and the hydrology of some of the estuaries and the oceanography sampling of the coastal areas of Tasmania.

JD And in the course of that you did a lot of diving yourself?

OLSEN Oh yes. The diving study on the commercial scallop in the D'Entrecasteaux Channel which I published in 1954 was the first underwater study using full dress

diving gear as a research tool. I understand that this research paper was probably the first wherein diving had been used as a research tool over a continuous period of time (from 1947 to 1954).

JD When you took up your duties with the South Australian Department of Fisheries, it was an era of change and you were heavily involved in organising those changes and in instituting them?

OLSEN When I came to South Australia in October, 1967, the licensing legislation at the time was such that anybody could come into the Department, pay $4 and get a fishing licence which entitled them to fish and sell their catch of fish. Thus only a person who had a full time job, could work during their holidays with whatever equipment they had for catching fish and could then sell their catch in competition with the commercial fishermen who were fishing for a livelihood. The situation was one that you could say was "laissez faire" here in South Australia. As regards any management philosophy for the resources there was only certain legislation on the amount of gear that could be used, the legal minimum lengths of fish and other similar regulatory procedures which have been in the legislation for a long, long time.

I came here because I believed that South Australia was the last refuge of "laissez faire" in fisheries and I was interested in introducing resource management into the fisheries. Prior to my arrival a report had been tabled produced by a Parliamentary Committee on the need for changes in fisheries legislation. They made recommendations that action be taken, but the method of doing it was not very clear. They were uncertain of the implementation of and how it should be done. So I was charged with that responsibility of acting and putting into effect, particularly in the rock lobster fishery, which was in a very parlous condition, all that was necessary to stabilise the fishery.

The Government had asked a number of fishermens' organisations around the State to nominate a member and the organisations forwarded. Six members were nominated to form a committee, called the Crayfish Industry Advisory Committee. I was the sole government representative on that committee as the chairman. We functioned quite independently and reported directly to the Minister responsible for fisheries. I called the meetings and we had our first meeting on the 23rd and 24th November, 1967 to examine all of the recommendations that had been received from the various fishing ports and organisations. We looked at these firstly, from a practical fishermens' point of view and, secondly, from a biological viewpoint. I had been studying rock lobster in Tasmania, both the fishery and also biologically and observing them underwater by diving. I was fairly familiar with certain biological facts which the fishermen were not. So between the fishermens representatives and myself, we were able to produce very practical measures for stabilising the fishery. There was also a need to reduce effort. There were some people in the industry who were using up to 200 pots a day from a vessel which functionally, they could not operate these pots properly because it is impossible to steam out from port, haul all the pots, rebait them, reset them and then get back to port in a day.

Hence we looked at the constraints that were needed to be applied and recommended the best of these [for] incorporation in the crayfishing industry regulations. These recommendations were embodied in the "Control of Crayfishing Industry Regulations." The number of pots which could be used legally was tied to the length of the vessel and to the number of members in the crew. Because of the disparity of the two types of pot fishing, the south-eastern area of South Australia which uses what we called "station fishing" methods, was the Southern Zone and the Northern Zone extended from Kangaroo Island west. The type of fishing used in the Northern Zone was similar

to that used in Tasmania, and is the "lift and shift" method. The vessel will stop at sea for a week or more, holding their crayfish in a well, before returning to port with a full load of crayfish.

We had a need for regulations for the control of two different fishing methods of rock lobster fishing in the State and this requirement was met by using two zones. The southern zone and the northern zone regulations were proclaimed in March, 1968.

JD Inevitably you'd have been involved in a number of controversies in the institutions of these new ideas and methods?

OLSEN One of the measures that I introduced into the legislation was that all crayfishing vessels had to be surveyed before an authority to fish was issued, which apparently passed unnoticed at the time of proclaiming the regulations. This requirement caused a lot of trouble later on. In South Australia they had a peculiar system whereby vessels of 25 feet and over had to be surveyed, but any vessel under 25 feet did not have to be surveyed. So you could have a vessel anywhere like ten nautical miles out to sea, where one was surveyed and the other one was not surveyed, fishing alongside each other. One could be 24 feet 11 inches long, and the other one could be exactly 25 feet. One had to be surveyed and carry certain safety gear, etc. whereas the other vessel did not. This regulation caused a lot of problems in the industry and the owners of the larger vessels demanded that the smaller vessels should come under the same type of survey legislation. I implemented into the regulations that when a commercial fisherman applied for a fishing licence and a permit to sell his catch of crayfish (this was a peculiarity of the recommendations of the Parliament) then his surveyed vessel must be given an authority to catch crayfish. The vessel owner had to have an authority and a permit to catch and sell his crayfish. So you had two types of requirements, i.e. two means of control, which caused difficulties with implementation. These complex requirements caused many of the problems encountered with introducing new management controls, i.e. tying up of the legislation on the surveys of vessels and the requirement that a person could not be issued with a permit for the sale of crayfish unless he held a survey certificate for his vessel. The need for survey certificates caused a lot of trouble for the Marine and Harbours Department which was caught unprepared for the additional workload.

The Marine and Harbours Department was very supportive of what I was doing because they had been trying by other means to get these smaller vessels included in surveys. There was a State election in 1968 which resulted in a change of Government. Because of the pressure applied by some voters during electioneering against the new survey regulations, a moratorium for one year was placed on the survey of all fishing vessels. During the year a committee was formed (I was the chairman of this committee for the survey of fishing vessels) which made several recommendations for the types of equipment that should be carried. There were two members from the Marine and Harbours Department, two members from the fishing industry and myself as Chairman, that recommended changes and additions to the regulations which were subsequently introduced for the survey of fishing vessels.

JD Did that result in a decrease in accidents?

OLSEN I'm not too certain about decrease in accidents, but it certainly eliminated some unsatisfactory vessels because there had been loss of life from such like vessels prior to the survey requirements. There were stories of concrete being poured into the bottom of a vessel to stop it leaking; it was suspected that in bad seas the bottom fell out of the vessel and the crew members were drowned. These were stories that were

told me when I came here, but I had no official understanding of the situation, but I knew that in Tasmania, they had surveys for all fishing vessels.

One of the measures that had been under discussion for a long time in Standing Committee on Fisheries, but could not be implemented (the Commonwealth were trying to get such legislation passed) and that was the requirement to have the number of the vessel painted on the upper section of the wheelhouse so that aerial surveys could identify each vessel. We incorporated that requirement in the State legislation so that any vessel, on the approach of an aircraft, was to make certain that the registered number of the vessel was easily displayed. If the vessel had no wheelhouse the commercial fisherman had to display a canvas on which the numbers were marked; the canvas could be unrolled so the vessel could be identified. This measure was very useful when searching for a missing vessel. I understand it has been implemented in other States now, but South Australia was the first to implement it as a part of their State legislation.

JD Some of the other items that were bones of contention perhaps could have been the commercial fisheries as opposed to recreational fisheries. Were you involved in that sort of controversy?

OLSEN Yes, I was involved in that controversy initially with the rock lobster fishery and other fisheries later. I suggested that the requirements for recreational fishermen should be similar to that in Tasmania because it worked quite well there. Whereas the commercial fishermen were confined to a given number of pots tied to the lengths of the vessel, the recreational fisherman was previously able to fish with any number of pots so long as they registered them. However, in the 1968 regulations the number of pots was reduced to one pot per person but because of the political and public pressures the number per person was raised to three pots per person in the recreational fishery. That restraint was a start towards the allocation of the resource between the two users but the recreational fishermen could not sell the fish they caught. There were many infringements of that particular legislation initially but with public relations promotions and talks the partition of the resource between the two was understood.

JD Would you like to comment on the problem of transferability of licences?

OLSEN Yes. I implemented wherever I could that there was no transferability of licences. The authority that had been given to the fishermen to catch rock lobsters was for the use of a specific vessel and the "permit to sell" endorsed on the licence issued to the crayfisherman. I saw no reason why a vessel with an authority on it should be a means of raising loans and also inflating its value above its replacement value. For those reasons I was strongly against any kind of transferability where there was a "goodwill" price attached to the transfer of the licence.

In the case of the abalone divers, the fishing licence and the "permit to dive" for abalone was issued to a person and no vessel or equipment was included which could be later sold at an inflated value because it had an "authority" attached to it. Throughout the whole of my time in which I administered the abalone fishery (up to 1975) there was no transferability of the abalone permit. Initially the permit cost nothing, the fisherman only paid for his fishing licence. Later there was an increase in the abalone licence fee of $200 which all abalone divers were required to pay to fund a research officer to work on abalone biology. That was the source of our funds for abalone research. This was a case of the user pays.

It was very difficult to get staff for the Department and I had to go outside Government to attract funds for the appointment of a research officer in rock lobster. We got the money originally from the Fishing Industry Research Trust Account, the salary and the equipment was purchased from funds from that source. The appointee commenced research work in 1973 on the rock lobsters. Up to that time, I had been, not only the Director, but also the research person on rock lobsters.

When I came here I found that the only means, the only sources of information on annual catches of different fish species was obtained by writing to all of the fish buyers who purchased fish and asked them would they give us a list of the total weight of fish by species purchased by them. These lists were totalled and the results became the total production for the State for that year.

In 1936, when F W Moorhouse was appointed Chief Inspector of Fisheries, he tried to introduce legislation to collect catch effort statistics but got no support from the Government for the collection. The lack of data and lack of support for its collection was adversely commented upon by several different Royal Commissions. So when I came here, all the details about fisheries that was available was the total amount of fish caught at certain ports and so long as the totals were not recognisable as coming from a particular buyer we were given his totals. Where there was only one buyer in a port that information was not made available in published lists. It was compounded with that from other ports.

In 1968 I introduced the requirement into legislation that each rock lobster fisherman had to supply his monthly catch effort figures at the end of each month. Not only was that required but I also asked that when a crayfisherman made an application for a permit to sell crayfish and an authority for his vessel, in order to justify that they were bona fide rock lobster fishermen, they had to supply me with their catches for the previous three years (1965-7) and how many pots they used in that period of time. When that information was not forthcoming with the application for a permit and authority then the representative of the crayfish industry[1] advisory committee was asked and so were our inspectors, whether this person that had applied for a licence was a justifiable case to be given authority to fish and a permit to sell rock lobsters. Local knowledge was a valuable asset in culling spurious applications.

When the statisticians in Tasmania at the Bureau of Statistics, knew that I was coming to Adelaide, they approached me before I left Hobart about the possibility of introducing some kind of fish catch and effort system. They offered to supply me with the necessary printed forms, print renewals of them and they would extract the data because they wanted the catch and effort data as much as I did. I had a happy relationship with the Bureau of Statistics when I came here to South Australia from Tasmania. I could put into the licence application the requirement of rock lobster fishermen because I had this good back-up of the use of resources of the Bureau of Statistics, Adelaide. South Australia has only really good statistics on rock lobsters from 1966. While on the staff of CSIRO I had been a member of Standing Committee of Fisheries with members from the Bureau and hence they knew my opinion about the need for reliable catch effort data.

JD Has that requirement been extended into other fisheries now?

OLSEN Yes, when we were preparing a new Fisheries Act, which was subsequently proclaimed in 1971 it was a requirement of all persons who held a Class A or Class B commercial fishing licence that they had to supply catch and effort data. When the abalone regulations came out in April, 1968 we required (there was a permit actually) they were required to supply me with all information on their number of days dived,

hours per day dived, and also their catch and where they mostly took their fish. That was an absolute requirement of the permit for which they paid nothing other than their $4.00 fishing licence. With the prawn permit (there was no prawn licence initially, it was a "discovery of the trawling grounds permit" under the 1917-1967 Fisheries Act) every trawl made commercially for prawns, had to be recorded and we had the information on catch, duration and location of haul, supplied on a special form that was provided for the fishermen. We had right from the very inception of the industry, prawn catch and effort data and I think this is the first time that such action had ever been required in Australia. Hence we did have with those three major fisheries; rock lobsters, abalone and prawns a situation whereby we have got very good statistics from 1968 and from other fisheries from 1971.

JD The South Australian Fisheries Department is now quite prominent in research. Would you like to comment on that?

OLSEN Yes. The research situation in South Australia when I arrived in 1967 was not a very good one. I know that the previous directors had great difficulty to recruit research staff. F W Moorhouse was the first director, rather than chief inspector, with a science degree. He held the position of Chief Inspector (there was no director, the title was not changed until 1971) and he was the only one with any scientific training until he retired in 1960. Alan Bogg, who took over from him, was an economist trained in fisheries economics in the Federal field. He transferred from the Commonwealth to the State and then when I came here in 1967, there was only one biologist on the staff. He had been working on the spotted whiting, (the spotted whiting is sometimes called the King George whiting) and had also been tagging the spotted whiting. With my appointment the situation was changed somewhat as I brought with me the expertise that I had gained in the research field on rock lobsters, scallops and school shark. Many South Australian fishermen knew of me in these studies. I was able to apply that expertise and knowledge that I brought with me to the management of the fish resources of this State.

The whiting work stopped when the one research officer transferred to the Commonwealth Fisheries. The new appointee I transferred to abalone studies which we were able to undertake with funds from abalone permit fees.

We were very very understaffed in the research field right up until 1973 when I went outside for funding. It was very difficult to get any research staff positions created even when the 1973 biologist on rock lobsters joined the Department. When the Department of Fisheries was created there were some new positions created which took some time to fill. One of the newly created biologist vacancies I transferred to an economist vacancy. I appointed an economist who was expected to look very much more critically at economics of the fishing industry. Prior to that appointment I had the assistance of the Economic Section in the Premier's Department, which looked at some of the problems in the industry for me until such times as we got our own economist. I was able to attract funds from an outside organisation to undertake some ecological studies of the solar salt fields at Dry Creek near Adelaide. The proposal was to examine the possibility of farming fish in these ponds, but I recommended ICI to change to Japanese oyster culture. The spat was obtained from Tasmania and the initial growing experiment was very successful, so much so, that ICI continued with trials and subsequently built a very modern hatchery near the primary ponds.

The Department recruited an oyster biologist from overseas and it was a very successful period for both organisations with the hatchery built out at the salt fields. It was unfortunate when ICI reduced their involvement in diversified ventures in order to concentrate on the two specific fields namely artificial fibres and agricultural chemicals

because they suffered economically from the droughts of [the] '80s. They closed down the hatchery and offered it for sale but, regretfully, the government didn't buy it and nor did private enterprise go ahead and use it. Tasmania was able to go ahead without competition and develop their own oyster hatcheries. Our oyster biologist resigned to return to Ireland.

When I retired in 1979 there were six research staff plus support staff which I had managed to recruit and so we had a very good research group. Of course I was aware of the lot of the research work which was going on in Western Australia, because South Australia was a member of the Western Fisheries Research Committee. South Australia had been honoured by an invitation from Western Australia to join their committee. Alan Bogg had been on it from about 1960-61 and when I came here I was invited to attend the annual meetings by Mr B Bowen the Western Australian Director of Fisheries. Hence I was aware of a lot of the research studies that was going on in Western Australia and I am certain I benefited from that contact.

[1]Rock Lobsters and crayfish are used interchangeably. **Jasus novachollandial** is a marine lobster. The transfer from crayfish to rock lobsters name was introduced for sales reasons.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

TAPE 1 SIDE B

JD Can we look at the resources available to your Department when you arrived and how that changed during your time in the Department?

OLSEN Yes, when I first arrived here in October 1967, we had a research vessel, but no regular crew. The research vessel was a former Tasmanian fishing vessel that the Government had bought and had been using, but it was always crewed by a number of fisheries inspectors. It was tied up and hadn't been used for some months because the moment the vessel put to sea, it required all metropolitan fisheries inspectors for crew. I asked the Government for permission to sell it and purchase a faster, smaller craft as replacement.

In Tasmania I had been using aircraft for survey work, high fixed wing aircraft. I was able to persuade the Minister to come on a flight with me because he was disbelieving up to that time of the value of aircraft for fisheries surveillance patrols and surveys. The Minister came with me and saw for himself the problems of locating pots used in the rock lobster fishery. After the flight he said he would support me in the use of the aircraft because he could understand how we could determine where pots were set and you could count the number of pots being used from the aircraft. You could see also where the vessels were operating. We showed him how you could tell which way the current was flowing, because you could see the lines stretching down to the pots. He was quite impressed with [the] ease distances were covered.

Aerial surveillance became a rather cheap method for us because I was able to use one of the clerical staff who was very keen to pilot us and gain in flying time himself. This clerk had passed his flying tests and was able to take passengers. He hired the aircraft and the Department reimbursed the cost. So these were the kind of "devious" means whereby you were able to make your funds go much further than otherwise. Fishing vessels are relatively slow and fishermen are never looking at the sky very much except for weather changes and his vessel's engine drowned out other noises and so they never knew when you were approaching by aircraft. I used to let it be

known that we would be patrolling the coast before the open season for rock lobsters and other such events of this nature. This aircraft surveillance was one of the new measures I introduced in 1968.

I managed to get the proceeds of the sale of the research vessel and with these funds I purchased a nineteen foot "Haines Hurler" patrol vessel which was trailerable and [with] the money from the sale of the vessel converted a large 4WD vehicle for towing of the trailerable nineteen foot vessel. Our patrolling became far more mobile and by using the vessel in combination with the aircraft we became a more potent inspection force. We obeyed all marine survey regulations about how far we could go out to sea and the like. We often surprised fishermen at sea when we turned up alongside of them in the nineteen foot planing hull vessel.

I had very competent people as the two-man crew. The skipper in charge of the patrol vessel was a Grade II inspector and an ex-fisherman. He knew weather and acted accordingly. The other departmental facilities were very poor generally, because one we had only a couple of small "tinnies" (aluminium dinghies with outboard engines) that were only about twelve feet long, trailerable and were for use by the local inspectors in inshore waters. The motor vehicles were old and run down but I managed to upgrade these old vehicles by exchanging them for surplus 4WD vehicles from other departments declared surplus to their needs and were sold by auction. There was very little transfer of money between Departments.

I also engaged in an exercise with the Government Garage whereby we would test run for them, smaller four cylinder vehicles for inspection work in city areas or in urban areas and thus keep our six cylinder vehicles for country inspectorates. Later I changed over to 4WD (four wheel drives) vehicles because our inspectors were expected to go into sand dune country and God knows what other conditions in ordinary standard back wheel drive vehicles. So the transport facilities were very poor in 1967-9.

We had no laboratory. The Department of Fisheries and Fauna Conservation was nearly all of my time in office with virtually no laboratory accommodation. When we established a laboratory out on the salt fields that was our first laboratory and was specially designed for the oyster work. It was a converted hut made suitable as a laboratory in combination with ICI. We did have a small shed for "yabby" study and some plastic swimming pools alongside the River Murray on the property of the person who was interested in the possibility of yabbie culture. The plastic swimming pools served as outdoor experimental pools.

It is only in the latter years, since about 1976-77, that there has been political recognition of the economic importance to the State of the rock lobster, prawn, abalone and southern blue-fin fisheries. Fishermen have told me that where once their bank managers always used to bypass and not even recognise them that with the advent of the resource management, i.e. limitation on effort and the restraint on the gear, etc., that the bank managers "used to go out of their way to trip up the fishermen" for they were ready to provide finance to fishermen in those industries which had been brought under resource management. These cynical comments were commonplace among fishermen in the first two to three years of my applications of resource management.

JD Policing the regulations would be a major part of the Fisheries Department's responsibilities and that is done in the field by the fisheries officers. Would you comment on the type of person that you recruit and his training, if any?

OLSEN When I came here there were some fisheries inspectors who previously had been fishermen themselves and had been recruited into the Department. There were also others who had either transferred from other government departments or been recruited as inspectors. By and large these men had to be a dedicated group. From 1964 to 1971-72, it was the Department of Fisheries and Fauna Conservation so the inspectors had mixed responsibilities with fisheries and wildlife enforcement. While they may be out on wildlife work they also travelled from port to port and in that travelling time they could also be doing inspection work for fisheries or vice versa. It was a very valuable and interactive type of work because a man may set out to do some fisheries work but he would then see something on the wildlife side and transfer his attention to it and vice versa.

As mentioned above we were also using aircraft for special patrolling duties. We had officers stationed in various ports around the coast but equipped with only small trailerable boats. I was always trying to upgrade these with the four wheel drive vehicles. I had read somewhere about the old saying, "You set a thief to catch a thief," and it was the older inspectors, who had been ex-fishermen whom I found to be very good in apprehending wrong doers. These experienced inspectors knew much about methods and gear used in the different fisheries and would anticipate the actions of wrong doers so I used to try and work older and younger inspectors together. I believed that we had to train our law enforcement staff and so I used to call the inspectors into Head Office each year for indoctrination and also to acquaint them with any new or proposed changes in legislation. They were encouraged to become more effective in their inspectorates and to assist and be involved with research work. I found that when the inspectors were involved with the research work, collecting data and doing public relations work, they became more interested and were much more effective in their inspectorates.

We had the situation where we wanted length frequencies of rock lobster catches at various ports so inspectors would go into a port and with a special device for measuring the carapace length of rock lobsters would measure rock lobsters from a bag selected at random. Nobody knew when he [was] coming and what bags he was going to measure. This practice reduced the number of undersized fish offered for sale and was fully supported by responsible fishermen.

The practice did have a beneficial effect on the fishery. I also had other aims whereby the involvement of the inspectors was not solely for law enforcement duties because I encouraged them to act as extension officers. They went to meetings and explained such matters as reasons for legislative changes and by having such public meetings with both fishermen and the public better lines of communication were established with the Department. We built up a better rapport with the fishermen and public generally. We believed education was better than prosecution.

I also gave talks to fishermen and public so in 1975 when Professor P Copes came from Canada, he made the comment in his Green Paper (which was produced) that he was quite surprised at the standard of knowledge of fisheries management and resource management amongst the fishermen in South Australia.

JD And have you found that the fishermen's response to the fisheries officers had become more positive?

OLSEN Yes. I believe that the fishermen (and public too) did become more positive because in the first place, a law enforcement officer is generally not regarded with much respect by many people, some of whom will transgress from time to time if given the opportunity. But with the educational thrust and the fishermen being made

aware of the reasons why certain legislation was being implemented, the fishermen were positive in their responses. The fact that industry committees were being promoted and developed and my talking to them, they became even more responsive. I attended by invitation the regular meetings of the South Australian Fishing Industry Council and I always tried to be present. I never attended unless I had received an invitation and I found that the Council meetings were a very good means of communication with the fishing industry. I recommended to the various fisheries representatives attending the Industry Council that they form their own specific fishery associations, e.g. rock lobster, prawn, abalone, scale fish and tuna, somewhat like an industry union as I preferred to talk to their Committee rather than several individual fishermen. When you meet a deputation of committee members representing many ports you expect they would have the suggestions put forward from the various ports which may be very specific to particular ports and would have sorted these out and supported those of benefit to the specific fishery. When they would come to me as a deputation, I always had present a senior inspector and the appropriate research officer (if there was a research officer in that field). I believe that we had very good relations with the industry.

JD Mr Olsen, I understand that it was a government policy in South Australia to have owner-operators? Does that still apply and if not, why the change?

OLSEN The owner-operator policy was brought about during the initial stages of the introduction of the management of the rock lobster fishery. It was known that there was a severe sociological problem, particularly in the south east of South Australia where those who were dependant on fishing in the summer months, either worked in the pine plantations or in other country work (farm work) during the winter months when work was available had to be considered seriously and not deprived of a summer livelihood.

In order to accommodate this sociological problem we had to try to maintain the greatest number of economic fishing units that the fishery could sustain. We wanted to avoid putting out fishing units (and I talk about a unit as a man and his vessel) from the industry; we wanted to accommodate as many people in the industry as was possible. We had to contend also with the situation forced on us by legislation and the recommendations contained in the Parliamentary 1967 Report that the vessel had to be given an **authority** to fish for crayfish and the owner had to be given a **permit** to sell what was caught. It was a rather difficult assignment but was overcome by maintaining that the unit had to be an owner-operator units. With an owner-operator fisherman, we would give the owner of the vessel the authority to work his vessel for catching crayfish and he could also be given a permit to sell the fish. There were complications where there was a company that owned the vessel. Of course they employed a skipper and this often caused legal difficulties but by making the licence to sell crayfish not transferable and introducing rigidity into the situation whereby the skipper (master) just could not walk off and leave a vessel unattended or out of surveys because no person could go to sea unless he had endorsed on his licence for a particular vessel an authority to catch fish and himself to sell the fish. The company vessels presented some difficulties but they were overcome. We tried to restrict that type of arrangement as much as possible, particularly in the rock lobster fishery which was virtually a small boat fishery.

When we came to the prawn fishery, it was basically a small boat industry, although the vessels generally were larger than those in the rock lobster fishery. About 1966, there had been an increase in the size of ships being built for tuna fishing and a number of fairly large vessels had been registered. Fishermen had committed themselves for very up-to-date vessels complete with brine tanks and other modern

gear, such as the live bait tanks for holding small fish used for "chumming" tuna. As soon as tuna are caught they should be bled and put in the chilled brine to keep them as fresh as possible. The 1967 southern blue-fin tuna season was a fiasco and many vessel owners were facing bankruptcy. It is readily understood their willingness to undertake prawn trawling to get themselves out of financial difficulties (1968).

The vessels were the most suitable to be used for prawn trawling. About 1968-9, the Commonwealth had established a policy for prawn trawling in the northern Australian waters, in the Northern Territory particularly, and encouraged it also in Queensland waters. In order to encourage the establishment of freezing units for the processing of prawns, the Commonwealth offered each establishment a number of licences to operate prawn fishing vessels. The policy was satisfactory where there were no established freezing units and/or storage facilities. Here in South Australia, we had operational freezing facilities established at ports from the Victorian border to Thevanard, in the west and these facilities were quite capable of handling all the prawn catches that could be caught and landed. We already had in operation an owner-operator policy and gave permits exclusively to owner-operated vessels which had freezer or brine tanks aboard. We tended not to exclude any company-owner. We ran into difficulties with some processors who wanted to corner the market but these were eventually ironed out because we had an owner-operators policy. That meant that the present South Australian freezing facilities had to be maintained to export standards of the Department of Primary Industry. We also saw that there was an advantage to the consumer as the fisherman was encouraged to sell his fish in best condition to the highest buyer. So you got an improvement in quality right throughout South Australia because it did not matter where you went, there were adequate freezing facilities for the prawn catch.

I was diametrically opposed to the Commonwealth Fisheries concept which had been applied in the Northern Territory. I was constantly under pressure by having this Northern Territory and Queensland situation put forward to me as a reason why the freezers and freezing facilities companies should have licences to operate vessels in the prawn fishery of South Australia. We had an owner-operator policy, and that was the one that was being implemented. It started from the need to have as many South Australian economic units in the industry as possible. Our resources were adequate without introducing vessels from outside the State.

JD Does it still exist? That policy?

OLSEN To a large extent yes, except that where you have larger vessels operating now - and this happened at about the time I was retiring - the companies were being registered by fishermen for taxation or purchasing benefits, but these had to nominate their skipper and it was always desirable that the skipper was a member of the company. Yes, it was a changing situation and I'm not certain now (1990) how that applies because you've got to accommodate your legislation often to changes that are taking place in industry, and you can't negate a lot of those developments, otherwise you do not get technological improvements.

JD Just before we finish, can I ask you what was the philosophical underpinning of your administration of this important resource management philosophy?

OLSEN It goes back to the time when there was quite a controversy raging in the northern hemisphere, particularly in Canada and the United States, about the value of legislation to control the halibut fishery on the Pacific coast. There was a Canadian economist by the name of Scott Gordon - who in 1954 put forward the philosophy of resource management - economic resource management. I read about this new

philosophy a year later and because I was somewhat concerned about the course being taken in legislation to control the exploitation of a fisheries resource, I believed this new approach to answer a lot of my doubts about the then course being followed. You have got a fishery under biological control methods where vessels were being built and be used for short periods of time, i.e. they were only being allowed to fish for a certain season and it could be only for three months in a year. Capital investment in big ships was tied up for nine months of the year and not able to fish. It was a most undesirable situation for any fishery.

When Scott Gordon came out with his paper in 1954, I wrote to him for a reprint. His paper explained a lot of what we were aiming for in fisheries studies: that we were dealing with a public property resource. This is where he first expounded this "common property" nature of the fisheries resource, and as it was a public resource it had to be managed adequately. It had to have an economic base too. We needed not only biological knowledge, but needed the costs of the procuring and land the fish. We had to consider the economic implications, and I was quite interested in these studies over a number of years, and when I resigned from CSIRO in 1963, I was still quite interested. I saw also the work that I was doing for the factory in a new dimension. We had a harvesting side that used to harvest seaweed; we harvested about twenty tons at a time, and then it was put through a chemical process to extract the alginate. All costings done had an economic basis, and because we had to keep our costs down and I saw the similarity between that operation and fishing.

When the vacant position of Director of Fisheries and Fauna Conservation South Australia, was advertised, I knew South Australia was, as I said earlier, the last refuge of "laissez faire" in fisheries management. I believed that I, and I knew nothing at the time about the Parliamentary committee enquiry into the fishing industry, but I did know from the times I used to travel backwards and forwards from Tasmania on rock lobster and shark studies and talking to the fishermen, what the situation was here. I was familiar with fisheries administration and policy in Tasmania and Victoria and I believed that there was something that I could do in South Australia by applying some aspects of the resource management to fisheries. I saw here was an opportunity to do something because I was aware of developments in Western Australia where they had started to implement licence limitation, and had been able to do this fairly successfully. Here was South Australia at the bottom of the list of the States without any kind of real control of fishing being done for the property management of the common property resource in the sea. I felt that I could try and redress that situation. That was one of the fundamental reasons why I applied for the position and was lucky enough to be appointed. I applied my theories and knowledge through all the various fisheries. There was a common property resource to be managed for the benefit of the community, and I looked at it as a challenge. Some years had to pass before I could get good economic inputs into certain fisheries. One needs a firm economic background for the costings of the industry and that was one of the reasons why I transferred a position for a biologist to that for an economist With an economist I could have that necessary economic input. For the first time I had "a tame economist" on the staff rather than having to go out and solicit information from other departments or other organisations within the government that wasn't always aware of a lot of the situations and practices peculiar to fisheries.

I came here originally with the intention of implementing resource management and up until the time of the economist joining the staff, I was doing all of the implementing by rule of thumb and my very limited economic knowledge. Because I believed in what I was doing, I could take to the fishermen about resource management. They understood too, and that's where I think we've got such a good understanding among fishermen in South Australia; that whatever you do you have to operate as an

economic unit. Your costings of all operations, even aerial surveys, have to be effective and cost efficient.

That is the background to my belief in resource management. Throughout the world there is this change-over from biological control to a bio-socia-economic control of fisheries. Industry is aware of the need to have good data bases for the decisions that are made by management and to provide facts to refute the unsupported opinions that are expressed from members of the public from time to time. As managers we have conducted surveys amongst the recreational fishermen, because recreational fishermen are only a part of a body that is using the common property resource. A fishery is not an exclusive resource of commercial fishermen. It is a public resource or common property and therefore, we must look after all who are users of the resource. We try to balance the total catch against the input from the recruitment. The amount or quantity taken by one user varies from place to place: both the commercial fishermen and the recreational fishermen and in some places the recreational fishermen - particularly in a big urban area like Adelaide close to the coast - the commercial fisherman is at a disadvantage in terms of the desires and needs of the recreational fisherman.

So you've got to legislate to look after both the commercial fisherman and the recreational fisherman, and make certain that both are able to have access to that resource; one for recreational purposes and the other one for a livelihood and for food purposes.

JD Mr Olsen, there's no doubt that you've made a great contribution to the fishing industry in South Australia and to this Oral History project. Thank you on both counts.

OLSEN Thank you.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW

Verbatim transcript of an interview with GRAHAM RUMBELOW

INTRODUCTION

Graham Rumbelow has lived all his life on Encounter Bay in South Australia where his forebears, for some for generations, also lived and fished in these waters. Perhaps it was natural that Graham, qualified carpenter as he was, should turn to building fishing boats and eventually to the occupation of fisherman.

As recorded on the tape, he tried many different forms of fishing and though he does not mention it, retired only when he suffered very serious health problems. In this account he mentions the efforts of radio operator Dulcie Smith of Kangaroo Island on behalf of the fishermen, a mention that is well merited. What he does not mention however is the lives of members of the Rumbelow family that the sea has claimed nor the reputation his people had of always being the first to respond to a call for help from a fellow fisherman. Graham Rumbelow typifies the fishermen of a by gone era: self-effacing, simple, tough, wise in the ways of the sea and always ready to lend a hand when needed. Hopefully the breed still persists.

The interview was conducted in Mr Rumbelow's home in Victor Harbour by Jack Darcey for Murdoch University on the 1st February, 1990. There is one side of one tape. The interview starts at 022 on the revolution counter.

TAPE 1 SIDE A

JD Graham would you record your full name and date and place of birth please?

RUMBELOW It's Graham Toleman Rumbelow and I was born on the 10th June 1927 at Ethelton down the Port (Adelaide).

JD In Adelaide?

RUMBELOW Yeah.

JD Right. And you've lived in South Australia all your life?

RUMBELOW I've lived in Encounter Bay all me life. I came home when I [was] three weeks old so I've been here all me life, yeah.

JD Your family's a very, very old established family in South Australia, isn't it?

RUMBELOW Yes. They've been here for well over 100 years; 140 years I think, something like that. So they've been here a long, long while. I think they've been fishermen all their life. You know, ever since they've been here.

JD And always in Encounter Bay or from Encounter Bay?

RUMBELOW From Encounter Bay, yes.

JD You're probably fifth generation or something?

RUMBELOW I think so. Yeah, I think I'm the fifth, yeah. Not [unclear] many though. I know that but we've had a good life and I think fishing's been very good to us really.

JD Did you have uncles and cousins also in fishing?

RUMBELOW I had grandfathers, fathers, uncles and cousins. All of them [have] been fishermen, yeah. They've been in all sorts of fishing.

JD But you didn't start off as a fisherman, did you?

RUMBELOW No I started off as a carpenter but ever since I could walk I've been in the boat with dad 'cause he was a professional fisherman. I've been in the boat with him ever since I could walk I think; just about. He was more or less an all round fisherman. He fished up the Coorong. He fished here for crayfish and mullet and snapper. [of] Course the sharks weren't any good when dad was a fisherman. He couldn't sell them so they didn't catch them much. Towards his latter part of life he caught a few shark and sold them. Up until then, no; he was only a cray fisherman mainly here.

JD How did it come about then that you, a carpenter, would go into fishing?

RUMBELOW I think it [laughs].... When I was a kid, he [unclear] me that I wanted to go fishing because he reckoned there was nothing in it but as the years went on, you know, he was still fishing and making a good living so I went fishing. I didn't go fishing until after dad. Didn't go fishing full time until after my father died but then I built a boat and then we went fishing in her.

JD You built it yourself?

RUMBELOW Yeah. A mate, Lin Shannon, and I built it between us. He'd come back and he wanted a mate to go fishing so we built the **Gralin** then and went fishing. She worked out very good really.

JD What size boat was it?

RUMBELOW She was 41 feet. She was supposed to be a 40 footer but when she finished she was 41 [laughs]. So somewhere along the line we made a bit of a blue but, oh no, she was very good.

JD And what sort of power did you have?

RUMBELOW We had a four cylinder Fordson diesel in it. It worked very well.

JD And what sort of fishing did you do from....

RUMBELOW We started off, the first year we were here, we done a bit of Cray fishing and caught some snapper. We paid for the first twelve months we had her in snapper [which] paid for the material. [of] Course we had no labour costs as we did it all ourselves but we paid for it with snapper alone. You wouldn't do it now I'm afraid. You'd be lucky if you caught enough to pay for the nails now let along anything else.

JD Yes. What style of construction was it?

RUMBELOW Planks; like we got all the planks. We imported the planking from Western Australia and she was jarrah. Everything in her was jarrah and [the] ribs of course were karri. The keel was one long length. We had to cut seven feet off it, it was that long but we had enough for the stem. Oh she was, you know, quite good.

JD Is that boat still going?

RUMBELOW Yeah. She's over at Lincoln. [as a] Matter of fact I was only over there, oh about twelve months ago I suppose and she's still working good. She's still working out of Lincoln now, yeah.

JD So how old would it be now?

RUMBELOW Oh we built her in '62 so she'd be....

JD Nearly 30 years old?

RUMBELOW Yeah. Yeah she'd be 30 years old I reckon. Well very close to 30 anyway.

JD Yeah. That's not a bad record is it?

RUMBELOW No. The old fellow, old Mr Hicks, drew us a plan for her and he drew it on a sheet of graph paper. When he drew it he said, "Now you want such and such" and he told us how much we'd want. He said, "You'll most probably be a bit more fussy than I'd be". He said, "You'll want a bit extra" so we got what he told us. It worked out exactly right so he was a clever old fellow.

JD Yeah. Was he a boat designer?

RUMBELOW Well, no. He was just a fisherman I think but he'd drawn a lot of boats. He was always building boats.

JD And where did you actually build this [unclear]?

RUMBELOW Built it in me back yard down Victor [Harbour] here, or in Encounter Bay, right alongside the hospital in me back yard where I lived there. We didn't have room to get her out so we had to borrow or get the next door neighbour to cut his fence so we could get the low loader in to get her out. We took her to Adelaide and they lifted her in off the wharf at Port Adelaide. Oh she worked real good. I was very pleased with her. She's done a good job really.

JD Have you built any other boats?

RUMBELOW Oh plenty of them yeah but I started off.... I built flatties like just for dad and them for mullet fishing for a start. When I started they were all planks. When we finished of course we went and they were all bondwood. The last one we built was all bondwood. There were still two or three of them up at Meningie. Oh only twelve months ago I seen one of them up there they were still using anyway. She'd be, oh well over 30 years old now.

JD Have you tried any steel boats?

RUMBELOW [as a] Matter of fact I've just put one in the water on the 13th December this year, or last year but she's only a river boat, a pleasure boat. She's 40 feet long with [a] 15 foot beam and I've gone back and put another Fordson motor in her but we're using it with hydraulics. So I'm quite happy. She's working alright, yeah.

JD When you started off in the **Gralin**, you went shark and Cray fishing, was it?

RUMBELOW Yeah. We started off Cray fishing actually. Then we started long lining.

JD For shark?

RUMBELOW For shark, yeah. We'd just started long lining and the sharks weren't too flash at the time and we were going down to the Murray mouth one day to have a look to see if we could get some crays down there. We'd been fishing all along the cliffs here and the crays had sort of steadied off a bit and it was in about March. We were off to the mouth to see if they were still crawling down there. As we were going we saw another fellow fishing outside of Seal Rock and so we steamed out towards him to see if he had any bait because we were a bit short of bait. When we got there, there was a porpoise floating on the top of the water and Lin looked over the side and he said, "Hell, look at the snapper". You could see the snapper swimming around under this porpoise so we immediately stopped and caught thirteen or fourteen boxes of snapper and we paid for her. That's what I was telling [you]; we paid for her in the first year with the snapper.

JD Is there still plenty of snapper around?

RUMBELOW No; very scarce now. Too many boats; more boats than snapper now. Where we used to go to the outer ground, you could always catch 30 or 40 or perhaps 100. You get a good day you get 100. You're lucky if you get one now. I went out there, oh about three years ago and I had pots. There were 27 amateur boats fishing for snapper. So there's no hope, you can't.... You couldn't hardly get your pots up there was that many damn boats you couldn't get your pots up.

JD Yeah. You feel the recreational fishermen are making a big impact on the fisheries?

RUMBELOW Oh yes. In shore here, yes. There's so many of them now. When I was a kid there was only about two amateurs here that had boats but now there's about 200 and everybody that comes down here, they've got a caravan or a boat on the back of their car. So the fish just can't stand it, I don't think anyway.

JD You used to fish around the Kangaroo Island area too, did you?

RUMBELOW Yes. Well we started off here. For the first six months we fished just locally here from the Murray mouth to the Newland Head and they went off so we went to Kangaroo Island then. We started off, we didn't know anything about the Island but

we soon learned. You got echo sounders and what have you and we soon learned the few spots and went on from there.

JD What about the shark fishery? That's gone down a bit too in recent years I understand?

RUMBELOW Oh yes. She's gone down here. When we started we were only hooking of course. We had 1200 hooks and we used to reckon we should get about 50 each day. Some days.... We got over 200 one day on the 1200 hooks. Well then you might get down and you'd get a few. When the nets come in we were one of the first ones to start with nets I think. We were fishing down at the Island and Neil Haselgrove and another fellow went to Victoria. They'd come back and they'd seen where they had these nets you see. Anyway they told us about them. We didn't know anything about them of course. Neil said, "Well I'm gonna buy a hydraulic motor. If you want one I'll get you one." So he bought the two and we had one and he had one; our old Raymond, no pressure thing (or limit). They were whopping big heavy things. We put them on and oh crikey we went like bombs once we put the nets on. You couldn't miss. You'd get a hundred every day.

JD They've gone off now?

RUMBELOW They've gone off now, yeah. I worked right through on the **Greylin** for, oh a number of years anyway. Then my son wanted to go fishing too and there wasn't enough room for three of us on the **Greylin** so I sold my share to Lin and bought the **Taperoo**. Donald went with me on the **Taperoo** then. Oh, hell, we caught a lot of fish. We had extra pots and I put more nets on her. I suppose I was one of them that ruined it a bit but we only had four nets and you could catch all you wanted in four nets but we used to come home every.... We'd leave here the Sunday or Monday morning and come home Friday night so that I'd give the kids a weekend home. I don't reckon we [should] have [kept] the kids away when they're young 'cause they gotta have a bit of life.

JD Did you have your family on board with you?

RUMBELOW I had Donald, me eldest son. He was on board. He was a crewman, yeah. Then I had another young cousin work for me, young Johnny. He worked [for me] for a long while. He's in Melbourne now, in the Customs [Department] over there.

JD Did you ever try other types of fishing, tuna for instance?

RUMBELOW Never done any tuna but they stopped us catching the sharks at one stage. They reckoned it was too much mercury in it. There was four of us here [who] went down and had a shot at the Fisheries Department to try and get a prawn licence. Well they give us a licence. When we got it, it was only experimental [which] we found out when we started catching them. We didn't catch any for a start. Then when we went to Kangaroo Island there was a fellow over there and he'd been a trawl fisherman and he said, "You haven't got your gear right". I said, "Well, do you know how to fix it up"? "Yes" he said, "I'll show you if you give me the little fish you catch". There was a lot of little fish like little trevally we used to catch. He said, "I want them. I make sausages out of them". I said, "That'll be alright. We'll give you all those if you set our gear up". We were only getting a few kilos a night and the first night we went out we caught 30 kilos. He said, "Oh that's a bit better". It was a lot better than what we were doing any way. He said, "I'll fix it up a lot better". So we went out and we

caught 200 kilos the next night. We had about a week there and we got over 1000 kilos [which] we had anyway, about a tonne. We brought them home.

When I got here there was a fishing inspector on the jetty. He said, "What are you gonna do with them"? I said, "Well what [do] you reckon a fisherman does with them? Sell them of course". He said, "You read the small print on the bottom of your thing [licence]. You'll find you're not allowed to sell them or barter them". He said, "You can give them away or eat them". I said "You'd be joking, wouldn't you"? "No" he said, "I'm not. You go and get your thing [licence] and have a look". Of course we came home and got it and sure enough, on the bottom in very small print, that's what it was. It was only an experimental permit so we had to give it up. Couldn't afford the blooming.... We'd wasted all our money, to go and set the thing up, then we weren't allowed to sell them. That's one of the things I had an argument with the Fisheries Department about.

JD What other experiences did you have with the Department and its management policies? I take it [it's] been some time ago?

RUMBELOW Yeah. This is a long while ago. There was two sizes of crayfish (this is the biggest thing we had trouble with), one for the local Victor[?] area. They were only eight inches. They were a bit small, admittedly I'll go along with that but then the others were ten inches at Kangaroo Island you see and down the south east. They were just from the Murray mouth to Newland Head [where] we could catch these little fellows. I think.... I don't know whether its because they'd been fished here for so long or what it is but you'd catch hundreds of these little fellows in that size - from eight inches to ten inches. That was one of the.... I reckon it was a stupid bloody rule anyway but that was 'cause it suited the blokes that were fishing here. It didn't do any good for anywhere else. Oh well. I suppose it's how it goes.

JD It's been resolves has it?

RUMBELOW It's been resolved now. It's all the one size right through now, yeah. It didn't matter what. I was on a Crayfish Advisory Council and it didn't matter what. If I went down and come home, the local blokes reckoned I wasn't sticking up for them and the other blokes reckoned I wasn't sticking up for them so I was on a no win situation.

JD Graham, could you talk a little bit about the marketing of the crayfish?

RUMBELOW Yeah well when dad was a fisherman, like when I was a kid, we used to send them to Dawes in Adelaide but we used to have to patch them up and then put them in like kerosene boxes and send them through to town. Oh we used to get quite a few dead ones. Then when we started here fishing properly, there was a fellow here, Arthur Rosser, used to buy them. He'd come down.... or we'd take them up and put them on his scales and he'd pay us for them, you know, on the spot so that was good. Then, any rate, he got crook and give it away and Raptis by this time had started. They used to come down and pick up our sharks and crays at the boat so that was very good. They used to take them through and weigh them and you'd get your money straight away so you couldn't ask for better.

Then Raptis give it away. When he went up to Queensland, he give it away a bit and we had to sell them to another fellow in Adelaide but he used to still come down and pick them up here. I think there's still fellows [who] come down and pick them up now. Oh no, we've been very lucky with the marketing arrangements.

JD The tail would be exported?

RUMBELOW Yeah the tail but they used to take them away whole. Raptis used to take our sharks and our crays on the same truck. When you come in from the Kangaroo Island we'd wireless into Dulc at the Island and she'd ring them. When we got in here, he'd be waiting for them so you couldn't have got anything better than that.

JD That's Dulcie Smith?

RUMBELOW Dulcie Smith yeah.

JD On the radio [unclear]?

RUMBELOW On the radio, yeah. She used to work for Raptis I think or she used to work in with them anyway.

JD I think they supplied the equipment and really employed her.

RUMBELOW Yeah, but oh she was a marvellous person. I don't care if you went the world over, you couldn't get a person as good as Mrs Smith. Everybody was a.... You'd swear you were either a relative or a son or a daughter or something, you know. She was marvellous.

JD Yeah. Fine person.

RUMBELOW Fine person, yeah.

JD Is there a live crayfish export market from these parts?

RUMBELOW No, not live I don't think. Not live I don't think. Not from just here. No they used to tail them. All ours were tailed and sent off, just the tail.

JD To the USA?

RUMBELOW Yeah. Mainly to the US, yeah.

JD Could we have a look then at the fishermen's organisations and their role in the management of the industry nowdays?

RUMBELOW Yeah well I've never had a great deal to do with them. I was the President of the Southern Fishermen's Association here for a few years but that's for the lakes and Coorong too, you see. Oh they put in quite a bit of effort and they get a bit of.... Before the Department actually changes any laws they'll come and have a bit of a yarn to this Association. Course I hadn't been in it for three or four years now so I can't tell you what's going on but up until I give fishing away I was an active member up there. Oh I think it helped quite a bit. Course as I say, I don't know what's going on now.

JD There is an opportunity for fishermen [unclear]

RUMBELOW Oh yeah, yes. The Department were quite good really 'cause they'd send a fellow down and have a bit of, you know, a talk here with them and go and show them. We had an old inspector here once, an old Mr Thompson. He come down and

when he come here he'd been a welfare officer and he didn't know a thing about fishing. He went and seen Burt Ludrum at Goolwa. Burt told him to come down and see us, we might take him out. Any rate we took him out and he was very interested and done a very good job as far as I was concerned 'cause he'd give you a go. He'd sort of put you on trust and you wouldn't break the law 'cause you reckoned he was a decent old bloke and you didn't want him to catch you cause he'd pinch you if he caught you, I was quite sure. No he was good.

JD Graham, things have changed a great deal from the early times to now and it must be very difficult for a young man starting off to break into the fishing industry? Is that true?

RUMBELOW Well I don't know how they can break into it now unless they've had a very wealthy family behind them or something because.... Oh look, when I was a kid you could get a boat and build it, or somehow you'd acquire a boat [and] you could go fishing. You've gotta have all these licences and that now. You gotta buy your pots. You've gotta buy a licence for your pots and your boats are worth a quarter of a million each so how in the devil can a young bloke.... I don't think there's any hope for the young fellow getting started. I honestly don't.

JD That must be changing the industry?

RUMBELOW Oh crikey yes. Yeah look the more you thing of it just the more you'd wonder how in the devil they can get started now 'cause if you want to buy a shark licence, its cost you so much. Cray licences are just about out of the question. I sold my first lot of pots for $1000 a pot and the last 30 pots I got $4000 a pot. They tell me now they're about $7000 or $8000 a pot so how in the devil can a young bloke get started? No hope, I don't think anyway.

JD So it looks as though they'll be companies that run the fishing?

RUMBELOW Yeah and that'll be worse than.... Once you get a big company running it, they're gonna really knock the.... 'Cause they're not gonna be interested in looking after the fish. All they want to do is get as much for the return of their money as they can. Once companies get into it I think it's the finish of it. [I] Honestly do.

JD So you're not too sort of confident about the future of the fishing industry?

RUMBELOW No, no. I wouldn't like to put too much of my money in it now anyway. It was good to me when I was in it but I reckon I was in it at the best time. No, I wouldn't like to put all these hundreds of thousands you've got to put in it now. You'd have to be a millionaire just about to start off anyway.

JD Yes. Before we finish, is there anything else that you'd like to have recorded on this tape Graham? Is there a problem with pollution?

RUMBELOW Not just here I don't think but in other parts of the world yes. It'd definitely a problem. I think they've got a problem up the Gulf where all this sewerage comes out. I think that's a problem anyway. I know it is but not here. I don't think we've got any real problem. There is a bit down here where they've got sewerage running into the river here, the Inman River. Now that is [where] all the weeds dying out where that's running in but they reckon it's nothing but I'm sure it's the sewerage that's causing it. No I think there's a bit of a problem with it.

JD Yeah. At sea do you get much litter?

RUMBELOW Down the Murray mouth. We never used to get much at Kangaroo Island but down the Murray mouth you'd sometimes get, oh strips two or three mile long and a hundred yards, two hundred yards wide just about solid plastic bags and what have you. We were always getting stuff hooked up in our pumps. You had to be careful down there. I don't think it's quite as bad now as it was. That's going back six or seven years now. Oh it was terrible there then, yes.

JD You're out of the industry now of course?

RUMBELOW Yes I'm retired. Yeah I'm one of the lucky ones I think.

JD If you had your time again would you go fishing?

RUMBELOW If I was in it, yes I'd still go fishing. I love it but I don't think I'd like to buy into it now. I wouldn't; well I couldn't afford to now anyway. Oh no. I'm happy now. I've got a little farm here [which] keeps me out of mischief.

JD Good. Well thank you very much for this interview. It's been nice to talk to you.

RUMBELOW Thank you very much.

That is the end of this interview with Mr Graham Rumbelow, fisherman of Victor Harbour, South Australia.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

END OF INTERVIEW

Verbatim transcript of an interview with BARRY SCHULTZ

INTRODUCTION

This is an interview with Mr Barry Robert Schultz of Port Lincoln, pharmacist, businessman and long serving president of fishermen's associations in South Australia.

The interview focuses on the tuna fishing at the main Australian port for which is Port Lincoln. Mr Schultz discusses the management of the industry and methods used in catching, transporting and marketing of the product. He also discusses the role of overseas interests in the industry, the training and employment of personnel and some of the problems facing the industry as well as its prospects for the future.

His is a knowledgeable and articulate contribution to this history of the Australian fishing industry.

The interview is recorded at his home on the 19th January, 1990 by Jack Darcey for Murdoch University and the Australian Fisheries Research Council. There is one tape of two sides and the interview starts at 019 on the revolution counter.

TAPE 1 SIDE A

SCHULTZ I have resided in Port Lincoln for the last 27 years.

JD Was your family involved in the fishing industry at all?

SCHULTZ No. My father was involved in the motor industry in South Australia, particularly in Adelaide, but my wife's father is a fisherman and so is my brother-in-law so I do have a link that area.

JD Yes. It's a little unusual isn't it for a pharmacist such as yourself to be the president of a fishing association in such an important port as Port Lincoln? How did that come about?

SCHULTZ It is of course a question that's commonly asked of me, that very suggestion, "Why should a pharmacist be involved in the fishing industry"? The reason is because I am involved in a company in fishing. I am a director of a company and I spent a considerable amount of time talking fishing with a next-door neighbour who is a very principal figure in the industry in this particular State and particularly in Port Lincoln; a gentleman by the name of Sam Sarin who was one of the founding fathers, if you like, of our Port Lincoln tuna industry. As a result of those discussions I became involved as a director of a company and at one stage, eight years ago, the members of our Association decided that they needed somebody who could talk on their behalf in

Canberra and they felt that that qualification was something that I had. It was felt also that even though I had no fishing experience, that I could make a contribution to the Association by virtue of handling those matters associated with Government. As a result I was elected at that time and have continued through being the President of the South Australian Association and then from that was involved in the setting up and becoming the inaugural President of the Australian Tuna Boat Owners' Association.

During the last three years, I have been involved on the National Fishing Industry Council and I'm currently the Chairman of the National Industry's Association on that Council. Yes, a pharmacist has somehow become quite embroiled in the national sphere as well as fishing in Port Lincoln and this State.

JD Yes indeed, in your case very much so.

SCHULTZ Yes.

JD To come back to Port Lincoln, its obviously a major fishing centre in South Australia. Would it be THE major centre or would Port Adelaide or some other port be of comparable size and importance?

SCHULTZ No, I believe there's no doubt that Port Lincoln is certainly the major fishing centre for South Australia. In fact I would suggest it's one of the major fishing ports in Australia. When we look at the value still of the tuna industry to the country and to this State, we find that 91% of the quota - that is the Individual Transferable Quota (which permits the taking of southern blue fin tuna) - 91% of that is owned and operated out of Port Lincoln. As a result, for tuna Port Lincoln is very important.

We also from here operate line fishing for scale fish. We have a very valuable prawn industry in the Gulf. We have a small but significant crayfishing industry, abalone industry and shark fishery; all of them operating out of this Port.

JD Could we have a closer look at the tuna fishery. Could you fill us in on the history of it in the earlier days. When did it start in this area?

SCHULTZ The industry started with the Haldane brothers and I'm not sure of the date but certainly it's in the mid-50s, possibly 1954 when it was being looked at and the development began. The original vessel was built outside of this State and brought here by Heldanes and it was a boat called the **Tacoma**. It used information and detail that was gained from America and that then became the beginning of the industry here.

JD About how long ago was it?

SCHULTZ I would need to check the date for you Jack, but I think it was in the early 1950s. Would you like me to check that date now for clarification?

JD Perhaps later on when we finish.

SCHULTZ Certainly.

JD Could you outline the start, development and current situation of the tuna fishery at Port Lincoln?

SCHULTZ Certainly. You remember a few moments ago we talked about the date and I've recalled now that really it was in 1956 that the fishing first began. As I mentioned, it was with the Haldane brothers and then another vessel called the **Fairtuna**. The fishery was looked at with surveys involving the help of State Government and others and ultimately we developed through the years until in the late '70s and the beginning of say 1980, we reached the highest catch with the involvement of vessels in Western Australia and South Australia being some 22,000 tonnes.

We developed at that stage to catching the fish by the pole and line method which is using a pole with a barbless hook on which the bait of small fish is used. Sometimes a lure is used. That was in the early days and the poling was done over the rear of the vessel. The fish were encouraged at that stage to a biting frenzy by the casting out of small live fish into a tuna school. The fish were drawn close to the boat; the boat very quietly continued to move and drew the fish after it and the men then poled the fish on board. As we developed it was obvious that more efficiencies were needed and using knowledge, then purse seineing came into effect.

May I describe the purse seine method. The manner in which it was done in South Australia was to find a patch with a small vessels (a pole vessel), encourage the fish to bite; perhaps pole the fish and then cast a net around the pole boat and the fish. The net is then pursed and the pole boat would draft out over the floats and leave the fish in the middle; the vessel then drew in the purse seine net and then the fish were drawn out. That was a more efficient method and raised the level of catches until, as I say, in 1981 was the highest catch ever of some 22,000 tonnes.

[it] Was indicated then by Government and others that there was a severe pressure on the stock. Not only were we catching high catches, relatively, of the smaller fish and I say smaller because at this stage we were catching fish that are under the spawning age of roughly seven years; but the Japanese were still catching large numbers by the long line method both inside and outside of Australian waters. So we developed then to the highest point, when the restrictions were applied. The first restrictions suggested the curtailing in some ways of purse seineing. That occurred then in 1982 and then in 1984 was the introduction of Individual Transferable Quotas.

These quotas which were set were based on past catch history, value and size of vessel. Using a formula the Government calculated how much each fisherman should be allowed to catch. It was pitched at a level which was roughly, approximately half of that which was needed for a fisherman to remain viable. Now there are two things there. By cutting back to that level, the scientists indicated to the fishing industry that this would allow the stocks to increase and develop and so it was a biological value to handle it in that way. At the same time by setting it at such a level, those fishermen who considered that it was nog longer viable for them to continue, then sold out their quota for money to those who decided that they needed to remain in. So it has been said that some people could get out of the industry with dignity and some money; and os it was a self-financing reconstruction which cost the Government nothing. It made the fishermen who remained more heavily involved with a reasonably large debt which they felt that they could wear and carry into the future.

So now we've developed into a regulated fishery and hopefully the fishermen could plan a financial return, based on their outlay for quota and the quota that they currently owned. As things developed it became evident that with the pressure on the fish, that the scientists were not right and that further cuts were necessary. In fact in 1988 we sustained the biggest cut which was back from 14,500 by 56% and we

sustained a further 16% cut this year in 1989 to bring the quota back to its current level of just over 5,000 tonnes from 14,500 which was originally set in 1984.

JD These quotas that are set, they're by international agreement aren't they?

SCHULTZ Well the total global quota you set by international agreement, and then as a consequence of that, so is the quota for each country. So yes, exactly.... the quota is set for each country through that trilateral discussion between Australia, New Zealand and Japan each year.

JD Barry, in terms of numbers of boats involved in the tuna fishery here, from its peak what would the peak have been and how many boats fishing now?

SCHULTZ We've come down from in excess of 100 vessels if you take into account the boats in Western Australia as well as those in South Australia and now we would be in the 20s total. It's a little hard to give you an exact picture except perhaps if I give you a broad indication; because in Western Australia many of the fishermen over there who held and have used quota, in earlier years used it as a part time fishery and they do other things. So the exact number of boats relatively is not some definitive figure; but if it gives you an idea that it's come down to perhaps 20% of what it was.

JD But the quota system has resulted in a sort of a flight really from the industry by many people?

SCHULTZ Well rather than a flight, it's probably better to say that a number of people have rearranged their catching so that the quota has gone to those people who wish to continue and make it more full-time. The larger purpose built boats in Port Lincoln had no other use and really had to continue, so they were forced to reinvest in quota and carry on. As the quota continued to shrink, so they needed more quota to remain viable. The pressure is now on for people to perhaps flee, if that's a word that can be used, but prior to that I would say it was quietly reorganised with the purchase of quota by one group and the selling by another and then those people then going out of the industry.

JD Other than the South Australian part of the quota and the small Western Australian component, is there any other State involved?

SCHULTZ Yes. New South Wales still has some quota. Principally that's leased back to South Australia and it's caught here.

JD It must be enormously expensive to set up these very large tuna fishing boats? Are they owner/skipper operated or are they a company boat or how is it arranged within the industry?

SCHULTZ Formerly in the earlier days, they were mainly owner/operated and it was an industry whereby the strongest and the hardiest worked out for the longest period in the harshest weather and brought home the most fish with the fishermen using all of his skill and knowledge as a fisherman. That skill was measured in the number of tonnes that were caught. Now that has changed. Not it is necessary to be able to catch in very efficiently with the lowest possible cost and gaining the highest return. The highest return that we can gain is for good quality fish placed in the sashimi market in Japan.

Because of that concept it was necessary for aggregation of boats, so in many cases individuals came together and formed companies and now you could suggest that they're only four major companies involved in tuna in South Australia. They then are able to share the costs of, flying planes to look after the boats, marketing experience, marketing costs, to get the greatest return. All of that's absolutely essential to reduce the losses.

JD Are they spotter planes that fly? Do they spot the schools of fish from the air?

SCHULTZ Yes they do. Spotter planes are operated by the companies and they have skilled spotters who are able to determine by looking at a patch in the water, the size of the fish and also the size of the school in tonnes.

JD When the fish are caught, there's two avenues I take it. One's the sashimi market and the other is a canning process. How are they dealt with? Are they brought to Port Lincoln for processing or what happens to them?

SCHULTZ Well now the whole process is such: The spotter planes would go out in good weather and they will find the fish. Because the greatest return is on the larger fish, they will spot and direct the vessels to the larger fish. Obviously for biological reasons, that's also the best method. A lesser number of units of fish per tonne means more fish left in the water if we catch larger fish. So as a result, the spotter planes go out and find them, then the vessels will go out and they will attempt to purse seine the fish. By using the purse seine method there is less damage to the fish and as a result, hopefully again they achieve a higher price.

The processing is done principally on the water. The fish will have a net put around them and in some cases they will even be floated across to the processing without even coming on board the catching vessel. Lifted out of one net into another, the fish may be floated to a Japanese processing vessel with which we may well have a link. They will then take the fish on board, gill and gut them, and immediately freeze them to a temperature of about -50 degrees centigrade. That is the temperature that's needed to be kept to be able to maintain the most optimum quality for the Japanese market.

JD Is that for both sashimi and canning?

SCHULTZ No, no. Obviously there's a high cost involved in this sort of handling that we're talking about and the movement from the water to the boat in the least possible time maintains the higher quality. For canning the quality requirements are nowhere near as high and at this stage it would only be damaged fish principally, or those fish that for whatever reason couldn't be put through the freezing processes on board, that are brought to share. The difference in return to the owner is so high that absolutely every effort is made to put the fish into the sashimi market.

It doesn't mean that there's a lower quality per se of fish. It might mean that fish caught today, when a processing vessel had broken down, would not be able to be processed for 24 hours. The fishermen would not put them on board the processing boat. As a result they must come back for canning. They will immediately be chilled or be in a frozen condition and will be brought back for processing through the cannery.

JD Those fish that are destined for the Japanese market, as sashimi from the Japanese processing boats, now do they get to Japan then?

SCHULTZ What happens: The vessel will catch the fish and then process them. We do have some of our own processing vessels but principally we would arrange for a carrier boat to come from Japan and she may come a month or two after the fishing has developed and go to each of the freezer boats that are operating with the fleet and take off the frozen fish and carry it back to Japan for the market.

JD And for the canning that is done here in Australia, is that done in Port Lincoln?

SCHULTZ Yes. We have a cannery at Port lincoln Tuna Processors here in Port Lincoln. There is another Heinz operated cannery in Victoria and there is another cannery in Western Australia operated by West Ocean - Kailis and France.

JD Right. Barry, our vessels fish mainly in the Bight I understand, whereas the Japanese are elsewhere. Is that correct?

SCHULTZ Yes. Most of the fish caught by the fleet out of Port Lincoln is caught in the Great Australian Bight between here and Western Australia. There are various spots: The head of the Bight where on average there are smaller fish, then on the Continental Shelf where we'd principally expect larger fish.

The fishing season really goes from December to about March and that's with the fishermen fishing slowly, picking the patches, picking the right fish of the right size. It's a slower process but that's the principal catching time now between those months. We do have operating from here, or based from here, two purpose built or Japanese built actually, tuna long liners and they operate far and wide around the Australian waters and they would operate in similar waters to the Japanese but our main fleet operates in the Bight as you suggest.

JD And the Japanese further to the south?

SCHULTZ Yes. They operate around Tasmania and then they operate along the east coast as well.

JD Oh, do they?

SCHULTZ Yes.

JD Our market then for sashimi is almost exclusively to Japan. Is that correct?

SCHULTZ Yes, that's correct. There's a very, very small amount being developed now in Australia. Some restaurants are choosing to present sashimi on their menu but it's very small. It's of no real significance. There is some sashimi also consumed in America but again its a very small market and the Americans desire a lower quality fish. They're not prepared to pay the top quality price. So again it is not a market that's very strong. Hence I would suggest 99% of our market for sashimi is in Japan.

JD Are we actively pursuing other markets or are we content with the Japanese?

SCHULTZ Well at this stage I think we could say that we are strongly pursuing the maintenance of the Japanese market. We still see that whilst we continue to improve our quality, we can improve our price, so we haven't yet reached the peak within that market. Even though we're maintaining the market, we can do better and get a better price so there's lots of effort being placed in that area. We are constantly looking at other markets but as yet none have come up with anything like the return that we're

able to achieve in Japan. Also because there is a lower amount of blue fin being placed on the Japanese market, the desire by the Japanese for their product is increasing and the value is increasing so as a result we still have a long way to go.

JD Is there a market for other forms of tuna other than the blue fin?

SCHULTZ Yes there is. Yellow fin tuna is sold in that market, albacore and big eye tuna and all are significant in the Japanese market.

JD But they're not used for sashimi?

SCHULTZ Yes they are. They are used as sashimi but again the most favoured fish is southern blue fin tuna as a sashimi product.

JD Are prices for canning holding up?

SCHULTZ Yes. They are holding up. Now most of the canning fish is what they call "stripeys". It's a smaller species of tuna and skipjack tuna is its normal name. Some is caught in our waters in Southern Australia but it's a sort of an abnormality to have them down here, because they breed and grow principally in the Pacific, in the warm waters. The movement of currents brings the skipjack into southern waters but since they don't propagate down here, we rely on these currents to bring them.

JD Is there a smoking of tuna industry here?

SCHULTZ There isn't in Port Lincoln. There has been, I understand, three different companies looking at it and working with it in Western Australia. I think the number is reduced back to one or two now but their product is very good, certainly well received. It is being used on our interstate Airlines and is a very, very good product.

JD It seems strange that it hasn't become more widespread?

SCHULTZ Well here, we have an initiative committee set up in Port Lincoln for developing particular businesses or helping or encouraging them in our current economic times and this was another area being considered and I certainly hope that that development is successful. Smoking tends to focus on slightly smaller tuna than those which are the optimum for sashimi and there's certainly a feeling amongst the fishermen not to catch smaller tuna, but certainly it's an industry that I hope we can develop.

JD Could we turn too look at the management of the fishery. I understand its fundamentally a Commonwealth managed industry but with input from the States in government and also from the industry itself. Could you talk about that?

SCHULTZ Certainly. It is a Commonwealth fishery and under the Offshore Constitutional Settlement it is under the Federal Government's control. Much of the work in surveillance and onshore management is conducted by the States. The State Governments will then contract with the Federal Government to do the particular work and this is the link between the two. Because of the income generated by tuna, the State Governments show a particular interest in it. When the State Ministers gather together in the Fisheries Council, chaired by Mr Kerin who is the Federal Fisheries Minister, they then discuss matters which include tuna.

The Southern Blue Fin Tuna Management Committee enables industry input into management and that particular committee meets with industry, Government reps. including State and Federal. We also have scientists attend and any other interested people can come along as observers. That committee has been responsible for looking at and making the day-to-day management decisions.

JD Would you say the industry is well managed?

SCHULTZ Yes. I think that over the last eight years when I've been involved as President, I think that the members of the industry have taken a very responsible attitude. We've changed from the situation whereby we ran it on a day-to-day situation ourselves to where we employ an executive officer who helps us by maintaining contact with the Government and members of our own industry and whose responsibility it is to keep an eye on matters, that would affect us to ensure that our industry side of tuna is properly run. So I would suggest that there has been a very responsible attitude and developed over the last few years.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

TAPE 1 SIDE B

JD In the fishing industry in Australia there seems to be a considerable inflow of capital from overseas. Is that a worry to the industry?

SCHULTZ No this has not occurred in the tuna industry. When you say a worry, there was concern, since the Japanese were controlling the sashimi market, that they may wish to buy quota. There was an investigation by our own Association to ensure that Japanese interests did not actually purchase quota. That is, buy Australian quota to catch Australian fish in Australian waters to take to their market. AT the Tuna Management Committee there have been discussions and representations that we should ensure that it is not possible for this to happen.

There are certainly legislative difficulties as one might imagine in constructing an act which prevents an overseas interest purchasing quota. If overseas interests were to buy an Australian company, and that Australian entity were to enter into the market, legislation would be needed. It hasn't been done and should it be seriously looked at, there would be, I'm confident, legislation or some action passed to prevent it from happening. So, no, it's one of those shadows that's been in the background. It hasn't occurred.

There has been support from Japan for fishermen to help them to produce the best fish to go onto the Japanese market. We have had Japanese technicians come out and work on our boats to ensure that the quality of gilling and gutting has been of a high standard to enable us to achieve a better price.

JD Could we have a look at the crewing and the people involved other than the owner/operators. What about their training? Is it adequate? Is there a need for enhanced training facilities?

SCHULTZ I think it would be foolish for anybody to say that in any area the training is adequate and that is in any profession or any industry. However we do have an excellent college in Tasmania where our young fishermen now have the opportunity to go and gain their certification, which they do and then come back and work on the

vessels. The level of certification required is constantly being looked at. There is a Training Committee which operated Federally and whose responsibility it is to report on the level of training. So I would suggest that within a reasonable realm, yes the training facilities are quite good and that the training requirements are quite reasonable and in some cases may be considered excellent.

JD Is there a career structure - a recognised career structure for young people coming into the industry?

SCHULTZ Fishing is still an industry whereby fathers encourage their sons to become involved. Perhaps its THAT sort of industry and as a result you'll quite often see the same names occurring generation after generation. We have had different ethnic groups involved within the fishing industry and again because of their love of the sea and their association with it, both in their former country and here, they have tended to develop a way of life rather than just a career. Hence there is less of a career structure as such within the tuna than perhaps in some other industries. It may be because of the quota system restricting our ability to catch. The severe restrictions, particularly economic, that are placed on the industry may well discourage people from taking it on as a career.

JD The labour force is fairly stable then?

SCHULTZ Well the labour force is usually young men that are prepared to accept the hardships of working on board a vessel for a very adequate return for their services. They work as share fishermen and a share of the profits of the catch is their remuneration. So it really means that they need to work hard. They pay expenses that are involved and then they gain a share of the final result.

Today, because of the lesser number of boats owners are able to employ those who have had previous experience. In the earlier days, quite often because boats were looking for crew, they would tend to look for any unemployed person who was prepared to accept hardships rather than those who had a skill. Now many of the fellows have definite skills that they've developed from experience over years of work on the boats.

JD Are there many women involved?

SCHULTZ Not many. There are some. There aren't many that work actually on the deck in reality because it's a very heavy work, particularly if a boat were poling tuna. Then it is very, very HARD work and you need muscle. When you're coming to handling of a huge and heavy net it is the same situation. It's MUSCLE which is the pre-requisite.

However we do have ladies on board tuna boats working as cooks.

JD Is it an attractive industry to Aborigines?

SCHULTZ It doesn't appear to be. We don't have a large number of Aborigines employed. In fact I'm not sure that we would have too many Aborigines at all that have ever become involved in the industry. It may be that the Aborigines do not prefer working on the Sea. Now that is only a personal comment.

JD Can we turn then to looking at some of the problems facing the industry. I have in mind things like depletion of stock, pollution, costs and prices and so on. Do any of those sorts of things stand out in your mind as very prominent?

SCHULTZ I don't know of any industry in Australia at the moment who wouldn't want to comment on the problems associated with the headings that you've given me. Yes of course. All of those things can be a problem.

Pollution may in the future be a problem but it's not recognised as a major problem at this time, perhaps because most of these fish are taken off shore and land generated pollutants have a lesser effect. The concern is more particularly with the early stages of the food chain and the effect of pollutants on the small fish such as pilchards. In some of the areas off the east coast and certainly in Queensland where there's the cutting down of the mangrove swamps that provide parts of the food chain, there is concern.

Depletion of stock, well yes. Anybody who's been associated with tuna knows that we have great concerns in this area at the moment; but we feel very confident that the action that's been taken certainly is bearing some fruit. In the last two years we've had reported by fishermen, increasing numbers of small fish moving through the fish route. We've reduced the catches so we're letting more fish go and as they aggregate we're seeing obviously a multiplication factor of more and more. As those fish move closer to the spawning age of say, seven years and they reproduce, we will have an improved fishery.

It is essential that we cut down on the catches of spawning fish. These are the fish caught by the Japanese long line fleet. If you analyse the situation, you can understand that there has not been shown a need to restrict the Australian catch. The catches have in fact been restricted, but only as a lever by the Australian Government to encourage Japan to catch less. Quite reasonably that means that we are being used as a pawn in the pressure game to encourage Japan to do this. It gives our fishermen a lot of concern. They are bearing huge hardships and it may not be unreasonable in the future for the Government to look at the opportunity of using other commodities to create the same pressure. It has been done, we understand, in the past in other areas and perhaps we need to encourage the Government to continue to look at this area.

So, yes the fishermen are concerned about stock levels. They've acted VERY responsibly. They've had voluntary restrictions on themselves not to catch small fish of less than two years to encourage them to catch larger fish of four to five years which then obviously reduces the numbers of fish taken per tonne. This is distinct from the adult fish of older than seven years which must be preserved.

So overall I think that the future for the tuna fishery is rosey. We need to look perhaps three and four years down the track to compensate for putting up large sums of money in times of high interest rates and suffered the catch restrictions to encourage stock recovery.

JD Before we finish, is there any other comment or thoughts that you'd like to have recorded on this tape?

SCHULTZ When we're looking at how the tuna fishery has developed over the years, I think one has to compliment those fishermen who have shown the courage and foresight to develop the tuna fishery. They have created a fishery which has in the

past been of economic importance to Australia and with their perseverance will again be an important contribution to the economy of our country.

So I think that the active fishermen should be congratulated. I believe I can comment as I am not an active fisherman but have been able to view these activities from a fairly close perspective.

JD Thank you for that and thank you for this interview.

SCHULTZ It's a pleasure. Thank's very much Jack.

That is the end of this interview with Mr Barry Schultz of Port Lincoln. The interview was conducted at Port Lincoln in South Australia on the 19th January, 1990.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW

Verbatim transcript of an interview with BEN SIMMS

INTRODUCTION

Ben Simms, a fourth generation fisherman in South Australia, is a member of a very well known family in the fishing industry in Spencer Gulf. He has been a fisherman all his working life and has fished South Australian waters for many types of fish including tuna and prawns. His father, though over eighty years of age, still fishes with him.

Ben Simms built a large multipurpose vessel shortly before restrictions were applied in many of the South Australian fisheries. These restrictions have confined him to the scale fishery which appears to be in a state of decline with reduced catches and dwindling numbers of genuine code fishermen. He expresses his concern in his writings. He has contributed to the industry through his work in establishing the Professional Prawn Fishermen's Association an organisation of which he was the secretary.

The background noise on the tape is due to the high winds on the day of the interview. The interview was conducted by Jack Darcey on the 24th January, 1990 at Moonta, South Australia for Murdoch University's oral history of the Australian fishing industry. There are two sides of one tape.

The interview starts at 022 on the revolution counter.

TAPE 1 SIDE A

JD Could you record your full name and date and place of birth please.

SIMMS Yeah. Benjamin Simms, named after my grandfather of course. I was born in 1931. I live at 36 Trelawny Street, Simms Cove, Moonta.

JD Were you born in Simms Cove?

SIMMS Born at Moonta.

JD Moonta?

SIMMS Yeah.

JD And your family, I understand, was the first if not the first, then very early days in the Spencer Gulf fishery? That's true?

SIMMS Yeah.

JD Can you outline the family background?

SIMMS Well my great grandfather came out from England in a brigantine called **Johseff Virgo**. He was flying around the local areas in small craft carting general cargo, mostly schooners and large ketches.

JD Out of Moonta?

SIMMS No. Out of Port Adelaide and Melbourne for a start. Then he heard of the Moonta copper mines up here, that just started up at Moonta here, first at Wallaroo and so he came to Wallaroo. First of all he got married and came to Wallaroo and ventured down here to Moonta and settled at a place that they ended up calling Simms Cove (after him). He started fishing because our family were fishermen in the North Sea. That was his interest. So he started fishing. I couldn't tell you the date; a long way back. (In the early 1860s).

When they first started fishing he had seven sons I think and five daughters. When he first started fishing they were hawking them out around the Moonta mines, the fish, by horse and cart. They were mostly Cornish people out around the mines and if they caught garfish or whiting or snapper, they'd end up bringing most of that home because they'd only buy tommy ruffs and mullet which is rubbish fish as far as we're concerned. Those fish resemble their native herring, see. So that's the sort of fish that they bought. They'd come home and bury the whiting and snapper and garfish and other fish, you know. They'd sell all they could catch of the tommy ruffs and mullet. That's about the beginning of the family.

Then they branched out into different areas like they bought cutters. They had cutters built to suit themselves, with large live fish wells built in.

JD They were sailing vessels?

SIMMS Oh yes; no motors. My Uncle Rick Simms, he went to Port Lincoln and fished out of Lincoln, salmon fishing and all sorts of fish but mostly salmon because that was a cheap fish and they could get rid of them. They'd sell them over the wharves you see at Port Pirie and Port Adelaide.

JD Was that netting off the beach or.... ?

SIMMS Yeah. Netting off the beach. They could sell some snapper but mostly salmon, you know. People went for the salmon.

JD The bigger fish?

SIMMS Oh I don't know about the bigger fish but they seemed to know more how to handle them you know; cook then and eat them. That's the class of fish they went for so they could catch big quantities quick because they had no refrigeration and they'd fill the well with live ones, as much as the well would hold. They'd have five tonne on **Minnie Simms**. She held about five tonne, two and a half tonne in each side of the well because that was a fair bit of fish that was swimming alive. Then they'd top up with deck fish and if they got into port they got in with them still in good order [and] they had good sailing weather. If they got into port with the deck fish OK they could sell them but you know, if not, they had to shovel them over the side before they got

to port, but they still had the live well fish to sell because [there was] no ice or anything those times; no engines. They just had to rely on wind.

JD And that was your father's....

SIMMS That was my grandfather (and his brothers) but my great grandfather, he started it, that was originally, and then the boys come along, like his seven sons. They were all fishermen. They all got cutters each and I'm just relating to one of the highlighted ones, like Rick Simms that worked around Port Lincoln mostly. The others stayed more up in the Spencer Gulf but they still had to take their fish to Port Adelaide or Port Pirie to sell over the wharves mostly. The sales around the local mining area was limited.

JD Yes. So you're a fourth generation fisherman in these waters then?

SIMMS Yeah.

JD Have you any sons or nephews in the....

SIMMS No [laughs]. I've got two daughters and I've got one grandson and one granddaughter.

JD Too young for fishing?

SIMMS My grandson's thirteen I think now so it won't be long.

JD Interested in fishing?

SIMMS He's interested alright but strange enough he gets seasick but oh that'll pass I hope. My grandfather, he always got seasick the first day out and after that he was OK. He must take after him.

JD Ben, what about your own entry into fishing?

SIMMS Well I just started fishing the same as my father did, grandfather, you know. You sort of carry on from.... You see it all happening and you go fishing with them and it gets into you.

JD So you left school and went straight to fishing with your dad?

SIMMS Yeah. I left school.... Well I was expelled from school and I went fishing straight away because I didn't want to stay at school. Fishing was my caper so that's what I wanted to do most. So through a little mishap with the school I got expelled and I went straight fishing from then. That was at thirteen.

JD With your father?

SIMMS Yeah.

JD What year about then would that have been?

SIMMS I'm 58 now so I was thirteen then. You work it out.

JD Laughter. Well '31 [was the year you were born in] so that would have been about '44.

SIMMS Then I was with my father for, oh two or three years and then my brother came along on the sea and he was younger. He started with my father so I branched out on my own.

JD What sort of fishing were you involved with? Scale fish was it?

SIMMS Yeah. All scale fish, yeah; net fishing and hook fishing.

JD In this part of the Gulf?

SIMMS Yeah. Well we just about fished most of the Gulf but Moonta and North Cowell were [the] main places; from Cowell up to Whyalla. I had a small boat built from McFarlane in Port Adelaide [by] Tack McFarlane. He first started building boats over in Port Lincoln. My father, he had his boat built by Jack McFarlane in Port Lincoln first. So did a lot of our family; [they] had boats built by Jack at Port Lincoln. Mine was the last big boat. When I say big boat, she was 28 feet, that he built in Port Adelaide. Well there was three I think. Mine was the last large one that he built in Port Adelaide.

JD Wooden boat?

SIMMS Yeah. She was called **Rum Runner**. Oh yeah, I fished with her for about eight years I reckon. I had the **Rum Runner** built in 1948. Then she got too small because fish were plentiful so I got a bigger one built by R.T. Searles & Son in Port Adelaide.

JD Just before we go on with the fishing, that McFarlane that you mentioned, I notice on a building in Franklin Harbour, Cowell, the name McFarlane and I think there's a McFarlane business still there.

SIMMS No relation.

JD No relation?

SIMMS That was Johnny McFarlane. He had the store in Cowell for years and years. He had the general store but no relation but we bought all our tucker and gear from there when we was in Cowell. Yeah, nice fellow; still going.

JD Did you ever branch out into any other form of fishing - prawning or tuna?

SIMMS Oh yeah. The boat that succeeded the **Rum Runner**, the **Mary Anne**, I went tuna fishing; scale fishing mostly. Then I went tuna fishing. I was tuna fishing for about six years in the early stages and then I went prawn fishing. I was one of the first to start prawn fishing. For a time I was able to do the lot but then they restricted us into different categories and when prawn fishing, you wasn't allowed to do anything else. The trouble is, I had me boat set up to be a multipurpose fishing vessel you know. All the money and time and knowledge that I gained over the years was all lost to me because they took the fishing away from us.

So I chose to go back scale fishing because in the prawning I got an allergy from some bloody seaweed that we hauled up in the deep water. It was like a purple algae type weed; slimy weed that got at me. I was losing my eyesight through it and the doctors told me to get out of it so I did. So I'm back scale fishing; just solely scale fishing. I

sold me prawn licence. In the meantime they took me scale fishing license away from me because of this restricted fishery business. So I had to get my father's licence transferred to me 'cause he was still capable of fishing himself but we decided [that we would] go together again. So he's still with me; 86 and still fishing with me.

JD Is he really?

SIMMS Yeah.

JD Hail and hearty?

SIMMS Oh yeah, yeah. He was here a while ago scaling fish. He goes every trip, yeah. He [can] still catch fish like he used to. Gets a bit tired you know but he has a sleep coming home after the fish are down below in the freezer. Still has a stubby of beer and things like that.

JD How long do you go out for? Is it a daytime thing or....?

SIMMS In the summertime we do day trips, you know. We go snapper fishing all the time. We leave early in the morning and we're back at 3.00 or 4.00 o'clock in the afternoon but in the winter time from March onwards we go away [and] stay away for seven or eight days until we [have] got enough fish to come home with. It is gradually taking longer and longer. One time we'd go away one day and we'd have one shot with a net and a load of fish but now there's that many fishermen restricted into the one area that the grounds like that is all kept dead. So we have to stay away now seven or eight days to get enough fish to make [it] worth while.

JD Do you line fish at all now?

SIMMS Yeah. That's what we're doing now; line fishing.

JD But sometimes you net?

SIMMS I net in winter time.

JD What's your chief catch, Ben?

SIMMS Well I should say now snapper is me chief catch but that's dwindling too because of the amount of boats that's starting to get in the picture. Everyone's after those big reds, see licensed or not.

JD Do you land them here at Moonta?

SIMMS Yeah. I land them here in Moonta during the summer time. In the winter time I work out from Port Broughton and we're able to lay alongside there.

JD Are they processed in any way here?

SIMMS No. There is a place down at Moonta Bay that can't handle many fish at processing but [the] bulk of our fish go to Adelaide.

JD On a freezer truck, I presume?

SIMMS I got me own freezer truck so if I haven't got enough to warrant one of me own trucks I send them down via another fellow that goes every night.

JD And are they auctioned down there or do you....?

SIMMS Well if I sell them to SAFCOL they're auctioned yeah but he'll take them to different places like CAPPO or whoever I make arrangements to sell them with [to] get the best price. SAFCOL, yeah we've sold hundreds of tonnes to SAFCOL; I suppose thousands of tonnes over the years to SAFCOL. They're alright but they.... I don't know what's happened to them now. They're not as good as they used to be.

JD It's not a co-operative any longer, is it?

SIMMS No. Their auctioneering down there is different. See years ago the auctioneer, he'd start the price. Now they ask the buyers the first price, you know and the buyers get their heads together and they start off with a low price and it goes lower from then on. Years ago before SAFCOL took Dawe's Fish Market over, old Howard Dawe, he'd say, "The price is" such and such. From then they'd have to bid up to get more or if they wouldn't bid at all he'd say, "Right we'll put these fish away in the room. You won't get any". So they'd start to buy at that price and they'd end up buying some at that price and then have to bid higher to get any more. Now they start off at a low price and go lower.

That is why I've sort of drifted away from SAFCOL. They weren't auctioned properly plus we always had top fish; caught and refrigerated within an hour of catching and like put down in the freezer, packed quick, put down in the freezer and shovels full of ice straight on. Then I used to go in in another couple of hours and put more ice on. It'd captured the flesh in the fish, you know icing and refrigeration. Once you've captured the flesh in its fresh state, the fish'll last a lot longer but you can't put a fish that's been violated I call it; that's been caught and then laying around in an open boat for six or seven hours in the blazing sun and expect to put it in the freezer and be any good.

That's another reason why SAFCOL is not so good now. They sell the rubbish fish first and keep the good fish because they know they can always sell the good fish so at the end of the market our good fish get sold and we don't get any better price than the rubbish. So that's why I.... I still sell to SAFCOL but not like I used to.

JD Could we have a look at some of the changes that you've seen in the industry. What about boats and gear and methods of catching and so on? Has that changed much [since] your day?

SIMMS Ah yeah. See years ago it was all big boat fishing and now they've got open boats and some might have refrigeration but I doubt it. You see people have spent a lot of money nowdays for good boats to go and catch fish. They spend heaps of money for that but they don't spend a lot of money to handle the fish properly when they've caught them. The boats are fast and they think they can get out and get back but the fish only have to be in a pile in the bottom of an open boat for one hour and the bottom fish have had it. They still sell them but the fish are only rubbish.

JD Where does the catch end up after it's sold? From Adelaide is it sold all over Australia or is it just for the Adelaide market?

SIMMS No. SAFCOL with their auction down there, it goes to the fish shops and SAFCOL buy some themselves and distribute them around interstate but not very

much. There's a lot of rubbish fish [which] seems to find its way into South Australia and take the place of our good fish. Like I just explained, the good fish aren't good because [of] the way they're caught and handled. So the rubbish fish come in from interstate or overseas and the buyers will buy that instead of our other fish, like our local fish because it's packed nice. It looks nice but it's tasteless really. It's there for a ready market, for them to use.

JD That's that frozen fish we see so much of?

SIMMS Yeah. That's the frozen fish, yeah.

JD What's the sort of origin of that frozen fish? Is it [from] New Zealand or South Africa or where?

SIMMS Well I don't know. Comes from all over; it comes from everywhere. I don't study it up enough. I just know it's taken the place of our local fish.

JD It's a threat to the fishing industry here?

SIMMS Yes. Here it is, yes.

JD Ben could you talk a bit about the other problems in fishing. You've mentioned earlier depletion of stock. Is that evident?

SIMMS Oh yeah. Yes there's two main reasons which I explain in me book. It's through the prawn fishery and because I was prawning for thirteen years myself and I know the damage it does. Otherwise I wouldn't know what I'm talking about but I know what I'm talking about 'cause I done thirteen years right from the word go, prawning. Then there's the thousands of amateurs.

JD Just before we get on to the amateurs, could you explain the damage that the prawning does to the scale fish industry?

SIMMS Yeah. It really tears the bottom up, the prawn fishing now. When we first started prawn fishing we were fishing in the mud lines like in what we call the gutter and it's not [a] hard bottom, it's all mud. That's where the prawns like [to be]. So it didn't damage the bottom so much but we didn't get that much rubbish but then they started to spread out over the other areas you know and tear up the tape weed and rip away the sponges and pull up razor fish by the thousands of tonnes. Razor fish are natural tucker for most fish and wherever they're in abundance, that's where fish seem to live and feed but now it's like a sand dune out there in most parts. They've stopped it from going into some areas now but I think it's too late.

JD What about pollution? Is that a problem in the Gulf?

SIMMS No I don't think so; not yet anyway. There's no polluted areas that I know of.

JD Is there much litter out there: plastic bags and [unclear]?

SIMMS No. I steam around the Gulf all the time and very seldom you see any litter; very seldom. You might see a bit of prawn net floating; sometimes it's plastic bag[s]. I have seen plastic out there all shredded. There's not much left of it. It might have been a big sheet but it eventually disintegrates. [it] Comes in on the shore line I think

and goes up on the beach where it can't hurt anything there. Can't hurt anything in the sea that I know of.

JD What about these, I suppose you'd have them here too, where they put cans of beer and soft drinks in - plastic rings? You buy half a dozen in a group strung together with plastic rings? They don't perhaps use that over here?

SIMMS No.

JD It seems to be a bit of a problem in the West.

SIMMS What's that for?

JD Well for beer and people throw it overboard, the plastic. The fish stick their heads into it and some of it strangles them; gets caught in their gills.

SIMMS Haven't heard of it.

JD Haven't heard of it?

SIMMS No. There's been none around here. I don't know anything about it.

JD I know it's a matter of some concern, the whole question of litter in the ocean; mostly the plastic.

SIMMS No. Any litter that goes in the bottom, it attracts fish. If you want to make a snapper ground you put any old rubbish, that's old fridges and stoves and 44 gallon drums, anything that goes on the bottom to attract small fish and the bigger fish come and eat the small ones. I think it does more good than bad.

JD That's why you get snapper around wrecks I suppose?

SIMMS Yeah.

JD Do you see aquaculture as a threat to the fishing in the wild?

SIMMS No, I don't think. No.

JD It seems to be worrying some of the prawn fishermen in some places.

SIMMS Well yeah we're talking scale fish now so.... Yeah it'd worry them because they produce thousands of tonnes like in Asian countries. I was interested in one that was started up in Port Broughton, a fellow called Tim Racovolis from Melbourne, he started it and I used to catch all the female prawns to stock it up.

JD Is it still operating?

SIMMS No. It wasn't viable because of the amount of feed it took to feed the prawns to get them up to marketing stage. The cost of the feed.... He had and has still got, the Melbourne Fish Markets so he had access to a lot of rubbishy fish to feed these prawns but it still cost too much so it folded up. Apparently[?] they grow quite quick prawns from the little small stage up to a couple of inches or three inches long and

then they just have to be force fed. They live on algae up until then and then after that the zoological plankton.

JD There's nobody doing it now at all then?

SIMMS No one in South Australia.

JD Would you like to talk a bit about the management of the industry and the relationship between the fishermen and their organisations and the Fisheries Department?

SIMMS Yeah. Well I've been in associations, prawn fishing and tuna fishing and most of the fishing activities and we've never got a lot of success trying to relate to the Fisheries Department, to get any sense out of them.

This interview is continued on side B.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

TAPE 1 SIDE B

JD We were talking about the management of the industry and the relationship between the Fisheries Department and the fishermen's organisations, Ben.

SIMMS Yeah well scale fish wise, the Fisheries Department are more for the amateur fishermen than they are the private [fishermen]. [the] Professional fishermen is finished from what I can see. They're all for tourism now and they turn blind eyes to their activities of the professional amateur. You know the ones which is I reckon 70-80% of the amateurs all sell their fish.

JD Do they really?

SIMMS Yeah.

JD Where do they sell them?

SIMMS Well they sell them [to] dozens of different avenues. There's fish shops, there's hotels, there's restaurants; to their neighbour.

JD They're not sold through the marketing organisations?

SIMMS Well a lot of it finds its way to the markets and then again it's rubbish fish and it spoils our price.

JD Is it reducing stocks?

SIMMS Yes. Yeah because there's that many of them. It spoils our market too because they're supplying these people that want the fish you know like the restaurants and hotels and cafes and so on.

JD Do you feel the Fisheries Department is not supervising them sufficiently closely?

SIMMS They're not supervising them. They're not doing anything about it. They seem to think a lot about abalone poaching and prawn.... Well the prawn fishery is coping pretty well because it's hard for amateurs to go catching prawns but with the cray fishery there's a lot of poachers. They seem to focus their activities mostly on them but they turn a blind eye to the poachers [who are] poaching snapper and whiting. There's hundreds of tonnes of fish being caught by them and sold.

Another thing that I don't like about [it]; we have to supply statistics, you know what fish we've caught, where and when. The amateurs don't have to do that at all.

JD There's a bag limit though, is there?

SIMMS Yeah. That's a bit of a laugh. Well there's been no.... yes. Once I think the Fisheries Inspector was down here at this boat ramp this year. All through the holiday season.... the boats, they've all got radios. If there's the Fishery Department on the shoreline they communicate and dump their fish. If not they bring them in. Very seldom, even if they're caught with more than their limit you don't hear of it any more.

JD Are the penalties severe?

SIMMS Well they say they're severe but it's only severe for us I think, the professional.

JD Well you could lose your licence [unclear]?

SIMMS Oh yeah. You can lose your licence but everything's fine for us, you know, doing the wrong thing. They're forcing us into doing the wrong thing with their restrictions.

JD Would you like to say a word about the transferability of licences?

SIMMS Yeah. It's all a bloody joke.

JD Is it?

SIMMS Yeah. See they've made the transferability of licences now into a profiteering racket. One time for a quid you could buy a licence and go and catch whatever you like. Now I think it cost us just for scale fishing about $500.00 and you're only allowed to catch the one type of fish like scale fish or.... Well that's all I can catch now but the scale fish licence, you're able to buy them from another fisherman and some people buy them just to keep them for a while to make a profit. They don't even have to put statistic forms in. As long as they put in a nil return they can keep the licence until they can sell it for a higher price. Anyone can get a licence. He doesn't have to be a fisherman. He can be a farmer or a bank manager or a publican or whatever. He can buy a licence and go and catch fish.

There again you see they don't have to really earn their money from fishing to earn a living because they're getting it from the shore activity. So actually they're just there for the quick quid and sell their licence later on if something happens.

JD Ben the number of professional fishermen in the scale fishery, [is it] increasing or reducing?

SIMMS Oh reducing. Well they're trying to reduce the net fishermen. They reckon that the net fishermen are killing the fish stocks off but that's all wrong. They reckon that the nets tear up the bottom and they don't know what they're talking about. Actually the areas that I've fished, net fishing, it's being fished on, well 100% more now than it ever did. Yet the weed that's growing is flourishing, all the tape weed. Where once there was big sandy areas, now it's all covered with beautiful tape weed and it's being dragged over by nets night and day. It's actually cultivating weed. Where they get this idea of the net fishermen ruining the coastline, I don't know but there again it's just people that don't know what they're talking about.

But the scale fishermen, all the good old timers are getting out of it because they're hounded by the new chum one, the one that's just bought a licence, the one that doesn't know how to handle his fish. So they're just selling their licence and getting out of it. It's too big a worry for them. They've got to the stage of their life that they want to fish quiet like and they can't do it. You can't plan a day's fishing because there's a dozen other new chum fellows waiting to pounce on you so you just don't go fishing because if you let them see you fishing on a known area where you've been fishing all your life, once they find it you never need to go back there ever again because there's gonna be a dozen of them on it day and night. It doesn't give the fish a chance to accumulate on those places. They catch every living thing too, everything; right down to the small ones.

JD They don't throw them back?

SIMMS They don't throw them back; not until they have to and then they've got to explain. There's no inspectors to stop them anyway.

JD Ben, what else would you like to comment on on this tape? What about the book that you've published?

SIMMS Oh well that book was just to explain.... At the time of writing that book, or just previous to that, they were on about the scarcity of snapper. They were blaming this and that but I thought I'd write a little booklet to let people know really what the fishing was like and what it's like now and the reason why. So there, it's in the book form. So if something happens to me, there it is still in the written form. I'm writing another one now. That'll be a bigger book but it'll cover the whole of the fishing industry from the word go and our family's involvement and my involvement in the fishery right from the word go.

JD Well best of luck with it.

SIMMS [laughs] yeah.

JD Hope it turns out very well indeed.

SIMMS Yeah.

JD And thanks very much for this interview.

SIMMS No worries - pleased to help.

JD It's been good. Thank you.

SIMMS Right.

That is the end of this interview with Mr Ben Simms of Simms Cove, Moonta, South Australia.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW

Verbatim transcript of an interview with DULCIE SMITH

INTRODUCTION

This interview with Mrs Dulcie Smith of Kingscote, Kangaroo Island, South Australia was conducted in the room in her home overlooking the Kingscote Harbour from which Dulcie Smith operated the radio base station for the Kangaroo Island fishing fleet for seventeen years from its inception until her retirement some eight years ago.

Soon after World War Two Dulcie's husband, Vern Smith, an ex-airforce air sea rescue radio operator, set up a base station in his home which became the link between the fishing vessels at sea and the shore. Dulcie became the operator of that station; but as is apparent on this record of the interview, Dulcie Smith was far more than just an operator of routine radio communications. She became a close friend of the men at sea and their families on shore and felt personally responsible for the safety of those at sea.

Dulcie Smith is still widely known and her service willingly acknowledged by the fishermen of South Australia. She has become a legend in her own lifetime. Her story graphically illustrates the dangers faced by those that go down to the sea in ships and the quite courage of the women who wait for them.

The interview was recorded by Jack Darcey for Murdoch University on the 31st January, 1990 at Kingscote, Kangaroo Island. There are two sides of one tape. The interview starts at 022 on the revolution counter.

TAPE 1 SIDE A

JD Dulcie would you please record your full name.

SMITH Yes. Dulcie May Smith.

JD Were you born on Kangaroo Island?

SMITH No. I was born at Streaky Bay back on the west coast of South Australia and grew up there during the War years and married almost immediately after the War.

JD At Streaky Bay?

SMITH At Streaky Bay. We went to Adelaide to live directly from there because Vernon had been in the Airforce as a radio operator in planes and rescue boats (air sea rescue boats) in the Airforce. After his discharge and our marriage we settled in Adelaide and he joined what was, or is now, Telecom, [formerly the] PMG as a

technician. After a few years in Adelaide we decided to come to Kangaroo Island to make our home permanently.

JD Was your husband still with Telecom?

SMITH Yes. He came here in charge of Telecom here on the Island which was in its infancy in those days in as much as the Island was going ahead in leaps and bounds because of the soldier settlement here. Of course with the soldier settlement scheme here there was telephones going up in every direction and the place was really busy; really busy.

JD You'd have seen a lot of changes on Kangaroo Island, wouldn't you?

SMITH Yes. When we came here it was, well as it had been probably for a good many years, a small farming community; a prosperous one I think, but still not densely populated. With the soldier settlement here the population jumped in a matter of a few years.

JD The soldier settlement scheme dug new ground [unclear]

SMITH Oh yes, yes. Well everything started to grow rapidly. The town itself started to grow rapidly and it was the economy of the Island I suppose that just went ahead in leaps and bounds from that period.

JD Was there a good sized fishing fleet fishing out of Kangaroo Island at the time?

SMITH Actually I don't think that.... the fishing fleet really did fish out [of Kangaroo Island]. I'm not sure on this but Nigel Buick, although he was an Islander, he had been fishing from Adelaide most of his life and most of the fishermen seemed to fish from Adelaide at this stage. I think they used to come over to the Island in the bigger boats and spend a week [to] ten days around the Island fishing and then go home. There were line fishermen here and I think there had been fishermen here since the Island was settled. Basically the crayfishing industry fished from Port Adelaide until around about that period when Nigel Buick wanted to set up a factory here on the Island so that the fishermen didn't have to take their catch back to Port Adelaide for processing.

JD How did it come about that you became involved with the radio?

SMITH Well of course in those days there wasn't a qualified electrician here I suppose. It was the early days of radio and echo sounders and Vern had had quite a bit of training in the Airforce and in his own technical training. He was very handy for the fishermen because he could service their radios for them in his spare time and other electrical equipment. Everybody was known to everybody else. Everybody was friendly and so it wasn't a job, or it wasn't even a sideline for him. It was virtually just for friends. If they had something wrong with their radio well [they would] see Vern because he knew about radios.

That's how it really started because Nigel Buick had an old radio down there that he wanted serviced and he got Vern to service it and then he wanted somebody to keep in touch with him while he was out at sea and Vern did that once or twice a day; talked to him just on a friendly basis, not as a shorter base business, but just as a friendly base. Then they wanted more. They wanted somebody to act as a base station and Vern said, "Oh well he could train the wife to do it". He thought, "If they liked to put a radio up here in the house my wife could listen out for the fishing". It didn't start

off as a job. It started off as something we were doing for friends virtually. Really that's what it continued to do for most of my working life. It didn't become a real business until years later, really.

JD Was it a voluntary thing?

SMITH In a sense. In a sense it was always voluntary because I never considered it as a nine to five job. I got paid for it but it was more something that you were doing because you enjoyed it and thought you were doing something that was helpful to your friends. In those days every fisherman was your friend. They appreciated being able to get in touch with their wives and their families which.... It's difficult to appreciate now how isolated the fishermen were when you consider that nowdays everybody has a two-way radio. In those days very few people had radios. The base station and the fishermen had radios but there was no radio set up in the home as they are now. Every fisherman's wife has a radio nowdays.

JD In your day, you operated from this house?

SMITH I operated from this house.

JD You were the base station?

SMITH I was the base station.

JD And the message to a wife from one of the fishermen at sea would come through you and you would ring the wife and pass the message on? That's the way it worked?

SMITH Yes. That's the way it worked. Yes for a while we even used our own phone until Telecom objected to that [laughs] because it wasn't actually a Telecom phone. Vern was in charge and he had a Telecom phone [laughs] so naturally Telecom objected to that after a while. They were very kind. Really they were most understanding. Eventually we had a company phone here for the radio and it just developed as an ongoing thing.

We never sat down and worked out terms or arrangements or working conditions. I never had any formal training. I had to have a radio licence. Vern gave me the first instructions I had in how to work the radio. They set it up here in the kitchen and [he said], "Now you do this, you do that and that's how you work a radio". Then I went to Adelaide and had to sit for my exam and went to Jack Peatfield at AWA and he showed me how to operate a 60A Tela radio. That's the one they were going to buy for me and he showed me how to operate it and [I] went around and got my licence [laughs]. The examiner came down there to AWA and examined me there but it was all rather informal I suppose and friendly.

JD What did you actually do? Did you listen at particular times?

SMITH At this stage it was definitely going to be a radio base station so we had to set up regular scheds and hopefully get the fishermen interested enough to report in regularly every day. So we set up two scheds a day: 11.15 in the morning and 3.15 in the afternoon. These scheds had to work in with other base stations around the coast because there were base stations down the south east and over at Port Lincoln and in the eastern states at regular periods during the day. So we had to slot ours in so it wouldn't clash with those. Those two times were most appropriate but of course the fishermen couldn't wait till 11.15 each day. If they wanted something they didn't wait

for 11.15 and so when Vern went to work at half past seven in the morning I would turn the radio on and be available for the fishermen from then until when Vern got home at half past five at night.

JD Did it tie you to the house all day?

SMITH Oh yes, yes. We didn't set out to do it but as the industry grew I found that I was spending more and more time here and it seemed essential to stay here. While the fishermen were at sea it seemed essential to stay here because basically you were here for emergencies. You didn't think of the emergencies but you were here if there was something wrong or if they wanted something in a hurry. So it became just the thing to stay here in case they did want something.

JD You could I suppose go about your normal household duties whilst....

SMITH Oh yes, yes. Here again, Vern set the radio up here for them. He erected the aerials and set the radio up and while he was doing that he made a good long extension cord so that I could take the extension cord out the back yard or out the front yard or even down to the bedroom. I could just walk around with the extension cord so that I'd be on call.

Actually one fisherman from Port Adelaide came to me one day and he said, "How is it that I can always get you on the radio but you don't answer your front door when I knock"? Well [the] simple reason was that I could hear the radio but I couldn't hear the front door because the noise of the radio blotted everything else out [laughs].

JD Did it become burdensome to you Dulcie?

SMITH No. I don't think so. I was glad to finish the job at the end because I was getting tired. No. It was just a way of life. The children knew they came after the radio. The radio had to be answered first, or the phone had to be answered first and then the children. They grew up realising that. They didn't seem to suffer from it. I did try and have meals on time. The children grew up of course and shifted away. Without Vern's co-operation none of it could have been possible because if anything went wrong he was there to help with advice and backup. It was just a family thing all the time.

JD Have you missed it since you've retired?

SMITH No. No. As a matter of fact, when Vern decided he wanted to retire I said, "Well I'll retire the same day" which we did. I haven't touched a radio since. We did have a couple of CB radios here but I had dismantled them the day I retired and that was the end of that; apart from the normal radio, fisherman's radio. When that went out the door I finished.

JD When an emergency occurred you'd have been very much in demand, wouldn't you? You would have been an essential link in the chain?

SMITH Yes. Originally emergencies.... In the early days the police were not interested in emergencies until there was actually a disaster like a death or somebody missing. Of course over the years that all changed with air sea rescue, SES and the police becoming very involved in rescue operations but in the early days, if there was an emergency we'd handle it ourselves. The fishermen handled it. I was only a go-between. I relayed messages. That's virtually all I was, was a go-between relaying

messages and getting help from the land side of things but the fishermen did all their own rescue work. It didn't matter whether the man came from Port Adelaide or the Island or Port Lincoln, if there was an emergency.

I remember one time a Port Lincoln man was in trouble over new Port Lincoln. It was a VERY rough day and one of our Adelaide fishermen, working the Island radio, answered my distress call.... my call for assistance for this Port Lincoln fisherman. He got almost over to this Island near Port Lincoln and another boat from Port Lincoln just around the corner picked up the call and beat him to it. It's like a race but he'd travelled all day to answer that call and eventually he wasn't really needed; but that's how they work. They all helped each other. That was how it was in the fishing industry in those days.

JD It would have been necessary for you to keep a good mental picture of what was going on?

SMITH Yes. I had a map, chart, of the Island and Port Lincoln and Adelaide, York Peninsula, set up above the radio in the kitchen here. Working each day you became familiar with all the places on it and you could work.... When they were giving you a position you could refer to it. After a while you didn't need to refer to it because you knew anyway because I was there for a fair while [laughs]. We did like them to give us, you know, an approximate area of where they were working so that if anything happened we'd have some idea of where to look for them.

JD Did all the fishermen have their vessels equipped with radio?

SMITH Not to start with. To start with I think we had, from memory, I think we had three boats: two Adelaide based boats and one Kangaroo Island boat, Nigel Buick again and Frank Miller of **the White Pointer** from Port Adelaide and Gus Mehers on **the Garabaldi** from Port Adelaide. I think our first actual sched was three boats. I'm not sure but it was well over 40 by the time I finished. We had well over 40 boats on the daily sched. Of course that would fluctuate with the season.

Originally we were cray fishermen and during the winter shark fishermen. Later on when the prawning industry started up I acted as a base station for the prawn boats of Port Adelaide and Kangaroo Island boats and that continued until I retired. The last few years, most of them had their own radios so it tapered off a little bit but they knew that I was retiring so everybody prepared accordingly because we didn't think that anybody could operate a....

It wasn't a viable situation to operate a radio base station the way I'd been operating it because I was on call all day and all night if necessary and nobody could afford to pay an operator or operators to do that so, you know, two way radios were becoming just so common that everybody had them by the time I finished really.

JD They are required now, aren't they, by law?

SMITH They were always required I think.

JD Yeah, but by law.

SMITH Yes. Well I think that.... I don't know when it became a law to have them but every boat got them and they were never by law required to ask their base station. I

don't think that they are even now, but for their own safety it was an essential thing and they knew it and appreciated it.

JD When you retired then, that was the end of the Kangaroo Island base station, was it?

SMITH No, no. During my working years I started off with a man who had a small factory here at Kingscote and that fell through. So Rocters & Son and Adelaide fish buyers and processors, they paid my wage and the expenses of the base station but they gave me a completely free hand to run the base station as if it was my own. He said, "The station's yours. I'll pay the bills and that's it".

Later on when Rocters pulled out, about two years before I retired, SAFCOL who by this time had had a factory here for quite a while, they took over the running expenses.

JD And then SAFCOL left.

SMITH So when I retired the radio actually belonged to SAFCOL and they transferred it from here down to the factory and operated the base station from the factory.

JD Is that now Nigel Buick's factory?

SMITH Yes. SAFCOL pulled out several years ago I think and Nigel's done it up again.

JD Yeah. You used to handle a lot of sort of private messages from the boats to the wives and such. Any incidents you'd like to recount? I heard one that involved a man named Lino.

SMITH [laughs] Yes Lino was quite a character in fact I think he's still a character. I think he's still getting around because in later years he left the fishing industry and went on television but he was a character. He asked me one day if I would do him a favour. "Of course Lino, yes, what can I do for you"? So well he wanted a birthday present for his wife. That wasn't unusual because one of the things I liked to do for the fishermen was to remind them about Christmas and Mother's Day and birthdays if necessary. We weren't very businesslike I'm afraid. So, [I said] "Yes Lino, what do you want"? He wanted one of those see-through things you can get for your wife. He thought.... he didn't know [whether it was] a nightie or negligee so that was alright. Well, what size would she take, because I'd never met Lino and I hadn't met his wife because they lived at Victor Harbour. You could hear him turning around and saying, "Aye mate, you know better than I do. What size does a wife take?" He was talking to his crewmen [laughter]. It was so funny it really split the.... 'Cause everybody on the air.... when Lino came on the air everybody would stop talking. Normally there's so many people talking on the air that you would have trouble getting through but when Lino came on, he was such a character that, yes, everybody would stop to hear what Lino was going to say.

JD So the whole fleet was.... [laughs]

SMITH So the whole fleet knew that Lino wanted a negligee for his wife. As I said, he was a character. He went shark fishing and he called Nigel up one day and asked him, "What does a shark look like"? [laughter]. He had something on the line and he thought it might be a shark. He was a character. We had a few characters on the fleet.

JD Fishermen tend to be, don't they?

SMITH I think so. Well I suppose everybody tends to but [it] seems to be exaggerated in the fishing fleet, especially on air because everybody can hear what's going on. [it] Becomes quite funny.

JD Funny, but not always funny. Some of the incidents must have been pretty much emergencies. Do any stick in your mind as being notable particularly?

SMITH In the very early days before radio became common I was the only link between the fisherman and his wife at home. The Rumbelos of Victor Harbour had a young family. One day one of the children was hurt at school and became unconscious. Mrs Rumbelo rang and wanted to know if I could contact her husband. I called and called and called. Mainly he had always kept his radio on and I seemed to be calling **Taparoo** all day. Eventually [I] got him on air and told him what had happened but that calling all day, it made me feel as though I was calling Graham for my own self, like Graham's child was my child.

I think that was my first trauma. We had a lot of traumas afterwards but that one always sort of stuck in my memory because from then on the Rumbelos and I always felt as though we had something really close, really in common. That's how I felt with all the fishermen. I think all my working life there seemed to get a very close feeling, I suppose, because you were so totally involved in their lives. If they had troubles, they were my troubles.

We had a young lad and his mother was dying in Adelaide and tried to get him home in time to reach his mother. It was very personal. It's difficult to explain. I suppose I was very lucky. I didn't have any tragic accidents. When I say tragic, we didn't lose any lives while I was working for the first, I think fourteen, fifteen years.

This interview is continued on side B of this tape.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

TAPE 1 SIDE B

SMITH I think for fourteen years we didn't have what I'd term a tragedy in the fleet. By that I mean loss of life. We had losses of boats but never loss of life. In a sense I sometimes thought afterwards.... I began to think that I had to stay here; that as long as I stayed by the radio, nothing would happen. You get to feel a bit like God [strong emotion in voice]. If you feel like God you're gonna be punished, that's for sure.

The last two years of my working life we had one tragedy after another. It just seemed as if they'd piled up. We lost a young fishing inspector. We should never have lost him, but we lost him. We lost two young boys. We should never have lost them. It wasn't because our helpers, our search parties didn't get there in time. It was just that they struck a big wave or something, a mountain of sea, and their boat just disintegrated. We were talking to this lad on the radio right up to a few seconds before he died [unclear].

JD They didn't have a chance to get a [unclear]

SMITH Didn't have a chance to do anything. They said that they were still talking on the radio. They must have been still talking when that last wave hit them, or whatever happened. [unclear] We had people looking for them within fifteen minutes I think. I think it was probably even less, we had people in the area. They couldn't find them. Those same boys.... you see they grew up here and I had known them as just children. I knew their parents and knew the boys and so it was like losing a member of the family. That just.... [voice very emotional]

The fishing inspector, he was from Victor Harbour and then we had one of the Rumbelo boys and the Rumbelo lad, he was one of those people that you could rely on in an emergency. He'd always be the first to answer the radio if you asked for help; never put his radio off the air. He'd leave it on all day. If you wanted some help, he'd answer. Always the first to go and help everybody else. Then he changed his way of fishing and one day he didn't answer the radio and he's said to me, "Well if I don't answer the sched, you know I've gone home". Next thing he was lost. So the last two years were very, very traumatic and I was so glad to finish. I was very glad to finish.

JD Dulcie, could I ask you: In latter years there were other authorities involved in rescue operations, police and air force and all sorts of people. Did you find co-operating with those authorities satisfactory?

SMITH There were teething problems. Yes there were teething problems and I think that at this stage, that two years, that was a teething period but in these three instances, for instance, there was nothing absolutely nothing that anybody could have done. Now I realise that nothing could have been done that wasn't done, although at the time you felt that nothing was being done correctly and help wasn't getting there quickly enough. You felt, I suppose just felt frustrated and helpless because you knew that there was a man there and you didn't know where he was. You knew that you should be able to find them; they had to be somewhere.

In the case of Glen Smart our fishing inspector, later when all the facts came out, he was virtually more or less inside of Kingscote when they went over but sitting here with this beautiful view over the sea and on a lovely day like this, you can't appreciate that day was so very different. It was different. We had a very, very bad day. The visibility was virtually.... I don't know what the visibility [was]. It was very, very poor visibility. You couldn't see the end of the spit that day because I was expecting boats in and I hadn't heard from one of them for a while so I, as was normal practice, [would] just keep looking out towards the end of the spit to see whether they were coming around. I couldn't see them and yet they were there. We knew they were there but I couldn't see them. Visibility was poor. Of course by the time they were reported overdue, it was pretty late in the evening and we had no idea where to look for them. The search party next day....

I think we all learned a lot in those days and I'm sure that the police learned a lot. When I finished work I had nothing more to do with operations because I left the job completely but you still have those troubles. I thought that they were dreadful experiences but you still see people with a yacht the other day, off Tasmania. See that disappeared with all those lives. Nobody's been able to find any sign of them or wreckage perhaps now after, what a couple of weeks. So there's still a great deal ..... I don't think they'll ever really get it down so that there isn't loss of life with accidents. Now I think perhaps accidents will happen and they'll go on happening until the end of time. There will be loss of life at sea but when you're totally involved as I was you feel as though.... I got to the stage where I felt as long as I was by the radio and within

calling distance, nothing could happen [strong emotion in voice] but of course it did happen.

Anyway the local police and the SES and all their helpers, they've set up a marvellous operation here on the Island. I don't think it could be bettered. I think when the two lads that went up at Vivonne Bay, I think that that was their real proving area. I think they did a marvellous job there. I haven't been involved in any rescue operations in the last eight years. I left the industry and that was the end of it as far as I was concerned. I don't even hear about things like that now until it's all over and probably in the paper.

JD Dulcie, you were very, very highly regarded by the fishermen in this area and I understand that when you retired they had a function for you. Would you like to talk about that?

SMITH Well it was a function alright [laughs]. It was incredible. I really didn't know what to expect and not having a terribly good imagination [laughs]. I had no idea it was going to be like that. There were people from the south east. There were people from Victor Harbour and Port Lincoln and Adelaide and York Peninsula I believe and Kangaroo Island. It was just incredible. I had no idea that people would go to so much trouble because it wasn't just the people coming that had gone to a lot of trouble, it was the local people that had sent boats from here over to Cape Jervis to pick up the friends from the mainland. The organisation, oh, was just incredible.

I didn't deserve it and it's one of those times when I look back and sometimes I wished I'd dropped out of it altogether [laughter]. I can't handle times like that but it really was marvellous. I don't think anybody's been ever given a testimonial on the Island like that. I'm sure of it. I've never heard of anything like it. I just wish that.... Well I suppose they had to hold me and hire a guard but I just didn't think that I'd earned it, quite that much anyway. I think there's a lot of people on the Island that.... country places particularly I think. There's so many people that earn these accolades but don't get their full recognition.

JD You were widely acclaimed beyond the fishing industry just here too, weren't you? Didn't you get an award?

SMITH The first award I got was from the AFIC which was pretty remarkable, the fact that it was the second or third award of its kind ever issued. It was terrific of them and I don't know why they chose me [laughs], to be quite honest.

After my retirement I had this phone call from Canberra [laughs] and they said that I'd been recommended for an award of the Queen's Honours [laughs]. I still really can't believe that it's true. I am very proud of it but....

JD What's the award Dulcie?

SMITH Order of Australia - OAM. I'm very proud of it but [laughs].... There again you see I think there's so many people on Kangaroo Island that earn these things and as I said, they don't get them. I think perhaps there were more worthy recipients than myself and that too but still I am very proud of it.

JD Dulcie is there anything else that you'd like to say just before we finish?

SMITH Well it was an honour to be involved with the fishing industry like that because it was like being the member of a family, a very large family. Although it's eight years since I left, they're still there. They're still family. Our own family are living up north. Our three daughters married naturally and one lives in the Northern Territory and two live in Queensland They couldn't get further away if they tried. I don't think the radio sent them there but it's just how things have worked out.

There's times when you do need friends and family and I think that I've got an extended family. I think I'll always have that extended family. I don't think that there's a greater section of the community of fishermen that seem to be.... Perhaps it's changing now with the way the whole world is changing but the fishing community as a whole seem to be just like a big family. Everybody helped each other out. If one was in trouble everybody was in trouble and the years that I spent with the fishing industry were marvellous.

I think that being a fisherman's wife must have been one of the, or would be one of the most difficult things that you could ever be because she had to be so self-reliant. She had to bring up her children. Apart from that she usually was at the beck and call of her husband if he wanted something taken out for instance. I think here on the Island we had an exceptional set of circumstances and the fact that the bulk of the fishing is not done here in Kingscote where most of the families live, it's done on the south coast of the Island. The roads haven't always been as good as they are now and so if a fisherman wanted something taken down to Vivonne Bay well the wife had to get in the car and go.

I know one fisherman, his wife used to make an appointment to go to the Melbourne Cup party. On Melbourne Cup day of course everybody has a Melbourne Cup party. I know one fisherman's wife that never did get to a Melbourne Cup party because her husband wanted her to come out and pick up the first catch of the cray season on that day and never failed. It became a bit of a joke after a while but he liked to get his crayfish in first and that was the day - 2nd of November [laughs].

Apart from that the wives I think.... I think that to be a successful fisherman you had to have a good wife behind you; seemed to be. I have my greatest admiration [for the wives].

JD Dulcie, thank you very much. It's been a wonderful interview. Thank you.

SMITH Thanks very much.

That is the end of this interview with Mrs Dulcie Smith, for seventeen years, radio operator on Kangaroo Island.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW

Verbatim transcript of an interview with DAVID STANHOPE

INTRODUCTION

David Stanhope is a well respected South Australian rock lobster fisherman, aquaculturalist, member of the shire council and President of the Professional Fishermen's Association as well as representative on the South Australian Fishing Industry Council. He is the managing director of Agradev Pty Ltd, a company which together with Israeli interests is involved in major developments in aquaculture and horticulture at Port Augusta and Portland.

He represents a leading edge of the Australian fishing industry and his views on this industry are deserving of close attention as are his initiatives in aquaculture. His contribution to this history of the Australian Fishing Industry is appreciated and we wish him all success in his pioneering ventures into aquaculture.

The interview was conducted by Jack Darcey in Mr Stanhope's home in Robe, South Australia for Murdoch University on the 3rd January, 1990. There is one side of one tape. The interview starts at 022 on the revolution counter.

TAPE 1 SIDE A

JD Would you record please your full name, date of birth and place of birth.

STANHOPE My name is David John Stanhope. I was born in Naricourt in South Australia on the 4th October, 1941.

JD And David have you lived in South Australia all your years?

STANHOPE Yes I have Jack, all my years. I started off in Naricourt. My parents moved to Robe in the early days. I spent my early schooling in Robe; then I went to Scotch College in Adelaide. From Scotch College in Adelaide I then went to the Weapons Research Establishment at Salisbury where I did electronics for four years and then on to Woomera in South Australia for three years in electronics and then into the fishing industry.

JD It's a rather unusual stepping stone into fishing; from electronics into fishing.

STANHOPE Yes I'd saved just enough money for a trip overseas with a friend and I came back home to do a little bit of work for some more pocket money and went crewing for a period of time and loved the fresh air and the sunshine and the outdoors and never went overseas and never went back to Woomera.

JD Did you have any sort of family background in fishing?

STANHOPE None at all. Oh slight bit Jack. When my parents came to Robe they had a private hotel and as an investment my father bought a little 21 footer and put a skipper on it. It wasn't a financial proposition and I think that lasted for two or three years and eventually he sold the boat but that was well before I even thought about fishing.

JD So when you came into fishing, it was here in Robe, was it?

STANHOPE Yes. It was in Robe Jack yes.

JD About how old would you have been then?

STANHOPE Oh I would have been about 21 at that stage. I came down; went crewing with a chap called Tom Tredwin on a boat called the **Binburough**. After three years of that I went halves with Tom in another old boat called the **Mercury** which was the same age as I was and that was a 45 footer conventional, for shark and lobster. After the first two years as a partnership I eventually bought Tom's half share out and Tom maintained the **Binburough** and I maintained the **Mercury**.

JD And it was shark and lobster all the way through, was it?

STANHOPE It was shark and lobster with this vessel all the way through. We'd lobster in the summer months and shark in the winter. At the early days it was hook sharking and eventually it was with the spool and the nets.

JD And have you stayed in those fisheries since?

STANHOPE I have stayed in those fisheries. Four years ago I purchased.... I sold the **Mercury** and I purchased a 48 foot planey hull from Western Australia, fibreglass. With the advent of that boat I did not maintain the shark fishing any more. Stocks were declining. The cost of fuel to run shark nets I didn't find a proposition so I just maintained myself in the lobster industry rather than both.

JD And that's what you're into now?

STANHOPE And that's the stage I am now. I now have.... for the last two years I've had a skipper on the boat. I haven't fished personally myself because of my involvement in aquaculture.

JD Would you like to tell us a bit about the aquaculture now?

STANHOPE Fine Jack. I've been into it now for about four to five years. It started with a trip overseas looking at aquaculture in other countries in Taiwan, Philippines etc. They are producing a lot of fish over there, mainly into the Japanese market and coming back realising that we had the same potential in Australia, then also realised that each fish grows at a certain speed being determined on water temperature and looked for a hot water source. The two sources I found was Port Augusta Power Station and Geothermal Bore at Portland in Victoria.

We did [an] initial pilot run with western king prawns at Port August which had mixed results, being the first ever done on that species. We had harvesting problems. We had a bit of growth problems. We had an algae bloom. Everything that should go

wrong went wrong but we learned a lot from it. [in] Portland, we have done two trial runs with barramundi. We, through [a] heat exchanger we bring our water temperature down from 60 degrees to 30 degrees. We've had two trial runs of barramundi; one at ten kilo per cubic metre and one at 25. We realise now that we can do two runs a year to plate size barramundi for the restaurant trade.

Now at this stage we are raising money to go commercial and my involvement now is that I've gone to bed with a company called Agradev which is 40% owned by Israel who are very good at aquaculture and horticulture and we're mixing the two together and hopefully we'll be commercial shortly.

JD Congratulations. If it turns out to be [a] success, that's great.

STANHOPE If it's not I'll be in gaol Jack. [laughter]

At Port Augusta Jack we're now firing up to do brine shrimp which is a very small species of prawn which is used in the hatchery stages throughout the world from the eggs through to the larvae of fish. It's very high protein fish. It needs hot water, high sunlight and high salinity and Port Augusta has all those to offer. Our production run at Port Augusta initially will be in brine shrimp and horticulture and through the help of [the] Fisheries Department where $250,000.00 is being spent at the moment to research other species for that area. So all going well I'd say within the next two or three years we'll have a fairly big show at Port Augusta alongside that power station which will be beneficial to South Australia and also a tourist thing for Port Augusta.

JD Why do you believe aquaculture is so important?

STANHOPE Jack I believe and I think it's statistically proven that fish stocks throughout Australia are either on the decline or steady. If you look at Japan who is one of the biggest fishing nations in the world, their aquaculture is now slowly catching up with their commercial fisheries and I believe that this is the only way to go for the future of South Australia with fish stocks, the need for more fish, for more protein. You know if we can grow it on the land rather than keep hitting the sea all the time, it's beneficial all round. My prediction is within ten years aquaculture will catch up with the Australian commercial fisheries.

JD What, in ten years? That soon?

STANHOPE Well that's my guess. I'm only guessing. Let's hope I'm right.

JD Your concern about depletion of stock is fairly widespread I notice among many of the people involved in fishing. It's a very common one and a very real concern. One wonders however whether aquaculture, given the limitations in places that it can be practised, would ever match up to the fisheries in the wild that we have now. Is there other places? There's bound to be I suppose but they've not been investigated yet? Is that....

STANHOPE Yes. I believe it's wide open. It's not only hot water that you need, you know. There's the abalone industry which is really developing. South Australia's doing a lot of research into abalone aquaculture. This will be a big industry. The oyster industry is now starting to get off its feet and really perform. The mussels is another one that's performing in Victoria. I believe that there'll be species we can't do like orange roughy and so forth or big eye trevally but there's so many species like whiting and snapper and brim and flounder and so forth that will be done. They're done in other countries. They will be done here and I believe that, you know, with R and D and

people putting a bit of money behind that it'll all happen and I think it'll all happen very, very quickly.

JD One of the comments that lots of people make, Australian people make about aquaculture, is that it's so labour intensive that it wouldn't be able to compete with the fisheries in the wild or fisheries overseas. What's your feelings on that?

STANHOPE I agree whole heartedly Jack. I think it depends on the species you're doing. Australia's gone into the prawn industry aquaculture in the northern New South Wales/Queensland area and Taiwan, Philippines and now Thailand are producing a lot of aquaculture prawn and you know, Australia with their labour costs cannot compete. When you're stocking prawns you're stocking at a fifteen kilo per cubic metre. You know, if you do fish you can stock up to 40 kilo per cubic metre. So I believe at this stage of the game, in the early stages, we should be looking at fish rather than crustaceans and then depending on overseas prices, then come back into your prawns and so forth. I believe that the aquaculture will enhance the commercial fisheries 'cause in the off season a lot of our fisheries are not fished all year round while the aquaculture can fill those gaps on the export market.

JD Presumably it's easier to control problems such as pollution in an aquaculture situation? Is that the case?

STANHOPE Yes, yes and I believe that it's becoming a very stringent part of aquaculture and all fisheries departments are taking it up and environment and planning say, hey you just don't discharge this high protein [unclear]. You don't discharge so and so and so and so and so and so. You have got to control everything within your own base and make sure there isn't a pollution 'cause you know, if you pollute the sea, you're pumping from the sea and the whole circle goes around.

JD What are some of the other problems? We've talked about depletion of stock and a little bit about pollution. What are some of the other problems you see the normal fisheries facing?

STANHOPE Well within our normal fisheries, if that's the connotation of say lobster fisheries within the state I was part of a buy back scheme. I was probably one of the instigators of a buy back scheme on the south east coast of the lobster industry. Our graphs show that we tend to take the same stock out, the same amount of fish out every year plus a minus for seasons but over the last twenty years it's a pretty well straight line. What we're saying is that the amount of boats in the industry or the catch, is being divided by too many. So we had a buy back scheme. It was very controversial; 51% in favour and it went through and we took 40 boats out of the industry that those that are left are paying for them.

I believe that's a step in the right direction, that those that are left are more viable. It's got a catch 22 situation that when this happens prices of pots go up so the young chappy coming in either can't afford it or if he does afford it, he's borrowing a lot of money, his capital and interest payments are high. When the bad seasons come he says, hey I can't afford to make ends meet so you have another buy back. So there's that catch 22 situation that shouldn't be there but unfortunately that happens.

JD The fishing industry is changing quite dramatically, is it not? One of the changes seems to be the reduced number of people and for obvious reasons that has to happen but it seems also to be becoming very much a company orientated industry. Is that the case would you say?

STANHOPE I believe you're right Jack in a lot of fisheries but not so much in the lobster at this stage. I think the time will come because the price of pots is escalating at such a rate that the poor individual or the young crew can't afford it. I believe that that will happen, that the company will take over and the crews will be employed whether they be skippers or crews. It's an unfortunate situation because at the moment it's great that, you know, the owners are the operators and are really part of a great industry.

JD That's been the South Australian Government's policy hasn't it - owner/operators in the crayfishing industry?

STANHOPE They have attempted that. They have tried it. A lot of fishermen don't' want it that way. I think for the best of the industry it should be that way. I guess I'm saying things that I don't abide by myself but if you look at the overall, yes I agree it should be owner/operator.

I think increased effort is happening all the time. New technology is making it easier to catch fish and maybe we're knocking our resources down by doing it but then I guess [at] the other end of the scale, fisheries must protect the fish and not the fishermen and therefore you don't fish as many days or there's a quota or something so that the stocks to stay there.

JD Could we have a look at this relationship between fishermen and the Fisheries Department. Is it a satisfactory working relationship would you say?

STANHOPE I would say it's an excellent working relationship. The Fisheries Department do not enforce any policies or legislation without coming to SAFIC (the South Australian Fisheries Industry Council) or to the Fishermen's Association and discussing it first. We've always had an input on anything that's been done.

JD David whilst we're still talking about problems in the industry, what about the problem of the inroads being made by the recreational fishermen, from the point of view of the commercial people?

STANHOPE Now I think this is a problem Jack. I represent around 200 boats on this coast on the South Australian Fisheries Industry Council in Adelaide and it's a problem that we talk about every meeting. I believe we're a little at fault that we haven't got our act together and I think we've got to get our act together very shortly because the recreation are making big inroads. They are a vast number of people. They have a lot of political clout because of that and political wise, they will have to come out on top because the ministers of the day will always listen to them because they're gonna lose votes.

So I believe we've really got to get our act together very shortly. Now whether it's through legislation while we still seem to be there and try and get some legislation through to protect ourselves because I believe in the short term that we will lose our stocks to the recreation.

JD You've been involved in the local shire council too, I understand?

STANHOPE Yes Jack. I've been on council probably for ten years now I think locally on the Robe District Council. It's interesting going back; well before that my father was chairman of this Council and during those days he was instigator of the channel that comes from the sea into the boat haven, it was a lake in those days and now it's our beautiful little boat haven. So he instigated that and when I went into council I

sort of followed a little bit along the same lines for the fishermen. So I really went in for the fishermen's sake and instigated [a] new travel left and hard standing area for putting the boats up for servicing.

JD This coast is quite notorious from the point of view of accidents at sea David. Is that still the case or has the incidence of accidents reduced?

STANHOPE I believe we still have probably not as many and not ones that are pre-empted or could have been overcome. You know, we have Eberts now and better radios and better motors and the whole lot and everybody's in contact with each other all day young, while in the old days this just didn't happen. I can remember my first days of fishing that, you know, we were one of the only ones with a wireless. There was very few that had a wireless on the boat and they were pretty prehistoric looking things. Contact wasn't made in those days. People were lost way out because of lack of contact. They didn't return for four or five days and people started wondering then where the hell they were.

Now these days it's a different story but we still have our mishaps where boats get hit by breakers coming through channels. It's mainly in close waters that these things are happening now.

JD Are the navigational aids and that sort of backup adequate?

STANHOPE I believe so and I believe the Government's done a marvellous job with the new global satellite navigation systems and the new Ebert system in Alice Springs that can pick up distress anywhere within Australia and put somebody there straight away. I think rescue wise sea safety, things have gone a long way and they're really good.

JD The rescue organisation's been improved a bit too has it?

STANHOPE I think, yes; right through. Dramatically, yes.

JD What about the influence of the surveying of vessels? Has that been a factor in improved safety?

STANHOPE I believe so and I believe it's a necessity. Fishermen will always complain saying, we don't need to pull our shaft, we don't need them to look at this or that but I believe that what they've done has helped. Whether it's a sea cop that could have been corroded where you could have sunk a boat. They check all these things and I believe that they've done a great, what's the word, contribution towards sea safety, yes. Although we pay for it, I think it's a necessity.

JD What about training within the industry, both in terms of the sea faring side and the processing side? Is that adequate?

STANHOPE I think on the seafaring side it's more than adequate. In some instances there are problems in as much as that.... [unclear] There's the example in Robe where Leeland Tonkin who spent his time in the Navy, has then come home and been fishing for the last 30 odd years, wanted to take passengers out for cruises and had to go back and do a coxan's ticket which would be way below what he had already to do this. So [pause] there are problems then. I guess these will never be sorted out because it's all written up and legislated and [they] say, this is what you have to do.

JD What about on the processing side and the marketing side? Are the people [who are] employed adequately trained?

STANHOPE No I believe there's a lot more to be done there. I believe the South Australian Fisheries Industry Training Committee is working on that at the moment to improve standards. I believe marketing wise, processors should market a little bit with each other rather than against each other. We have problems there.

We have problems within our own marketing fish off the wharf that processors are running a cartel at the moment where they got together and determine a price for the fishermen, where the fishermen misses out in the long run and the processor is making too much money but I guess this is something that the fishermen have got to get together on and say, hey we're gonna do our own thing but this takes time. It's very hard to get fishermen together.

JD The history of SAFCOL would illustrate that point I think, would it?

STANHOPE Yes, you're right. I shouldn't be criticising SAFCOL but I think SAFCOL did rip the fishermen off for many, many years.

JD The presentation of the product is vitally important in the market they tell me.

STANHOPE Yes Jack and I believe that we need more training. In the lobster industry I believe that we realise now that you don't break a leg off or you don't break a feeler off 'cause a lot of these fish are exported into Japan live and the product doesn't sell if there's pieces missing; but in the scale fishing industry there's a lot of education still to be done of looking after fish when they leave the water to be able to bleed them properly, freeze them properly and handle them properly for the market.

JD Anything else that you'd like to comment on in regard to the fishing industry?

STANHOPE [silence]

JD David, for ten years you were the President of the Robe Professional Fishermen's Association and I understand you are a life member now, so that you'd have had a lot of experience with a lot of fishermen in Robe. Would you like to mention some of the more prominent ones?

STANHOPE Sure Jack. Before I start, just going back.... Looking at their minute book in the early days, it was interesting just after the War that the Fishermen's Association seeked more grog or beer from the Government 'cause there were quotas at that stage and the fishermen weren't getting their supply of beer and their excuse was that the ammonia from the shark, the only way you could cure it was to drink beer and I gather, from the minute book, that they really did get some more beer to drink to counteract the ammonia from the shark; but going back, we've had some interesting guys and some very funny and happy characters.

One coming to mind is Charlie Fennell who is still alive today but tells some fantastic stories about double headed snapper and things like that. The Denning brothers, their father who came from Boson's Point which is just across our bay; old Jack started fishing and all the boys follows suit and some of them are still fishing today. Ron Smith was another one that comes to mind who now, his sons fish on Kangaroo Island. Fred and Ron Wendt; Fred was an original fisherman of this port after the War and then became harbour master and Ron followed suit. Ron's now retired. Murray Elliot was

one of our early ones also. Milton Hall was a character. Milton actually was president of our Association for many years prior to me. I was secretary to Milton for many years before taking over but Milton did a hell of a lot for our industry in the early days and was part of the reconstruction of the industry on the amount of pots on the water and so forth. We owe a lot to Milton Hall.

JD Thank you David. Thank you for that and thank you for this interview. It's been great to talk to you.

STANHOPE My pleasure Jack. I enjoyed it.

That is the end of this interview with Mr David Stanhope, rock lobster fisherman and aquaculturalist of Robe, South Australia.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

END OF INTERVIEW

Verbatim transcript of an interview with EVELYN WALLACE-CARTER

INTRODUCTION

Evelyn Wallace-Carter devoted ten years to researching, writing and eventually herself publishing in 1987 the book **For They Were Fishers** which is a history of the fishing industry in South Australia. In this interview she recounts some of the difficulties she faced in bringing this mammoth task to fruition. As will be apparent from the tape, she has a great regard for and sense of commit to the fishermen of South Australia and tells their story with sensitivity and understanding.

Evelyn Wallace-Carter enlivens her book and this tape with delightful stories as told by the fishermen themselves. **For They Were Fishers** is an outstanding achievement. In producing it Evelyn Wallace-Carter's determination, persistence and courage reflects that of the people whose story she tells. In her they have an adequate chronicle.

The interview was conducted in her home in Marino, Adelaide by Jack Darcey on the 28th January, 1990 for Murdoch University. There is one tape of two sides.

TAPE 1 SIDE A

JD Evelyn would you record your full name please.

WALLACE-CARTER Evelyn Wallace-Carter.

JD And where were you born?

WALLACE-CARTER I was born in Adelaide as Evelyn Carter and Wallace was one of my married names [laughs]. I was known as Evelyn Wallace when I worked for the Fisheries Department; then I changed it to Wallace-Carter when I got divorced so I've sort of retained that.

JD Would you like to tell us something of your early years?

WALLACE-CARTER Yes. I grew up in Cheltenham which is in Port Adelaide Football Club's area so I was a Port Adelaide supporter. I went to Woodville High and to work I did sort of office work because my mother was a widow and I didn't have a chance to go on much further at high school but then when I went to England I did some writing courses and started doing public relations work, putting out staff magazines. So I did that same thing when I came back to Australia and got a job with the Fisheries Department as a publicity officer or public relations officer when they were just starting up the magazine for the professional fishermen here in South Australia. The fishermen had agreed to have even more money taken towards a licence so that they

could have such a magazine so they were very keen to have it and it was quite popular I think. They used to contribute [to the magazine].

JD About when was that, that you came back to Australia and joined the Fisheries Department?

WALLACE-CARTER Oh, I came back in the early '70s and I joined the Fisheries in 1974.

JD And you stayed with fisheries then for quite some time?

WALLACE-CARTER Till about the end of the '70s and then I did part-time work and worked on my book the rest of the time.

JD Did you have any training in journalism at all in England?

WALLACE-CARTER Ah, really it was only writing in all forms including journalism and I did a library course and then it was on the job training with a big department in a, what's a co-operative over there which is a, what would you say, well a co-operative where you pay a subscription in and they had 10,000 staff so it was a big concern.

JD Before you wrote and published your history of South Australian fisheries, had you done any other publications, other than for the Fisheries Department?

WALLACE-CARTER Yes. The one in England was really the same as the one in the Fisheries Department in that it was a printed monthly magazine put out for.... but there it was put out for staff and another one was put out for members. Then I worked for Elders for a while and just did a staff newsletter and contributed to the Australia-wide staff magazine and really the Fisheries was a similar thing except it was for professional fishermen rather than staff.

JD But you hadn't done a full scale, full length book?

WALLACE-CARTER Oh no. This is the first book I've written [laughs] and it'll be the last one I write too, on fact anyway. I think the next thing's fiction. It's much easier. That's really only a joke. I found it quite fascinating finding out facts. Facts being really living information. I didn't even used to think I was interested in history particularly. People think of history in a different way sometimes. They think, oh history, you know, long long ago but there's history of people who are really still living or their fathers' and mothers' history or even their parents' history comes alive when they talk about it or when you can read their actual words they wrote in some report or letter, or when you see photographs of them in the boats they used and, you know, the horses and carts they used to transport their catches. It sort of all came alive and history became very different.

I think this is why oral history's so good because its living history and I hope my book is as well. We've tried to make it live as much as possible. By we, I meant the fishermen and I, by telling, you know, funny stories as well as fact.

JD You've certainly succeeded I can ashore you.

WALLACE-CARTER Thank you.

JD In preparing the book which was a tremendous undertaking I'm sure, it must have taken you many, many years of work. How many years did it take?

WALLACE-CARTER Ah, ten years part-time but towards the last couple of years it was close, well at least two-thirds time. You know I was working until, say sometimes 3.00 o'clock in the morning 'cause once you start.... Well this is what I think and I've had discussions with other people about this, but once you start, it's starting to flow and you've at last worked all these threads in and you can feel it in your mind how it's all gonna flow. I don't think you can stop until that segment's finished. Someone I was talking to said, "Oh you should work 9.00 till 5.00" and I thought writing's not like that [laughs].

JD Did you ever feel that you'd undertaken something that was too big and perhaps you wouldn't continue with it?

WALLACE-CARTER I always thought I'd taken on something enormous and once early on I thought, I didn't quite know how I was gonna do it but I never thought I would not do it because I thought once I'd interviewed one person, I was committed, and then two, three, four. I mean you're just more and more committed. I felt I couldn't not do it.

JD You couldn't break faith with the people [unclear]

WALLACE-CARTER No but I mean I got divorced and everything [laughs]. Not wholly because of the book but I bet it contributed [laughs]. No, my ex-husband and I are quite good friends. We laugh about the fact that the book did take up a lot of my life.

JD Did you get a lot of support, or not much from various people and organisations?

WALLACE-CARTER I got a lot of emotional support and enthusiasm and a lot of information was given to me without any effort. Well, you know there was some effort of course. I mean you have to go and see people and interview them but a lot of people were keen. There wasn't much monetary support [laughs] like I got $1,000.00 special purpose grant from the Australia Council Literature Board which was the other reason why I was committed. I applied for this grant before I did anything at all and it was really just, oh well I'll apply for a grant and if I get it I'll write a history, because the fishermen were pressuring me to write a history, a few of them anyway, such as Bill Haldane over in Port Lincoln. They were sort of the thoughtful fishermen who were on the Fishing Industry Board here in South Australia. Some of those were saying, you know, someone's died and our history's gonna die with him.

So I applied for this special purpose grant. As I say $1,000.00 and when I received this envelope I could see it was from the Australia Council and I thought, do I want it to be yes or no? Anyway I opened it up and it was yes so although it was only $1,000.00, that also committed me morally. They didn't commit anyone to finishing a project with that. They just said "Should you ever get a book published, do let us know and let us have a copy" and they did want just a report on how much help the special purpose grant had been. You just write that within say a year or so and that was really all they wanted. So I bet they were surprised ten years later when they got a book.

JD How else helped?

WALLACE-CARTER Oh mostly Neville Wanklin in Port Lincoln [who] was amazingly helpful. He worked for the **Port Lincoln Times** and over the years he'd interviewed people, I suppose in his own spare time; fishing industry people for, oh twenty or

more years, just because he was interested. He was interested in boats and he was interested in the people and he had these files and files of interviews. One day he was gonna write them up but he reckoned one day wasn't ever going to come and he said I could use ANYTHING that he had. This also included photographs 'cause he was also a photographer for the **Times** so that was an amazingly helpful.

The **Port Lincoln Times** themselves were very helpful. They, you know, they could sort of lend me or get me copies of photographs. I think I paid for them, I'm not sure now. I paid for photographs everywhere else but I'm not sure there. Anyway I used their indexes, or Neville's indexes, but their old file copies. So they were quite helpful. They'd even send me across photocopies of pieces I asked for from, you know, Neville's indexes he'd kept for himself.

Apart from, you know, just a lot of interest people put into.... Oh, I know someone else yes. Jim MacIntime [of] Stansbury was so helpful I was overwhelmed; but really he just wanted the history of the old oyster fishery recorded and so he used to send me information and contact me and ask me to come and stay, which I did. He was in his '70s at the time and he got one of his old mates, I think it was his old mate perhaps from World War Two days 'cause he was one of the Rats of Tobruk. Anyway he got one of his old mates to come and stay as a, what do you call it, a chaperon [laughs] so I could stay in the house with him. First time I went and stayed I stayed in the Stansbury Hotel and he said, "No, come and stay here" and he was just so full of information about the old days because South Australia had an old oyster fishery before anything else, which was the native oyster which they called a mud oyster which is a bit off-putting for people. Jim had taken the trouble to contact one of these old oyster men in about the 1930s I think and he actually recorded everything this old fellow told him. This old fellow at the time of the early oyster fishery, had only been a young boy in at the tale end. So you can see it was a real oral history.

There must be others around that were helpful. Yes, Joy Chilman who was the daughter of one of the Port Lincoln fishermen. She contacted me out of the blue, quite near the end of.... when I was in the process of almost getting it printed. Her father was.... who was her father[?].... I know him so well. Now I'll have to get you to stop. Yes her father, Sid Leach, was one of the really well known fishermen out of Port Lincoln. Just scale fishing, well after World War One. Joy was so keen that the story of her father and all the old fishermen of those days should be included that she loaned me photographs and was a lot of help; helped me index the book and that was quite a job. I know we've missed some but, you know, indexing all the boats and all the people who are mentioned....

Oh I'm just trying to think of other people who were helpful; but really masses of people just came forward just saying they wanted to give information and that was the main help. I think the main help was also.... another fact was the fact that I'd worked for the Fisheries Department. I don't think the fishermen would have just fronted up to someone who was gonna write a history. I think it had to be someone they knew.

JD Could you tell us a bit about how you went about gathering all this data?

WALLACE-CARTER Well at first I thought I'd better interview the elderly people, mostly the elderly fishermen; but then I realised that often their wives were involved and fishing, sometimes particularly in the past, was a real family business. As I got involved, because people were dying and the history was being lost (this is what you're kept being told) I thought I'd better interview them before any more died. So I

rushed round trying to interview older ones before they died. Of course some of them are still alive today which was a good thing and they have even got to read the book.

Then I started going back into the early days after that. I went to the archives and it seemed like I spent, you know, months and years down in the archives in the State Library which are right at the very bottom; rather like a womb, all nice and safe and quiet and rather muted light. I read a lot of the actual, what they call primary sources, which are the actual original letters written by people which they had to call up from various deposits they had. That way I actually found one of the early chiefs of the Fisheries Department that the records of him having held such a position, had been lost. It was really quite fascinating. I went on and on reading old papers, reading old reports and cross-checking and chasing stories. 'Cause in the end you can see the stories evolving through the letters.

One of them was the old oyster fishery. There was a man in Glenelg who used to go across to either Coffin Bay or just across to York Peninsula and this is in the days before there were any beacons or lights or any navigational aids, and pick up oysters, bring them back and put them on what's called Oyster Point at Glenelg here which is sort of south of the jetty. It's still there and then people would just watch him do it and come and steal his oysters. So he wrote to the Colonial Secretary and said, "Is there any legislation to protect me and my oysters"? They said, "No you've got to catch them by your own vigilance". So the next letter he wrote said, "I have caught them by my own vigilance, what shall I do now"? [laughs] Eventually a law was passed to protect anyone who deposited oysters ready for resale.

There's all little.... This is what I was saying before about history. In the end you realise there's fascinating little stories about real people in there.

JD Were you working as well as researching this book?

WALLACE-CARTER I was to begin with which meant I didn't do all that much 'cause I was working full-time at the Fisheries Department and then I was just going off doing interviews when I could or if I happened to go down to the south east for the Department for instance, I could go and interview someone in the evening or stay over the weekend and interview them, but [it] didn't really work out very well. So I eventually went part-time and worked on the book the rest of the time which of course meant that there was no income from it but it was absolutely fascinating. [laughs]

JD It must have entailed a great deal of travel and costly accommodation?

WALLACE-CARTER Yes it did sometimes. Other times I actually stayed with various people like Neville and his wife in Port Lincoln [who] put me up and, oh, who I always think of as the main fisherman on the River Murray, he and his wife put me up - Frank Harrup. People were very good like that which I suppose is a bit cheeky but they ask so I said, "Yes please". Then other places I did go and stay in hotels and motels and drove around a lot. I just wanted to do it so I didn't sort of think about the costs I suppose.

JD Did you have much travel tracking the people that you wanted to interview down?

WALLACE-CARTER Not most of them. A lot of them, it was quite simple in that they came forward but there were a few that I really realised needed to be worked into it such as Bert Wilson in Port Lincoln 'cause he was, or well he used to be in Port Lincoln I should say, in early tuna fishering days. He had the **Fair Tuna** and I really wanted to get the story right about when all these big boats came in and it started the tuna big

boat era. Really it was the big boat era for all the fisheries because prior to that it'd all been small boat fishing.

I really wanted that to be right 'cause there was the **Fair Tuna** and the **Tacoma** and another Fair boat. Oh I can't think of its name. I wanted to get the story right of who was doing what when because eventually the fishermen and Safcol and the Government brought out the two brothers from America to teach them pole and live bait fishing 'cause they'd been trying to do it purseseining and trolling. One went on one boat and one went on the other and one went on Bert Wilson's **Fair Tuna** and one went on the **Tacoma** with the Haldane brothers. I really wanted to get it right and it took a lot of working around to get it.... I wrote to any address I could find for Bert Wilson but I didn't make any contact with him, but through researching the **Port Lincoln Times** at the time and talking to some other people, I gradually got it right. Then it turned out Gunnar Jensen was on the **Fair Tuna** so that worked out well. 'Cause he of course is still in Port Lincoln and talking about what they used to do.

JD It took you in total at least ten years, didn't it?

WALLACE-CARTER Yes. That was up to getting it to the printer cause I'm the publisher.

JD You yourself published it?

WALLACE-CARTER Yes, I'm the publisher.

JD Could you tell us that story?

WALLACE-CARTER Really by chance the putting together of the book and the writing of it was just about finished in time for South Australia's diamond jubilee (it wasn't a diamond jubilee), 150 years. There were grants available for having books printed and published in South Australia. I applied for one through Wakefield Press which had been set up by the Government to actually handle these sort of publications. I was advised by Wakefield Press that the Government had put up $4,000.00 and that they (Wakefield Press) would be happy to publish the book and print it. So I waited and we fiddled around for a long time and eventually the actual publisher went elsewhere and a new fellow was appointed and he said, "Oh no, no we're not doing this. We've got to work all this out. It's all a bit of a mix up" or a mess or something. By this time the Jubilee was over so the beginning of the next year I sort of pressed the Government to say I still wanted this $4,000.00 because it wasn't my fault they've made such a mess of it and it would have been available. I didn't know this. I could have just taken it at any stage to any other printer or if someone else was gonna publish it, to any publisher and get it printed.

So what I did was, I did get the $4,000.00 and then I just got quotes myself which was $26,000.00 for a hard cover because there's a lot of pages in the book, like over 400. I just went ahead and had it printed myself. The South Australian Fishing Industry Council put up $2,000.00. I asked them and they were most helpful then. Over the years they'd had different executive secretaries and although they'd been helpful in guiding me to different fishermen, they hadn't thought about the money angle. Anyway they put up $2,000.00 then. The Department put up $1,000.00. Safcol put up $1,000.00 and Milan Wrap at Ocean Foods put up $500.00 which I thought was very nice of him 'cause it's a small business. I put up the rest which was something like, I think I got about $9,000.00 somehow. So there was $17,000.00 I put up.

Anyway I then found a printer and got it printed through them with me as the publisher. I registered a name because I decided I didn't want it to be published by the author, but now it's quite an accepted thing; it's published by the author. I used to think it looked like nobody wanted to publish the book and you [have] done it yourself. There was even hassles getting it printed which is a great shame because the printer I went to, (Gibbinghams, I think, wasn't it.... yes) are good printers. Just by chance they were busy at that time and they'd taken on someone just to help out. I suppose it was luck I'd put in writing the fact that I wanted the photographs put into pages. When I got there one day and saw them laying out, this fellow was putting in all little small versions of photographs dotted around the book which I thought looked terrible. So I had to go and fight with them about it and I didn't change all of it but I changed some of it to make them into pages of photographs. My name was mud with them I think but anyway I had to put it in writing and that was what I wanted. So I half got it anyway. In the end the book looks quite good and the cover photograph came up really well. I borrowed it from the Fisheries Department and at first the printers said, "Oh that's gonna be too dark" but they did a really good job of it. They closed in on the silhouette of the prawn trawler at sunset and they took some of the dark that was around it out. I thought, well I've been so disagreeable about the photographs, I'd better say, yes, yes good idea about the cover. They were right in that case. It came out very well.

JD I must say it's a beautifully presented book.

WALLACE-CARTER Yeah. I thought it needed to be a hard cover. A number of the fishermen said that too. They said, "Oh if you can make it a really good looking book, we'll use it to present to overseas visitors". I know some of the Port Lincoln fishermen did do that 'cause there's even a photograph of some abalone divers presenting it to some Japanese visitors I think that was in the **Port Lincoln Times**.

JD What size print run did you have?

WALLACE-CARTER 1500 and 1300 or more of them are sold now. So there's only about 200 I hope left. I hope that's right and I'm gonna try and sell every one and I'm not going to have a reprint as people are suggesting.

JD Are you handling the distribution yourself?

WALLACE-CARTER Yes, yes. I thought that was the most economical way 'cause it needed.... I needed to sell 1,000 I think it was to cover the printing costs because of course selling through bookshops, they take a big percentage off. I sold some directly but most of them went through bookshops and the Maritime Museum and the State Library Bookshop and really their newsagents in Port Lincoln but they've sold masses of them. Really after about 1,000 were sold, then I could start covering some of the other costs so it has covered its printing costs and its covered some of the other costs. It will never cover time, but as everybody says, history books don't cover you for your time; the time you spent researching it or writing it but it doesn't matter.

JD You must have had a great deal of satisfaction out of it, quite apart from the financial aspects?

WALLACE-CARTER Oh yes, yes. I thought I was really pleased I've finished it but it was really good when we had a proper launch. We had SAFIC (the South Australian Fishing Industry Council) [which] organised a launch at the Maritime Museum in Port Adelaide. We had one of the fishing identities, Hagen Steere launch it because he'd been in so many of the different fisheries and he was now a big entrepreneur in the

tuna fishery. It was really a very moving time because he gave a.... I say surprisingly because everyone things, you know, Hagen's this big strong, forceful character, which he is, but he gave a tremendous speech which had people just about in tears. Then next minute he had them laughing. He was just telling about fishermen and what had happened over the years, how he is gonna tell Government nowdays before they start, you know, sort of saying fishermen make too much money, he's going to encourage them to read what struggles fishermen had over the years. So he's actually said he's gonna tell them to read the book [laughs] and that was a really good day for me, yes.

We had another launch over in Port Lincoln when they opened the Lincoln Cove Marina. We asked.... what's his name, someone Kelsey? Anyway the man who was sort of mainly organising the opening of Lincoln Cove Marina and if we could have a Port Lincoln launch there which we did and the Premier was there and all sorts of people. They all came and bought their copies of the book and Joy Chilman, the one that helped me index it, came over specially. Her and her husband were doing the selling. It was really another good day. As I'm interested in yachting we've since taken our boat over to Port Lincoln Marina. It's a lovely place.

JD 'Tis indeed. I know your book was very, very well received in the fishing community. What about the broader community? Has it had a good sale or a good acceptance there?

WALLACE-CARTER I think it's always someone who knows someone unless of course they're amateur fishermen. That was a surprise early on, that's right. A couple of the, what do you call them, fishing writers in newspapers and fishing journals wrote up the book. Some of them interviewed me, some on air. They encouraged sort of amateur fishermen to read it. I kept saying, "It's only about professional fishing" but they said, "Oh no, people who are interested in fishing in any way are interested in every book that's ever published on fishing. So that was quite a surprise but apart from that usually it's someone who knew someone who was involved in the fishing industry or was interested in boats or.... Well they've got to be interested in some part of the segment but Port Lincoln, I don't know how they're still selling the book, but they're still selling it. They must have sold at least 1,000 of them.

This interview is continued on side B.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

TAPE 1 SIDE B

JD Your whole book deals with all manner of people and incidents in the fishing world in South Australia. Some of those people and incidents I think would have stuck in your memory as being quite outstanding. Could you identify some of those?

WALLACE-CARTER Yes. There's a whole group of them that I, don't know why but I feel really quite involved with. They were the scale fishermen who fished out of, well partly out of Port Lincoln. They were Port Lincoln people but they often went round to Farm Beach and the other ports along the west coast there. There were the Munday brothers and probably I [am] particularly interested in them because I did have a chance to interview Jim Munday before he died, although he was a very old man. He was the youngest of the brothers and his son I've talked to, Ken Munday; but I've read so much about them and heard stories about them. They've sort of started up scale fishing round in Coffin Bay I think, Jim, and he used to have a young man with him, one after another and give them training in fishing. There's some lovely photos I've

got of the three brothers and there's one of the three brothers plus Joy Chilman's dad and their camp, I think it's in Venus Bay about the 1920s, and they've got the bow spread of their boat, the must have had it pulled up against the.... on the sand, with a sail thrown over and that's their tent. Here are Perc, Jim and Augie Munday and Sid Leach it is; camped at Venus Bay for the 1928 fishing season. I think they're marvellous.

There's another little photograph which I borrowed from Blondie Harvey who still lives in Port Lincoln. He used to crew with some of the Munday brothers and they've got, he and his brother as well, Blondie and Bob Harvey and I've got a picture of their shack in Venus Bay. It looks like it's made of corrugated iron and they've got their cooking utensils hanging on the outside wall and it's probably, it doesn't even look big enough for two of them to lay down in. They seem like they were real cards, real characters. Blondie Harvey's told me such stories about them that, you know, they really live. Some of them were little devils. They used to go to dances and in those days it was early closing and also you weren't allowed to have alcohol at the dance. This is at Wangareena, round that way. They used to just go out and slid their hands down the backs of cars along by the fence posts and he said, "You always found a bottle someone had put somewhere". Although they told us real fun stories, you then realised that they had to walk or push a bike back to their boat which was quite a few miles away.

When any of them married their wives had to, sort of had, a reasonably hard life in living mostly alone, washing these, what shall we say, soiled clothing covered in fish scales and looking after the children. Some of them took up teaching and one I remember started a little shop up at Wangaree to try and also raise money 'cause these were really about subsistence fishing some times. 'Cause as they said when there was a big catch, and they think, right we're gonna get a lot of money here. Everyone had a big catch so there was very little money 'cause they got such a small price for it. As I think you were saying, and I know Joy said this about her father, that they never thought of doing anything else. They were fishermen and that's all they wanted to do. She said when her father wanted to have a holiday or wanted to take his wife and children on holiday, he used to continue fishing. He'd just take them with him and they used to call at the islands out from Port Lincoln and the lighthouse keepers would give them some of the new baked bread and Joy and her brother Bill thought this was great, but all the time her dad kept on fishing 'cause that was their income. So it wasn't easy but she said they never thought of anything else. In fact it's the only part in the book that I find so sad that I don't like to even read it again when she talks about when they grew old. She said he and one of the other old fishermen.... That's really sensible. They sold one boat and the two of them fished together until they were really so old they couldn't fish any more.

So they were really just fishermen, but thoughtful fishermen who cared about the fact that the stocks were down even in those days. Even in the '20s this, I always call him Joy's dad but in actual fact it's Sid Leach, Sid Leach was interviewed in Adelaide for a Royal Commission and he was saying then how worried they were that the stocks were going down. He said how many they used to catch when he went to this patch and how long it took him and how many days he was there and how long it took him now to catch the same number of fish in the same area. So they were saying then they wanted the biologists to go and study the fish stocks but the poor old Fisheries Department never used to have much money to do such things in those days but eventually of course it did.

JD It's an industry that seems always to have had wonderful characters.

WALLACE-CARTER Yes.

JD And it's a rugged industry; has always been and I think still is.

WALLACE-CARTER Yes. There's one character I would like to mention because it's associated with a boat that was one of THE boats in the South Australian fishing industry and this is the Simms family and the character I was thinking of was Rick Simms but all the Simms I reckon. The early ones were Curly Joe and I should remember the wives as well 'cause I was careful always to bring the women into the book because I realised quite early on that they did a lot of the work as well.

Anyway Curly Joe had these sons and one of them he called Riccardo Geronimo which must have given him a strange start in life. Curly Joe had this marvellous boat called the **Mini Simms** [which he] built but quite early on Rick bought it from him and that's what he called himself, Rick, and he went to Port Lincoln. He left, oh it was called Simmons Cove, it's out from Moonta He left there where the Simms family still live today and he went to Port Lincoln with the **Mini Simms** and he married Jack Green's sister Clare.

That's another big fishing family and they had only one son and you see this idea of calling people funny names, they called their son Thistle after Thistle island [laughs]. He was a real character. He used to wear a bowler hat and a waistcoat when he was fishing but bare feet and he used to catch sharks and exhibit them under canvas, you know in a tent at Glenelg when it was Australia Day. He did the same at Port Lincoln and I think it was him that used to, oh, compete in tremendous rowing races. They'd row the boat or row the catch up the Gulf as if they were fishing under sail of course and then they'd sail to Port Adelaide with the catch. Even when there were motors, Rick put one on the **Mini Simms** for a short while and then he took it off. He didn't need a motor he said. This was the boat that had the record for 40 years against any yacht for sailing from Port Lincoln to Adelaide. They held the record for 40 years. Many stories are told about him racing these glamour yachts, these glamorous, glamorous is perhaps the wrong word. These smartly dressed yachtsmen used to come and challenge him to race us and they've got photos of them where Rick says, "Oh no I won't bother to unload my fish. I'll sail. Just let me change my sails and I'm ready to go". He had silk sails and he just hoisted this set of silk sails and he would just leave them for dead they reckon. He'd be back up the wharf packing his fish up by the time the other yacht got back in, or limped back in I think. He used to race the steamers sometimes back to Port Adelaide. Only, for instance, he missed it one time they reckon and so he said "Oh well, let's keep going" and they just sailed on and got to Port Adelaide and they were selling their fish and then the steamer arrived. So, you know, he was a real character they reckon. There's so many stories but once I start telling stories I don't stop.

JD Just to change the tack a little bit. In the course of preparing this book and publishing it you must have gained a great deal of knowledge about the fishing industry in South Australia. How do you see its future?

WALLACE-CARTER Oh I don't know. I couldn't talk about the future as such only the fact that it's always been an industry, every aspect of it, every fishery, has always seemed to be so fragile that they're always got to be protected with care. A lot of the fishermen did do the protecting themselves even before the Department became involved but there were always rogues that came in and I suppose ripped it off and the first fishery, this old native oyster fishery, was absolutely ruined through, not the oyster fishermen themselves so they said, but through just anybody being allowed to come in and take the oysters 'cause the old legislation was anyone with a licence could

take anything and no size limits either. So size limits and seasons and all these things have been brought in but in some fisheries, maybe too late or maybe there's some trying to cheat too much. I don't think there is. I think there's very few that go against the good of the fishermen and their future generations. It still seems to fragile, all of it.

I mean the thing that jumps into my mind is something that Australia doesn't do this drift netting and all these things. They're just so horrific I mean it sort of shows our species to be so greedy. So really all I can say about perhaps the future of fishery is that it continues to be fragile and everyone has to do their best to keep the balance right with nature.

JD Do you see changes in the offering in regard to owner/operators?

WALLACE-CARTER Oh, that's been very interesting here in South Australia 'cause when I worked for the Fisheries Department, when I used to do the magazine for the fishermen, the policy was owner/operator. In a way it was to protect the fishermen themselves against big business coming in and taking them over but now that the fishermen have won the right to sell the licence really it is, to sell the licence with the boat, which they wanted because they said otherwise the boat was no good, the fishermen say really only fishermen buy the boats anyway. So what was feared doesn't seem to be happening which is a good thing. It gives the fisherman, you know, more control of his own future, his or her 'cause we have got a few women getting more involved, in the upfront fishing I meant. So because I was brought up, or I worked with the owner/operator policy I thought oh dear, what will happen when it comes in, but it seems to be that many of them are so careful and so good at managing themselves. I'm thinking of the abalone divers who've taken more and more responsibility for their own management and the prawn fishermen in Spencer Gulf that, as some of them say, this is probably the way it goes, the way it should go. I don't know but this is what the fishermen say themselves that perhaps they can manage it themselves at much less cost than the Government. They sort of report to the Government and have their biologists but they don't need so much policing if they police themselves.

So in a way perhaps that's certainly a hope for the future but perhaps the main hope for the future is the aquaculture and murrayculture. Some of the fishermen's associations were getting involved in this the last time I sort of, you know, heard about it. I don't know it in detail except I know one of the ab. divers in Port Lincoln have worked and worked to start up a abalone hatchery and had a number of setbacks but he's been working at it for years. I know we've got spatfall now, or have had for some years in South Australia with oysters which was a great success at long last. After years of people saying it wouldn't be possible. So probably aquaculture is the way it will have to go.

JD Thank you very much for all of that. Just before we finish, is there anything else either about the book or the industry that you'd like to have on this record?

WALLACE-CARTER Ah, I'd like to tell a story that Ken Munday told me 'cause I think the boats.... and that's probably something I haven't mentioned. I was terribly interested in the early history of the fishermen because they were sailor fishermen and the boats they used were sailing boats. In fact a lot of them were yachts that were converted to fishing cutters and they used to, well rock lobster was an early fishery in South Australia and they used to pull the pots onto sail.

Anyway one of the yachts was the **Annie** which was built in 1902 I think it was; anyway early in this century. I went and talked to Ken Munday which is the son of Jim Munday, the three brothers, about this boat 'cause he had it. It had been converted just to an ordinary looking cray boat but he was really fascinated in the history of the boat. It turns out a lot of the fishermen were and probably still are. So he said, "Go and talk to"; he game me the name of someone in Kangaroo Island who had the boat. That's something about the fishermen, they just talk Port Lincoln. They say, "Oh go and see so and so" and you say, "Where?" and he said "Oh he's in Kangaroo Island, American River". So they're all like neighbours although they live a long way apart. Anyway the history of that boat I followed up and put it in the book; but when I was talking to Ken he said, oh, he thought of the name of someone. He told me one of the names of one of the people who had it when he used to fish out of Venus Bay, this is the **Annie**. It had other names. It's got the other names in the book but I can't remember. Anyway he said this fellow had the **Annie** and this Johnny Sandelias in a boat called the **Iris**. I always remember that 'cause I couldn't work out how to spell Sandelias and nor could anyone else. Anyway he said (this fellow on the **Annie** said) "Oh look, if you've never been into Venus Bay before, look just follow me. Watch what I do. Do what I do" and I've got Ken telling it word for word in the book which I think makes it much more fun than me trying to sort of paraphrase him. So he turned the **Annie** into Venus Bay and it's got like a breaking bar at Venus Bay and he got the motor going quite fast, headed the **Annie** in, turned turtle totally, came up with the motor running and kept going into Venus Bay. Johnny Sandelias on the **Iris** said, "I can't do that" [laughs]. So he never, never went into Venus Bay [laughs].

JD Thanks for that and thanks for this wonderful interview.

WALLACE-CARTER Thank you very much.

JD May I congratulate you on your book. It's a tremendous achievement and a great contribution to the fishing industry in South Australia.

WALLACE-CARTER Thank you very much.

That is the end of this interview with Evelyn Wallace-Carter, author of the book **For They Were Fishers** which is the history of the fishing industry in South Australia.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW

Verbatim transcript of an interview with NEIL WILLIAMS

INTRODUCTION

This interview with Mr Neil Williams, who is a pioneer abalone diver of Port Lincoln, South Australia, was conducted on the 20th January, 1990 at Mr Williams' home in Port Lincoln for Murdoch University and the Australian Fishing Industry Research Council. It is part of the oral history of the Australian Fishing Industry project.

Mr Williams was the first full-time professional abalone diver working out of Port Lincoln. With the help of his wife, Lyn, he started diving commercially for Port Lincoln oysters before changing over to abalone fishing using only the most primitive equipment. His account of the risks he faced from bends, from shark attack and from all the other hazards of the sea make an enthralling adventure story and one he tells with great modesty and clarity. The rewards no doubt have been great but so have the risks.

Mr Williams has earned his success and it is pleasing indeed to have this record of his achievement.

There are two tapes. The interview starts at 021 on the revolution counter.

TAPE 1 SIDE A

JD Could you record your full name, date and place of birth please.

WILLIAMS Darby Neil Williams.

JD And your date of birth?

WILLIAMS 3/7/36.

JD And where were you born?

WILLIAMS Broken Hill.

JD Was your family involved in fishing? Hardly, from Broken Hill I suppose!

WILLIAMS [laughs] No, no, no. There's no connection with [the] fishing industry in the family at all.

JD No. Broken Hill would probably be mining, would it?

WILLIAMS Oh, actually my father worked in the timber industry there.

JD In Broken Hill?

WILLIAMS In Broken Hill, yes. You know, the timber they use in the mines for shoring up the drives etc.

JD What did you do after you left school Neil?

WILLIAMS First I got a job in the power station and did an apprenticeship as an electrician.

JD At Broken Hill?

WILLIAMS No, no. We'd left Broken Hill and went to live at Naracoorte in the south east [of] South Australia. It was there that I joined the power house which at that stage wasn't under the Electricity Trust of South Australia. It was just a privately owned power house. I joined that to do an apprenticeship as an electrician.

JD What brought you to Port Lincoln?

WILLIAMS Well it was quite a few years after my apprenticeship, but my wife and I had got a job with [the] Department of Works at Woomera and moved up to there. One Christmas we came down to Port Lincoln for a holiday and we liked the place so much we just went back and gave notice and came back to Port Lincoln.

JD To work as an electrician?

WILLIAMS Yes. I got a job with a chap called Frank Hunt who was at that time putting in swerlines which is a single wire earth return to all the farms round the district. I got a job with him working in that category.

JD Well how did you get into fishing?

WILLIAMS Well I wasn't.... being an electrician, it was really only a stop gap. It wasn't what I wanted to do with my life. I hadn't sort of really found what I wanted and this would have been the first time that we actually lived by the sea, and I think that suddenly I realised that what I would really like to do was something out on the water.

When we first came to Port Lincoln I took the opportunity to go out on one of the tuna boats thinking that I'd try my hand as a tuna fisherman. I did a trip out on one of the boats just as a passenger, a working passenger, but unfortunately I found that I got sea sick. I found out that it really wasn't my cup of tea so I came back and continued working as an electrician in Port Lincoln. I got a job with the abattoirs and worked there as their maintenance electrician. Then on weekends I would go out and in those days there was quite a lot of natural oysters in Proper Bay. On the weekends my wife and I would go out and collect, I'd do the diving, and collect oysters.

JD Was this skin diving?

WILLIAMS Yeah. In those days of course, you know, the equipment.... we didn't have the equipment that that they have today. Basically what we'd do is have compressed air bottles on board the boat and still use an air line though, leaving the bottles on the boat. Hooker[s] at those days were virtually unknown and were not available, and they were too expensive 'cause we didn't have any money. So we just made do with whatever we could and we'd just go out and collect these oysters.

Of course at that stage Port Lincoln oysters were unknown. Although they'd been a big industry back in the early days (they used to dredge them here). They'd sort of virtually wiped the industry out and then it'd been left for many years and nobody worried about it. When we started, well I started diving for them again, we had to sort of re-create the market because they're such a huge oyster. They were nothing like the Sydney Rock. They were a big mud oyster and although they were very tasty, they weren't the best looking oyster on a plate, being so big. So we had to create a market at that stage.

JD What was the market that you created?

WILLIAMS Well because we weren't getting any great amount, it was a little bit difficult and we had to concentrate first of all on the local scene because we couldn't keep them. Once we caught them we had to do something with them. So we tried, you know, just selling them to the hotels and people, just the locals in general but then we found out we had too many for that. We tried selling them to some of the different places in Adelaide but the biggest problem was getting them there, being 400 miles by road and the freezer and chilling facilities weren't available in those days. But anyway we persevered and were making a small bit of money at it. It subsidised our income a little bit, you know, covers expenses.

JD This was just a weekend occupation?

WILLIAMS It was just a weekend thing at that stage, yes. That's how it was that we became, we were on the scene as a diving (only recreational diving) couple. Well Lynne was doing the boat work, my wife, when Safcol first became aware of the possibility of abalone being.... (which in those days were known as mutton fish to us) may be in commercial quantities in South Australia, or in the area around here.

JD Was that the Co-Op?

WILLIAMS That's the South Australian Fishermen's Co-Op, yes. Dick Fowler was the general manager at that stage. One of the original people that approached me was a chap called Colonel Dredge who was a member of the Board in those early days. I knew him personally and privately and he approached me knowing that I had been diving for oysters because some of the oysters we tried to sell through Safcol to Adelaide. So that was virtually the start of us getting into the abalone field.

JD And the Co-Op asked you to have a look at the abalone fishery?

WILLIAMS Yes. They virtually came up with a proposition. As I said, we couldn't' afford to buy the proper diving equipment. I had a small boat at that stage but they said that they were prepared to make a small payment or they would buy the hooker for me to use to go out and do the actual research. So they contributed to the original start of the industry.

JD Did you have experience in using a hooker?

WILLIAMS At that stage, no. The only experience that we'd had, as I said, we were using air line but from bottles. So all we were doing was going from bottles to a compressor and using the air line so it was basically the same. So I'd had experience at that.

JD [unclear]. What sort of depth of water did you dive in for abalone initially?

WILLIAMS Well in those days of course we were very inexperienced and we were virtually only looking for abalone in shallow water, say to depths of 45,50 feet; but of course our coastline here drops off pretty quick. It didn't take long before we found out that the particular species of abalone, or one of them over here, occurred on the weed line in general, where the rocks come down and meet the tape weed or the sand. So it meant that suddenly we were working in 60 and 70 and 80 feet of water. It came up pretty quick because naturally there isn't a lot of really shallow water and you have to have exceptionally good days, swell wise and weather wise, to get at the shallow areas.

JD What would be the maximum depth of water that a diver can work in?

WILLIAMS Well the maximum I'd say over here that we found abalone occur to, would probably be around about 120, 130 foot mark.

JD Is it safe to dive at that depth?

WILLIAMS Yes, yes. Divers were diving to that depth probably twenty years ago and they were going there because most of the inshore waters had been exhausted.

JD They breathe just compressed air, do they?

WILLIAMS That's right, yes, just compressed air. Of course once you get to that depth you start to run into all sorts of problems, you know, associated with the bends. Of course Port Lincoln being in the position that it is, with no recompression facilities available in Port Lincoln, made it very difficult for commercial diving at that depth because of the limited amount of time that a diver could spend there without having to recompress or risk cases of the bends.

JD You were the first commercial abalone diver in this area Neil, weren't you?

WILLIAMS Yes, that's right. We started about 1964 I'd say. At that stage when we first started looking for abalone, when it first became a marketable product, there were quite a few sports divers, which we were all sports divers at that stage, going out on weekends collecting abalone, but I was the first one to be doing it full-time. Once I started out doing the original survey for Safcol and found that we could make a living, not entirely out of the abalone that I was catching, but also in conjunction with the oysters that we were still getting, I decided to take the chance to try to make a living at it because I felt that this was what I wanted to do with my life.

You know, it was a big risk in those days because I had a couple of small children and it meant leaving our house, because that belonged to the Government Produce Department who I worked for, and it meant taking a tremendous risk and going into debt to buy a suitable boat and equipment to do the job properly.

JD And you were getting very low prices, weren't you?

WILLIAMS Yes, when we first started out it was a shilling a pound for the meat or six pence a pound in the shell. Of course in those days because we had nobody to refer to really in how to find abalone or where it occurred or anything about it, it was a hit and miss. It was something that you just sort of had to go out and try. Of course we've got hundreds of miles of coast here and abalone don't occur on all the area. Of course not even all the rocky area, so it was a matter of trial and error.

I even went to the extent of writing to America and asking them over there what.... could they offer any information because our Fisheries Department here in South Australia had none whatsoever. They'd done no research or had no information on the abalone.

JD Did the Americans help you?

WILLIAMS They only sent over what literature they had available on their species. Of course they merely told us, you know, that it occurred on rocky outcrops etc. which we knew. Of course being a different specie, they occur in different areas. Even like our abalone here, we have two commercial varieties, a greenlip and a blacklip. Both occur in different areas. You get your greenlip as an abalone that lives out in the open along the weedline or around the bottom of granite outcrops or flat limestone areas. The blacklip predominantly lives in crevices and under ledges. Our greenlip which is haliotis laevigata (is the botanical name) was the predominant fishery here in the early days but because it was readily available and easy to find and existed mainly out in the deeper waters, made it more readily accessible to the divers. It tended to get over exploited.

JD Did you get the same price for greenlip and blacklip?

WILLIAMS In the early days we were getting the same price for both varieties but of course the blacklip variety which was the one known by the people who bought abalone.... The greenlip was virtually a new species and not as readily acceptable. The market had to be .... They had to do a lot of work on it. Safcol at that stage ..... [there were] two buyers: Safcol and Raptis. Both of these people had to do a lot of work on the overseas market to get the acceptability of our greenlip abalone here.

JD Could I ask you, what's the current price to the fishermen of abalone?

WILLIAMS Current price now is probably around about $50.00 a kilo.

JD So that's $25.00 a pound roughly?

WILLIAMS That's right, yes so you can see the....

JD There's been a big increase....

WILLIAMS Big increase. In the early days of the fishery it was very difficult to make a living and a lot of the original divers went broke and went by the wayside because it was just too demanding and there wasn't enough money in it. I think it was only the die hard people, divers, that wanted the life-style, enjoyed the adventure, I think, of being an abalone diver. They were the ones that survived.

JD How many divers would be working out of Port Lincoln?

WILLIAMS Port Lincoln, well there's about 29 I think, 29 or 30. I'm not sure exactly how many there are at the moment. Of course in the early days when there were unlimited access, we had hundreds and when they first brought in licensing of the abalone fishery, the Department issued something like about 120 licences so you can see that we've gone from 120 licences down to about 30.

JD Is that in order to preserve the stock?

WILLIAMS The stocks, yes. When they decided that there had to be some management policies they restricted the number of divers and of course in those days there was no transferability of licences. If you stopped diving, you lost your licence. It was just the end of it. That was the only way they could reduce the number because they realised after the initial issuing of 120 licences, that there were too many and that they had to reduce that number. Of course it's not something that happens over night. It takes years to reduce the number of fishermen because not only are those, some of them getting out and leaving for whatever reasons, there's also still those that want to get in. Of course at that stage when they had 120 and they had to get it down to 30, they had to.

JD How did they do it if there was transferability in licences? How did they manage to reduce it from....

WILLIAMS Well they just let it go at that stage. Of course because there were too many licences in there, they couldn't survive. There just wasn't enough abalone out there.

JD I suppose the licence didn't have a great saleability?

WILLIAMS Had no saleability. There was no value. Originally you just bought a fishing licence and then when they brought in management policies, it was the introduction of a permit to take abalone, so it had no value. It was just a piece of paper that you got for twelve months.

JD That's not the case nowdays is it?

WILLIAMS No, well of course when they gradually got the licences numbers down to an acceptable amount, it got to the stage then of saying, well how are we going to manage this fishery? How are we going to keep these numbers at this level? If a person left then, they're saying well, everybody that was in it at that stage had probably been in it for many years and had contributed a lot to the survival of the industry to that stage. I think the Department, with consultation with industry, found out that or decided that transferability was probably the most acceptable way of managing it.

JD Talking about the management of the industry, its a sort of a joint operation between the Department and the fishermen's organisations, is it?

WILLIAMS Well it is now. Course it's been a pretty rocky road right from the beginning. I would say today that the industry and fisheries have got a very good understanding and we're working together for the benefit of the fishery and also for the management of the industry. The industry has to be able to be managed as well as the stocks so it has to be a workable arrangement. There's still quite a few areas that I

think need to be ironed out but I've no doubt that within a few years they'll sort out their differences and come to a very good workable management arrangement.

JD Neil is there a problem with poachers?

WILLIAMS Well once they started to restrict the issuing of licences and there was still a number of people that wanted to get in and then with the increase in price, it made it a very attractive proposition to weekend divers and to in some cases probably full-time commercial poachers. We don't have a great deal of trouble in Port Lincoln but there have been, I believe, some fairly large amounts of poaching done at Streaky Bay or further west where our divers only visit. Because of the length, you know the distance involved from going to Port Lincoln to Streaky Bay or Ceduna or what have you, they only visit the area on occasions when the weather's right to maximise the amount of money they can earn with spending, how much it costs them to go there. So you try to work this in and you work the area, say for a month or two a year and then that's all it can really stand anyway; but of course what happened here then was that once the divers moved out of an area to let it have a rest, the poachers would come in and because poachers don't have a size limit, and we do, they've got easy pickings. There's no trouble selling the smaller abalone because the Asian markets, there's a big demand.

JD Are they sold through the processors?

WILLIAMS Oh, no. I don't know how they get rid of them today. Certainly not through the processors here that we have any dealings with. They could be run interstate; perhaps some backyard buyer; somebody.... I don't think any of the larger processors would be involved in it.

JD Are the penalties for poachers and illegal processing severe enough?

WILLIAMS Well I think they are now. The Department's finally got to the stage where they've been getting the power from the Government to put sufficient fines. I think that at this stage they're getting around about the mark where it's making it not a profitable business. They might not stop the full-time professional poacher but for the average weekend recreational guy that wants to do a little bit of poaching to pay for his fuel and motor etc, it's not worth the risk of losing his boat and equipment and the hefty fine involved for him to do it now, I think. So it will tend to rule out the small time poacher anyway. I think the Department from now on, it's just a matter of catching the professional poacher who's usually pretty well organised.

This interview is continued on side B of this tape.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

TAPE 1 SIDE B

JD Neil, is there a closed season for abalone?

WILLIAMS No. There's no closed season. What we've got in the industry at the moment is a quota arrangement to restrict the effort. When it was first decided by the Department to restrict in some way the effort, they reduced the number of divers. It then wasn't sufficient. They felt that there was sufficient number of divers [who] could harvest the resource but they then needed another means of reducing the effort

without reducing the number of people involved in the industry. So one of the options was a bag limit or restricting the number of days, say like the crayfishing industry.

Anyway they decided that with consultation with the industry, that the best way of managing it was by introducing a quota. That is, a certain tonnage every year.

JD Does everybody get the same quota?

WILLIAMS Everybody gets the same tonnage. Of course this created problems when it was first brought in because in those days, say we were down to 30 divers. Now the top divers, the gun divers, would get fifteen or twenty tonne and at the bottom end of the line you'd get the divers that just made a living; who may be got three or four tonne a year. So when they decided to bring in a quota that was going to be even across the board, the Department decided, I think on a figure like, they estimated that there was probably 200 tonne of maximum sustainable abalone, and divided it amongst the divers. Of course everybody then had to accept or, if we were going to accept the fact that the industry needed a quota, that the good divers were gonna have to make the sacrifice of reducing their earning ability and their catching ability from say 15 or 20 tonne down to 81/2 which was the original figure the Department put on us.

So you can imagine that it wasn't exactly a favourable decision by some guys but everybody made the decision and the industry went that way because they could see that it was necessary. It was the only way the industry was gonna survive; but you can see that there were probably the top 30% of the divers had to make a big sacrifice and of course when they.... by doing this.... In those days we used [to] prior to getting a quota, you worked every workable day of the year and [there were] a lot of days that weren't virtually workable. In other words there were days you went out that you shouldn't really be there. Visibility was bad. Wind was bad. Conditions were bad but sometimes if you went, you'd already gone to work. You'd travel a long way and you'd make the effort.

Well in those days divers probably worked 200 or 250 days a year whereas once the quota came in and they only had to go out and catch 81/2 tonne, it meant that the real good divers could just go out and pick them up virtually at their leisure. The lower end divers that were only getting four or five tonne or three tonne or whatever it was a year, that was probably.... They got that amount either because of their capabilities. In other words they weren't good enough to get [more] or they just preferred the life-style where they didn't need the large amount of money. You know, they just were in it for, you know, [to] go surfing or do whatever they wanted to do and just make enough money to survive; but of course going back then, when everybody go 81/2 tonne, suddenly they had a licence that they could take 81/2 tonne and of course everybody wanted to catch their quota.

So you found that some of these guys, you know, would pick their game up a bit or transfer their quota. The Department made arrangements in bringing in the quota that, you know, you could transfer part of a quota which meant that this gave some of these chaps a right to sell off part of their quota.

JD Did they sell it or lease it?

WILLIAMS No. Depended on the individual. No, when I say sell it, they couldn't sell it permanently. They could only sell it for that year. It wasn't something that could be sold and maintained by the other individual but they could sell their quota. Some of them, depending on the needs of the individual, some of them even gave it away. You

know, if they hadn't used it and it was getting towards the end of the year and somebody else who perhaps needed a little bit more, could negotiate about it anyway.

JD Neil, could you describe the operation of abalone fishing? How was it when you first started off and how did it develop whilst you were in the industry?

WILLIAMS Well when we first started of course it was pretty much a trial and error. Because there was no money in it, we couldn't afford to take along a crew. So when I first started the first couple of trips I went out I had a chap come along with me just on a weekend to tend the boat; but of course once it became full time, it was obvious that there wasn't enough money in it at that stage to pay a crew. We weren't making enough money so what I did was go out and work the boat on my own. In other words, we'd go out, anchor the boat and go over the side which meant that the boat had to be left unattended.

In the area down here common[ly] referred to as "the Passage", there's an area of fairly strong tide. Of course the thing that you had to watch most was that you didn't get swept away from the boat. You always had the hose.... you were attached to it with the hose but not with a life line. So if the hose parted or you had any problem, you'd be on your own. So to protect against this we used to swim down the anchor and work around the anchor all the time and then just gradually let the boat go back to a new area but of course it was pretty hard work. You're working in a two or three knot tide and trying to hang on down the bottom and shift the boat. Then of course when you filled the bag of abalone up, you had to get it back in the boat.

JD So you'd take up the anchor?

WILLIAMS Yeah. Well that's right. Well in those days of course, as I said, it was trial and error. First of all we [thought] well, how are we gonna pick the abalone up? What are we gonna put them in? I know originally some guys started off using hessian bags, wheat bags and they were putting them in those. Then they found out they were too clumsy under the water and so guys made net bags out of heavy twine. This was the sort of start of it. We put a piece of hose around the top, which they still do today, and we'd just make the bag. Then we'd carry it along the bottom, whereas today they use a parachute and we fill it with air and we can move along with it.

In the early days when it was trial and error, we'd lever a rope over the side of the boat with a weight on it and you'd get back underneath the boat and tie the bag onto the rope and then go up in boat and then pull the bag up which, some of the bags probably weighed 100 pound or more. It was pretty difficult to lift on board when you lifted them on by hand. Today of course they've winches and you, know, but in those days it was get them on board the best way you could. You couldn't afford to buy the equipment and it was developed over years the most efficient way of getting everything on board and handling it.

JD Did you have a compressor on board?

WILLIAMS Yes. Well the one I did, Safcol bought an original compressor for me to do the original survey and I was fortunate enough to have that compressor. It was a little three cubic foot compressor which was very limited in its capabilities. I wouldn't like to try and work with it today. It was alright for reasonably shallow water and probably one diver to 60 feet but that was getting about the maximum that it could handle. Today of course with the introduction of the cage along the way, I've seen much large

compressors used and of course the divers have to work to a lot deeper too which means that they need a lot bigger compressor.

JD How many hours a day could you work in the early days?

WILLIAMS In the early days we were all very conscious of the bends. Nobody had the bends and we didn't know what they were so it was a sort of a spooky grey area. We'd heard about these bends but we hadn't actually had any involvement with them. So we tended to stick pretty well to the US diving tables and you could do it because there was.... In the real early days, there was sufficient abalone around that you could have a, perhaps a deep dive to 60 or 70 feet [which was] what we called deep in those days, and then come up and work in the shallow waters afterwards without getting into too much trouble. So we tended to try to spend about five or six hours on the bottom every day. I don't think that's changed much. In some areas and in some cases, some divers probably spend up to eight hours in exceptional circumstances, but I would say today that they still dive between five and six hours a day, underneath, on the bottom.

JD I suppose that would depend on the depth of water and the temperature of the water?

WILLIAMS It does. Well not so much the temperature. See what happened, in the early days we'd go.... Of course here again we can jump back to wet suits and the availability of them. In the early days we had.... The only wet suits that were available were thin wet suits. I mean that was a new innovation at that stage anyway. So that limited us to a certain extent, especially in winter, as to how long you could stay in the water but you tended to stay there too long, especially if you were catching a few abalone. This was a matter of need and of course you'd start to suffer from exposure and sort of hypothermia. You'd get too cold. The cold would get right inside you and you'd have to come up. In those days we'd come up and sit around a little primus fire on the boat to try to get warm because there was nothing else, you know, available. It was the best we had.

In later years of course the need was there so they made thicker wet suits and most of the guys now probably wear nine millimetre wetsuits which are pretty thick. Of course with the introduction of the cage, also came the introduction of hot water. Because when the chaps were using the cage, [they] found that because they weren't swimming, their body wasn't generating enough heat and when they operated the cage they got too cold. So they had to run another.... They put a heat exchanger on the exhaust and ran hot water and another hose down and put hot water into the suit to keep them warm down there. So the thickness of the wet suit doesn't really matter quite as much now as what it used to in the early days.

JD Were you ever bent?

WILLIAMS Oh yeah. I think most of the guys that have been diving for years have had bends, you know, once or twice in their life, but no we.... Actually it became a problem. As the abalone stocks became exhausted and the divers had to work the deeper areas, we found that we had to stay for longer periods in deeper water than we wanted to. Of course where the problem arose was that we, of we had to stay four or five hours, we still had to stay that long in the deep water and by the time you put in that much time and effort, you had reached the extremes of your own capabilities. You had reached your limit of your endurance and of course the thought then of recompression and spending considerable time hanging under the boat, wasn't a desirable fact; especially in our waters here where, say late afternoon, you didn't

really want to be hanging 30 feet below a boat when [there was] the chance of running into a white pointer.

Most of the divers tended to experiment with themselves and see how far they could go before they got bent. What we found was that there was a large tolerance to the bends and it also depended on the degree. I think being bent became an acceptable thing if you got, say skin bends which really was only inconvenient to yourself. It wasn't something that put you in agony but you still had it. You were still right on the verge of perhaps getting a bend if it shifted, like the bubble shifted. You could get it in the spine or in the brain or you know and create big problems. The divers sort of got to a stage where there was an acceptable degree of being bent. Some divers had a lot higher tolerance to being bent than others. So what we found was there was a group of divers spent more time in the deep water because they had a higher tolerance to being bent and there were more abalone out in the deep water because a lot of the other divers couldn't spend the time there. So we ended up with a group of fairly, oh I suppose they got known as gun divers because they had this tolerance to being bent.

Then we also.... At around about that stage we'd had a lot of contact with people from the Navy over the years and we'd got a sort of feed back from them that they were using oxygen in treating their patients for the bends. Of course Port Lincoln, if you got bent here, it meant probably eight hours before you could be treated because first of all you'd have to come in from wherever you were working which could be anything from two or three hours away to get to the hospital here. The hospital couldn't treat you anyway. All they could do was put you on oxygen and then arrange for a plane to fly you to Adelaide. So then by the time the seats were removed from the plane and the plane was made available and you were flown over to Adelaide, from the time you actually got bent, it was probably about eight hours anyhow. Most of the damage had been done but least you could still get treatment.

So everybody was looking for some magical cure to overcome this problem of being able to stay down and work and not get bent. So as we found out that oxygen was being used, we decided to carry oxygen in our boats (some of us) and use it to recompress; to reduce the recompression time. So in other words, if you used pure oxygen at 30 feet under the boat, you could reduce your recompression time probably by half. Then [of] course some of the divers experimented with that again and said well, you know, what if we go to 60 feet but of course we all knew that oxygen becomes toxic under pressure so that it's safe, say to 30 feet, but once you go over 30 feet, becomes toxic. This was what happened to the old frogmen during the War. They had re-breathers and they were using oxygen and if they swam below 30 feet, they'd just swim off into the darkness. Be the end of them. They'd die.

Anyway we found that we could go deeper with oxygen and reduce our recompression times again. The use of oxygen was used probably to a greater degree if you got bent. If a bloke actually got up in the boat [and] found out that he had a bend in the shoulder or the arm or the leg or wherever, he could immediately go back in the water on pure oxygen and had a good chance of dissolving the bubble and having no further problems. So if it was late in the day and you'd had a hard day's diving and you were suffering from the cold. The incentive was there. it was almost, not incentive but a desperation because you'd reached your limit and the thought of going back in the water was almost unbearable anyway but you knew that you couldn't put up with the pain so you'd go straight back in the water and you'd say, go to 60 feet on oxygen; take a chance. We found that, you know, some of them had a tolerance to it and could handle it alright and could get rid of a bend in half the time again.

We were using oxygen to all sorts of depths; but of course here in just a few years ago, Dr Karl Edmunds, who is the foremost authority on the bends with the Navy, held a seminar over here to see the results of diving on the abalone divers and of course found out what we'd been doing. Course they'd been doing some research at HMAS Penguin, the Naval depot, and they'd found that this oxygen was.... the use of it was alright, but if you used it in excess of a depth of 30 feet, that it could cause brain damage. So we sort of were interesting subjects, so to speak and from his point of view because here were a group of divers who'd been using oxygen to.... recompress A lot [unclear] in excess of 30 feet and it was an opportunity for him to experiment and see what had happened to them. I don't know the outcome of his research.

JD Did any of the divers sustain permanent injury?

WILLIAMS Well we've had.... One of the biggest problems of course is bonenecrosis That's nitrogen getting into the bones through not properly decompressing. We've had quite a few cases of divers of having had hips replaced which is again.... Some people seem to be more susceptible to it than others but we won't really know the results of what actually has taken place until the current divers, the original divers, are reached the end of their tether or die or.... then we'll know because a lot of the effects may be long term rather than something that shows up within a few years. I'd say that there'd be quite a few with some form of problem, whether it be a bone problem or a hearing problem or a nerve problem because all of these things are associated with diving and as commercial divers said, they tended to push to the limit. In other words, to take chances that a normal commercial diver wouldn't do.

JD Like recreational divers?

WILLIAMS He wouldn't be called on to do it because he'd be diving by tables and he would be working on a calculated dive schedule, whereas an abalone diver goes out and finds abalone wherever he can. He's working on a basis that he's got to make a living. So, you know, in some cases you might start off in 30 or 40 feet of water at the start of the day and finish up in 100 which is the opposite to what you would normally do, but we're looking at making a living and you do whatever you need to do. If, for example, you just found you'd spent four hours of the day looking for abalone and then you'd just found a little patch but you knew that it was time to get out of the water and another boat pulls up in the general area, you're not gonna go and leave them there for him to go down and collect cause they're not gonna be there tomorrow. So you've just gotta stay there and take your chances.

JD It would tend to be a young man's industry, I should think.

WILLIAMS Ah, well it should be and it really is. I think that once you get to, into your forties; although we've had divers here as old as 60, but of course by that time they're not.... You wouldn't say they were 100% commercial divers say. They were making a living but not to the extent of being a top diver. We've found that, you know, once you get to, if you've done twenty years at it, you're gonna have problems. By that time most people realise that they're getting older and that they're going to have problems and so you tend to find that around about 50 they're gone. So you've gotta be out of the game before then. I'd say a lot of them are out of it before 45 but there's no reason why you can't continue diving, especially in a sensible fashion. Today it's so much easier. See the pressure's not on you today because of quotas that was on the divers here, you know, ten or fifteen years ago.

This interview is continued on tape 2 side A.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B

TAPE 2 SIDE A

JD Neil, a little while ago you mentioned sharks. Were they a real hazard?

WILLIAMS Well in Port Lincoln area, which is virtually known as the home of the great white shark, it has always been I think in the back of every guy's mind that you knew that sooner or later you were going to have a run in with one. There have been numerous occurrences of divers running into the white pointer but we've only lost one. We lost a chap, Terry Manuel, up at Streaky Bay quite a few years ago. He was the only fatality that we've had. Unfortunately Terry was attacked while working in close to shore and it was a rather trying experience for, you know, the chap shelling for him because Terry surfaced and sang out to the chap tending the boat which wasn't anchored. The sheller at that stage [had] just been following the bubbles of the diver. He just surfaced and yelled out "shark" and by the time the chap could get the boat over to him, the shark, he grabbed hold of Terry while he was in the water and the shark had hold of the other side of him. So there was virtually a tug of war between the two and the sheller managed to beat the shark off. He said that, you know, basically though while he was trying to get him into the boat.... I think he probably died from loss of blood but he'd been pretty badly mauled at that stage.

We've had numerous other encounters. Chap called Colin Andrews who's no longer in the industry but was diving for many years, ran into one down at Avoid Bay and actually had the shark come up and push him in the chest. It wasn't long after that that Colin left the industry. So I think it probably had some bearing on him giving the game away.

JD Did you have any brushes with them yourself?

WILLIAMS Yes. I'd run into probably three or four at different times and hadn't had any real problems with them but the white pointer's a shark that you never know what it's gonna do. To be working on the bottom and just look up and just see it coming out of the gloom straight for you. They don't come fast. They just cruise out of the gloom and then just as it [would] go to within say ten feet of you, just circled; just go around. You were always had that.... your heart in your mouth at that stage as to whether it was gonna turn off or keep coming straight at you. They seem to have a pattern. We were talking to most of the divers that have been involved with them. They would come in and they would swim around and have a good look but they'd do this and they'd keep coming back. Each time they'd come back you weren't sure whether that was gonna be the time that they were gonna have a go at you.

The risk was always there also that they would mouth the air line. See most divers, when you'd have a brush with a pointer, was that you'd look for somewhere to hide or to get your back up against a wall or a granite rock so that the shark could only come at you from one way and you could see where it was cause your biggest problem is the shark would come one way and you'd see it and then it would pass you. It would go into the gloom and you couldn't see it any more but you didn't know where it was gonna re-appear and having the limited visibility of a face mask, that you can only.... it's like a tunnel vision to a certain extent. You'd have to be looking around you all the time trying to see where the shark was gonna come from but as long as you could see it you knew where it was. They'd come from all angles; from all different places. The risk was always there that if you were, say down 70 or 80 feet with your back against a wall and a bag of abalone (if you were lucky enough to have some) in front of you to

try and protect yourself, that they'd mouth the air line and if they did that you'd have to go up. I think that was one of the biggest terrors would be have to leave the bottom when you didn't want to.

I had a run in with one at the South Neptune Islands a few years ago. Exactly the same thing occurred that had happened in previous occasions excepting that instead of turning off the shark just kept coming and swam straight up to me and stopped right in front of me. So we had a situation that I'd been swimming, looking for abalone about twenty feet off the bottom when it occurred. So I was at mid-water and suddenly the shark was in mid-water and we were standing looking at one another or stationary looking at one another. At that stage I wasn't feeling too good. Well this thing had swum right up and it was right there in front of me. They'd never done that before and while I was sort of looking at it and it was looking at me, it opened it's mouth and just took a bite. You know, it just started biting, you know. So I did the only reflex thing I could do [which] was I had half a bag of abalone with me that I'd picked up, you know going along, and I just put it in its mouth and it just bit on the bag two or three times. While it was doing this it caught a couple of fingers and nearly severed them but, you know, they were stitched up and everything was alright. The shark just.... You know, it was just one of those occasions when it decided it was gonna try a bit of abalone diver and see if he was edible or not. On that occasion it probably stayed in the vicinity for, oh fifteen or twenty minutes after the initial attack. Came back but each time it came back after that it didn't actually try to eat me. It was very difficult at the time because the injury to my hand was bleeding and of course, you know, I had the blood pouring out; I'm trying to hold my other hand over that hand and what's left of the abalone bag and look for the shark and work out how the hell I was gonna get out of it alive. God willing, you know, it all worked out alright for me in the long run.

JD What did you ultimately do, surface?

WILLIAMS Well ultimately I.... I was working about a couple of hundred yards off shore and it was probably 90 or 100 feet of water at the Neptune Islands. The South Neptune Islands is the largest fur seal colony in South Australia so that's why the pointers, the reason why I probably ran into one there. My first thought was: Oh well, I didn't want to go up 90 feet and risk being attacked in mid-water so the only alternative was to work my way across the rocky bottom trying to get as much protection as I could and as well, at the same time looking out for the shark cause it would keep coming back and going and that and try to get right up to the shore line. As it turned out I got to about 50 feet of water and I hadn't seen the shark for about five minutes and it wasn't within visibility and the visibility that day was probably 100 foot. It was pretty clear. So I decided to take a chance. So I blew the parachute up that I had to the maximum amount of air and then rode it to the surface which meant I had virtually a steam train ride to the top and risked getting the bends but I figured that was a more acceptable risk than being eaten alive. As it turned out, I hit the surface alongside the boat and let the bag go and then just tried to jump over the boat. As I tried to get over the boat my lead belt hooked on the side of the boat. The chap hadn't seen the shark (the chap who was shelling for me). He sort of wondered what the hell I was doing until he saw the fear in my eyes and then he just reached over and grabbed my lead belt and pulled me straight into the boat. So I was very glad to get into the boat, I can tell you.

JD I don't doubt it.

WILLIAMS [laughs]. I thought then it wasn't, you know, it was only a couple of years after that or twelve months after that that I decided that I might have had enough

abalone; the actual diving part of the abalone industry. I thought it was time that [I should] give it away and to have a rest from it for a while.

JD Do many of the chaps use cages in this area?

WILLIAMS Yes well the cage of course was an innovation of the divers. Two local divers were involved in the cage. It was a local invention. This was basically prompted by the attack on Terry Manuel up at Streaky Bay when some of the divers realised that if they intended to stay in the industry that they had to have some form of protection. So a chap by the name of Jim Ellis and Ted Edwards started experimenting with ways of propulsion under the water with bars that they could get some sort of protection. Over the years that's been developed to quite a degree with most of the current divers using a cage as a means of collecting abalone; giving them a form of protection on the bottom and a certain amount of mobility.

The cage also had an impact on the stocks because of there were areas that were not commercially viable to swim over as a swimming diver but when the cages came in the cages could travel say three times the speed of a diver so they could cover three times the area that a diver could cover. So where a diver might catch, say 50 kilos a day in an area, a cage could catch 150 because he was covering three times the area. So there were large areas that had virtually been left by the swimming divers that when the cages came in, they suddenly.... the catch rate went up because they were fishing these areas which are not a viable operation to a swimming diver. So they had to make allowances with the Department. They had to make allowances for catch rates and variations in catch rates in establishing the quota when it came to be.

JD Neil, were there any other, other than the normal risks of the sea, other risks that.... apart from shark and bends....

WILLIAMS Well there's always the risk of an embolism of course which is another form of rupturing your lungs if you forget to breathe out. This was not so much a problem to experienced divers but it [is] always a risk in a case of a free assent that a diver [would] be caught swimming and out of breathe in deep water and having his air line cut by the propeller of the boat or a malfunction; finding himself without air on the bottom and out of breathe and would have to make a quick assent to the surface which meant in some cases dropping your lead belt. Of course the moment you drop your lead belt you, because of the buoyancy of your wet suit, you accelerate to the top and having to remember that you've got to breath out and being able to breath out quick enough with a non-control assent. Most of the divers that have been in it for years now are aware of the risk and take the necessary precautions of either carrying a mini-lung, another form of breathing you know, or wearing different types of weighting system so that they don't drop all their weight. This way they can control their assent to the top and that's another one.

Then of course there's the normal sea risks that the boat capsizing or being injured on the bottom; getting yourself into a position underneath the surface under the water where you [are] in a cave or ledge or something where you could get hooked up and not be able to get out. I think, you know, the industry is full of unexpected and dangerous.... It's a dangerous activity. There's no doubt about that or can be depending on the individual.

JD You don't have a form of communication with the tenderer [unclear] ?

WILLIAMS No. Unlike the early pearl divers where they used to have a communication system set up with a number of pulls on a rope, we don't have any

communication. The diver's virtually a free unit. They prefer it this way. We've tried.... Different people over the years have tried using different types of communication but you find that it doesn't.... work; it's not satisfactory. It doesn't lend itself to the way that we work the industry. They've used, tried to use, underwater communications in the form of radio but it's not satisfactory. Well it's never proved to be satisfactory. If it was necessary I think it's one of those things that they would have done; [it has] certainly been tried but I don't know of any abalone industry where they use any type of communication.

JD The abalone industry in Australia is one of the largest in the word I understand? Is that....

WILLIAMS Yes well we're one of the few places where it hasn't been over-exploited and I think this is due to the management policies taken by the industry itself and the Fisheries Department and the awareness that is being seen throughout all the fishing industries now that there is a big need for fish management policies if they want the stocks to maintain for ever and ever. We're finding that, I think, that Australia, this is one field where they've learnt from the rest of the world. We've seen other countries that have had large stocks of abalone over exploited and the industry's virtually destroyed. We've been lucky enough to bring in management policies early enough.

JD And our stocks you feel are holding up?

WILLIAMS I think, yes. I think the stocks are holding up very well. The Department adopts a policy of being on the.... [pause] lost for words!

JD Conservative?

WILLIAMS Conservative, yeah. Always when they're issuing our quota, they look not to what might be there but to take the conservative view all the time and sort of better to be safe than sorry. Of course the same thing applies to industry. We want the industry to be here forever and ever too and it's no good just getting a quick dollar today and gone tomorrow. Those days are gone and we find now that the industry's so big and it's such a big money maker that it has to be managed in this way.

JD Neil, you've figured in a number of publications and films and things, haven't you?

WILLIAMS Yes, well here a few years ago a group of us got together and decided that we'd like to make a video film of perhaps the introduction of the cage to the abalone industry as a sort of historical thing more than anything. We felt that the industry was being watched a little bit in that there should be some record made of the early days of the industry. One of the most historical points of course was the introduction of the cage so we made a video film called "**Caged in Fear**" which was an attempt by us to bring to the public's attention some of the aspects and dangers of the life of an abalone diver.

Other than that, there was a small publication in a National Geographic done by David Dubelea and he was over here doing a section on the South Australian fisheries and I was fortunate enough to be included in part of his publication.

JD That was in the March 1987 edition was it?

WILLIAMS Yes, March 1987. The other one was a book on "**For They Were Fishes**" by Evelyn Wallace Carter and she came over and was interviewing most of the

fishermen and trying to record for South Australia some of the incidents and hazards etc. [in] the life of the fisherman of primarily the early fishermen, the pioneers that got the industries going.

JD Yes. It's been a most interesting discussion with you Neil. Is there anything else that you'd like to add before we finish?

WILLIAMS Well I don't think that there's.... There's so much that could be said but I don't think there's anything that we could, that we sort of missed out on.

The only thing is that, you know, in the early days a lot of the people that see the industry today don't realise the hardships and the risks that were taken by the early divers. The non-availability of equipment saw different divers using.... Divers always had to be, oh I say, inventive. We saw them in the early days using compressors out of refrigerators and [a] water hose for [an] air line hose which of course sinks and would hook up on the rocks; but it was all that was available. You couldn't buy diving hose and a lot of the guys couldn't afford it anyway if they could buy it. So you saw all sorts of equipment in the early days being made and invented, you know, virtually by.... They just used whatever they could get.

Another thing was getting access to the coast. Because of the nature of the area, big boats weren't really the thing that we could use here as we had to work very close to the rocks [in] very dangerous waters and found that small boats were the most suitable to get into these inaccessible areas; but to get to them we had to travel over bush tracks and sandy beaches. Of course old landrovers were the only thing that were available at [the] time and wide wheels and tyres weren't available so you saw blokes getting rims split and having two or three inches added into the rim and trying to fit fat tyres onto them and all sorts of schemes to get to these areas. We built a track at Avoid Bay with pick and shove virtually and laid mesh down the sand to get onto the beach. Of course when you tried to get your boat back up all the time, they'd hook up on the mesh and tear all the mesh up and you'd be bogged for hours. You'd be down there in the dark and lights on trying to cut mesh away from underneath the trailers.

People who see it today don't realise the amount of hardships that were involved. The accommodation: Today they stay in a motel or a hotel. In those days we lived in a tent on the beach; travelled over dirt roads to get there. [in] Some cases perhaps lived in an old tram car or in a caravan park if you were lucky to have the glory. The divers would have to line up at night at the showers. You'd find there'd be one block of showers in the caravan park at Elliston and you'd have 30 or 40 divers all trying to get in under one shower. You'd be lined up in the freezing cold, you know, at 10.00 or 11.00 o'clock at night trying to get a shower.

So, you know, times have changed so much from the good old days that I don't think I'd like to go back to, to what we see today where the current divers seem to be able to catch their quota in about 60 days. So today they don't have to take the risks or they don't have the pressure on them that we had where you would have ten or twelve boats working in one small area for trawl trying to catch the one little lot of abalone which, you know, abalone generally colonise. That doesn't happen today because there's so few divers and the pressure's not there. They don't have to take the risks that their predecessors had to take. No I don't think.... I think the current rate of divers today.... The fact that they don't have to take the chances that we took; they don't have the pressure of competing that we had.

In those days, twenty years ago, it was a very competitive industry because each diver was competing against the next for what the few abalone that could be found. I don't think that we'll ever see their like again actually. The old days are gone and thank goodness for that [laughter].

JD But you wouldn't want to have missed it, would you?

WILLIAMS Oh no, no. I look back on it now and I think that we were very fortunate to have been in that era because we won't see it again. We won't see the type of people that were.... made the industry what it is today competing now because it's big business. Today you've gotta have big money to get into it and in those days you had no money.

JD But they were no ordinary people either.

Thank you very much for that interview. It's wonderful.

That is the end of this interview with Mr Neil Williams, abalone diver of Port Lincoln. The interview was conducted by Jack Darcey at Mr Williams' home in Port Lincoln on the 20th January, 1990.

END OF TAPE 2 SIDE A

END OF INTERVIEW