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 Tasmania tell their stories here.

Brian **Bailey**

Jim **Bridge**

Captain Richard **Burgess**

Clyde **Clayton**

Bern **Cuthbertson**

Trevor **Dix**

Desmond **French**

Tony **Harrison**

John **Jacobs**

Cecil **Long**

Bill **Parker**

Ken **Petith**

Reg **Roberts**

Peter **Rockliff**

Contents

Verbatim transcript of an interview with BRIAN BAILEY

INTRODUCTION

This interview with Mr Brian Bailey was recorded at his home in Hobart on the 5th March, 1990 by Jack Darcey for Murdoch University's oral history of the Australian fishing industry.

The first part of the recording outlines Mr Bailey's entry into the fishing industry and his subsequent career in crayfishing, sharking and scalloping in many areas in Tasmania but it is the saga of the building of the **Teena B**, a very large fishing boat, that forms the main part of the recording. Problems of finance, design and bureaucratic ineptitude during almost a decade of effort would have overwhelmed a lesser man. They did not overwhelm Brian Bailey. Despite all the setbacks and difficulties, he completed the vessel and the **Teena B** is now deep sea trawling successfully, though under other ownership.

The story is told wonderfully well and vividly illustrates the resourcefulness, skills and dogged persistence in the face of enormous difficulties that characterise so many Australian fishermen. They are a tough breed. It is an enriching experience to hear Brian Bailey tell the story of the **Teena B**.

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

TAPE 1 SIDE A

JD Brian would you please record your full name.

BAILEY Brian Kenneth Bailey.

JD And your date of birth.

BAILEY 25th July, 1943

JD And where were you born?

BAILEY Carlton, Victoria.

JD Did you have a fishing background in your family?

BAILEY Yes, in my family, in that my father's brother, he was a fisherman and one of his sons was a fisherman as well and I tended to go to that side of the family and followed a fishing career rather than a farming career with my father.

JD Right, so that you came into fishing immediately [on] leaving school, did you?

BAILEY No. I left school.... I didn't have much joy at school at all. School didn't suit me. Work suited me more so I left school at fourteen and they never asked me to come back, and just worked as a deckhand all eastern coast of Tasmania, Flinders Island and into Victoria by the time I was fifteen.

JD With your uncle was it?

BAILEY No, no with other people. I never fished with my uncle at all but I worked on other boats all round; old boats, leaky, you know not much like you see today.

JD What sort of fishing were you doing?

BAILEY Mainly crayfishing and sharking.... and sharking using the long lines not the gill nets.

JD And this was in Victoria was it?

BAILEY No this was from Victoria, from Flinders.

JD Flinders Island?

BAILEY No, Flinders in Victoria on the Mornington Peninsula and out of San Remo.

JD And how long did you continue then as a deck hand?

BAILEY I continued as a deck hand, I fished out of Victoria, I come back to Tasmania when I was sixteen and fished with Bernie Burgess from Hobart. Done that for eighteen months and then I got a dinghy, an eighteen foot wooden dinghy and I worked out of Gardens at St Helens. There was a few other odd boat jobs in between, only a few trips here and a few trips there but when I was.... No I was eighteen when I started working for myself out of an eighteen foot dinghy with 22 foot oars and a little dury rigged sail you used to stick up on the paddle to sail when the wind was right.

JD On the paddle?

BAILEY On the paddle. You know, I started off reasonably successful. Nobody had the ideas of being millionaires them days. Everyone only worked to a living and existence and a way of life.

JD What were you fishing for?

BAILEY All crayfish, all crayfish and gill netting a few trumpeter but that was just a by-catch produce and that just for specialist little outlets and there wasn't the sales outlets we have today either.

JD What did it cost you to get into that dinghy?

BAILEY That dinghy, oh it was about 200 pound; yeah about 200 pound I think, from memory and the engine for it cost a hundred and something pounds when I could afford the engine and I thought I was made. I thought I had a Mercedes Benz in a boat, when I had the engine in. I used to go two, three hours up the coast fishing,

back to the Gardens Gulch every night. I slept ashore. Very seldom I'd sleep up in the bows of the boat but it did happen a few times.

JD Wouldn't be a lot of room in a dinghy that size, would there?

BAILEY Oh no room in it. It had a little well in it that'd hold about three bags of crayfish which it was no trouble them days getting three bags of crayfish and that with your fifteen, sixteen cray pots you had on it. Sometimes you'd get that in one shot so you'd have to come back to your gulch where you were anchored from and to put them into coffs and you'd keep your fish in coffs. Probably every week you'd put them on the trailer, take them into the factory at St Helens.

JD And you worked that boat on your own?

BAILEY Worked that boat on my own but when school holidays were on and things like that there was a lot of people used to come and camp all round the bush and the scrub in tents and there's always somebody jumping aboard and coming and giving you a hand. You'd get back in and even when it was the day you're unloading your coffs of your fish to send them to market or to the factory and that, there'd be dozens of people around to give you a hand. No one stood back and watched. Everyone hopped in and helped.

JD What sort of prices were you getting in those days?

BAILEY Oh the prices then.... Gee I can't even.... I think we were getting about, somewhere around about four shillings a pound then.

JD And there were plenty of crays about?

BAILEY Plenty of crayfish; stacks of crayfish. Probably we even moaned then there wasn't enough, like the fishermen moan today, it's never enough but crayfish and that, when you look at what's happening to the fishing industry today and what they're catching to what we used to catch then with [a] fraction [of the] amount of gear and that, there was crayfish everywhere.

JD What depth of water would you have been fishing in?

BAILEY The deepest water we used to work with the dinghy, because we had no pot hauler or anything, and we only used to work probably ten fathoms, thirty, forty feet of water.

JD Still be pretty heavy work?

BAILEY Never thought of it as heavy work. It just had to be done. The only time it used to be heavy was when you had a pot with nothing in it. An empty craypot was always heavier than a full one.

JD What happened when you graduated from the dinghy?

BAILEY Well I leased.... When I graduated from the dinghy, I suppose I got the feeling most people get; wanted to get into bigger, better boats and all the rest of it like that and I leased for the next two or three years and worked for other people as an employed skipper. We done that for quite a few years. I can't remember just off hand for sure, but I think about '65 I bought my first fishing vessel of my own of any

size. That was the old **Doris Louise**, an old schooner style vessel, 36 footer and we fished the east coast, Flinders Island, west coast of Tasmania, all round. Fished that for about three to four years and being and old boat she was, we rebuilt her a couple of times and rebuilt the engine several times.

JD Did she still have sail at all?

BAILEY She had reduced sail. She never had her old schooner rig that she used to have but she had reduced sail on her and had a Marconi rig mainsail and a great big flying jib and that used to help. She used to.... when you'd get a bit of wind she used to sail faster under sail than she would steam under motor. Beautiful old boat. Probably still one of the better boats and sea boats that's ever been around.

Then after sort of building up a bit of asset then and new houses, new car over those years, we graduated up then into a 60 foot boat and come to Hobart and looked around to what we could buy and we bought the **James Jones**. We thought we had a good boat but it turned a bit sour on us. Everything went wrong and we had a very hard year and SAFCOL them days was very heavily involved in factories right throughout the State. Safcol saw the difficulty we were getting into then, so they supported us with new gear, new electronics, pilots, radios, sounders, new auxillary and pumps; financed us all for all that at no interest because I used to sell all my fish to them, during this period. So that run into probably around $20,000 them days which was literally a fortune. Then we went back to work with everything working, no breakdowns, and we done very well from then on and really we haven't looked back since.

JD That **James Jones** is still afloat, is she not in the harbour?

BAILEY **James Jones** is in Victoria Dock. It's owned by an abalone diver.

JD I saw her there yesterday, yeah.

BAILEY The chappy that I sold the **James Jones** to, oh that must have been about '73 I sold her, he had it right up till about three years ago till he'd sold it. The bloke that's got it now is just refitting it, putting a new wheel house on it and she's still going strong.

JD Yeah she looked good, just been painted I think.

BAILEY Yeap. Mechanical's still the same as from the day as when we rebuilt it.

JD Were you still crayfishing then?

BAILEY Yeah. Crayfished right up to **James Jones**' days till I sold that. Crayfished.... that was the main backbone of earning a living, was crayfishing but off season from crayfishing were the **Doris Louise** and the **James Jones**. We used to go sharking, long line sharking and then the nets were coming in on Victorian boats and a few Tasmanians were getting nets as well so to keep up with it we had to put the gill nets on for shark. **James Jones**, we used to do gill netting with her for about three months a year, from the opening of the season in November, cray right through to about March, then gill net from then on till about June and then go scalloping. So we never used to worry too greatly about going craying in the winter time because with those three types of fisheries you've got to change and with the sharking you weren't away

from home at long periods, only two, three days. With the scalloping you're away only over night so you got a bit better family life-style as well.

JD You can't do that sort of thing now in Tasmania?

BAILEY No. The way the licensing system is now, there's a few of us got multi-purposes licences, but a lot of the industry is caught up in one fishery access licence and that's putting terrible pressure on that one fishery. It's something I don't agree with at all. I feel that we must have multi-access to fisheries, multi-purposes licences so you can diversify and when one species is getting a bit of adverse pressure on it, you can go and leave that species alone and go and do another and if the same thing's there you can change your gear and that again and go and do something differently. You take the weight off the catching of that fish. After having good success with the **James Jones** we had a good offer to buy it from an abalone diver and with the scallop industry shifting off out of the bay fishing area into the offshore area, the wooden boats were feeling the strain of working in the rougher conditions in Bass Strait and the little steel boats that were around doing it, it was making no effects on it so I thought, well [I'm] gonna have to have one of these steel boats that's gonna handle the scallop situation better than that in rougher weather.

So with this good offer that I had for her, I sold her to this chappy and went off around several of the boat builders in Tasmania with a rough sketch of what I had in mind of what I wanted. Didn't have a lot of joy with a lot of them. They were a bit negative. Went to Tamar Steel Boats in Launceston. He liked what I had drawn but there was one catch, he couldn't built it under two years. His orders were two years in advance. So I sort of had a look around again to see who else I could choose and still didn't like the rest of them, no matter what they were building and the workmanship in them. I thought, right, after seeing some of the rough ones that were put together around I thought, "Damn it, I'm gonna have a crack at this meself". So I went back to the chappy, Alan Foggerty at Tamar Steel Boats and said to him, "I think I'll have a go at this myself". He said, "I can't see why you can't do it" 'cause I'd built my scallop gear before and my shark reels. Didn't know a lot about welding or steel but had a bit of a base idea and he give me one bit of advice, Alan and it was quite encouraging and I remember it, and I'll remember it till the day I die. He said, "Right oh". He says, "Have a go at it but remember I'm only as far as the telephone if you get stuck on a point". And I remembered that all the way through that boat and I remember it plainly today. I think that's what made everything [a] success. I knew I had somebody there, if I got into a position, [who] could help me and advise me around it. Anyway I took fifteen months to build the first boat, a 53 footer. We called it after the wife, the **Heather B** and we fished with that quite successfully for five years. One of the better steel work boats. A bit different design, different shape, different wheelhouse layout, bit radical probably in some areas but still suited me very well. It was the way I wanted things. So then along comes the Tasmanian Fisheries Development Authority with all these new fangled ideas of how we can all be millionaires overnight if we had these big super boats and offering all this cheap money around the place. They did offer cheap money too [laughs] but only a selected few got it. I was one that didn't. I sold the **Heather B** to be able to go in and build a large boat for trawling, a multipurpose fishing boat to be able to do anything. Well that turned into an endless saga of about eight years before that boat actually went fishing.

So just to explain that in brief: roughly why it was an endless saga for so long, we got licenses approved by the Department for the vessel. That, I thought, would be the hardest thing but that turned into being quite easy at that time; all the licences we required to fish anywhere. Approached the Agricultural Bank, being the State Bank under this new Fisheries Development Authority for all the cheap loans, cheap interest

rate, [for] support. Everything was rosey there. That went together very simply. They told me what procedure had to be done. We needed proper plans, everything documented properly. So we went away and get them done. We employed a naval architect in Sydney to design the plans up for the big boat and everything we needed to get us started. Come back, put them all in. Yeah, that's ok. Had our cash flow. Had everything done nicely and that. Yeap, you'll be right. Go ahead and do it. So away we go and spend a heap of money sort of getting material and everything. Found that where we were gonna build it at St Helens, that the boat was gonna be too big and heavy to be able to get to the water. So Tommy Tucker had the old slipways at St Helens, so I approached him to buy a section of that off him to be able to build this boat on. He sold me a piece of the ground. So we started setting up a slipway there to launch it on, and a workshop to build it in, get going. It wasn't a cheap exercise really when you were watching the dollar. So we get well started [with] material and stuff started to be cut out ready for the boat.

Go back to get all the formalities done and that to be able to get our money, and they knock us back. Their reason for knocking me back was I didn't have the experience to built that sort of vessel 'cause I only had the **Heather B** to point to; designed it, laid it out, built it, done the machinery, done everything except the electrical wiring. Had been a successful boat for five years with no hold up, breakdowns or anything. I thought, well that's a bit of a plus to sort of give you confidence in doing something else, because all it is with a bigger boat to a small one, is things are heavier and larger. The procedure's very much the same. Anyway, fought with them for a year over that, having no boat to fish. I was in a bit of a catch [22] situation, whether to go on and spend the balance of the money I had left and didn't know whether I was going to get anywhere.

So a chappy in St Helens, Lance Barber, a fisherman I went to school with, both the same age we were; we were mates. He wanted a little steel boat built for himself. The wooden boat he had was getting a bit old and sad. Had a set of plans, so we hopped in and built that for him. He went away happy; a very happy customer. His boat's been fishing now for ten, eleven years [with] no breakdowns. When it went to work and that boat was new, [there was] no teething problems. Me tail got up a bit more. Hang on, I can still do this. I'm not gonna have these blokes tell me I can't!. So still in that same bind of no cash flow. We only made a living out of building Lance's boat. There was no big commercial profits or anything. It was only done on a salary and wage system, so I thought, well I'm getting nowhere here. So I liked the little boat of Lances and that. I thought, "I'll just build a small one, put a few of my modifications into that and least I can fish and keep fighting".

So I built a little one, 35 footer, 16 footer beam. Damn near square it was but it worked. Put a shark reel on it, went fishing, got a bit of a cash flow coming in at fishing. In the meantime another chappy that used to be a deck hand of mine, Steven Felmingham, said, "I'd like one of those little boats, just a little bit different than Lances, bit different than the little one you built". "Oh yeah, I know what you want Steve, no troubles". Scribbled out a few lines and a bit of a profile on the pad for him and he said "That's what I want, yeah". So we grabbed a heap of steel again and I had a couple of good employees working all the time in the yard.

In the meantime we'd put in a slipway for the local fishing boats to use because the Government wouldn't supply facilities. I did get a bit of a grant out of Industrial Development or something I think they call themselves and had $15,000 to assist in putting in the slipway but that was another nightmare, Government nightmare. They wanted plans and specifications and DLI certificates and everything. That was gonna eat up twice the fifteen grand. So told them to go to buggery and that. If they want all

that, they get it. Low and behold they did do it. So right I've still got me $15,000 for the material. Built the slipway which was really badly needed in the area because there was only the pike slipway then at the time. That was just over burdened with 30, 40 boats in the town. There was just no way off season everyone could do their maintenance so it was a help to the community of St Helen's to have the added slip. Plus it was a small income for my men doing repairs that I had employed.

So I sort of kept the yard going and sort of building the yard up and that slowly all the time with the big boat idea in mind, while still fishing. Scallops were good. We done well with the scallops. We wish we'd have had twice the size boat and carried twice the fish. It'd have been much better but we still done quite well out of them and the shark. So that stalemated me then till probably about '83, '84. So then the Commonwealth in their wisdom decides on a management plan in the South East Trawl. Somehow or other they look and say, "Oh this bloke's got a licence, hasn't used it. We're not gonna give it to him now". So they took it off me. No trawl licence. Nothing for the boat. There's still 110, 120 tonne of steel hanging around in a mate's farm out the back of St Helens and up somebody else's place there's something else for the boat. I had gear everywhere for it. All in this time, these people that have let me put gear on their places in old gravel pits to store it and things. That was very helpful. It was starting by this time that big boat idea was getting to be a bit of a joke around the community and around the State and I was starting to look like a bit of a damn idiot.

So I went right back through the whole system again and that to fight the Commonwealth to get me licences back. Without having my licences I had no hope of getting finance for the boat. So that went on. That was another damn two, three years. Several trips to Canberra; bureaucratic fight. No one wanted to know you so I started to get a bit determined. Started to get a bit tougher and by this time I was getting a bit damn smarter too on how to handle these guys. So I'd find out when they're holding their fancy little meetings, how they run around behind the closed doors, and I'd show up and I was starting to embarrass a few of them by showing up and stifling them from having their talks because I was there and I knew the other players in the industry. They were starting to keep their mouth shut a bit. They couldn't rule the roost like they used to because they had somebody sitting in the corner jotting down their comments, adding them all up and me doing this for a couple of years. Well their lies caught up with them. In the end with the support, not of Tasmanian fishermen or the Fisheries Department. Well the Tasmanian fishermen really had no involvement, but the Tasmanian Fisheries Department, no support from them whatsoever or our local Government to be able to have some of this industry for Tasmania and this boat, but a Victorian fishermen that I've known for years from when I was a kid there working and some of the very successful ones, took up the fight for me too on these management things. A bit of the truth started to come out.

So in the end they give me a licence with conditions. I rejected the conditions because I had an open licence they had taken from me. By accepting the conditions of licence I can only fish here and there and do certain things. If ever the day came that the licence was worth a value of monetary money, that my licence would never be for sale. I'd only ever be handing it back in if my son didn't want to go on with it or whatever. Anyway they didn't take any notice of that. In the end we got an open licence. So then, go back through the financial system again.

Back to our local banks. We had this new fangled set-up in Tasmania called Tasmanian Development Authority that took over from the Agricultural Bank. So I thought, "How am I gonna approach these guys"? By this time we had the new Premier in the State going around doing you-beut things, old Robin Gray, so I thought right, "This submission this time, I've got all my "i"s dotted, my "t"'s crossed, I've got it down pat

this time. They're not gonna trap me". So I go along with all fancy plans, everything laid out and what I'd drawn up myself by altering the previous set of plans I had, which wasn't really suitable. I altered myself and then took back to a naval architect to put into real professional stuff sort of, but being not his invention, he wouldn't sign them with his guarantee. So that didn't worry me greatly. I went along to the TDA, just found out what they wanted. They told me what I had to do so I just walked away from them and done it. I thought well, "These blokes are a bit negative. We've got this Premier telling us how good he's helping all the little people and the people wanting to have a go, so I make an appointment, go and see him, show him what I want. He gets all keen, fired up". He said, "Oh, I'll slip that in for you. You won't have to wait, you'll know". He said, "I'll be in contact with you no later than a fortnight". Yeah, this sounds bloody good, a fortnight! I've been used to things going for years and getting nowhere.

So in between times of that fortnight (and he did get back to me within a fortnight too) but in between that fortnight there was a Professional Fishermen's Association conference in Launceston. At a social do after the conference finished for the day, that evening, one of the TDA blokes involved in the fishing industry side of finance was there. He come up and he said, "Oh you've got no hope of getting finance". I said, "What do you mean"? He said, "Oh your submission that's coming in from the Premier", he said, "You haven't got no hope. You need a foreign equity partner to get anything". I said, "but what do you know about it"? "Oh we know it's coming". "Oh you've got it, you've read it?" "Oh no", he said. I said, "Well why haven't I got any hope"? He said, "Oh no. You have to go and get a foreign equity partner. We can recommend you some people overseas who could be interested" After I thought gees, this is not too bright. I started down.... me tail was dropping a bit again. I sort of felt we might have been getting somewhere. Anyway, true enough, get a phone call from Robin Gray's Department that TDA don't think they can do anything for me. They named the officer that would be in contact with me in due time. Well this went on for months and months and months. Get back onto Gray, "What's going on"? By this time Gray had given me his home number as well, sort of to pacify me over a few different meetings. "Oh give me a call if you've got any trouble" blah, blah, blah! So I rang him up and got a bit tough with him. "What the hell's going on? What are they playing at. You can't stand around forever". By this time I'd sold the little boat I'd built to build my capital up even further thinking that right I was going somewhere and done that premature too. I shouldn't have done it.

Anyway TDA couldn't find a genuine reason in my submission why they could knock me back otherwise than on the same old story, I didn't have the experience to build this type of high-tech boat. Anyway, kept at them, kept at them.

JD This interview continues on side B of this tape.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

TAPE 1 SIDE B

BAILEY At about the same time as all this happened that sort of put us behind the trawl industry was taking off in the orange roughy fishery in quite a large way and a lot of the mainland big companies were very interested in trying to get into boats, but seeing it wasn't [an] open access fishery, licences were hard to get for them. They had to buy them or when the trawl licences that we did have become worth money and with a boom in the fishery, they become worth a lot of money. So I get approached by Kailis & France from Western Australia on whether I'd be interested and that in selling

or them financing or a joint venture, or whatever on it. So Theo Kailis come to St Helens, made approaches to me, talked about it, stayed over night in St Helens, let us think about it. So next day he met with us and we agreed on a financing deal with everything still being my boat and the only condition that I really had hard on me was that I could only, if I ever wanted to sell out or get out I could only sell to them but at the market value. So we done our agreement. They took me to Western Australia, met all the main players in their company. They were very open and free with everything and all their information. Actually it was a pleasure working with them for the valuable knowledge I gained on a different side of the fishing industry I knew nothing about.

So then everything was full bore into go and she'd turned into a mammoth job because one of our conditions was (that I never give a lot of consideration to in the beginning) a Naval architect and a consultant. Well we did have a bit of a rabbit (I think he was). He knew it all out of the big ships but he didn't know a damn thing about fishing boats. That caused a lot of problems, a lot of extra added alterations in design factors of things that were built. He wanted it one way and I couldn't get it across to him that it wouldn't work. A lot of things, in the end and that I just didn't take any notice of him regardless what he said because he might have been alright on a 10,000 tonne tanker or something Merchant but he was just hopeless in the fishing industry side of thing but we taught him a lot in the end. That's the way I look at it now but as a person he was a nice bloke. Anyway we decided not to completely finish the vessel in St Helens so we launched her in a terrible condition and state (she was just seaworthy) to be towed to Hobart to finish and fit out because labour content in the area of bringing professional people in and people who were capable of doing jobs was starting to become cost prohibitive. We had a look at it and we thought, well if we shift to Hobart and that, we've got access to more people, more services and that and we can have quite a large saving on it which balanced out the cost of towing it down and everything.

So down to Hobart we shift, family and all, four or five of my permanent workers as well and I've been here ever since [laughs]. We completed the boat here and she's successfully fishing now but as of last year (six months ago) I decided to get out so now Kailis & France are the owners of the **Teena B** and they've got an excellent crew and everything on it. She's catching fish in quite a large way. She's turning into being a very profitable vessel for them.

JD And what are you doing with yourself now Brian?

BAILEY Well I've got a 68 footer virtually completed but last six months have been pretty casual. I've done a bit of work for other people overseas in Fiji [for] a Melbourne crowd that have set up a fishing long line venture over there. I worked for them and that for about a month in two fortnight trips to Fiji, getting their catching side set up. They're going very well. Bit of work for a few other mainland companies just as sort of advice from the practical side of things but its been just a change in life-style for me after the pressures of all them years on the **Teena B** which I think was greater than what.... They didn't affect me at the time but I think now that it's all over I realise that the stress and the strain of it was pretty great and I've sort of enjoyed being reasonably casual. Just playing around here with Heather's new house and getting things slowly set up for her and [a] workshop set up for myself to play around in and the other boat [will] get finished by the end of this year and then just do a bit of casual fishing around without any great big high pressure dramas or sweats or anything, then try and have a look at the rest of the world and what the rest of the people are up to.

JD Brian, that story of the **Teena B** is a real epic. Congratulations on the ship and on the way you've told the story. Is there anything else now that you'd like to have on this tape?

BAILEY I think the major thing I see at the moment is, from my 30 years in fishing, is from what it was like when I started as a deck hand and then self-employed at a young age, and I've been self-employed all the rest of the years through, I think the technology change is hard to believe to what we used to have, a hunk of lead and fat and drop it in, pull it out, see what the weed or the gravel or the rock formation was like that [was] imprinted into the fat; all those things. There was an odd sounder about but it was only two or three between Victoria and Tasmania. There was none when I first started. The technology we've got today as such, no man can get lost. You don't even need to know how to count or do nothing. You just turn on a machine, SATNAV, GPS, colour plotters, colour sounders, daylight radars, bring up everything, interfaces together on the screens. It's made fishing so very easy but it's made it very hard on the species as a fish. The technology is not giving them much of a chance at all.

The bureaucrats are giving the fishermen less chance but we've still got to have management of the industry against the greedy but I think the bureaucrats have got to be employed out of people that know what the industry's about, not just public servants. I think that's about all I can add. Right, thank you.

JD Thank you, thank you indeed.

That is the end of this interview with Mr Brian Bailey, fisherman and boat builder of Hobart, Tasmania.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW

Disclaimer

Verbatim transcript of an interview with JIM BRIDGE

INTRODUCTION

The Bridge family have been fishermen in Tasmanian waters for generations and Jim Bridge who recorded this interview has spent a lifetime in the industry. He has been involved in many fisheries from barracouta to crayfish and scale fish to scallops. He is a thoughtful and knowledgeable fisherman with a keen interest in the well-being of the industry.

In this wide ranging discussion Jim Bridge covers many topics including fishing methods, boats and gear, marketing and management. He also considers matters of topical interest such as pollution, changes in technology and the ecology, aquaculture and the affects of increased recreational fishing. He speaks from a large background of experience and tradition and thereby makes a most valuable contribution to this oral history of the Australian fishing industry.

The interview was conducted in Mr Bridge's home in Hobart, Tasmania by Jack Darcey for Murdoch University's oral history of the Australian fishing industry on the 3rd March, 1990. There are two sides of one tape. The interview starts at 022 on the revolution counter.

TAPE 1 SIDE A

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

BRIDGE Yes. I'm Leslie James Bridge. I was born at Sorell in south east Tasmania on the 2nd November, 1930.

JD Thank you. Your family have been in fishing now for generations, haven't they?

BRIDGE Yes. My father was fishing at the time and he was a second generation fisherman then.

JD So your grandfather was also a fisherman?

BRIDGE Yeah. Grandfather was a fisherman from the time he was about sixteen years old.

JD And what about your great grandfather? Do you go back that far?

BRIDGE My great grandfather was a remittance man from England who settled at Oyster Cove down below Kettering and on D'Entrecasteaux Channel. He had some small trading vessels and my great grandfather had a union with his housekeeper that resulted in the birth of two sons. They finished up in an orphanage, these two boys

and one of them was drowned at Cornelian Bay on a picnic and the other was my grandfather who went fishing.

JD And then your father followed in his footsteps?

BRIDGE Yes.

JD And you followed in your fathers?

BRIDGE Yes. Grandfather Bridge had four sons and they all, you know, from the age of nine or ten, finished up as mates and working with him on the boats.

JD Including your father?

BRIDGE Including my father, yes. Grandfather didn't hesitate to make use of a bit of child labour.

JD When did you enter the industry?

BRIDGE I went fishing in 1947 after we had a good high school education. We moved from Nubeena where we spent our childhood to Hobart in 1941 and attended town school basically for our education. We finished up there.... I went to Bowen Road State School and my brother and sister did. Then we went on to Ogilvie High School. It was a co-ed school then but it's reverted to an all girls' school today. When I left school we had good educations and I went to Cadburys in the office as my brother did. He became an accountant and I had the fishing bug in me all the time. All I could ever think of was following in the old man's footsteps; waiting for him to come home to get out on the boat. I reckon every Sunday that I was off school and they were catching barracouta, I'd be down the river on the boat too.

JD And when you left Cadburys....

BRIDGE Yeah I left Cadburys in 1947 and then I went fishing on the **Storm Bay**, that was the bigger of their two boats at the time, and we went graballing then. That was gill netting for trumpeter because that was.... I went in the winter time and apart from rock cod fishing, at the time we weren't after crayfish and there was no barracouta in the depths of winter and we used to set gill nets out of a twelve foot dinghy off this 52 foot fishing boat **Storm Bay**.

We used to fish as far up the east coast as the Friendly Beaches down to the Actoen Islands off Southport. We'd do trips of about ten to fourteen days. We'd keep the fish alive in a wet well on the big boat. The dinghy that we used to work the nets off had a wet well. We'd haul the nets, you'd remove the fish carefully from the net to save damaging them, put them in this wet well and then transfer them to the big boat's well until hopefully we had the big boat's well full and then we'd return to town. Then they'd be transferred again to a wet welled punt in Victoria Dock. From there they'd be retailed to the public.

JD Direct from the punt?

BRIDGE Direct from the punt. In the shore premises there at Victoria Dock grandfather Bridge had leased a council fish market and this market premises was converted to (part of it) a restaurant and people could select the fish from this punt

and have it filleted and cooked and served to them in this restaurant. The other part of it was just for retailing barracouta and fresh fish direct to the public to take home.

JD So you went for barracouta in the....

BRIDGE When they were about, yes. They were the most prolific fish and quite the cheapest to catch.

JD Were they caught by net or....

BRIDGE We used to catch them with jig sticks as they called it. We had a fourteen foot sassafras sapling, it was at the time, and on the end of that you'd have a chain lanyard about three foot long made out of wire, steel ploughed wire [with] cut off ends [which] we used to get from the ship chandler and make these small links. On the end of that you'd have a piece of huon pine about six inches long with two barbless hooks underneath it like a lure we used to trail about in the water. The barracouta would jump at this. When you hooked one we used to swing them aboard the boat and land them in a wooden chute that was about, on our boat would be about five foot wide at the aft end where we used to fish off the counter stern, and have it tapered down with sideboards on it feeding these fish into the wet well.

Our family was most successful at that type of fishing. They had been.... about the only boat that ever used to berley or chum couta and this was a well kept family secret because the couta would be easily startled and the school of them that were following him, if there was scraps of fish or something coming out of the wet well, then they would stay following him but if there was none of this, if anything startled [them], you dropped one off your jig stick and he'd fly away wounded, the others would tend to follow him. I think this basically was the reason of our success chiefly catching barracouta.

JD Did you circle around?

BRIDGE We used to just catch them under sail in those early days. In later years tow lining became the order of the day. I think it was just a desperate effort by other fishermen to try and match our expertise. In the finish they'd put outriggers out with about a dozen tow lines on them and they'd be all going in different directions because they didn't have to rely on one tack on the wind to do anything. It did seem to split the schools of fish up and distribute them so that you never seemed to be able to gather a big pod of them together again under your boat. So in the finish we.... we persisted for a long time with our method but we were more or less overwhelmed and we used to have to do some tow lining ourselves.

JD Jim the barracouta more or less suddenly disappeared?

BRIDGE They did, yes. Many years ago before my time fishing old grandfather Bridge said that they went away for seven years after being very, very thick. He said that the fish they call gemfish today, appeared in great numbers. They were known at the time as king fish or king barracouta. They had a mouth full of savage teeth and it did seem like as if the couta were afraid of them and found their business somewhere else when they were about. Then after a time those gemfish disappeared and they still catch them in the deep water but these were on the surface in Storm Bay and around the main couta country in south-eastern Tasmania.

JD Did the Tasmanians use these what Victorians call couta boats?

BRIDGE Yeah they were diff.... We used to have couta boats here but they were different to Victoria because Victoria where their couta country was, they never had the harbours and mostly they had smaller boats, something that they could lift out of the water of a night or in bad weather but in south eastern Tasmania a lot of them [had] good harbours and they used to use bigger boats.

Our family at Nubeena, when they were so very thick, set up a smoking operation and they smoked couta for many years there in, I think from about 1912. Grandfather Bridge took up some land in Nubeena and built these smoke houses. They used to catch the barracouta, about 100 or 200 dozen a day and then they'd fillet them (or split them as they used to say) and pickle them, dry them and hang them in these smoke sheds. Then about every second day.... and the only boat we had the **Inez** with an engine, they'd load her up with these boxes of smoked couta, take them to town (Hobart), pack them in ice and put them on the train to Launceston and from there they'd go to Melbourne markets. This is where grandfather Bridge made most money because they were in such vast numbers and although there used to be quite a lot of rejects when they got to Melbourne because of these nematode worm infestations in them and milkiness, and we had no representative there to see whether in fact they should have been rejected. So they had to accept that but even so they still got good returns for the fish. Actually barracouta smoked is one of my favourite fish. I think it's a high quality fish but they still tend to [have] such crook ones amongst them that they've always had a bit of a load to carry in the way of market acceptability.

JD Yeah. They're very boney, aren't they?

BRIDGE Yes. They were at the time but nowdays when they fillet them they can fillet this inner rib cage out and it only leaves that one particular bone pattern that's not very hard to follow. We used to split them and leave the back fin on but nowdays that's taken away too. The bones have been a problem in them.

JD But they are still caught of course, aren't they, in small numbers?

BRIDGE Yes. They're catching quite a few now but they don't seem to be in such great numbers as they used to be, or perhaps they haven't got the fishermen that really grew up with them and knew how to get as many as you could in a day.

JD Are people still smoking them here in Tasmania?

BRIDGE No not that I know of. No not that I know of.

JD Jim was there ever a fish auction in Hobart?

BRIDGE Yes. That place where grandfather Bridge leased, that fish market on the Victoria Dockside, that was built by the city council to let anybody in there and fish were in the early days like 1850s I suppose, they were auctioned there in, oh dozen lots; depending a lot on the size of the fish. They'd be auctioned to hotels and boarding houses and things. There wasn't many other fish buyers here until Greg Casmaty came and Arthur Bowtell.

Greg Casmaty was a bit of an entrepreneur. He came here with practically nothing and built himself quite a considerable business with boats and fish buying. One of his greatest achievements was when they legalised cray pots in Tasmanian waters,

crayfish were very thick here. He used to have boats on there and because there was no other market for them and he could offer the lowest price you could imagine and then send them to Sydney and was getting, you know, quite considerable returns on the Sydney market. More or less at the fishermen's expense here he made, you know, lots and lots of money. Of course the crayfish population stayed pretty good for a long time. It must have been a wonderful place for crayfish here but they slowly wore them down till they've got them on the ropes now.

JD Your family went into crayfishing [unclear]?

BRIDGE Only in a small way. We were on for barracouta and catching cod and trumpeter.

JD Scale fish?

BRIDGE Yes, scale fish.

JD Did you ever go sharking, Jim?

BRIDGE Oh no, no; never. No; school sharks, snapper sharks as they call them were very, very thick in those early days coutaing. One boat **Bell Brandon** that was under the Bluett family, they were around in Fortescue Bay near the Lanterns and they gaffed a load of sharks aboard her one night by just by hanging a couple of couta overboard and these sharks came up and they'd be biting and then biting at one another and they were gaffing and blood flowing. They [caught] a load but that like all good stuff, that was mostly used for manure. We couldn't eat it. We'd get rid of it: chop it down, shoot it, catch it, throw it on the beach; didn't like to see it swimming about. I don't think we've learned a great deal since then because I think they're doing the same with the orange roughy today. They flood the plants with them and when they can't handle them, up to the tip they go and go out and catch another lot [laughs].

Some of the most important changes I've seen myself is the advance of diesel engines and although I didn't see the legalisation of cray pots, that certainly had a dramatic effect on cray stocks. Also when the price of crays, when they got a bit scarcer, the price was very high and the US market were paying unbelievable figures for tails, just the cray tail because I suppose it cost a lot to export and freight the body that wasn't much use to any one. The body was the part that was supplied to measure. Course when unscrupulous dealers and fishermen were able to rip the tails out of crays and they weren't sort of answerable to any particular measure, for years this had a real dramatic effect on cray stocks. So I think the cray population behaviour was different after they got so scarce. I myself in the small way that we used to catch crayfish, seemed to notice that you'd pull six pots and only two would have crays in them like as if the crays gathered together through sheer scarcity so they could keep in some sort of, not family units, but a gathering where some of their wits and senses and instincts might have been beneficial as a group rather than as scattered individuals.

We went scalloping in 1953 when scallops seemed to be getting more and more plentiful in D'Entrecasteaux Channel. Each year they seemed to be continuing to increase in numbers with the lip dredging. Many more boats came into the industry from as far north as Triabunna till it was up to about 80 or 90 boats operating in the winter months in D'Entrecasteaux Channel and all doing very well. Then in about 1958 or '59 a sputnik dredge, a dangerous sort of a dredge, was introduced from overseas and this had a pressure plate on the top of it and a lip on it with three inch steel teeth that was adjustable up or down between sledge runners, steel sledge runners, like the

blade of a plane that could be adjusted to cut into the sand and the surface of the bottom. Boats had to get twice as much power to tow them in the D'Entrecasteaux Channel and this resulted in about.... for two and a half years the population of scallops was almost wiped out.

These dredges, what they didn't kill.... I think myself that the worst effect of them was the pressure plate sucking up the bottom silt after the sandy surface of the bottom was cut through because it used to be part of the Derwent River system and of course all river systems as a rule have got a silt bed. The Derwent River had apparently broken out into Storm Bay and didn't flow continuously down the D'Entreasteaux Channel. The bottom formed a new type of eco system that firmed up and the amount of small fish and life in that Channel with the lip dredging was unbelievable. Year after year tiny fish and starfish, that scallop fishermen's old enemy, but may well have been a necessary part of the system that supported scallops. Perhaps the starfish by driving them all together and keeping them on the move [had] more [of a] tendency to have effective reproductive effort. After about three years with the sputnik dredge the scallops were no more in the channel. Then they took them up and made a fool frontal assault on Bass Strait and Port Phillip Bay and in a few years they successfully reduced the numbers of them up there till [it was made] a closed season etc. They were a full proof dredge. If you had the power in your boat to pull them along, they'd catch. It was a certain amount of skill with the lip dredges. They were only a light sort of a dredge and have to be well balanced and the right amount of line and stuff on them and they were really only effective in waters up to about, oh fifteen, twenty fathoms.

Although there's been some other big beds of scallops found, the D'Entrecasteaux Channel definitely seemed to be really suited to the commercial scallop. When they first used to catch scallops there they tended to be all doughboys with only very few commercials but it does appear that the lip dredging selected in favour of the commercial. Whether it was the fact that boats were, they had to pull up and down the channel in a straight line with the tides, you couldn't very well pull across the tide, and whether this helped spawning aggregations, keep all the smaller scallops in the one tidal line because they're a sort of a bisexual thing, aren't they? There's a special word for that. Each scallop had both male and female components; maybe hermaphrodite or something?

JD Hermaphrodite I think, yes.

BRIDGE Yes but anyway they did and I thought it was a great tragedy when these tooth dredges were allowed in; allowed in under Ministerial approval with very little research except the fact that the year before they were allowed to be used, confiscation of your boat and gear was mandatory for anybody caught with anything in the Channel with teeth on the lip of the dredge. It was a dramatic turn around and certainly it was the wrong thing to do.

JD The scallops have never come back?

BRIDGE I believe there's some slow recovery there now but the Government are very loath to permit any sort of dredging there at all. There was some amateur dredging allowed in a small way years after and I went down there and you just couldn't believe.... We pulled a little dredge about out all day there and only saw one commercial scallop where there used to be thousands upon thousands of them. All the shells, empty shells that were on the bottom at the time when we were scalloping, were quite firm, healthy although dead shell and after when I went back there on that particular day, all the dead shells on the bottom were soft and sort of porous because I think there's silt effect from the sputniks [which] had settled over everything and more

or less buried them in this river silt which does tend to destroy shell. Then of course the scallop [unclear].

That was a dramatic effect on fishing in that area because most of the families along D'Entrescaux Channel were forced to go to urban areas to earn a living. They weren't sort of outside fishermen. Some used to go [and] do some barracouta fishing but most of them really relied for about, oh 80% of their year's wages on the scallops. Kettering was the main port for them. A family of Sward there used to be some of the main scallop fishermen. I do believe that Sward probably developed them, or discovered by accident, how best to catch scallops. They used to, all six or seven of them, would go scalloping and they tend to follow one another. When they started dredging the first boat wouldn't catch many and the boat behind him would catch a few more and the boat behind that would catch a few more. We didn't at the time, or they didn't I don't think, know how mobile scallops were swimming about. The fact that the first boat caught very few was that the scallops were pretty lively and they'd avoid that first bloke's boat's dredges and then the second bloke would catch more and so as the scallops got tireder and tireder and couldn't avoid the dredges, you'd get dredge fulls where you probably wouldn't know they existed. I wouldn't have believed that a scallop was so mobile until I'd seen underwater film of them swimming about.

While they were doing that they would certainly be affected by tidal flows while they were up off the bottom swimming. It would tend to plant them in big heaps at the end of each particular pull so once again it would be beneficial I think to their breeding cycle. Every year in D'Entrecasteaux Channel you'd find a massive bed of scallops about the size of a 50 cent piece. This was enough to sort of keep the population of scallops in the Channel at a sufficient level for commercial fishing.

JD Jim, what do you think about the modern or present day management techniques that apply in the industry?

BRIDGE I think it's a very difficult thing to manage because it must be extremely hard to measure fish stocks. For years our system, Sea Fisheries in Tasmania, they had quite, oh about eight or ten mile of coast, rocky coast, crayfish country (a crayfish survey) locked up and banned to all fishing while they conducted a survey of growth rates and populations. Here today they'd tell you that they don't know how quickly a crayfish grows like as if all that particular investigation had been lost or hadn't revealed any facts or worthwhile information at all but it certainly showed that when shore areas where closed up, the population increased dramatically. I thought it was a great pity that nothing sensible seemed to come out of it. A couple of years ago someone told me that a crayfish that had been tagged or marked at Maatsuyker Island was found up in Reidle Bay outside Maria in about three days. Now where ever that information came from, was absolute nonsense because a crayfish just couldn't do it.

I don't like the idea of seasons on fish, especially the crayfish. Years gone by, cray fishermen would go out after the spring shelling; today they call it a moult, but a crayfish was soft shelled and after he'd shed his previous year's shell.... They didn't go into the cray pots until they had a fairly firm shell on them and even then to carry them in wet wells, the shell had to be fairly strong. It takes a few days before it's hard enough for them to pack in one amongst the other in the well and walk on one another without losing too many through self mutilation destruction in the wells. Course they didn't all shell at the one time and they didn't all harden their shells at the one time. So crayfish boats tended to be further scattered and not concentrated in one particular area on one day. When they put a season on them they had assessed that when

they'd all be firmly shelled and hungry, then they'd make a full frontal assault on that one particular area.

JD This interview continues on side B of this tape.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

TAPE 1 SIDE B

JD Jim it's a different world in fishing now, isn't it? It's much more difficult for a young person for example to get into fishing?

BRIDGE It certainly is with licence prices the way they are and transferring licences; something like $10,000 a cray pot these days and a million dollars for an abalone licence. I don't agree with it myself. I thought that when a fellow wanted to finish with his licence, it should go back to the next in line or the next one in turn in the queue really that wanted a licence but it seems to become the thing these days to trade in them and it's permitted so that's the way it goes. I'm not sure whether it has any affect much on the industry or on the fish stocks. I can't really see how it would. Sometimes a fisherman with ten pots is more particular where he sets them and they're probably more effective in the number of crays per pot but at the price that the licence is up to now, sometimes it pays him to sell his ten pot licence to some bigger operator that may be more effective or may not. I wouldn't like to say but that's the way it's sort of gone.

Management of the fishery industry's been very, very difficult. Fishermen aren't always as honest as they should be. When I was fishing a booklet was introduced where you had to put in returns of your fish but [there] was a mortal fear of the inland revenue system. Most fishermen used to lie and understate their catches; didn't realise that management plans were formulated from these figures and it was probably counterproductive to the fisherman.

I think some of the greatest changes I've seen was in the synthetic materials, in nets and lines. Once there was a limit how long rope would last and how long a net would last. They had to be dried and tanned and looked after, [the] cotton and hemp fibres, but now it's sort of more or less indestructible except by severe damage. Our biggest problem when we were gill netting was the crayfish attack on any fish that got into your net. Of course now with the reduced numbers of crayfish you can leave a net down almost 24 hours and not see a crayfish at all. So it's made it bad for the fish stocks, scale fish and certainly it indicates the scarcity of the crayfish to me. We used to have to leave our graballs in the dinghy while we had a cuppa tea in the summertime on the east coast because almost as soon as the fish hit the net, half a dozen crays would be after him and either kill him or chew his fins off and then he wouldn't keep so well and be a damaged, ugly looking specimen. Today you can leave the nets down like in the daylight hours and very rarely see a crayfish so there's definitely been a massive reduction in numbers.

I guess management didn't really know the population rates at the time. I've seen cray pots in Monroe's Bight there, we've set them out of the dinghy and you'd get 70 and 80 small crays in a pot in about two hours, mostly little male fish. There's no doubt that perhaps the vast numbers of the little ones reduce their food supply so they stayed littler than they probably should have done. Some culling may have been a good thing but there was no end to it. Perhaps it's been over fished and course nobody could ever tell, to my mind. Most of the fisheries' scientists weren't fishermen and

where they set a pot or how they set it to do any tests certainly wouldn't have been anywhere near as efficient as a fisherman although some fishermen were hired to assist in these operations. When some of the Adventure Bay area was closed many years ago to allow crayfish investigation to proceed, they brought two loads of crayfish from Bass Strait, particularly females because they felt that the Bass Strait population was a faster growing crayfish but I'm not sure whether anything ever came of it. Even at the time I guess they knew that crayfish larvae was certainly subject to wind and tides and things and the larvae from one area certainly wasn't going to stay in that area.

I do think it was another bad decision made by our leaders that they allowed kelp harvesting. It does seem like as if southern kelp is most important to fish stocks around here. I was intrigued in recent years when they started setting these plastic larvae ketches in the open sea: lots of fronds of plastic and they'd lift it every so often and see how much little larvae from the plankton had made a home in it. Course this was basically what the kelp provided in massive areas round the shoreline, especially after storms when some of this kelp had tangled up and be ripped up and drift about and 'cause it didn't depend on a root system for survival or life (kelp) and it would be just as happy drifting about and it must have had a great bearing on the trapping of crayfish larvae when they were in their swimming stage on the surface of the sea. When it drifted in shore well then they'd have a pretty safe trip to the bottom. At that time when they allowed this kelp harvesting I noticed myself that soon after that, fish stocks seemed to go down a bit but it was a great protector of fish; like animals being in amongst trees, they have somewhere to hide and dodge their way from predators and also a source of food.

JD What about pollution, Jim? Is that a problem in Tasmanian waters?

BRIDGE Well I'm blowed if I know really. I've worked at EZ Company and I know that over the years there's lots and lots of heavy metal been spilt into the river system. 'Cause when EZ went to Risdon, we were taught at schools that the best place for a factory was on the banks of a river so you could get rid of all your waste and have access to shipping. So you can't blame them I suppose for the choice they made. I don't think the.... unless there's [a] direct spill of acid which kills fish, the actual heavy metals don't seem to harm the fish although they harm people at the end of the food chain and those who eat these fish, especially mercury and cadmium have been bad news. I think the worst pollution in the river systems here is sewerage. It apparently deprives the sea of oxygen and definitely reduced their food supply for these fish and I think that's the worst thing.

I'm not sure whether it's reached the stage of affecting commercial fishing in my area because by the time it gets to Storm Bay which was about the.... the Iron Pot was about the upper limit of our fishing activities for barracouta and silver trumpeter and that. I dare say the water would be reasonably rejuvenated or re-oxygenated or something for that fish to survive there. Although over later years when I was coutaing, there seemed to be a loss of blue sprats that were most important food for barracouta and there seemed to be less and less krill about but this could well be related to the warmer waters that we seem to be copping these days. Whether that's cyclable or permanent, I wouldn't like to say but a couple of years ago they caught two or three marlin off Tasman Island. Well this is a fairly warm water fish and it does seem like as if at the moment there's much warmer water round Tasmania than there was in the early days.

JD Jim, what would you see as the prospects for fishing in Tasmania? Is it likely to thrive (the industry) or stand still or go back?

BRIDGE I guess it depends on the fish stocks themselves. These orange roughy certainly seem to be in the ascent at the moment but while they allow gill net fishing with these monofilaments, I can't see any recovery in scale fish, reef fish types of things like silver trumpeter and some of the others, the rock cod. They all get caught sooner or later; red morwongs must reduce in numbers. I'm not sure what affect this bottom trawling has on king flathead stocks or white morwong. Whether the fishing is so effective that it would wipe them out or whether they can survive. There does seem to be a problem with our jack mackerel. One could never imagine their stocks being lowered to see them in the spawning aggregations on the surface in April. They were just as far as the eye could see almost all around the south-east coast.

JD Aquaculture's becoming a big industry in Tasmania, is it not?

BRIDGE It is, it is. They've got what they call cold waters but I think they're warming up a bit. It's a young industry and most of the farmers are still sort of learning about it. It's been a massive capital investment to get the things off the ground. [It] does seem as if the fish can survive and thrive in our waters but whether the markets will be suitable or whether after too long in one particular spot these farms would have to be moved because of the aggregation of excreta from the concentration of fish in the one area; maybe the effect on the bottom on other fish. I believe at the moment there's a real scarcity of rock cod in Port Esperance where this farming, aquaculture goes on for Atlantic salmon. I myself have been surprised that when we've set nets there recently, not to find a cod or not to be able to hook one. The suspicion is that there's a disease killing these rock cod but whether it would be a localised destruction of cod or whether it would reach into deeper waters where these cod also exist, I wouldn't know at the moment. I'm sure nobody else does.

JD Seems to be a need for a lot more research into biology of fish?

BRIDGE This is right but there's nobody much interested in these reef fish today that used to be most important to our particular type of fishing. When you get away from crayfish and to a lesser extent barracouta, then they seem to go for the deeper water trawling for gem fish and morwongs and these deep sea trevella and the orange roughy. These orange roughy have sort of filled a bit of a void in our fishing. We don't have a fish in our waters similar to the herring of overseas where there's a massive sort of a pelagic fish and edible table fish spread over wider areas and through great depths of water. The nearest thing we've probably got is what we used to call "snottys" but now they call them "wahoo". That's quite a pleasant table fish in considerable numbers and tends to be like a pelagic mid-water fish.

JD Jim before we finish, is there any other aspect of fishing that you'd like to have recorded on this tape?

BRIDGE Oh not really. It's a very widespread subject. As I said before, I didn't agree with seasons on fish. Our flounder were almost extinct here in south-eastern Tasmania until they took the season off. When there was a season on them everybody with a boat and a light and three or four spears would line up on all the favourite spots and really would concentrate their effort. When they took the season off you didn't have to be away on a certain day and people didn't seem to be so keen to catch the last one on the first day.

JD Is there a conflict of interest between the commercial fisherman and the recreational fisherman in Tasmania?

BRIDGE There would be a little bit in the crayfish area but because.... I don't know of very many commercial fishermen these days that gill net along the shore. There'd be no real conflict there, I shouldn't imagine except that there'd be no love lost either. I know when I was a commercial fisherman we thought any amateur fisherman was bad news, partly for their fishing methods and a tendency to waste lots of fish that they caught. Quite often they were much wealthier than we were and could afford better gear and more time off etc to engage in these activities. I know as soon as recreational fishermen gained access to a good fishing area the writing was on the wall for all the reef fish and net fish in the area. Fortescue Bay was one of our main fishing ports and when the Forestry Commission put a road through to the beach there, in about two years it wasn't worth setting a net anywhere between the Lanterns and the Thumbs inside that Fortescue Bay.

JD Because of the....

BRIDGE Because of the concentration of nets all the time; left over night and.... If you were the only boat in the area and you left your net overnight, conger eels and crayfish etc would make you think twice about the next time but when you've got an endless stream of recreational fishermen with an endless stream of nets, sooner or later these predators get caught, killed and slowly but inexorably it goes on to till it's safe to leave nets all night. Then any fish that gets big enough, as soon as he's big enough to get meshed in a net, that's the end of him.

So there's definitely a conflict there with based.... Based motor boats were nearly as bad as recreational fishermen. When you have boats at [the] bay all the time and their gear never out of the water, if there was any good fishing available they'd certainly get more than their share of those fish. Crayfish were noted at times to be what they'd say running. This was in greater numbers than usual; more active; would get in the pots more quickly and bigger ones that used to be a bit shy when their belly was full. At a certain time, perhaps before shelling they'd become more active and these base boats certainly with their pots down all the time.... Any time there was an increase in crayfish activity their pots would be in the water and they'd be the first ones to know about it and profit by it.

JD Right Jim, anything else then?

BRIDGE Not really, not really. I think I've had enough of that [laughter].

JD Thank you very much. It's been nice to talk to you.

BRIDGE No problem; no problem at all.

JD Thank you.

That is the end of this interview with Mr Jim Bridge, fisherman of Hobart, Tasmania.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW

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Edited transcript of an interview with CAPTAIN RICHARD BURGESS

INTRODUCTION

Captain Richard Burgess is a third generation member of a very well known seafaring and fishing family in Victorian and Tasmanian waters and has had a wealth of experience since first going to sea as a boy. As a fisherman his interest has been mainly in crayfishing, but as he explains, this involves not only catching but also the transportation of the catch and its marketing.

In this interview Captain Burgess gives us an outline of the Burgess family history and in so doing shows the influence of the family on his own career. His account of the hardships and satisfactions of a fisherman's life is outstanding. Outstanding too has been his contribution to the preservation of the maritime history of Tasmania and to the management of the port of Devonport, particularly in his current role of master warden. His concluding comments on the condition of the Tasmanian fishing industry and the need for conservation of the resource are especially thought provoking, as are his earlier comments on the contribution of women to the industry.

The interview was recorded in the master warden's office in Devonport for Murdoch University on the 8th March, 1990. The interviewer is Jack Darcey. There are four sides of two tapes and the interview starts at 022 on the revolution counter.

TAPE 1 SIDE A

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

BURGESS Richard John Burgess, born in Melbourne, Victoria on the 9th of the twelfth, 1929.

JD When did you come to Tasmania?

BURGESS Oh we came over here in 1956

JD So you were brought up in Melbourne?

BURGESS Yes because it's tied up a little bit with the family history in fishing. What actually happened was that our people were Tasmanians, came out to Tasmania originally, and settled, and they had shipping interests.

JD Excuse me. When did they come out first?

BURGESS Oh, around about the 1820s.

JD Very early times?

BURGESS Yeah, very early. Early 1820s. During the 1890s there was a terrible depression in Tasmania which.... there used to be quite a few of them in those days. I think the first one happened when transportation was abolished in Tasmania, when the convict system was ended and they had to pay for labour then and there was quite a slump in the economy. Tasmania seemed to be plagued with those for, you know, right up until the '90s when the State had the big economic slump. My grandfather found that the trade had fell off so badly that he had to find something to supplement the financial returns and so he went crayfishing.

My family weren't the first to crayfish, but they were the first to make it an industry and on a continuous basis. There'd been quite a lot of spasmodic crayfishing done by people who didn't sort of last very long, but they were actually the ones that started it off in the form it is today; made an actual industry out of it.

JD And that was in Tasmania, was it?

BURGESS Yes but as you can imagine, there was no markets in Tasmania. So what the family did.... Of course they had ships and they built ships especially for the fishing.

JD They actually built the ships?

BURGESS Yes because the ships they were normally using were trading ships with a different shaped bottom and they didn't know much about the methods of how one kept crayfish. When I use the word "crayfish", I'll refer [to] them as "fish" because that's the parlance that's used in the crayfishing industry at that particular time, and right up until, well all my life. We hear about lobsters now, but actually we referred to crayfish as fish.

What my grandfather did, he adapted the English fish well which was in vogue in England. It is a different shape to what the wells are at the present. My grandfather built a vessel called the **Lady Brassy** on the same lines as the trading ships they used to use. In other words, they were the same rig with the masts in the same position, ketch rigged with three head sails and two topsails and two lower sails and they developed in the hold where the cargo would normally go, "the well". They altered that around and made the bottom a bit sharper to get the well down into the water because as you know, a cargo ship's flat and it means that the less cargo that you put in, the harder it is to put the ship down in the water, so you've got to put a lot of cargo in to get the ship down to the marks.

Obviously if you had a flat bottom ship and you put a well in it, you would have no water in it to keep the fish alive. You'd only have, a foot of water because you've got no weight to push it down and so the ships' bottoms were made sharper so they would go down in the water anyway. The wells were made and constructed in a certain manner along the English lines which were a trunk type of thing that went down under the water and spread out to the sides of the ship. The English people used to catch scale fish, and they used to put boxes of fish down below the well's trunk and slid them in under to keep them cool. That was the English method. So that wasn't a very good method as far as keeping crayfish alive here. The wells had to be adapted and so the grandfather gave them more of an angle and brought them up to the vessel's deck making it easier to get the crayfish out because in those English sorts of wells you had

to virtually put the ship aground and wait till the tide went out to unload it, which wasn't very convenient at times in Tasmania.

JD Were they wet wells?

BURGESS Wet wells, yeah. There were no fresh markets in Tasmania at the time. The only market was in Victoria and so they used to have to catch the crayfish, take them across to Melbourne and sell them. My grandfather worked on the reasoning that they would go fishing until the cargo trade picked up (in 1890), as a means of making a livelihood. So they used to catch crayfish around the islands in Bass Strait and down the west coast of Tasmania to Conical Boat Harbour and places like that. They used to use nets at first, crayfish rings they were called but they did make some pots modelled on the Cornish careel. They made those and they found that wherever they used pots, they were far superior in catching numbers than what the rings were, because the pots virtually caught fish while you were away doing something else and did not require someone to look after them.

They sort of worked along from these beginnings and they used to catch the fish and take the fish over to the Melbourne fish market. They used to run to Queenscliff and the crayfish were taken up by rail from Queenscliff to Melbourne where they were auctioned on the open market. Some of the prices were about one pound a bag to perhaps 30 shillings. The bags were large bags, some around the 156 pound weight which were fairly large bags. One of the things they had to find out of course was: (number) one, how to catch the crayfish, because no one knew anything about catching the crayfish in quantity, and they had to find out how to take the crayfish from where they caught them to Melbourne, then they also had to work out how to actually sell the crayfish.

So part and parcel of the operation was: (number) one, catching the crayfish, (number) two, carrying the crayfish and (number) three, selling them. If you didn't master those three subjects, you were virtually wasting your time. That's why a lot of people never really succeeded in the fishing industry because they hadn't mastered these rules. They could catch the crayfish. That even applies today. They were great catchers of whatever, but unless they could get them there in good order and condition to land the article in front of the buyer in first class condition, quite obviously the buyers weren't going to buy them. So that was the marketing.

All through our family career and right up until when I stopped selling in the Melbourne fish market, we always topped the market on price. I remember an occasion when I had fish in the Melbourne market and I think there were about 250 bags in that particular morning. My fish were sold first. They didn't even go to auction. The buyers who knew the ship's name (because that was on the label) used to buy them unseen. They'd just run their hand down the side of the bag and they knew the sort of fish that were in the bags and they'd buy them just like that. That was at what, say half past six in the morning, and I've come back to my agents at 12.00 o'clock and they've been still trying to sell crayfish in the market. Of course they were in a terrible state, a lot of these other fish. They were dead and just alive and badly packed. So it was quite a business.

In those days of course they were.... I'm talking about the 1890s now, they were sailing. There was no engines and the vessels were all sail. Had to be sailed from point to point and it sounds very easy saying that but people who move about in the industry today know exactly the hardship that was involved with sailing because a lot of these islands they worked about, there was tides and they had to work out ways to go from one point to another point without being carried too far away with the tide and

if they were, how then could they get back if there was no wind? The pots (as they were called) were all hauled by hand out of tenders or boats; equivalent I suppose to the American dorys. That's the main way the fishing was done then. It was done by a boat carried on board a larger vessel and when the vessel arrived at a certain point, they anchored the larger ship, put the boat out and worked around the rocks.

JD Did they have a line of pots?

BURGESS Well they used to work, what was it, about 25 pots I think it was because as you may know, its a pretty slow sort of business; but when they had these nets ..... I remember my father telling me about one particular place. They went down to the west coast of Tasmania at Conical Boat Harbour, and they tied up in there (moored up in there) behind the rocks which seems impossible today by doing it under sail, but they did. They used to hang these nets over the side of the ship and pull the crayfish aboard and filled up, I think, in a few hours. Because it was all virgin ground. It'd never been worked and it took them longer to go to market and come back again than what it actually did to catch the fish.

Around the north-west coast and Furneaux Islands they found a lot of the ground around there by accident actually. By sailing and getting carried away with the tides and finally having to anchor wherever they were if they could anchor. If they couldn't anchor well they used to just dodge about and put the boat out and try with the pots then and catch crayfish.

JD What size vessels were these ketchs?

BURGESS Different sizes. They were, some were from.... Well the family started off with vessels around about the 60 feet, 60-70 feet [mark]. Some of them were larger but they finished up with the ideal size of around about the 60 odd feet, about 64 feet, mainly because of crews. Those sorts of ships could be handled quite comfortably with three people on board and also they found that by having vessels too large it became a bit awkward in narrow bays and if you lost a sail or you lost an anchor or anything like that, you were up for a lot of money and of course you needed a lot of manpower to man the windlass to heave the anchor in because everything was bigger. The 60 foot vessel was quite a good ship for carrying fish to Melbourne. It carried a good load and it was also fairly weatherly and also they had the small crew of three on board, three to four; but they could work them quite comfortably with three. There used to be two men in the motor boat or the sailing boat. Later on they used motors but two men would be in the working boat and the cook used to be the one that dodged the ship off the shore.

JD It must have been, as you say, very weatherly to survive down the west coast, for example?

BURGESS Well of course if the weather was bad you just poked off the sea and hove to like any other ship would. The men were tough. One's that weren't tough soon were "killed" off. I mean, as you could imagine, if you weren't strong enough you just couldn't physically do the work and if you were weak, well of course obviously you'd develop some complaint that stopped you going. So the people who did survive in that type of environment were fairly tough people. Not only tough in physical attributes but tough in mental and every other sort of hardship they had to put up with because it was hard. You can imagine pulling hard rope, tarred rope and sisal rope. Coil rope used to be made out of coconut fibre. The early pot ropes were made out of that and it used to fairly rip their hands to pieces. If you hadn't been used to any hard work you had blisters and of course if you had been used to hard work and you had very hard

hands, you would get salt water caking on them. They used to tend to split in the joints. When they split of course the flesh underneath was exposed and you'd get one of these prickles of rope in there and I'll tell you what, it was very painful.

Fresh water was always at a premium. The ships didn't carry a lot of fresh water, perhaps a couple of hundred gallons at the most or whatever they could carry on deck. Water was a very important and valuable commodity. So you couldn't waste water at all. People didn't waste water. It was always a prime thing, so you washed a lot in salt water if you could, or you didn't wash at all or you washed in very little. Water was quite the thing. Therefore, if you washed today in water, well you would try and save it and get another wash tomorrow out of it. I suppose there was a lot of dirty people about but no one seemed to worry about it.

JD How many days would they spend at sea?

BURGESS It just depends on the weather. It might be a week or it might be three weeks. Might be two weeks, depending on the weather. Sometimes the weather was such they circumnavigated Bass Strait. Started off from, say Melbourne and gone down to King Island and go across the coast and up through Flinders Island and back to Melbourne but I suppose you could say ten days could be the trip, just depending on where they actually were. King Island of course, it wasn't very far from Melbourne so they'd go over there in the day and catch their crayfish in the next couple of days and be gone again.

JD Crayfish poisoning would have been a problem with the crew, would it?

BURGESS What, how do you mean crayfish poisoning?

JD Well in the West there's a disease the crew often get through being pricked with the crayfish.

BURGESS Oh I see what you mean. No. The only thing we ever had here was, if you're pricked with a crayfish it usually festers. It doesn't.... it's not fatal or anything but it's very painful and usually you have to suck it out or perhaps get some tweezers and try and pull the spine out but most people bit them out anyway. That was the commonest way to get rid of things. People didn't have tweezers. First aid kits were never heard of.

JD Penicillin wasn't around either.

BURGESS They never had penicillin. They never had anything and as I said, it was the survival of the fittest actually, but that's how the family started in the trade and then they went on from that and as the sons grew up, the business got bigger and bigger and bigger until finally they had, oh seven ships in the end. Grandfather retired in his 50s. By this time they'd shifted to Melbourne and they were living in Melbourne. Then of course the crayfish was.... There was a lot of other people following them into the crayfishing and it became quite a major industry, but there was only one snag in it that the crayfish pots were being branded as illegal and the use of the crayfish pots in certain areas below a certain degrees latitude were illegal.

Of course they used to get to the stage where they'd get driven down the east coast of Tasmania by certain north-west winds and of course obviously you're down there and they fished. There was quite a kerfuffle over this and the locals were saying that these people were capturing our resources and destroying the grounds, which is all based on rubbish actually because the locals were probably using as many illegal pots as anyone

else was but the family never made many trips down the coast. That was the funny part about it. They mainly worked around the Bass Strait Islands and down south of Eddystone Point area and same the other way. So the times they used to go below the line was pretty limited to the winter but there's been all sorts of things written about it; quite a lot of rubbish written about it.

The family was heavily involved in a court action at one stage. My uncle was down the coast and he was murdered actually and that legalised the whole industry. There were enquiries into the crayfishing industry and after that it was all legalised but up till then it was a terrible thing to catch crayfish with a crayfish pot south of a certain latitude in Tasmania.

JD But then after that tragedy the pot became legal?

BURGESS It became legal and it made a.... Well it always was an industry but it became legal then but there's all sorts of nonsense written about crayfish pots were engines of destruction; the crayfish got in, couldn't get out. It was middle age stuff really. I'm talking about 1920/21. You can hardly believe that people could perpetrate the myths that were mouthed about it. Obviously the crayfish got in alright but they also got out. I think one of the myths grew up about that was that somebody up the coast had used a crayfish pot as a coff to keep the crayfish in and they put a lot of skewers across the neck to stop them getting out. Out of that grew another myth that you couldn't have any more than, what was it, four skewers (I think it was) in a crayfish pot because it wouldn't let the fish get out. Of course no logical person ever stood up and said, "Well if they can't get out, how can they get in"? It's fantastic to think that anyone could think like that. Well I suppose we are the same today.

JD Fishing seems to attract that sort of story though, doesn't it, or myth?

BURGESS Think it does. I think fishing's a funny sort of a game. I think people in fishing are very individualistic. They're interested in themselves and what they can do and a lot of people of course try to stop everybody else doing anything, as long as the regulation [laughs] doesn't apply to themselves. Of course they forget that one law, one state, but getting back to the family though, we've got it all out of sequence here really. Going back to the original [days], what happened was that they gradually worked up and made a trade and therefore the grandfather decided that he would move to Melbourne and he settled in Melbourne. They operated then out of Queenscliff originally and then out of Western Port, Stony Point, in the finish. There was 27 vessels at one stage operating out of Stony Point in the Bass Strait crayfishery. The family used to work into Port Welshpool in the winter time when they were working to the eastern islands, or the Furneaux Islands because they used to get these heavy nor-west gales coming down the coast of Victoria and they could run across under the lee of Wilson's Promontory and go into Port Welshpool and lay there. They used to catch the train from there to Melbourne with the fish; used to go up by train. They used railheads a lot those days in sending the fish to market. Stony Point had a railhead right at the wharf. Welshpool was three miles from the railhead and Queenscliff obviously had the railhead right at Queenscliff. So that was the principal way they got them up to market.

Later on of course motor trucks came into being and people used to ship by motor truck direct from the ships' side straight to the Melbourne Fish Market which used to be down at the bottom end of Flinders Street. A very beautiful old building. It had a slate roof and was one of the architectual gems of Melbourne actually, but now of course it's been demolished and now I think the site is a part of the Yarra River beautification area and the main market now is down the Footscray Road, the new

one. I had crayfish in the Melbourne Fish Market when it first opened and topped the market there, so I suppose it's some sort of a record. I just forgot the price now but I remember we sometimes got a telegram from the agents and it said, "Fish topped markets this day. Five pounds per dozen" [laughs]. That was a hell of a price, five pounds. Well you can't relate pounds to what it is today because you'd have to put the CPI and everything on it, the inflation rate on it. So to say a thing was worth ten pounds, say 50 years ago, and say it's worth $20 today wouldn't be right because it doesn't relate like that. That's where a lot of historians make a mistake. They say, "Oh only got 30 shillings for so and so" but that 30 shillings would buy an awful lot [laughs].

JD Yeah. A packet of cigarettes was three pence.

BURGESS Yeah, that's right.

JD Your father then continued on after your grandfather, in fishing, did he?

BURGESS The family went to sea in various stages. They went away to sea and then they came back and bought their own vessels or chartered their own vessels and operated that way. My father did the same. When he started fishing of course he went with his father and learned the rudiments of seafaring. Well not only with his father, but I mean we say that but he was with other people as well. In fact at one stage when he was quite young he was with the Holyman over here, old Roaring Tom Holyman. Anyway, what he did, when he came back to go fishing, he bought a vessel or actually chartered a vessel from a Melbourner owner, a schooner it was. He worked along in that until such time as he got his own ship built. In other words he got enough money for the deposit for a ship and worked up that way. The first one he had was the **Ada Burgess**, I think she cost 600 pounds those days (that's Sterling). She was built in Launceston and she was finally dis-mastered and lost off the Victorian coast in 1934. Then he retired for two years and thought this would be the life. He got so bored with everything that he went back to Launceston (Tasmania) and got the **Julie Burgess** built which is the present ship and probably the last survivor of that particular era. In fact she is the last survivor, now in the original form that she was built in.

JD She's still here in....

BURGESS Yeah that's her out of the window there.

JD Just there, yeah.

BURGESS So everything you see in that ship there, around the deck, apart from a few of the modern innovations, but the way the rigging's made and the way the thing's set up, the whole thing, that's exactly the way they were built which is a bit unusual today because you see a lot of these ships rigged up today which are rigged up out of books, but she's actually rigged up the right way.

JD Do you mind if I take a photograph before I go?

BURGESS No. You can do that.

JD Good. How then did you yourself come to come into fishing?

BURGESS Well we were never supposed to go fishing. As I said, the family came to Melbourne. Grandfather settled in Melbourne and my father lived there too. He married and settled there and we lived in East Malvern which is, I suppose, a fairly upper middle class area then. Kitchen soap people were next door on the other side and I think the bloke that ran one of the big wool companies was on the other side of us and there was a stock broker down the road. It was as far removed from the sea as you'd probably find.

JD This interview continues on side B of this tape.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

TAPE 1 SIDE B

BURGESS Anyhow the area we lived in of course was far removed from ships. In our dining room (we had a large dining room) and there were paintings of family ships on the wall. Of course my brother and I always looked at these ships. We used to talk about them and we sort of.... it wasn't supposed to be orientated towards the sea but there was only one thing that was wrong. My grandfather's house at Hawksburn was a similar large old house and grandmother was one of those pioneering women that was absolutely a lady in every degree, [a] tall, regal, upstanding sort of a lady. I used to go down to see her of course and I would sit on a little foot stool that was there and she used to tell me stories about the early days in Tasmania and about the old colonial ships and about the river, revenue cutters, and about great grandfather, and great, great grandfather, and about all the things that happened then because they lived later on Three Hummock Island, my grandfather, and my grandmother actually leased Three Hummock Island in the 1890s. That's actually where they went fishing from, you see. She was telling me about all these things of course.

Well I suppose the sea's in you. They say it's not and they say that environment's everything and hereditary's nothing but I don't believe that. I used to believe that when I was young but I don't believe it any more after seeing a lot of life. I think that things are in people and it's bred in them and I don't know why, but it's there. We just sort of took to water like ducks, my brother and I. My eldest brother, he was a member of the yacht club in St Kilda and sometimes we used to go down to the bay with him in the **Oimara**. She was quite a famous yacht, that **Oimara**, she was one of the original Devonport/Queenscliff racers which is the oldest sailing classic in Australia. A fellow called Doc Bennell, I think it was, used to own her and Bill used to crew for him. Anyhow I remember us going down the bay one time and it was blowing a northerly gale. The spray was breaking over the yacht. We were sitting up on the deck and wet through of course. I remember I went home clothed in a great big woollen jumper, one of my brother's jumpers [laughs], all my clothes were wet.

Anyhow grandmother used to talk about ships, the sea and things like that. My second eldest brother and I used to go to school in Melbourne. I was going to be a marine biologist. At one stage I wanted to be a marine biologist and I also wanted to be a ship builder. I suppose apart from all the things kids want to do when they grow up, like engine driving and all the rest of it, but I think the two things that really stuck in my mind was to be a seafaring gentleman and I always had a scientific interest in things. Probably [I was] an obnoxious kid I would think because I was always enquiring and I used to ask questions to the stage where people would get sick of answering them because they couldn't answer them and they'd say, "Oh well, run away son" or something like that. I never ever tried to embarrass anyone, I was just interested in knowledge and one question always led to another. Of course I used to think about

things and as I said before, always sat down amongst usually older people and had a great affinity with older people and used to listen to what they were saying and was very interested in them; and still am too. So gradually I suppose your knowledge builds up.

Well then, when dad came home from sea, of course it was marvellous, you know. Mum used to carry the house and the family like all sailor's wives do and I think it's a tribute to.... They talk about women's lib these days, but I'll tell you what. My grandmother used to run a whole island, 23,000 acres and run the shipping side of it and everything else as well as the children, eight children, on a place like that in the 1890s. There was no one who ever said anything about her not being equal or having equality. She was working as a partnership and she was complementary to grandfather. That's how this country was built, by people (men and women and families) working like that. The kids all had to work and they had to carry water up to the house and fill the house cask up from the spring down on the beach. Families were always part of a team which did things. You can see the photo of my grandmother in those days, in the real colonial days of 1890 and then you see her in a very regal house in Melbourne. There is a family photograph there which could have been taken anywhere, dressed in their beautiful long dresses and smart clothes and compare it with the photo taken on the island out there in the old battling days. I suppose those people had a lot of dignity and they knew what life was all about.

As I said, my grandmother was one of those sorts and my mother was similar. When dad was away she ran the house. She had to do all the things that the man would have done at home. She had to make sure the kids were fed and clothed and got to the school on time. Did everything that people had to do. We've lost a lot of that today because we're too hung up on this equality thing. Worries me a little bit because they're trying to take the gender out of human life. We're not male and we're not female. Well we are male and are female, but I mean they're trying to make everybody into one gender so to speak and it just doesn't work. They're saying that women have got to have equality, well I don't know what that really means because now they're starting to say women have got to work in factories and then they say women have got to be able to lift certain things, so they make the packages small enough and light enough for women to lift. So actually they're gearing the strength of men down to the strength of women. Now what the ultimate outcome of all that is, I don't know because one is complimentary to the other. There's no race going on. I do believe you've got equal opportunity if a women's got the brains and the intelligence and the qualifications, yes why not. Why shouldn't she get the same pay and why shouldn't she get the same opportunity. There's a lot of those old ideas where a women gets married and all the effort you put into it would be lost but that's not valid either because even if a women is married and has children and she has intelligence and she has qualifications, at least she's passing it on to the children. I mean we don't want just a whole lot of breeding machines inside that's got no brains. I mean if you're going to have children coming up, it's the parents that set them and the mother in the family sets the pattern a lot. I think that we tend to forget that these days. I think we're actually turning out children today that are really not going to be very good citizens. A lot of them are, but I think broadly speaking you're not going to have that type of person that you had years ago because remember a lot of people were doing very ordinary jobs and jobs today that people wouldn't want to be bothered doing, who were very intelligent and didn't have the opportunity for further education and didn't have the opportunity to go on and graduate in various disciplines out of university but the intelligence of those people, had they applied it to whatever job they're doing, no matter how lowly it was, and obviously they made that job, they improved the quality of that job by doing it, by finding a way and thinking a way of doing it easier and they did it. That's why the whole of society worked very well because people.... You had the drones always, you always had them but there was a

lot of intelligent people who could have gone to great heights had they the opportunities but didn't, but they still had the intelligence to apply it to the job that they were doing no matter how lowly it was. So the country had to benefit from people like that.

Anyhow when dad came home of course we'd all jump around and [say] "Where you been" and all the rest of it. Of course there's always that peculiar sea smell the sailors get about them when they first come home. Their clothes have got a funny sea smell and they have a whale of a time. Dad used to come home and he'd have a day in bed of course. He'd get up and he'd have his breakfast. He never had his meals in bed but used to get up in his pyjamas, have his breakfast and go back to bed and read the papers and generally have a rest. That's what it was, a rest and I remember this quite often and used to wonder why but I found out years later why when I was in the same position because when you are at sea you are completely geared to what you're doing. In fact you drive yourself every minute of the day and night. You're on alert and you don't really know it until you come home when you suddenly have no responsibility, the ship's safe and everything's done, the ship's discharged, everything's finished as far as the ship [is concerned]. You come home and suddenly you go flat and your brain seals off. You can't even think straight. Honestly it's amazing. It's just like you're in suspended animation because you've been so pitched up and keyed up to preserve the ship and the people in it all through gales of wind, wind coming in at night all hours and you're sort of awake and half asleep and awake. You do that for three weeks or a month and you come back, you're really flat. This rest period they used to have sort of made up for all that stress.

So after a day in bed the old man got up and went about his business in Melbourne. Course we used to say "Oh can we come with you". "Oh yes" he'd say "You can come; I don't know, you'll have to ask your mother" 'cause he said "I'm going down to the dirty end of Flinders Street today". That was down where the ship chandlers were, and all the wharfs and interesting things were. We used to go down there with him and it was like a royal progress because my father was a fairly big man. Well he was a presence anyway (put it that way). He was well known of course and he'd go down to the ship chandlers and we'd go with him and he'd say, "How are you Bill?" Bill McBean was one of the ship chandlers down there in Flinders Street. They used to have a natter and talk about things. He'd get whatever he wanted to buy. Ship chandlers those days.... you didn't walk in and buy over the counter. Ship masters never did that, they just walked in, very much similar to a supermarket actually. They just walked in and pulled things off shelves and threw it in the middle of the floor. A boy came along later and gathered it up and put their name on it and it was dispatched where ever but that's how they used to buy. I suppose early ship chandlers were probably the first supermarkets working on the principle that you see what you want. Quite often you'd go in with an idea to buy a coil of rope and you'd come out with a coil of rope and something else too because you saw it on the shelf. They did have a counter of course, ship chandler[s] but that was for people who weren't used to buying like that, just ordinary passing trade.

When we'd go down we'd get into, (oh, where was it) the hotel. I'll show you the hotel. Well the shipping agents used to be at the back of Markellies in Flinders Street, Lamb & Co and later F.H. Steven and there were three pubs there. There was one on the corner, the Lord Clyde, the Sir Charles Hotham and Markellies and they were all together you see. They were all full of sailors, wharfies, you know, anything to do with shipping. I'll tell you what, it was quite interesting as kids. The thing that used to strike me when I was small was all the legs standing in the place. A little kid gets sort of lost amongst the legs and you used to get a little bit frightened of that but you'd get around about, lunch time or something and you'd say, "Oh I feel a bit hungry" and the old man would say, "Come on, we'll go and get something to eat". He used to take us

up to that hotel near the railway station, Johnny Connells, it used to be called. It's gone now, there's some high rise thing there now. They used to sell rolls and savaloys, these great big savaloys. Don't know what they cost, three pence I think, and he used to buy us one of them and oh we had a great time.

Sometimes when we were with him we were too far away for that particular place and he'd put his hand in his pocket and he'd pull out a dry roll he must have got the day before and give it to us kids. I think his suit was amazing. He used to wear.... I'm using the words "used to" and I think it's wrong (somehow or other I think it's bad English) but I can't help it. Anyway he used to wear a suit, blue suit, waistcoat and they were all tailor made. He had his clothes tailored because he was a big fellow and he had a tailor up in Little Collins Street I was introduced to, in the later stage and he used to make my suits.

Anyway, in his pockets he had all sorts of things. He always carried a notebook inside his coat pocket, black notebook. He carried a wallet of sorts, pigskin thing it was full of papers; money, I don't [think] there was a lot of money in it, they didn't work on money those days because they were too well known but there was money, but not hundreds of pounds or anything. Pockets [would] bulge with all sorts of things. As I said, these bread rolls used to appear out of his coat pocket; bits of rope yarns for tying things up with. One stage there a potato appeared, like a little hard stone. Somebody had told him it was good for rheumatism. You put a potato in your pocket and the moisture, as it drys up, helps, and so that was in one pocket. Always carried a pocket knife. All sailors carried a pocket knife and my father was no different. He always had a pocket knife and that was used for a variety of things, cutting pieces of rope or cutting up an apple or something or whatever. It was there. The suit, I reckon, must have weighed half a tonne because I know it used to be.... When he'd take his coat off at night and hang it up, I remember feeling it once. It fell off the coat hanger and I picked it up and it was terribly heavy but of course they were pure wool suits too. Didn't have nylon mixes then.

I also remember him coming home one day down the street and I used to sit outside, or stand outside by the gate and watch him come down and there used to be a whole procession of the local gentry come down the street. The first bloke off the rank would be the stockbroker. He must have come home about 4.00 o'clock and he used to go past our place with a hat, a blue suit and about 4,000 flies sitting on his back laughs in Melbourne. That was a thing I think I always remembered as a kid. Then down would come another fellow from round the corner, an old doctor; he was the same [laughs]. Then dad would come along then and he had his compliment of flies too [laughs]. I don't think with motor cars you see that these days but there used to be all these flies [laughs] on the backs of the coats, just sitting on the backs. I don't know whether you ever found that or not? You don't really see it these days but I think it's motor cars, people are in motor cars.

JD You don't see many people walking around, do you?

BURGESS That's right. I think I can always remember that. Anyhow we used to go down across to Ingle Smiths, Paul & Grays, and of course the same old thing there, you had a yack yack with whoever it was. It was quite a full day and I think that's probably where I got my enquiring mind; from my grandmother first and from listening. Of course kids.... you sort of shuffle your feet a bit but [I] never shuffled my feet when I went out with my father because it was all so interesting. If it got a little bit boring, the conversation, you had all these wonderful things in the ship chandlers to look at. There was all sorts of things, bits of rope and funny sorts of blocks, bits of

iron bent up here and there. God knows what they were but you soon learned what they were.

He used to order the pilot bread, as it was called, from a fellow called Burroughs down in Flinders Street. They were big ship's biscuits and I suppose they were about, oh I don't know, six inchs square or something. They were very big and they used to be in a box, a tin box, all soldered up, three foot square. There used to be two to a crate and they were sent down to the ship plus the lime juice. We always carried lime juice, ship's lime juice which is not this pussy stuff you get today, although it smells like it but it [was] very strong. In fact about, oh I don't know, I suppose about a quarter of an inch in a pannikin, you would want a full pannikin of water and then it would be very tart but it was a real lime juice to stop scurvy We used that all the time in our ships. The ship's biscuits.... I remember being very young. I had one of these biscuits and it was more like a rat chewing it, it was so hard and I always had a longing for ships' biscuits. All my life I've liked them. I haven't had any the last twenty years I suppose, since they've gone out of business but I've always liked ships' biscuits.

I remember we used to have on board cooks and they used to make up things with the biscuits. You'd break them up and make them into a topping on top for sea pies which were usually corned beef ground up with potato on top and biscuits spread out, or just biscuits soaked in water and baked in an oven as a topping for a dish and they used them for all sorts of things. They were actually our fresh bread but not that we lived on them all the time because we used to make fresh bread on board the ships. We carried yeast and we made our own yeast out of various things, potatoes sometimes and ordinary yeast. It was quite good because anyone that went away in these sorts of ships learned how to cook, how to fish and they learned how to do the seafaring side of it and they were pretty good people. When they finished up they could go anywhere. The fellows that were in our particular ships were very much sought after by other coastal sailing ship people because they knew they were pretty good men and had a good grounding. Where did we get to?

JD We were talking about your own career in the fishing.

BURGESS Oh yeah, well anyhow then I went away for a couple of trips but [was] never encouraged. My father said, "Oh it's only a dog's life and you don't want to be involved in seafaring. You've got to be something else". We thought, well, "We'll be something else" but he said, "You've got to get an education first. If you get an education, then you can do what you like then". Anyhow we got an education I suppose or whatever it was and that's how it happened.

I remember the first trip I went to sea.... How old was I, about I don't know, fourteen or something or thirteen. Actually I went away for a trip years before that but anyhow I went away this trip and oh we had a fire on board and we put that out. We had to go back to port to do repairs and later on we had all sorts of things happen to us, like as you do. We had all sorts of gales. It's all a part of, I suppose your training, that people say, "Oh you must have had a lot of experiences". I suppose on the hop like this, if somebody said, "Recall one", you've got a job to sort of think which one would be the most outstanding because it was all the time happening. It was just a part of the thing but I know that what I said earlier about physical stamina, you had to be tough because it was a hard, tough life. If you were on a place like the west coast of Tasmania, on the east coast and you came and you anchored somewhere. You had to be awake at night. If the wind came around you had to get under way and get the ship to sea off the lee shore and get out of it and you may have been working all day in the boat, in a motor boat whatever it is pulling the pots, three times a day, four times a

day depending on where you were, I'll tell you what, hand hauling on say 20 fathom lines and 30 fathom lines is a terrible lot of rope to be handling all the time.

At the end of the day you were absolutely.... just dropped in your bunk and that was it. You just woke up and you'd think you'd only been asleep for a minute, made you sleep for hours. The thing was that the skipper was always, had one eye open or one ear open. That's why I said earlier about this tensed up business, you were physically there all the time and the least little movement of the ship would mean the wind had come around, the ship was on a lee shore. Well as the ship.... there was no mechanical thing much in it, the anchor windlass was manned by manpower and if you didn't get the anchor aboard fairly quickly in the beginning of the shift of wind, very often you'd have to let it go and slip it because there's too much sea which meant that the ship was plunging up and down and putting strain on the windlass which made it dangerous. There was quite a few occasions where people have.... the pawls have let go with the strain on the windlass and the windlass handle would come back and hit people in the head and the vessel was lost. **Daisy Knights** down the east coast was lost the same way and the **Tasman** was lost up at Bagal Island the same way.

So it had to be a hard life. The food was hard. There was no fancy food. It was all plain food, usually a round of porridge for breakfast and perhaps bacon, perhaps corned beef and the usual bread when it was fresh. Sometimes you couldn't get to make it so it went a bit mouldy and you had to shave that off or pick it out or eat it, whatever you wanted to do. Somehow or other we didn't seem to mind. We were very tough sort of kids. I don't know, we [were] tough I suppose, hard. Sounds funny talking about it today like this but I don't know. I suppose.... My son of course runs around jogging, "Oh I've got to keep fit and do this and do that" and I said, "Good God, man" "Why don't you do some work". He said, "That's alright for you. You worked when you were my age". He said, "I'm in a job where I'm inside a lot. I don't get to do the physical work". Well I suppose he's right too.

We used to have some quite highlights. I think the highlights when you'd arrive, after leaving Melbourne and you'd have to go and catch the bait which was used for the crayfish pots and that consisted of all sorts of fish from gummy sharks to whatever. When you caught the bait you wanted, as there was no refrigeration, the bait went on deck. That was a start. You got the start so you'd be all day catching the bait, enough to start you off. Then you got down and set the pots, then you would top the bait up each day by catching enough to keep you for the next day. So when you finished hauling your pots you usually caught enough bait then for the next day's bait. That was either by hook line or fish traps by using a crayfish pot being made into a fish trap, the catch consisting of parrot fish or setting a small long line with about 100 hooks on it, which kept the sharks going and a couple of nets which provided as well as bait, table fish, trumpeter. All the fine fish as we called them, for eating and also there used to be a lot of couta about then. That was always good for crayfish bait or eating.

So to see the well empty on the first of the voyage and you'd say, "Oh, how are we going to fill it up"? Then of course the first few fish went in and they all went up into one corner and then the next lot went in and they all went up in another corner and you had four corners in the one compartment. Then you still had another six compartments to go but gradually as the ship started to load, it was quite nice. Like looking at a garden, I think, with all the red crayfish in the well and then they started to build up and the ship was getting to the stage where she only wanted another couple of days to finish her off. As she got to the stage where she was nearly finished off, and then you started to top off, and the cargo was topped up and there was much looking in the well by the master or whoever. Everybody'd be sort of looking in the

well saying, "Oh yeah, get a few more in there", put a few more in there perhaps and you'd be saying, "Oh yeah, one dozen" and another dozen here and another three dozen in this one and you were starting to get to the stage where you were looking forward to the fact that the trip was coming to an end and you had a certain amount of pride, the fact that you'd loaded the vessel from empty and there she was, this beautiful garden of crayfish with their horns all looking up and their black eyes. One day you'd say, "Right oh, we'll put the pots aboard today" and everybody was, you know, great activity, productivity I suppose they use the word today [laughs]. We'd have about 300% [laughs]; getting the pots aboard and stowing the lines [laughs] and all these things.

JD This account continues on side A of tape 2

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B

TAPE 2 SIDE A

BURGESS Well the ship had got to the stage where she was loaded and so the pots were all put on board and the lines were stowed in the pots and the pots were stacked down below in the hold and the motor boat was lifted up on board the ship and we were off, as they say. There was an air of excitement about the ship. Usually the wind was, whatever it was, favourable at that particular moment. Of course the sails were all set and away we went. Sometimes you would get a run right through. If you were coming up from the east coast you would get a south-easter which would take you right up to Western Port. It was quite marvellous actually because on that particular course you laid off brought the wind at times right aft and the vessel ran with one sail on one side of the ship and one sail on the other, which isac called goose winged (which is the proper sailing term) and the vessel would be virtually sailing upright.

I remember running up many times from down the east coast with the ship in this situation and the full moon. I'll tell you what, it was really spectacular and as you got to the Wilson's Promontory the next morning, you started to sight the local Victorian fishing boats, the ones that used to work around the Promontory and they.... You'd encounter the local Victorian fishing boats working from San Remo and Welshpool and those places down to the Promontory and next morning you'd run up through the different fleets, you know the ones out of the Promontory and you'd find the ones that were working out of Venus Bay. Then you'd come along to the San Remo.... As you met them, they'd be working in various groups and we'd sail past them and we'd all wave and shout and pass the time of day and the things you do. It was quite good.

When we got up to Western Port, to Stony Point of course, then we had to discharge the fish. The agent would come down and tell us what the state of the market was, whether there was any fish wanted on the market that day because they might have had a glut or something. So we always had to skim off the top of the load by putting them in crayfish coffs which were kept on the wharf. They were big triangular boxes and you pushed them into the sea and towed them out to the vessel anchored close to the wharf. We never went alongside the wharf. We always just laid off the wharf, mainly because of the weather to keep the circulation of the water in the well. We used to then tow these coffs off to the ship and load them and then put them on moorings. They used to be then towed back to the wharf when it was time for loading for the market and they used to be lifted up with a crane and bagged up and sent up to Melbourne by the train but the market was regulated by the amount of crayfish that was on it at any one time.

Years later we didn't have agents. The agents at that stage used to take 10% out of our catch; cost to cover the agents' fees, the bags, the twine, the cost of baskets and coffs and things like that. Later the agents of course, as a trade, fell away over the years and we were the only ship operating out of Stony Point then. We gave the agents' side of it away and we became our own agents. We used to then send our fish up to market the way we thought about it because we found that there were a certain amount of, I won't say rackets; that's probably a bit hard, but it's probably nevertheless true but there was a certain amount of anomalies, perhaps is a better word in the way the fish were being marketed because the agents at the time.... The actual agents [were] in Melbourne. When I say we did away with the agents, I'm talking about the local port agent, but the actual agents in Melbourne owned shops in many cases and we suspected that they were being in a dual role of auctioning your own fish and buying them themselves for their own shops. We know in cases where that did happen and so you never really realised or could ascertain whether the actual price was a proper fair market price or they took the top best and let the others go.

So I adopted the fashion then that I do my own strategy, which I did. I then used to regulate the market the way I felt it should be regulated and if I felt that, or if I knew the weather was going to be bad for a certain period of time, which you do by your knowledge, I used to sail for Melbourne or sail for Western Port to be in time for when the weather broke up, arriving usually about the morning the weather broke up. So there was a lot of split second timing I suppose in getting the ship into the right position because if you didn't, you could be weather bound under an island somewhere and you would have lost the opportunity of regulating the market. So I used to wait and load while I could and then if I wasn't quite finished with the load, I used to leave and go with what I had. It was never under a load, it was almost a load but for the extra, say day's work or extra night's work, it was sometimes better to let that go and get the market. Many times I had the Melbourne market to myself. Out of the whole of Victoria, there'd been no fish in the market, only mine. I rang my agents in Melbourne up and asked them (they're old family agents) what fish they wanted, and they said "Oh send them all up". I said, "No I won't do that. I'll send you some". They said, "How many you got"? I said, "Oh, I don't know yet. The water's too thick, can't see properly down there in the well but you'll have some tomorrow". I think I've had twenty bags on the market and I've had as low as one. I had the market going at different times in a frenzy that the buyers were fighting over the one or two bags that were sent up and nobody ever quite knew what I was going to send. Anyhow it paid off quite well.

I did very well but I must say now, the opposition to that is that when my grandfather was selling in the 1890s, early 1900s post World War One, he had to actually go and physically stand on the stand to see the fish sales, with the amount of anomalies going on at the time. Somebody once said to me, I think Con Maddocks from down at Flinders in Victoria, said to me, "You're grandfather had the right idea". He said, "He was the only bloke that ever kept anyone honest up there". He said "because he was there when they were sold and he kept the same books as they kept". There was always trouble with the fishermen on the marketing side, in the Melbourne Market of short weights or fish that were supposed to be dead that weren't. In the times we're talking about and right up until I finished you could put fish on the Melbourne Market and get what we call a "bluey" back which was a notice of condemnation or condemned notice from the health inspector to say the fish were unfit for human consumption and they'd be taken to the tip. The fisherman would get a bill for that and also for the cartage to the tip. So a lot of the scale fish of course used to be subject to that. They were only iced and especially with couta, went soft and things like that. Fishermen quite often could put a lot of fish on the market and find they didn't get any or very few for sale.

It's pretty hard on people but I made the practice following on from my grandfather, I made the practice of, after one particular cargo or some consignment I sent up there, I was told that it was in a very bad state and therefore it didn't fetch a very big price. So I begged to differ with my agent in Melbourne and said, "Well that's not right". I said that particular consignment was packed at 2.00 o'clock in the morning, on a cold morning because we used to have to work the temperatures in those days, when you had heat like Melbourne's, what 102 and 103 degrees, high humidity, hard northerly wind down Western Port Bay and if you'd started to bag your fish at say 3.00 o'clock in the afternoon, they'd all be dead next day. So we used to have to work very odd hours at night to make sure the fish got there in good condition so when they were turned out they were alive and kicking, which is what people like to see. I said, "No that's not right". So I took it then to go see the cargo up in the truck, to make sure that the truck.... This was after they changed over when the railways didn't fit in with the market time, they put on motor trucks, carriers they used to call [them]. Some of the carriers used to drive up fairly fast and of course the fish used to get thumped about and break their tails. So I used to go up with the carrier as what I call the super cargo to make sure those fish arrived OK and the fellow didn't go over too many bumps and he drove at a certain speed and everything was going along alright. When we got up to the market I used to see how they unloaded and make sure that the market hands didn't throw the crayfish off the truck onto the barrow. They had little low barrows with big wheels that used to run on a little railway track. Sometimes I've seen the fish thrown off the truck, bang on the market stand and smashed to bits. It seemed a tragedy that so many people had taken so much care over hundreds of miles of voyaging to land the product up in the fish market only, what 30 feet from where it was ultimately sold to be destroyed in that short distance.

So that's why I made sure I went up with the fish and of course when the bag was ripped open, it was tipped out and anything that didn't move was grabbed and put in a box and they were called dead fish, which were sold for, oh I think, a shilling each or something about that price. Hawkers used to buy them. I used to have to stop the sale on occasions when these fish would suddenly come alive. They used to start crawling about and I made them put them back on the stand for sale. You had to watch the market. If you didn't watch the market, well honestly you were at the mercy of the honesty of whoever were there. I could never see the point in going to so much hard work and hard effort to get the fish in there to have myself robbed at the end of the line. So you had to keep watch on that side of it and that goes back to what I said when we first started talking. There was always three things. There was catching the fish, or knowing where to catch them and then catch them, which is part and parcel of the same thing; carrying them to the market and selling them. The middle bit I didn't ever explain to you properly was that carrying them to market meant that having loaded the fish, you had to nurse the ship along in certain sorts of weather so as the fish didn't get knocked about because of violent movements of the vessel and die, because if they died it meant that they killed the fish underneath them and if you didn't regulate whatever was dead in the well from the day you started to load the ship, if you didn't look at the well every day and check it, make sure the dead ones, if there were any dead or injured ones, you didn't put the injured ones in because obviously they would die, you didn't have a very good outcome because the dead ones would poison the water and you'd finish up and lose the whole cargo. So you had to learn to carry them. It had to be done very conscientiously. So it was no good rushing across to Melbourne in a gale of wind and getting there with their legs chafed off and tails broken; not that we went in fine weather either, but you just had to be careful in picking your weather and if you were caught in a gale to minimise the amount of motion that the ship sustained.

So all that was an art and it was all part of the game. Years later of course, when markets became available in Tasmania with freezers, it was just a matter of, like

processing in fact, just a matter of coming alongside the wharf and just throwing the fish onto the wharf and that was the end of it. So the actual art of selling on a competitive market, I don't know whether it's lost these days but I think it is and it seems funny when you hear the rural industry, virtually every day on the radio saying, "We've got to do our marketing right. We've got to have the product. It's got to be presented". I mean, we've been doing this for, I suppose nearly a hundred years (the family has), up until I finished off presenting the article onto the market and that's what people wanted to buy, and what's new in life?

JD Yeah, it's so important though, isn't it?

BURGESS Yeah it is important because a whole lot of people just die off and forget what it was about and a new lot comes in and discovers the wheel again. So it is, and that's the main thing of it.

JD Later on you became the head warden of this sea port of Devonport?

BURGESS Yeah, the master warden here. Well, that's another.... I mean I don't talk much about.... I don't like actually talking about myself. I think there's far more interesting things in the history side but I've been, I suppose since about, ever since, what when I was at school and after, always been involved in things. Not for anything in the personal way and I suppose it's the upbringing because my father always encouraged the family to discuss things around the table. At our breakfast table or our dinner table at night we would discuss all sorts of subjects, subjects that possibly most people shear off from. It would be politics, it would be religion, it would be all sorts of things and the children were always encouraged to participate. It was never a case in our house of kids are seen and never heard. The only time that rule ever applied was when, I remember my mother used to have, I don't know, soirees I suppose (I don't know) [laughs]. Perhaps that's going a bit too far, but relations or whatever would come to visit and the kids are always paraded you see. "Oh yeah, come in". They were always sitting in the sitting room and they'd all be round the chairs and of course young Dick or young Bernard or whatever it was, would be shown off you see. The last time they were sighted, they were only about that high and suddenly "Oh yes, they've grown" and all this and "He looks like his father" or "He looks like his mother" or something. After that you were kicked out. You had your inspection and, "Well you can go out and play now" [laughs].

I remember at afternoon tea time we were let in too and there used to be nice plates, whatever it was and of course even as a kid you'd look at these things. We had plenty of food in our place and we had plenty of everything and the cakes were always pretty good and you'd see a nice cream cake there and you'd put your hand in and you'd look up and suddenly you'd feel someone was looking at you. Of course mum would be there and that cake was for the guests. When the guests had had one well of course, you had a go then [laughs] but every now and then you used to sneak one off [laughs] when no one was looking. It was typical of kids in that era and that's not that hundreds of years ago. That's only in the '30s. I suppose it's all part of what makes a human being human.

Anyhow, by these discussions we had had some real good.... not arguments. We never had arguments. We never got too excited but we used to have varying viewpoints around the table from my mother and my father and brother and myself. I suppose I've always had that, I don't know, that speaking out and if I thought things were wrong, I said so. I suppose by being in a family of people who have always been their own people and not necessarily depending on other people perhaps for employment, they became a little bit more independent and perhaps it was good for them. I say

that in inverted commas, "What was good for them" because it probably gave them a lot of freedom, where other people would fear to say something because perhaps they might get the sack or they might do something else. Because our people virtually were fairly independent, they could speak out about a lot of things and it didn't matter. I've actually, I suppose, inherited that and all my life I've been in the same mould and I've had some terrible repercussions for that because people say, "Well that's a sweeping statement" or, "What right [have] you got to say that" or perhaps tread on a lot of sacred cows and a lot of organisations, politically and otherwise that people .....I become, I suppose.... They say, I'm a (what is it) knocker of the system or I don't conform to these things, I'm not a "yes" man or something like that for I speak bluntly or I speak my mind or all the cliches people use. I suppose it's all a part of your make-up of how you're brought up. Certainly my family never hid their light under a bushel from great-grandfather right away down to me. I can see my son shaping up exactly the same way. Yes, as I said before, at school I was always sort of a.... I don't know. Kids used to sort of gang around and I had to organise people.

I hate organisation. Don't think I'm.... I'm not an organiser. I hate organisation. People used to sort of come around and want me to do this for them and do that and it's sort of gone on all my life. As I said, I've been in a lot of things and yet I hate organisation such as organised sport and things. I don't like that. If I want to do something, I'll do it. I don't like to be standing around waiting and dressed up in fancy uniforms to do this or do that. So that's how it's been. I've been appointed spokesman on different things when I was young and virtually one thing led to another and then, it's hard when you think back. You don't sort of think of what you've done and you don't catalogue it a little bit but there's quite a few things I suppose I've had a bit to do with.

That one down in Hobart, the Folk Museum at Battery Point, Narryna. I remember coming ashore from the vessel at Purdon & Featherstone, we were going on the slip there and I went up to a barber shop that used to be on the corner. We always had our hair cut there. Battery Point in those days was a place where people lived and the community was such that it had its barbers and its baker and the butchers and the local stores. When we came to the slip of course we were all part of that. That was part of our thing and so we had a little barber's shop around the corner. I remember the barber particularly well and anyhow I was going around there one morning and there was this old house "Narryna" which is a folk museum now and it's quite a nice set-up. It was derelict and on looking through the gates, there was a bloke standing there, and I looked through the gate. I said, "It's a terrible shame about this place. It should be preserved". Course no one looked after old buildings then. This is somewhere about 1946. This bloke said, "Oh" he said, "What do you reckon"? I said, "Should be preserved. Should be made into a maritime museum". He said, "Why". "Well", I said, "This is Battery Point. This is where it all happened in the early days. Tasmania has got no maritime museum, it's a maritime nation" I said, "full of the history of the place. This is where it ought to be". He said, "What organisation do you belong to"? I said, "I don't belong to anything. I've just come here from Melbourne". So that went off alright and on the way back to the ship [there was] another fellow peeping through the fence. The fellow said to me, after I'd repeated all this again, I said, "What do you do" and he said "Oh, I'm Dr Briden from the museum in Hobart". He said, "Matter of fact, we've come here today to decide the fate of this building. I'm supposed to meet the Professor of the Chair of Architecture at the University but he hasn't turned up and I've got to go". So on the way back there was a fellow standing there peeping through the fence, much the same as we were earlier. I said to the bloke, "How are you"? He said, "Alright". I said, "You must be Mr So and So" and he said "Yes". I said, "Well Dr Briden's gone. He couldn't wait". Anyhow I got talking to this bloke and he said "Oh, these old buildings, they want pulling down". He said, "They've got rising damp and they've no foundations" Well he surprised me. I said,

"You're a disgrace sir". He said "What"! I said, "You're a disgrace. You're a Professor of Architecture down there and you're rubbishing the heritage. You ought to be preserving it, working out ways and means of stopping the rising damp, all that instead of knocking it".

Anyhow him and I didn't go to well but the upshot of all that was that the ABC called up and I had to do a talk on the ABC about various things [laughs]. From then on there's all sorts of things I've had a bit [to do with]. Anyhow the museum is now saved and Miss Rowntree down there was a driving force in Battery Point to save it but I always pride meself that perhaps somewhere, the outside casual comment has perhaps made a contribution to the final analysis.

Another thing, I used to have great arguments with the Hobart Marine Board about the pulling down of three Georgian houses to build the wheat silos on the waterfront there. I remember saying to one of their top Wardens years ago when I was young, I said, "You ought to build that thing up at Self's Point out of the way because it's no good building it here. This is all beautiful waterfront buildings. You won't find this anywhere in Australia". He said, "Ah no". (I remember it was old Roy Gibson). He said "Ah no, she's too far away. Got the flour mill around the corner". I said "Yeah, that's why you're building there, alongside your flour mill. I'll tell you what, those buildings will be standing here long after your flour mill's bit the dust". Anyway his flour mill has bit the dust. It's been turned into a shopping complex and now I see there's talks about trying to shift the silos off the wharf in Hobart [laughs]. As I said before, it all goes round in a circle.

Oh lots of things I suppose I've had indirect input. The bowls club over here, we were made an offer years ago when I came here to put a bowling club in east Devonport by the local council. They'd offered, I think it was a thousand pounds and free cement and materials and the services of the council engineer if we could get 40 members, foundation members. A mate of mine who was a bowler and had a great interest in the sport came to me one day and he said, "Would you like to be a foundation member of the bowling club"? I said, not on your life. I'm not a bowler, I'm a sailor". He said, "No I don't mean that way". He told me what the offer was and I said, "Yeah, I'll be in it. How much do you want"? He said, "Oh, ten pounds is all". I said, "Right oh". He said, "I'll contact you in a month or so". Anyway a long time went by, it was over a month and I thought, well I haven't heard any more about it. So I saw Lou one day coming past my house and I said, "Lou, what's happened to the bowling club"? He said, "Oh, it's kaput. We can't get the people. Can only get eighteen". I said, "Well that seems odd, a deal like that". He said, "Well that's the fact, she's had it. Mick Baker (who was a local councillor) is going up to the meeting on Wednesday and he's going to say he can't do anything about it.

Well I said, "Hang on a minute". So I went round and saw Mick Baker and I said, "What's the story on it". He told me and I said, "Well look, you go and get 40 forms printed up, typed up or something to say that, "I wish to be a member of the East Devonport Bowling Club" and give them to me". I said, "You've got eighteen to start with. I'll get the rest". Anyhow I went around and I knocked on doors and I finished up with 39 and there was one bloke over there who [laughs] I'd been to a few days before and he was a pretty canny sort of a bloke. He owned a lot of property over there and he [was] pretty tight. He said, "Oh I don't know. I don't know about this thing". Anyway I went back, the last night I think it was. In fact I think it was about 6.00 o'clock at night and the council meeting was at half-past seven. So I said, "Well come on, what about this bowling club. You're the only bloke. I want one more signature". He said, "Well I don't know. What happens if it goes bung"? "Well" I said, "If it goes bung, the whole municipality will pay. They'll just put half a half-penny or

whatever it is, point something or other. There's a rate the ratepayers will pay for it. It won't cost you. You won't have to pay for it. Anyway, it'll put value on your property". "Oh" he said, "Give us the paper" and he signed. Well I went round to see Mick Baker, knocked on the door and Mrs Baker said, "Oh Mick's just getting ready for the council". I went in and old Mick was there, just putting his shirt on and he said, "Oh, I don't know" he said. "I'm sick of these people. You battle all the time and no one wants to do anything". I said, "Mick, go and get the bowling club". Well I've never seen a man look so happy. Anyway he jumped up and down and we got the bowling club.

It's one of the biggest bowling clubs about now but the interesting part was, everybody said, "How much is it gonna cost"? So I worked out what the interest and the repayment would be on this thousand pounds and I said, "Oh it'll cost you five pound a year". Anyhow, when the thing was put to the Council, that night I had two old men come to see me. They were champion blokes, bowlers, that had signed up. Part of the first eighteen, so they didn't take any sighing up. They were there. One of them said to me, "Now listen son, we want you to come to the first meeting tomorrow night" (the bowling club meeting). I said "What for, you've got your bowling club. I'm not a bowler. You've got it". He said, "No, we're gonna put you up as first president and first patron". I said, "Don't be so stupid. What do I know about bowls". He said, "That's not the point. Without you that club would have never got up and running. Take it from me son, I'm an old man (he was in his '80s) and I'll tell you something. A few years down the line, everybody built that bowling club but there's only one bloke that built that bowling club and that's you". He said "That name will always be on that board, on the top and it doesn't matter how long it goes on when you're only dust in the ground. People will look at that and wonder why your name is in those two positions. That is where it should be because you were the man that got the bowling club".

This interview continues on side B of this tape.

END OF TAPE 2 SIDE A

TAPE 2 SIDE B

BURGESS Well from the bowling club of course I got involved in saving a little ferry down here across the river. The Port Authority was going to take it off the run and it's been a controversial subject I suppose for, what best part of 100 years, that little ferry. Living in East Devonport, I've always been a great champion of it and the ultimate outcome was that I did eventually save the ferry and I won't mention all the details, but it's quite an interesting exercise. Also the old Port Authority building down there after I joined the Board.... I was asked to go on the Board by an East Devonport resident, which I stood for in 1966 and was elected to the Board and I've been on the Board ever since, as a warden originally, then later as a deputy master warden for one year and I think I probably wasn't a yes man and so I got dumped out of that the following year. Then three years ago now I was elected to the master warden's position.

I've seen a lot happen on the Board since that time. Quite a lot of history but I think one of the greatest achievements was saving the little old Marine Board building down by the ferry which is the original building that this Authority had built in the 1880s. It was going to be destroyed I think just about the time.... the time I got on the Board it was brought up at the first or second meeting I think and I stopped it from being destroyed and worked a compromise out which kept it there. Some five years ago, I think it would be roughly from memory but anyway it's easily determined, the vandals

had got into it and nearly burnt it down. Now really, they made a mess inside and the Board was going to demolish it and I fought very hard. I spoke for about an hour and a half (I was told after by the minute secretary) about this and convinced the Board to give it to me to give it to the National Trust (which I'm a member of and also a State Councillor of the National Trust) and I got a CPE scheme through the Port Authority here and it's restored the way it is at the moment. It's back to a very good building and it's now the headquarters of the National Trust in Devonport and now Maritime Museum people meet there, of which I'm also the president.

We had our first port authority meeting in there for about 80 years the other day to celebrate the centenary of Devonport being named as a city. The Devonport Town Board which had some members of the original Port Authority on it, or Marine Board as it was called then, met for the first time when Devonport became a united town a hundred years ago this February. So to honour that I said that we would hold our regular monthly meeting, the February's meeting in that building, which we did. Everybody loved it, thought it was a great place down by the water, looked at all the people walking past. So I suppose.... somebody said to me, "You going to have period costume"? I said "No, we're planning the next hundred years of the port." I said to him "We're not a ceremonial thing. It's a real fair dinkum proper board meeting" and some of the decisions we made down there the other day will have far reaching effects into the next hundred years of Devonport which is quite good.

So the master warden, as you know, in the Port is the chairman of the Board and the members of the Board are called wardens. There was a move at one stage in our Port system to do away with that name and just call them board members and chairman. The argument was that this was confusing to mainland people. When we went anywhere people thought that we were warders of a gaol and I said "No. That's not right. I don't have any trouble with that". I said, "I introduce meself as the chairman of the Board and then explain to people that we're actually called the master warden and wardens, because of the traditions of what the word warden means, a custodian" and so I said "If explained to people it doesn't matter" and I said, "I had no problem with people understanding that. In fact they're quite interested in that particular title".

JD As the master warden your role would be to manage the Port, is that [correct]?

BURGESS Yes. We have professional.... When I say professional, we have full-time people employed in the Port to run the day to day port . We have a manager and a secretary. Actually what was classified years ago as a secretary is actually now the manager and all through the Marine Act, it refers to the secretary and the master warden and wardens but the term "general manager" is only a very modern one within the last twenty years, but before that was always referred to as the secretary. So we have here a manager and we have the secretary who's usually the returning officer under the Act. He's the returning officer for elections to the Board. We have a Port engineer and we have a harbour master. They're the basic characteristics.

We have a staff that operate the office and the various functions and then going out on the wharf we have the Harbour Master's Department which encompasses the harbour masters, there's two and they're both pilot harbour masters. They pilot the ships in and so they do a dual function and they also act as surveyors. Down in the Port operations we have a, what we call a receiver, who is actually I suppose a boson of the Port operations under the harbour master and he operates the normal business of arranging whatever comes into the switchboard down there on fork-lift hires or shipping movements or handling the agents. Then we have watchmen who man the radio around the clock. So if ships call up we have that service available. Then we have a work's force who do our actual work of construction and repairs and

maintenance and anything that has to be done in the Port. The Board has six members or wardens.

The Port also operates the airport out at Pardo so that our work force does work there as well as in the Port. We also operate very large cool stores in the area, both at East Devonport and Quoiba. There again our works force does any repairs on buildings or whatever. We're presently engaged in building a berth at East Devonport now to take the new ANL ship which is a complete departure from other ships that are in the trade. She will be a roller trailer operation which carries four containers on a trailer which backs into the ship. With these four containers, it's called a Rollex system and it's very much similar to the Maffi trailers which is another patented system used by Brambles at Burnie.

So generally speaking the master warden is the chairman of the Board who is the go-between between, the front man I suppose to talk on policy matters and do the legal bits as representing his Board. Since I've been master warden I've had to (for various reasons we won't go into at the moment) spend a lot of time here because we've been reorganising things and we've got a new acting manager at the moment who will be appointed the manager. He's a very keen man. He's an accountant by profession and therefore he has a fairly responsible job and he needs all the help and guidance that perhaps the experience that I've had can help him with. So I've spent a lot of time here in the last couple of years because there's been quite a lot happening in the Port, both political and otherwise. I suppose that's about it in a nutshell.

JD Have you retained any sort of connection with the fishing industry?

BURGESS Ah, interesting; very interesting. I did sell my licence but I also in the throws and there's a long thing that I don't want to get too far involved; it'll take all day but there was a great lot of talk about revising the fishing licences in Tasmania. One of my arguments in Tasmania about the fishing has been that there's been too many theoretical people messing around with it and not enough practical people dealing with it and it's become a mess: licensing and the trafficing in licences and the things that happen with restrictive trades and restricted industries and limited industries. We've got a thing called TIFIC which is about nine, I think it is, commodity groups and they've done away with the old Professional Fishermen's Association which used to look after the lot. I would have thought that the Tasmanian Professional Fishermen's Association is probably the oldest one in Australia, that's the Tasmanian branch, it would have been better to have TIFIC set up as sub-committees, (like industry sub-committees) as a part of the Professional Fishermen's Association but now we have this thing which everyone says works well. I don't know whether it works well or not. It just seems to me that everybody's got, sort of nine different organisations involved in something that could have been done by sub-committees of the one.

So to get back to the question you asked, well there's a lot of talk about reducing the licences and getting people out of the trade and it all seems to me to make it more attractive for people that were in the trade to be able to sell a licence eventually, whereas I think it's a terrible thing that they started all this in the first place 'cause I think the people should be able to come and go out of the fishing industry, allowing people and sons of people who want to take up the fishing to come into it without paying, say a million dollars or five hundred thousand dollars or whatever it is to buy a licence and boat. I think that's a monsterous thing and I don't think it was good for the industry but the politics of the thing was that a company came down here with a pretty slick line of talk and the Government fostered them and they came in and bought up a lot of licences and of course prices went up in licences and speculators

also got into the abalone industry and they too started to buy licences. It started to cost a million dollars and people were buying bits of them and it's not a good system but like all systems, once it's in place, how do you fix it? Well there's no easy quick fix on it. It should never [have] happened in the first place, but seeing it's happened, you can't expect someone who's paid a lot of money for a licence then to be suddenly told it's not worth anything.

So they've had a system whereby they tryed to weed out people and a part of the system was that there's always been provision for a "grandfather" licence for the fellows who had retired or had left the industry but they still wanted to catch a few fish to keep the wolf off the door, if need be. So I said, "Well I'll go and test this system out" and I did. I was granted a licence by the Review Panel. There's nothing sinister about it. I told them the sort of licence I wanted. I wanted a licence that could never be sold because it wasn't intended to have as a speculative thing. It could never be sold and it would be limited to certain things. That's what happened and I do have a licence for that and that's all it was intended to be. I think that if there'd been a bit more thought gone in, say 25 years ago, you wouldn't have had the debacle you've got today with the fishing industry. I'll sum up the thing and end in saying this. The major problem with the fishing industry has always been that there's been too many people saying what should be good for the fishing industry, for the future, but in actual fact what they're really saying is that they want as much as they can get to shove in their pocket for the present and to hell with the future, 'cause that's about what it's all about and that's what conservation's all about.

When our people were fishing we used to rotate our fishing grounds. We used to go to one place and then later we'd leave it and go somewhere else but today they seem to want to catch, and catch, and catch and catch off the same ground and then they say, "Well, what's happened to the fish"? What's happened to the fish is that they've over fished it and they haven't used the intelligence that they were given by God to use it. That's really what your major problem with the fishing industry is, whether it be the Japanese coming down here or where ever it is, it's the same old story, that people want to stuff in their pocket as many dollars as they can and to hell with the future.

JD Thank you very much. It's been a great talk, thank you.

That is the end of this interview with Captain R.J. Burgess, master warden in the Port of Devonport.

END OF TAPE 2 SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW

Disclaimer

Edited transcript of an interview with CLYDE CLAYTON

INTRODUCTION

Clyde Clayton and his wife, whom he refers to as "the mate" and his dog "the pup" lives at Franklin in the beautiful Huon Valley in Tasmania. Although retired now he still retains his interest in boats and fishing. The **Box** he refers to is his current vessel.

Clyde fished mainly for crayfish and mostly out of Port Davey on the remote and isolated south west coast of the island. During his working life he rebuilt and worked several well-known Tasmanian vessels, notably the **Belle Brandon** thought to be the second oldest vessel in Tasmania and the **Reemree** an early steaming ferry still to be seen at Victoria Dock, Hobart. Clyde is one of the characters of Tasmanian fishing. He and his wife represent the tough, resourceful, capable people who spent a lifetime confronting the hazards of the sea and weather off the wild shores of southern western Tasmania and in so doing laid the foundations of a great industry. They have become legends in their own lifetime and deservedly so.

The interview is part of Murdoch University's oral history of the Australian fishing industry and was recorded at Franklin by Jack Darcey on the 4th March, 1990. There is one tape. The interview starts at 022 on the revolution counter.

TAPE 1 SIDE A

JD Clyde, would you tell us your full name please.

CLAYTON Clyde Glenville Clayton.

JD And where were you born?

CLAYTON Dover, Port Esperance down here [in] 1914.

JD And have you spent all your life in Tasmania?

CLAYTON Yep. I'm a Taswegian.

JD Whereabouts were you brought up?

CLAYTON Oh mainly Dover for so many years then finished up in Bellerive, you know.

JD Was your father a fisherman?

CLAYTON No, no; a farmer.

JD Did you have any fishermen in your family?

CLAYTON A step father and half brother.

JD So how did you come to become a fisherman yourself?

CLAYTON Well my own father died originally and course I had a stepfather. He was a fisherman, oh: Syd Dale from Dover. Of course I went on the boats when I was thirteen years old.

JD Straight from school?

CLAYTON Yeah. Never left them till 1973 or '74. Never left a boat, never left them. Course he was always crayfish boats; always crayfishing; nothing else. Then of course when I was about eighteen I had me own boat. Well a bloke sort of give it to me. She was very expensive. She cost 300 pound, me own boat. Oh this is the seventh boat I've had now and that was an uncompleted boat but I had four or five fishing boats. Course I should have them here but I haven't got them.

JD Have you fished out of this part of Tasmania all the time?

CLAYTON Yeah, all Tasmania from east coast to the west. Not the top end but all, round the bottom and east coast and sou-west coast and Tasmania. Nothing to do with the Top End at all. That's foreign going [laughs].

JD You'd have been in crayfishing then before pots came in?

CLAYTON Just after the pots came in; about six months after. I went on the boats as a kid of course. That's pretty tough days too [laughs].

JD Yes. You'd have seen a lot of changes?

CLAYTON Oh yes, yes. There's a lot of that of course. Best in boats and old days as.... Some of the boats are still about like the old **Belle** down here, she was there too but there's no power in them; little engines and slow and all sails and you know [how] it goes.

JD Your first boat, could you....

CLAYTON The **Mary May**, a double ender, 43 feet. Then I got rid of her. Then I sold another boat called the **Arlie D**. Dennis King painted that there. She's up there. She's 48 foot. Dennis King painted that photo. We had her for fourteen or fifteen years. Then we got ANOTHER one called **Storm Along**. She was a 50 foot ketch. Had her for ten or twelve years. Course I don't know, I always liked changes and I was going past. ..... I see **Reemere** up there, the ferry boat and we sort of pulled it to pieces and rebuilt her and that's what we done. That was about ten years before I sold her and got **the Box** [laughs].

JD Are you still fishing at all?

CLAYTON Yes. All the time up till '73 ('73 or '74...'73); '74 wasn't it [when] we'd knocked off fishing?

JD Yeah, but you don't now fish?

CLAYTON No, oh no, no, no, no. We get our fish out of a tin of sardines.

(Mrs Clayton's, voice in background, "'76").

CLAYTON '76 was it, oh. Continual; 49 years straight chasing crayfish. I wasn't on my own all the while but the last 30 years I was with my wife on the west coast. There was crayfish this thick. Didn't get much for them though; ten bob, twelve bob a score.

JD A score was not just twenty?

CLAYTON 24 in a fisherman's score; two dozen see, twenty four. Twelve shillings as they come.

JD Where did you sell them?

CLAYTON Oh Casamaty in Hobart, they used to take them all. We brought them up to Hobart them days; take as many as you could catch you see.

JD Did you take them up yourself?

CLAYTON Oh yes, oh yes; bring them up. Might take us twelve or fourteen hours to bring them back, you know.

JD You sailed up?

CLAYTON Oh sail and motor, course. We had little engines or car engines in them days and diesel had just started then you see. Actually I didn't have petrol at all. I started off with an old diesel. Didn't like petrol jobs.

JD Did you employ crew?

CLAYTON Yes, yes. I've had two or three occasionally and oh for quite a many years I had a mate till we got married and she became first mate. If we were down Port Davey you see, you couldn't expect people to stop down Port Davey, you see. The mate, he had to come back to Hobart every week or so and so we finished up fishing on our own down there with the wife.

JD And there's no road to Port Davey?

CLAYTON No, no road; no no roads as I say, only three days' walk or go by aircraft or by boat.

JD And your wife went with you on board and fished with you?

CLAYTON Yes. She was the first mate on the boat but for 28 years. She lived at Port Davey with her brother, tin mining. I used to take the stores then, you see, the mail. Of course I met her down there. Something like that goes on [laughs].

JD Yes. So you married and you worked together on the boat?

CLAYTON Yeah. Oh well she had a few times off, you know. I'd have a mate and he'd go back to Hobart. See 'cause we was the only two people down there. You can't expect mates to stop down there, you know, just back to the city. No we done alright. We kept on for donkeys years ourselves.

JD Fairly rough weather down there isn't it?

CLAYTON Oh it can be rough. Oh she can be rough down there. Course the nearest land is about six and a half thousand miles away, South America and big seas down there. It will break in fourteen fathoms of water. The sea will break in fourteen fathoms deep. Seen it many times and of course wind is nothing down there. It only blows a hundred mile an hour. My brother-in-law, he got a tin mine down there, Dennis King had him spinning things to tell the speed. He's been up and clocked 105 but he can't hang on the hardest ones. He can't hang on the hardest ones but see that's a very windy place. They make it down there, [by the] time it gets up to Port Davey it's gone to Hobart. If it didn't there'd be no house or roof left. She'd blow them all away but it's broken down [by] time it gets up there.

Rain, Port Davey gets a hundred inches a year little and often. Quite a bit down there of course. The same as Strahan in the west coast.

JD In your time catching crays, did the catches drop off at all?

CLAYTON No, no, no. There was odd time[s] they went down. Yes I'm wrong there although they was extraordinary thick. They just went down for [a] few months. Just went down, what in two months. Just sort of go off and that's how they do today. People think because they do it today they're finished but they will come back. You know, might be twelve months but they'll come back again. No doubt they're thinner than they used to be. They'd have to be but [we would] get the 40 dozen, 80 dozen a day but not often.

JD About how many people would be fishing out of Port Davey?

CLAYTON Oh them days, in my early days, only three boats. Three of us like Fred Marks and meself and me stepfather, Sid Dale. That's all was down there. Whole coast was ours. Do what we liked with it [laughs]. Well we didn't of course.

JD You'd have been in the industry when they started exporting tails to America?

CLAYTON Yes, oh yes, yes.

JD And prices went up and up [and you] would be fishing out of Port Davey?

CLAYTON Oh them days, in my early days for three pence a pound and that was better than what we got for ten bob a score. Course now of course the price of one fish now, in them days it'd be half a load for our fishing boat, after profit, you know. What, about $23 a kilo. Gawd we used to catch a half load or that. We used to say, it could be 30 dozen a crayfish for the same price.

JD You'd have been fishing through the Depression years wouldn't you?

CLAYTON Yes, in Depression; right in the Depression. People come down to the boat (course I'm the kid on the boat then) but my stepfather.... there'd be people we know would come to the docks and want to come away. Course he couldn't take people like that. We had our own crew. Could be nothing to see 50 people, "Could I come away for a trip"? Course you know fishing was still better than what it was ashore, much better. Tough times.

JD You used to sell all your catch in Hobart?

CLAYTON Yes.

JD And to the one.... Casamaty Bros, Hobart.

CLAYTON Yeah one dealer. There was a couple there but no, we just had the one dealer. He was a good fellow and your money was [paid] straight away and there was no mucking around. Course that's all we had; we only had two. Money - you put your fish down and he used to pay soon, see. Course that was it.

JD During your time in the industry there were regulations and licences and all that brought in.

CLAYTON Yes, oh yes. Oh regulation but nothing like today of course. We had [to have] pot licences, all that caper but the boat wasn't registered. It had no navigation those days, the boat, nothing whatever. As long as she floated you were right. We know today's a bit different but still regulations with crayfishes and scale fishing. Matter of fact we never brought scale fish up. They'd pay about eighteen pence a dozen for beautiful trumpeter. That's all, or couta.... the **Bell Brandon** down there, she used to catch them for a shilling a dozen for the orchards.

JD What to use as fertiliser?

CLAYTON Fertiliser, yes, the old ship down there; a shilling a dozen; eighteen pence a dozen at the most, to put on orchards.

JD That's the barracouta?

CLAYTON Yeah barracouta, couta. Oh waste of good fish of course but they was very plentiful. Then they went off and they're slowing coming back. They're down there now, you can nearly walk on them down the coast or east coast or back here (west coast). Couta that long, big fellows.

JD Is there a fishery, you know, people are catching them down there?

CLAYTON Oh yeah, yeah. Well course they used [to]. I [unclear] went coutaing but, you know, they don't worry much about it really. They don't worry much about it. The dealers like, they get all their barracouta from New Zealand; they're New Zealand couta. Still they will buy ours of course but a few of them. I don't say a hundred dozen. The old **Belle** down there, in the good days two men would put a hundred dozen aboard in about two and a half to three hours. They'd put a hundred dozen of couta aboard with jig sticks. Might'n do it today. Course they were the experts on the stick of course. I wasn't quite in that. I've got a few but not like those people. Crayfish didn't hook by hook sticks them days [laughs].

JD You bought that vessel?

CLAYTON Yeah, the **Belle Brandon**, yeah from an old chap up in Hobart. She was [in a] pretty sorry state and he couldn't [do] nothing. I took different ones up and I said, "What do you think of the old boat down there"? I knew her of course. "Well, what's she worth"? "Oh one dollar". [laughs] I said, "No, she's alright. She'll be right". I already had other people help me get her going. Help [unclear] and of course made a good boat than I sold her like a FOOL and this chap sort of ruined her. She'd last another 50 years if he'd done the right thing you see. She'd be the oldest.... I suppose she'd be the oldest boat in Tassie I'd think today. Well she would be. I don't know of any older. Oh yes there's one boat older, the **Frolic**. She's a bit older but the **Belle's** very close to the second [oldest] boat. 1886 (as I mentioned) she was built in Tasmania. I'm guessing, by that time according to the old [people] who know about boats, I think she cost about 48 pound to build in those days. She mighten even cost that much in 1886. You know what things were like them days. No electric planes, was there? [laughs]

JD No. What size is she?

CLAYTON 52 feet long but deep, very deep; eight foot draft you know.

JD Yeah. Is she a double ender?

CLAYTON No, no. She's a fantail; known as fantail. It's a little round stern, you know, like a little duck. That was a fantail.

JD And is it ketch rigged?

CLAYTON Yes, ketch rigged. Well she was when she was younger. Then she was just dismasted and put back to a cutter and I bought her as a cutter and the bloke whose bought her put her back as she used to be which I think he made a big mistake with her. I might.... I haven't got a photo. I gave him the old photos like a fool. I haven't got a photo of her now when she was.... oh going back say 60 years ago. Me uncle used to own her, Walter Blewitt. That was their boat.

JD What's she built of?

CLAYTON Built in karri two inches thick and frame built; very strongly built 'cause them days they did build strong boats, you know. Well the **Reemere**, we had the **Reemere**. She was built at Purdon Fetherstone. She was 81 foot, nearly eighteen beam and she's considered as the quickest boat in the Commonwealth of Australia built. She was built and launched in nine weeks. They take them nine weeks to think about it now, that size boat.

JD What was she powered by?

CLAYTON Oh steam; a steam ship. I [unclear] a little cargo ship like in the channel. There was a lot of them.

JD And what fuel did she use?

CLAYTON Oh used coal. Them days, coal. Then she went to Launceston as a tourist boat and she come back I think about 1925 and she done 25 years ferry service from

Hobart to Linda's Farm backwards and forwards till the bridge went up there. They stopped her then and course we brought her up here.

JD And you converted her to a fishing boat?

CLAYTON Yeah. We converted her back to a fishing boat, the wife and I. We pulled her to pieces and re-done her up. A chap, Mat McVillie, he decked her and made a good ship out of her for that type of boat.

JD Did you replace the engines?

CLAYTON Yes. We put a big eight cylinder Gardner in her from.... We were lucky..... [unclear] in Port Davy (we had transmitted of course doing that) and we wirelessed backwards and forwards to Sark in the Channel Islands. We got that engine brand new, half-price. We got it in Hobart from the Channel Islands. She's still in her of course. She's still up in the dock for sale now. He wants too much money for her. I'd like to get her back. I could get her back if I sell me boat and me car and the pup and a couple of chairs I might get her back [laughter].

JD You used her for crayfishing?

CLAYTON Yeah, crayfishing, yes. A cosy old ship, you know. She's nearly, she must be 80 years old now. Yeah 1909, that's right, she was launched in 1909.

JD How many crew did you use on her?

CLAYTON Oh only two of us; the three of us and the pup. Course [we had] another dog besides this but only three of us. Oh we'd handle her. She'd handle very easy 'cause she had a good motor in her; do what you like with her. I could handle her better than I could the **Box** down here.

JD How long would you stay at sea?

CLAYTON All depends on the weather you see. I mean it could be a week, it might be four or five days, it could be ten days, it could be a month. See we'd get enough to come [back]. We wouldn't run back say 100 mile every time. You'd get enough to bring them back you see. Some time we'd put a few aboard different boats. There used to be a boat of a friend who, lived in Hobart. They'd bring a few score back like Viv Careless or Rupert Denne and different ones, [the] McQueen boys. They'd bring them back [to] save us running backwards and forwards. Course we lived here see. The wife wanted to get back to the garden you see.

JD So when you left Port Davey, you went to Hobart did you?

CLAYTON No we sold.... Well actually the doctor reckoned she couldn't be on the boat any longer on account of her leg you see. So we [thought] oh well we'll sell the lot out (like a fool) and we went up north coast farming. Me being a farmer! [I] was a farmer for six months. Cattle, we had cattle there. We was up there four years (I think it was) and we had four shifts. The anchor wouldn't hold in the red soil up the nor-west coast. It wouldn't hold her so we come back down here, down to Franklin. Course it was a central little spot here. Anchor's got a hold in this clay [laughs].

JD You're settled here now?

CLAYTON Oh I'm afraid she's not going to drag now. [as] I say we were thinking of going to Western Australia, Albany but I think she thought it was a bit too much for her. It's a beautiful spot we think. You should know that place, wouldn't you?

JD If you had your time again would you go fishing?

CLAYTON Too right I would. Oh yes. The house is alright but it doesn't rock, doesn't rock, it doesn't move [laughs]. I like to feel a boat move underneath me [laughs].

JD You still do a lot of work on boats, don't you?

CLAYTON Oh yes I help different people best I can and do 'em up. Do engines up if we can. I actually help them for something to do you see. I can't sit down and do nothing.

JD Do you work on nets?

CLAYTON No, no. I've used nets but I never, ever made them; nothing like that. They're cheap them days. You just buy them. If you've got an old [one] just chuck it away and get a new one, you see [for] five quid but never used nets nor seineing. Nothing like that, only crayfish; crayfish only.

JD How did you get on with the fisheries inspectors and....?

CLAYTON No worries we was always good cobbers. Oh they were strict. Them days we had a very good man. He was very, very strict but you knew where you stood. If he said "You do that", you done it and that was all there was in it. Today was totally different. It's a bit sort of, upheaval sort of business. There's no troubles.

JD Do you have a fishermen's organisation?

CLAYTON Not till many years later what in the '50s before they started that. We got into that but Safcol was better. It was much better like but everyone just went along nice and easy see. There was no troubles. There wasn't as many boats. Today there's hundreds of them. In the west coast there they reckon there's pots for 50 miles this row of pots. Them days when we had a few pots we had to.... we could leave a place today and come back [to] work in another week's time. Today's it's "I'm there today" and every day there's someone else. Crayfish is going down slowly of course but, well not going, they've gone down.

JD They've got a lot more aids now.

CLAYTON Well see they've got the gear. They've got the instruments and the pots and good boats, powerful boats. They can work bad weather where we didn't worry about bad weather but they can do it today. Of course that's made a big difference. Well it will. Eventually it'll ruin in time. Well fish have got to come to an end. You can't keep taking them. They've got to have a spell. Same as ashore, you can't keep doing the same ashore, could you? As you'd know yourself.

JD What else would you like to have recorded on this tape Clyde?

CLAYTON Oh I don't know. I still liked it back in Port Davey but we sold the place in the parks, well they bought it so we can't go back you see. Otherwise we could have got a boat and went back but she gotta be close to the doctors you see. Just ruined

that way. She's gotta be close to the doctors and that's it. The wife, we've got to think of the first mate of course.

JD But you haven't had a bad run of it have you?

CLAYTON No I've been very lucky. I've had a good go. I done 74 years of no trouble and I'm getting all little troubles now. You know, little troubles. I've never had a day's illness in me life. Good salt water and clean air down there [laughs]. Does make a difference. I'm sure of it.

JD I think you've been lucky Clyde.

CLAYTON Yeah see Dennis King, he's the same. He's been there for nearly 40 years. He's turned over 80 and he's still climbing a mountain up three or four thousand feet. I couldn't keep up with him now. No way I couldn't. He'd run up and I'd be walking up. I get down the day after but it does make a difference, you know, that good air down there. We used to come [to] Hobart and get up in the morning in the dock, [sound of breathing in air] oh, the smell of the fumes. Oh strong, really strong. Of course we got used to it up here. We don't notice it but oh it makes a difference, a big difference in Franklin.

JD You've still got a pretty nice place here.

CLAYTON Oh yes. It is quite good on the river side. This is an old place. We've done it up a bit and the pup couldn't cross the road you see it had to be [on the] water side. Course there's very few places on the water side. Course today you couldn't built here today, naturally. You're not allowed to. We own the bit of land we're on [as] luck happened. Course the foreshore, of course is public foreshore. Still we're lucky because they can't alter that. We've got the river in front of the door; high tide we're about 40 feet from the water when the tide comes in, a big tide. It does flood a little bit. Nothing bad but it's only fresh water. It's a nice river and we're close by. Only a half hour from Hobart and then our cobbers, any way we like. It's only 45 minutes back to Port Davey in the plane.

JD Well look thanks very much for that. It's been beaut to talk to you.

CLAYTON Oh we've had a lot of experience now. We've had a lot of experience and all that but I haven't mentioned them sort of things; bad times and leave me boat in bad weather in all this; caught in bad storms down the west coast; leave the boats and my half brother had one boat, go ashore and leave them. It wasn't insured. Fishing boats wasn't insured past Research them days. Oh no it was considered too wild. One last one we had, we had a bad gale and me wife and me brother (half brother) we left the boat [and] sat in a cave all night. Oh no, a lot of these stories; hit with lightening; a lot of things, you know.

JD Your boat was struck by lightening?

CLAYTON Hit by lightening once [unclear]. Knocked some planks out of it, cut all the wire, blew the batteries out of her. The glass was that low, well it hasn't been low since. Down to 2835 on the glass; 2835 was low because there was a 2835. We'd be up all night and look to the nor-west in [unclear] Harbour. A big snow.... a cylinder, a fog. It could be about a mile long and about 100 feet thick and was rolling. It got to the boat and exploded. My brother-in-law he heard it, he was ten mile [away] and heard it real plain, you know, the noise of it. It was that low to the boat that it pushed me mate up foreward and the boat was that blue with smoke, sulphur, we had a job to

breath for a while. We was too frightened to look out, there might be another one coming. Still we got away with it alright. We had gum boots. That's what saved us probably. Oh I had lot of experience [at] times. Used to go [to] Strahan a few times [with] a load of fish [unclear] to go Strahan and up those places.

Yes a good life. I'd like to be back in it again but I'm afraid it's a bit awkward now but I could still do it. My word I could [laughs]. It'd be better than mowing lawns [laughter].

JD Good on you Clyde.

That is the end of this interview with Mr Clyde Clayton, retired fisherman and boat builder of Franklin, Tasmania.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

END OF INTERVIEW

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Verbatim transcript of an interview with BERN CUTHBERTSON

INTRODUCTION

This is an interview with Mr Bern Cuthbertson of Hobart, Tasmania. The interview is part of Murdoch University's oral history of the Australian fishing industry. It was recorded in Mr Cuthbertson's home in Hobart on the 2nd March, 1990 by Jack Darcey.

Mr Cuthbertson first went to sea with his father prior to the outbreak of World War Two and was engaged on fishing surveys in Tasmanian and New South Wales waters. His career in fishing has many facets. He has fished for barracouta, shark, crayfish and abalone, among other species, and in addition to fishing has been involved in processing, transportation and marketing. He makes many interesting comments on matters such as methods of fishing, transfer of licences and product presentation. He also has wide experience in sailing, both in Australia and overseas.

In recent times and despite a physical handicap, Bern Cuthbertson sailed an open whaleboat around Tasmania in a re-enactment as part of Tasmania's maritime history and has published an account of that adventure. He has also been much involved in sea cadet training and in the tall ships parts in the Bicentenary celebrations. His long time interest in the maritime history of Tasmania is expressed in his outstanding collection of seafaring artefacts. Though now retired he currently is having a cruising yacht built with which to continue his lifelong involvement with the sea.

There are three sides on two tapes. The interview starts at 022 on the revolution counter.

TAPE 1 SIDE A

JD Bern could I ask you to record your full name and date and place of birth please?

CUTHBERTSON Right. My full name is Bernal (which is unusual) Tasman Cuthbertson. I was born in Devonport on the north coast of Tasmania on the 23rd January, 1924.

JD And have you lived in Tasmania all your life?

CUTHBERTSON Right. I left Devonport when I was eleven years of age. We came to Lindisfarne for a year. We spent two years on Bruny Island and back to Hobart. I've spent the greater part of my life in Hobart but I had ten years in a little fishing village called Dover in southern Tasmania and I had four winters fishing out of Coffs Harbour on the north coast of New South Wales. So that about covers my places of abode.

JD Were your people fishermen?

CUTHBERTSON No. Well going right back to Devonport, my father was a carrier. He had a carrying business there, a truck or lorry, and a couple of old floats, horse drawn vehicles and just towards the end of the Depression, he was offered the job of carting timber from a timber mill from Port Sorell to Devonport by sea. They were about to build a new timber mill there and my father jumped the gun and he came to Hobart and he bought one of Hobart's little old trading ketches called the **Wee Rutter**. She was about 54 feet long. She carried about 30 tonnes. He took her up to Devonport and obviously the Depression wasn't quite over and they didn't build the mill so my father was stuck with this little boat. For two years he kept the boat rather than the boat keeping him. He sold his carrying business and he carted firewood and shell grit and all sorts of things to try and make the boat pay. In the end he was forced into selling up in Devonport and coming down to Hobart. He traded in the Channel from Bruny Island and after a while he realised he'd be better off if he went and lived on Bruny Island. He set up a little sort of trading post there where freight used to congregate and he'd pick it up from where we lived at Barnes Bay [and] bring it to Hobart.

Of course as a kid, any boy loves the sea and I used to go to sea with my father from, oh about ten years of age, eleven years of age onwards. When I turned thirteen I went with him. He didn't want me to but it was the adventure I guess. Anyway I was thirteen [and] went off to sea with my father. I was his only deckhand and we traded in the Channel but mostly from Barnes Bay with all sorts of produce. About, I think it was 1937 it was, we were unloading a load of firewood in Constitution Dock in Hobart and we noticed three gentlemen leaning on a fence looking at **Weerutta** and my father was wondering why. Finally they approached my father and one, his name was Fowler from the CSIRO and the Chief Inspector of Fisheries those days, Tom Challenger, and a chap named Tom Webb from the CSIRO. They said that our boat, in their mind, was a suitable boat to go and test tuna in Tasmanian waters and would we be interested. Dad said he was.

So the idea was in February, 1938, that was when we were to finish trading. The boat was to go to a boat yard here in Hobart and be converted to a fishing boat. We sailed in the Centenary Regatta in 1938 against all the other ketches. There were about eight or ten of them left then. That was an exciting life.

JD Did you win?

CUTHBERTSON No [laughs] we actually, we got third on handicap. We sailed back home after the Regatta to Bruny Island, gathered up all our gear and moved to Hobart and shifted round to Purdon Featherstons. It took about eight months, sorry four months, to convert her to a fishing boat. There were men all over it; put a big ice box in it to go trolling for tuna. There was an agreement with the Government that my father and I were paid while she was being fitted out and when she went to sea we would be paid again on a wage while they proved whether tuna could be a paying proposition. We were on wages while the boat was being converted.

Well turned out it wasn't. The Government failed to pay my father and I. We had to get a living out of the few tuna we caught and we had to move into other things to try and make a living. It was a really bad time for my father. The chappy, Tom Webb, who was from the CSIRO who went with us thought the speed wasn't great enough for the boat. The Government (this is the State Government, it was nothing to do with Commonwealth then) decided they'd buy us a new engine. So it was 1939 before this engine arrived and we were so poor, my father couldn't even afford two pence on the tram to go about three miles to where we lived. They really treated us badly. When the engine arrived my father had been to a friend of his, a solicitor, and told him what had happened and how we'd been badly treated by the Government and that he

thought when the engine went in the boat they were going to need the boat as security. Up till this time there'd been nothing signed, no agreements, nothing but the Government had spent all this money on the boat. It was quite substantial for those days. What they'd spent was more than what the boat was worth.

Anyway the engine arrived and my father had been advised to get it down into the boat and bolt it down. Two days after it was bolted down a Government representative came down and wanted dad to sign a document that the engine installed in **Weerutta** was the property of the Government and dad said, "No way". I used to think about this as a kid, whether my father did the right thing but now as I get older, he certainly did the right thing because we were badly treated, for the Government to spend all that money without an agreement of any sort. It was rather strange. Anyway we got the new engine in. We still kept on catching tuna. Still no wage from the Government. We had to make our own way and it was tough.

It's only a short season for tuna here and we used to catch barracouta and mackerel. We used to catch mackerel by a little ring net, lowering it over the side and pulling it up at night, burling and all that sort of thing, like a big cray ring. We used to sell them for a penny each on the water front. We used to get those days.... The apple trucks used to be inspected and they were breaking open the boxes before they were shipped overseas and we used to gather up the wire that they cut off these boxes after the inspection. We used to thread a dozen mackerel on a wire and we used to keep [them] in ice and when people would come along they'd give us a shilling [and] we'd give them a dozen mackerel. That's how we kept alive.

Then Jones & Co got interested in canning mackerel, 'cause they were canning the tuna. Then dad was able to buy a little net. I think it was a heck of an investment, about 25 pounds to buy his first hundred yard beach seine. Then we started to catch them half a tonne (or) a tonne at a time, so we gradually did better. Then the CSIRO wanted us to go to New South Wales to try out the tuna there. This was in 1941, might have been '42. So we went over there. It always amuses me to look back on it now. There were then three of us in the boat, my father, myself and a mate. The contract we had with the CSIRO then was 32 pounds ten a week for the boat and three crew. Dad had to find the fuel and feed us and pay us and I got three pounds a week and my keep then. It was tremendous. It was good money, really good money, three pounds a week ($6.00).

So off we went to New South Wales and we were over there for eighteen weeks. We worked mostly out of Bermagui and Narooma, a little down at Eden but we were mostly around Montague Island. We did prove that you could catch tuna but it wasn't a profitable way of doing it. Our best day with lines, we had four 30 foot poles out from the two masts and we used to tow, I think it was, eighteen lines. Our best day was 156 tuna. I don't remember the weights of them but there was a cannery then in Narooma and we used to take them into the cannery. This particular night we got caught on the bar and we got knocked done and we knocked the bulwarks out and we lost about half the tuna. That was our worst disaster while we were up there. Actually we caught more in value than the 32 pounds ten a week though it wasn't much more. It was only about 30 shillings or something like that. So my father showed a profit for the first time in his life since he'd been fishing but that was finished after eighteen weeks and I was only eighteen years of age then. I had a glorious time up there which is another story. Had a girl in every port [laughs].

Anyway we came back home and that was the end of anything to do with the Government. We were on our own then and dad had this new engine but I can't quite remember whether it was 1942 or 1943. Dad was just getting on his feet and we were

off to sea early one morning and [there was] a knock on the door and we went out and there's a chappy from the Royal Australian Navy come to take our vessel for War service. Anyway dad got a bit irate about it and the fellow said, "Well there's nothing I can do about it. I'm only doing my job. You've got 24 hours to get your gear off and deliver it round to the slipway where it'll go on the slip, have certain things done to it to go to New Guinea". The fellow did say, "If you think you're capable of taking it to Sydney, you can deliver it in Sydney for us". That was us out of the fishing industry. Well we knew the boats had to be taken for War service but it was still a bit of a blow. I do remember the Navy sent dad a cheque for 1700 pound. I also remember that the engine cost 600 pounds. I think the conversion was about 800 pound so dad wasn't getting value for his boat. In the end I think he got about two and a half thousand pounds.

My father never wanted me to be a fisherman; didn't want me to go to sea at all. So when we first got back from New South Wales, he'd been at me for some time to have a go at something else. So I finished up junior fisheries inspector. The first junior fisheries inspector in Tasmania on two pounds a week. I think I stuck that for about three months and money was starting to get bigger in the fishing industry. I think by then they might have been getting about four pounds a week [as] a fisherman and started to pay shares to fishermen. So I didn't want to be a fisheries inspector, I wanted to make big money. So I went back with my father, (that's right) and then shortly after the boat was taken by the Navy.

Then I was at a loose end. I tried getting work with other fishermen and couldn't because a lot of the good vessels had been taken for war service and so in the end, after my father came back from Sydney, he bought a little 34 footer. It was a yacht and we converted it (or a shipwright converted it) and I was his offsider. I'm sure that old gentleman was the cause of.... was my teacher in swearing. I had six weeks of swearing lessons and he was the most foul mouthed man I ever knew [laughs] and I blame him for the way I swear at some of my deckies sometimes. Anyway after six weeks the (little) **Kestral** (her name was) was up and going and we used it for barracouta fishing. Then we used to sail for them. Used to just jog along through the water; the boat would steer itself and the fish came up underneath the boat. We had wet wells and we had a shute over the top of the aft cabin and we used poles and very flimsy jig sticks (we called them) with wooden jigs on the end with two barbless hooks and the trace to the end of the jig stick was about three feet long. We used to make them up out of links like a chain out of again, box wire from the apple cases. We didn't have to go far, just down into the mouth of the river and we used to catch, oh anything from twenty, 30, 50 up to 132 dozen was my record, another man and myself. Then we were getting, I think it was six shillings a dozen for them which was pretty good money. I did well.

Just prior to my father buying this fishing boat for me to work I'd been out with these couta boats working with one fellow in particular, a chappy named Jack Harwood. He was a well known couta fisherman then and he was getting six shillings a dozen and I used to get four shillings in the pound, was my take. The boat was owned by a fish buyer but I do remember I used to get four shillings in the pound. One week I went home with a cheque for 31 pounds and I was that excited I went down to the bank and cashed the cheque into one pound notes [laughs] 'cause it looked more. You've got to remember I was only nineteen or something (or twenty) and went home, got my mother's iron out and ironed all these out nice and flat so as they fitted in my wallet. I never thought about saving any money in those days. I used to spend it [laughs]. Anyway I was a big wheel with all my mates and all this money in my wallet.

Anyway, as I said I started to work the **Kestral**. I did fairly well with that and meantime after my father came back from Sydney and I was working this boat, he had an older brother who was a boat builder at Montague Bay, Alf Cuthbertson. Dad laid the keel and started to build a new **Weerutta** which was slightly bigger than the old one. (Weerutta is Aboriginal meaning sound and trong). It was getting well on the way, about half finished, and the Navy came over and had a look at that and they said, "It'll be good. Go on and finish it and we'll have that one too". So that disheartened my father and he just left it as it was and he started running a ferry on the east coast; or rather a trading vessel on the east coast for the Government. I kept on fishing with the little **Kestral**; net fishing; did a bit of crayfishing. I remember I was crayfishing with the **Kestral** when we stopped selling by the score and I must add here that a score was 24 not 20 because there was a buyer, a Mr Casamaty, who used to ship them out to Sydney on the deck of a big steamer (passenger steamer) [which] used to leave here at 10.00 o'clock every Saturday morning. I never, ever sold any fish to him but this was how the score came about. Fishermen had to put two score in a sack bag and they had to put four extra for every score in case of breakages so as they had the right count in the bag when they got there. Quite often the story goes that the whole lot got through without a breakage and the four in each score paid all expenses and the two score would be clear profit to Casamaty. Then we used to get five shillings a score. That's twenty four fish, five shillings. Then fishermen thought they were made when they went up to ten shillings a score. Then shortly afterwards, I was just in the industry when it changed instead of selling by the count, they sold by the pound and we got three pence halfpenny a pound for the first lot of crayfish we caught. The fishermen complained that they weren't working out quite as well as so much a score and they went up to four pence a pound.

I worked this little boat and we worked a motor dinghy. I remember the motor dinghy, things were so scarce after the War, it had a 1912 two stroke invincible petrol engine in it and it used to drive me mad [laughs]. It drove me so crazy one day I threw the starting handle over the side to save time and I rode the darn thing but that was my time in the **Kestral**. During this period my father went on and finished **Weerutta** off when the War was all but over and when I'd come home from sea I'd go over and help with building the boat, either planing, sand papering, or corking or puttying and finally the boat was launched in April 1945. The (little) **Kestral** was sold and I joined my father in **Weerutta II** which was more a modern motor vessel rather than a sailing vessel like we had with the old **Weerutta** and the **Kestral**. She had a foreward wheel house

So we didn't go crayfishing. We went mackerel fishing because the price was better and we went catching barracouta and we also were catching tuna. We worked wholly from Hobart but out on the east coast to a place called Fortescue Bay. It was rich in fish in those days. In the end dad decided he'd put in a base at Fortescue Bay and he put in a freezer there. It was about a twenty tonne freezer. We built our own jetty. He had three fairly big cray dinghys built about 28, 30 feet long with powerful motors in them and he built three or four little huts down there. We were fortunate that on the other side of Fortescue Bay there was a big timber mill that closed down shortly after the War and dad bought up a lot of the old buildings and transferred them over and built the freezer and a cleaning shed [and] the jetty; [he] had a little lighting plant there. It was just a, you know, a coastal factory all on its own but we only handled frozen fish like mackerel and barracouta and the tuna. We kept the crayfish alive that the dinghys caught in corfs (floating cages). Corfs are built out of wood. They used to hold about twenty score each and the boat would go to town, load up every Thursday night and be in town for Friday to unload, clean up for the weekend and the boat would go back on the Monday. I stayed in this with my father. Father went ashore and ran the freezers for a while and I ran the boat.

There's a bit I should add here. Shortly after the boat was launched and before we built the factory place down at Fortescue Bay, I took over the boat entirely. My father had taken on something else on shore. It was East Coast Trading Services, that's right, and I just had a crew of two and I ran it, again on barracouta, tuna and mackerel. We used to catch big loads of mackerel. There was a chappy who came out from Germany. He had actually escaped from Germany during the War and he was a German Jew and his name was Professor Bleuman. He mated up with a fellow at Triabunna named Albert Thompson and he was a professional smoker. He used to do a hot smoke and they wanted all these mackeral. I remember the two crew and I, we used to catch all this mackerel and I remember ten tonnes we had in one load in ice, we took up there. It was a beautiful product. You could eat it, take it out of the smokehouse and eat it straight away. That went well for a while, about two years on that. It was darn hard work and shortly after the War there was a big fish shortage in Melbourne and we used to catch a lot of barracouta, put them in ice, take them to Triabunna. We had a man up there, he used to fillet them and we'd pack them in boxes and freeze them; or he'd do that and we'd go back and get another load of barracouta until we had about twenty tonnes of fillets. Then we'd take them out of the freezer, put them in the icebox without ice, just pack it tightly full and the lid tight so as no air could get in and we'd race them across to Melbourne; go over in a bit over two days and ship them straight into the market there. We did that for a while. I think it was a big shipping strike [which] was on after the War and fish became very scarce and once again dad picked up some big bickies out of that.

Now back to **Weerutta** and the factory down at Fortescue Bay, we used to do a lot of evening and early morning work catching barracouta and tuna 'cause they'd run in the early hours and the late hours of the day and catching mackerel at night, beach seineing in this little bay where the factory was. There were several hours during the day we didn't have a use for and I knew there was a lot of deep water cray bottom around there and with the currents, we only had cork buoys then, and we couldn't work in deep water because the buoys would drown very easily. So we developed a method of long lining where we used to use twelve gallon drums for buoys. The long lining method was, we used inch and three-quarter circumference rope which is about three-quarters diameter. We used to make a pot fast with a clip-on business every twenty fathoms. If we were working in 40 fathoms of water (which you couldn't single pots those days) we'd have about 100 fathoms of buoy line with a twelve gallon drum on it and we used to shoot twelve pots on a line and just have two buoy lines clipped on, as I said, every twenty fathoms. We found out we could work in up to 50, 60 fathoms and [of] course we found a lot of new ground working these pots like that and we caught a lot of crays.

We had to bring them back. We kept them alive in two 44 gallon drums on deck with a deck hose running through. The way we started off was quite simple. We'd bring them back and put them in corfs in Fortescue Bay where the factory was. About this time my father and I weren't going all that well together. I wanted to advance and he was quite happy to stay as he was. I'd developed this method of being able to work in deep water but we didn't have a winch to haul the pots out of deep water, but we managed to do it with three men. It was very hard to do it by hand. In the end it got too hard and we had to give it up and dad never bought me this winch. I think that was the beginning of the end for my father and I because I could see a new fishery developing in deep water and he was quite happy to stay as he was. I understand that too.

Anyway I left. I think I was about.... yes I was 27 years of age when I left my father. I hired a boat or chartered a boat for a year after that, a boat called the **Pacific Pride** and she was an ex-wartime boat built for taking bombs up the Fly River in New Guinea and they were called the Fly River Scow; 55 feet long and this one was fitted out with refrigeration and I took it shark fishing. I was newly married then and my wife went

along with me as the cook and bottle washer. We had good quarters which was unusual for a fishing boat those days. It actually had two toilets on board so my wife was completely segregated from the crew and it was a good set-up. So we worked pretty hard for a year and I was able to earn enough money to pay a deposit on an old tug that had been converted for fishing. It was laying sort of part derelict up at Lady Baron on Flinders Island. I went up there and paid the 500 [pound] deposit to the fellow and there was money owing on it to the Agriculture Bank. Anyway I got it home and there was an argument. I shouldn't have taken this boat with money owing on it. Anyway it all worked out that I got the boat and we set it up for crayfishing with this idea I had. We put a big steel tank in it. It was an old boat but it had a brand new Gardner diesel in it. The Gardner diesel had cost new about 850 pounds and I bought the whole set up for 1500 so it was a good deal but I only had 500 pounds and I had to borrow a thousand from the Agriculture Bank. So we got this steel tank put in and we got the hauler put on that I wanted (and my daddy wouldn't get for me [laughs]) and away we went long lining for crayfish.

We were working 56 pots. We worked four strings of twelve. From a Western Australian point of view, this is not a lot of pots but in Tasmania it's a lot of pots where you could have five shots a day and we did with 56 pots. We had, as I say, four strings of twelve and we had eight as a trial line. We'd find a bit of bottom with a lead line and we'd just shoot this trail line on it and if we got fish on it we'd transfer the lines over to there. We were up and going and the first year.... and by then crayfish were ten pence a pound. We'd done about two trips in the first new shellers which started in November and they went up to a shilling and we thought we were made; a shilling a pound! That first season we caught 3000 score, that's 6000 dozen. The boat was very dicey. It was a bit rotten and suspect in lots of places so we only worked for eight months and we hauled her out of the industry and did all the spots on her that weren't too good. We did extremely well with it and I thought then we'd set a record. We had three and a half shots one day for 101 and a half score, so that's, what, 203 dozen. I thought it was a lot of crays. I never heard of anybody catching any more than that until I recently read an article about an older fellow than me said he'd caught about 120 score out of a pot dinghy. I don't think it was at all possible because we were fully mechanised with four men on board and it was go, go, go all day long. We were on virgin fishing ground and not only were the pots absolutely full to the neck, they were hanging on the outside and we called these fellows "jockeys". I grabbed, I think it was, five score for the day just sitting on the tops of the pots as they'd come up to the rail. So they were very, very thick then. That was about 1950, '51.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

TAPE 1 SIDE B

CUTHBERTSON We used a beehive type of pot. We had tried all sorts of others made out of cane, made out of wire. We tried the ones made out of slats like in Cornwall but we finished up with [a] wire frame, a cane neck and then melalucca teatree type of thing for the top and down the sides and then a wire bottom. If we were working in heavy currents we'd put weights in the bottom. We found that the best pot to use in Tasmania.

In the '50s (not like it is today where you buy your bait from the processor who has a special freezer he keeps the bait in) we had to find all our own bait and certain times of the year it was a bit difficult. We used shark. We'd shoot a shark line and catch a few shark but sometimes there was just no shark about and no barracouta. When they were about we'd use those but when things were really tough.... I get a bit upset

about it now, but we did it. I had a wife and three starving children [laughs] at home kind of thing. We used to go ashore in the evenings as the little penguins were coming ashore and looking back on it now, it was pretty to watch them. Just at dusk they'd swim in and land on the beach or the rocks and stand up on their back legs and scratch themself, preen themself. They looked like little men in dress suits; lovely white chests and blacks or bluey black. We had pieces of rubber hose about an inch diameter and with a piece of wire through. As they came up the track I'd be up the top of the track about 100 yards up, another crew member'd be about half way and another one would be down near the boat and he'd whistle when there was about 200 had landed and we'd move in on them. A smart whack on the head and we'd finish up with 200. We'd throw them in the dinghy and take on board and they were excellent bait. We just chopped them in half with a butcher's chopper and skewer a whole penguin, like cut in half, two halves in the neck of the pot. The big problem was that there'd be feathers all over the top of the tank. They wouldn't flow out and fisheries inspectors used to look down at them (the feathers in the tank) with suspicion. Feathers used to get into the gullet of the cray which didn't look too good when they were opened up. Anyway I consider we were forced to do it.

Other times when it was too rough to land to get the penguins, we used to harpoon a dolphin. Two dolphins would get us a full load of crayfish. They were quite easy to get. I'm not making excuses. A lot of people look down now but we were desperate for bait and that's what we used to do. After all, they were killing whales those days.

I went on in this boat. A fellow named Bill Dennis joined me in the **Flying Scud**, [which] was the first boat I had. She was 78 feet long. As I said, an old steam tug with only 68 horsepower although she'd steam along at seven knots. In case I haven't made myself clear, never at any time did we leave the big boat. It was all done from the deck of the big boat and only time we'd get off the boat was to go and catch bait on shore. We did fairly well and I wanted to get a fleet of boats. I had this idea of being big. I don't recommend it. I bought another boat for 1200 pounds and she was an ex-wartime boat. She was used between Cairns and New Guinea. She used to take the mail to New Guinea and 'cause she had refrigeration, she'd bring bodies back. So I got this boat and used it for sharking and let this Bill Dennis take the **Flying Scud**. We only used to shark for about six months of the year and we'd work in the same vicinity and I'd freeze or put the bodies on ice and he'd get the head. So it was a good set-up. When the shark would disappear I'd then put the **Flying Cloud** (she was then) onto crayfish.

Then another boat became available and I bought it and put one of my crew members that I had on the **Flying Cloud** but she was mainly scalloping in the channel. So I finished up with three boats; the flying fleet, they called it: the **Flying Scud**, the **Flying Spray** and the **Flying Cloud**. That **Flying Cloud** today is the nice schooner you see down the waterfront which a fellow recently spent $600,000 on it and I paid 1200 pounds for it. It's unbelievable. It's incredible. Anyway away we went and I found out that owning three boats wasn't a proposition. Nobody, doesn't matter who they are, how good the man is, they don't seem to look after your boat like you do yourself. I finished up most of my time on shore fixing up the engines or repairing them and I wasn't doing any fishing. So I finished all the fellows and kept the **Flying Scud** and sold the **Flying Cloud** and the **Flying Spray**. I did better financially with the one boat (after I got it back and up and going) on my own than I did with the other two so I stuck with the **Flying Scud** for many years.

During this period, and without looking up my records to get the exact date, but I think it was somewhere about, oh 1957, a lot of the smaller boat owners had got together and tried to bring in and did bring in a 30 pot limit. Well it's alright for small

boats but all it meant for me was that I'd have to stay longer at sea with 30 pots with a bigger boat to get my load of fish before I got back to my family. There was no talk of bringing in licence limitation, only limitation of pots. Well most of these fellows had 30, 40 foot boats. Well I had a 78 foot boat. I was capable of working further off the shore in deeper water and I think upset a lot of people because of the quantity of crays I was catching; a bit of jealousy. Anyway they brought in the 30 pot limit. I'd gone to see the Minister of the day and he said, "Look, don't worry about it son". He said he didn't think it would get through but I came in with a load of crays and 56 pots on deck and headlines in the local paper, "Minister Leaves his Hospital Bed to put New Regulation Through" which was the 30 pot limit. Well, deary, deary me [laughs].

So we took the pots off immediately to comply with the law but we left at midnight one night and we had 30 pots on board and I thought, "Well I won't put the 56 pots back" but I put eighteen back. So I worked four lines of twelve, 48 pots. I was able to keep it quiet 'cause we'd come in the dock with only 30 pots on the deck. [I would] leave them on an old wharf [that] was down at Research Bay or on a wharf at Adventure Bay. It was quite alright to leave your gear laying around then, nobody'd steal it. Because crews were coming and going and they talked about it, I used to say to them, "Well look, you don't talk because of the extra pots, you get extra money, getting a share of the boat" but still it got out. I became hated a little bit more [laughs]. So they sent fisheries inspectors after me (that's right) to catch me and I still thought that (and still consider) I was justified because there was no licence limitation. They were only limiting me, or in my thoughts, making me stay at sea longer to catch my load of crays. There were plenty of crays there. Anyway it went on and I think there was only about 120 boats in Tasmania in those days. So they let it go on without bringing in licence limitations. I think today there's about 380 licences. I think it got up to 420 before they did something about it. So I was fully justified in my book.

Anyway, on I went and the fisheries fellow.... I was able to dodge him 'cause they couldn't catch me while the pots were in the water. They had to see me hauling them and have them on the boat. Course I just didn't haul them if they were any where near. Anyway we'd been working off.... I'm a bit before my story. We were laying weather bound under Partridge Island with a fresh southerly gale and we couldn't get to sea and someone must have reported that we were there and we'd picked up our pots and we had them on the deck. We saw this boat coming and we realised it was the fisheries boat. Fortunately all our pots just had a short snude on them where they clipped onto the long line and our boat was sort of laying side on to him and he was about a quarter of a mile away and we were able to slip the eighteen pots over the side [laughs]. Sounds all naughty but it was all exciting. I felt like a pirate [laughs]. Anyway he got down to us and Dick Andrews was the fellow's name. We were great mates. I don't think he really wanted to catch me but he had to do his job. I said, "After how many pots we've got, are you Dick"? He said, "Yes I'll have to count them". So he counted them and there were 30 and he was suspicious they were laying underneath the boat at anchor there. He didn't leave us for two days. He sat there and the weather had fined up and we wanted to go to sea. So anyway he finally left and we got the grappling hook out and we got them all back but one. We only lost one pot and off we went. So we realised then we had to stop being so brazen so we left them further down the river.

We were working off South West Cape. By this time I had a crew of a man and his wife and it was Dirk Tober who's done very well in the fishing industry. He's working out of Portland now in Victoria; Dirk and Margo and we'd been working off South West Cape. It came in fresh south east and we were about half loaded and we only needed a couple of shots to top up. So we ran away with the south east and went up into Port Davey for the night. We got in about 4.00 o'clock in the afternoon. It was a bit rough to work and I'd been talking to somebody on the radio and telling them where I was

going and didn't think there was a fisheries boat anywhere near and the fisheries boat was listening and he had a fisherman on board which annoyed me 'cause Dick hadn't been to Port Davey. They must have been just on the other side of South West Cape. Anyway we hadn't had the anchor down half an hour and I came up out of the cabin and looked and all I could see was a mast sticking out of the water and this bow wave and they were within 200 yards of us then and it was too late.

I said to Dirk, "Well Dirk we're caught at last". He said, "What's the matter"? [laughs] I said "Dick Andrews in the **Fiona**". He [was] all but ready to tie up alongside. So I said "We've got to accept it. We've had a good run. We'll put some fenders over", which we did and took his line and tied up and I said "Well Dick, you've caught me at last" [laughs]. He said "You haven't got more than 30 pots on board Bern". I said "You know damn fine I have Dick, don't give me that". [laughs] I said, "Do you want to count them"? He said, "Yes" so he counted them. We had 48 and I said "Well, it's happened at last. You might as well have a cup of coffee now" and we had a cup of coffee and a yarn about it and I said, "Well what are you going to do"? I said, "I suppose you want the pots for evidence"? He said, "Oh yes I'll have to take some". I thought he was a tremendous bloke. He was that upset about the whole thing. He took eight for evidence. He said, "I don't want to keep you out here any longer than you have to". He said, "I've got to do a bit of work". He said, "I'll leave you with the extra ten and I'll pick them up from you at Recherche on the way home". It only took us about a day to top up and we met him in Recherche and he took all the excess pots then.

Anyway I went to Court. I did know. I did go to a solicitor of mine and found out that the law was incorrectly written and when we finally got to Court, I won the day. It cost me ten pounds for my solicitor and the law was incorrectly written and I had no case to answer but that was it. It was sewn up after that. I still didn't believe I could work with 30 pots and I had a big area down below and I knew I couldn't any more hide them around wharves and that and I had this hatch way cut in the deck and I still continued to work the eighteen because there was an uproar in the industry then that there were a lot of bigger boats in it and they couldn't make it with 30 pots. A lot of boats were then working more pots than they should have done. So I kept the eighteen down below. Fortunately I kept the same crew for two years and they didn't talk. In that two years they increased the pots to 40 for the bigger boats; only boats over 60 feet. I keep saying justified but I [laughs] don't feel guilty at all about doing that but it was an exciting time and in my period in the fishing industry from five to seven boats working with, [when] I first started on the west coast to see over 200 round there today, it's crazy. Where we could load in a day, two days, if we couldn't get 40 score for a day (that's 80 dozen) we'd move on to another ground and if a boat can get 40 score in a trip now, a week's work, they're doing well. So it's grossly over fished.

They finally limited the licences and limited the pots from twelve for a small boat to twenty for a bigger boat, twenty five, thirty five. Then it got into tonnage and they slowly got the amount of boats down in the industry but it was too late. It wasn't so bad then when they limited it but nobody reckoned on.... When I first started I had a diesel engine. The most modern thing you could have then was a diesel engine. In fact my father was the first one to have that diesel engine in a fishing boat, and we had a lead line and a compass and nothing else. We had a cow's carved out horn for blowing (for a fog horn). To move in today, they've got radar, sonar, coloured sounders, nobody reckoned on that when they were thinking about limiting. Of course there's twice..... When they finally limited the boats they'd be four times the pressure now because people bought into the industry and paid high prices for licences and they had to work their gear harder to pay off their debts and that. To my mind, a transfer of

licences is not good for the fishing industry because people over extend themselves, over capitalise and the fishery, any fishery, suffers for it.

So that was about my life in the crayfishery. I don't think there's anything else I can add to that. Regarding the craypots again, they weren't always legal in Tasmania. I'm not quite certain when it happened but it would be on record but it was somewhere in the early '20s before pots became completely legal. The authorities in Tasmania considered that they were a trap and the argument was that a fish, any sort of fish or crustacean should have a sporting chance, plus if the pot was a trap, sometimes lines were broken and the pots went back to the bottom and they thought those fish could stay trapped in the pot but in the end it was proven.... They got two or three pots and filled them up with crayfish and had them watched in the dock over night. The crays were counted, how many went in, and the next morning they hauled them and most of the pots, the crays had left them so it proved they weren't' a trap. When they were illegal here they were legal in Victoria and a lot of the fishermen used to come from Victoria and fish the islands illegally. The Tasmanian Government agreed to let them come into the islands and work pots, but then the Victorian fishermen got a little bit cheeky and were coming onto the Tasmanian coast and so they then drew another line straight through Tasmania through Eddystone Point. Then there were problems. They wanted to move further.... There's lots of stories to be told about boats being caught with pots on board.

I'll quickly tell you one about Tom Challenger. He was our most famous inspector in Tasmania and our research vessel here has been named after him, **the Challenger**. He was in a hotel one night in a saloon bar and he could hear a fisherman bragging in the outer bar that Tom Challenger couldn't catch him and Tom knew he was working pots. He knew most of them were working pots but it was that stage as to whether it was going to continue but he didn't like to hear this fellow bragging he couldn't catch him. Then few fishing boats kept their cabins locked and the pots were kept up the wings of their wet wells. They were dropped down through a hatchway in the aft cabin and pushed up along the wings. Anyway Tom Challenger knew this fellow was going to work the next morning. He went aboard this boat about midnight, pulled a couple of the pots out and there was enough room for him to climb up inside. He was a character, Tom Challenger, no doubt about [that]. He is a story on his own. He spent the rest of the night there, uncomfortable and the trip down the river the next morning and they shot their gear down around Adventure Bay. To get the pots out, they reached the first two or three but the next they'd just hook them out with a hook on the end of a stick. Tom told me the story 'cause I was the junior fisheries inspector beneath Tom. He said he'd be dodging round this hook stick until they got hold of a corner of a pot and when they pulled the corner of the pot out he'd slip around and get in behind the other one. Anyway this gentleman shot all his gear and when he came back he couldn't believe it 'cause then the boats were anchored and they took them off in a motor dinghy. There was Tom Challenger sitting up on the deck. He said, "Right oh Benny, you can go and pull them all now. In future don't brag that I can't catch you". That was the story [laughs].

It was quite crazy. The only thing they could use were rings but to have it legal in one State and not in another created great problems. The other problem was the size of crayfish. Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia and Tasmania all had different legal measurements. Some measured over all twelve inchs long from tip to tail but we had a measure from where the tail enters the body, well the whole carapace shell but we had the largest measure in the southern part of Australia. Naturally [that] encouraged boats to come here from South Australia and catch the small fish and take them back to South Australia. There wasn't much of it there but it happened quite a bit in Victoria but there was a stage it was commonly known that several fishermen were working up around Flinders Island and they had one boat just doing nothing else but

running the crays over to Eden 'cause they only had to take them over the border and they were legal. It was a long time and a lot of undersized crays were sold to New South Wales before it was stopped.

Now one thing that always bugged me in the fishing industry was quality. With lobster it was alright. They had to be alive or you couldn't sell them. The moment they were dead they were no good at all but when you go into the shark fishery or salmon or a net fishery and you've got to kill the fish and bring them back dead, a lot of fishermen didn't (and still don't) look after their fish properly. Even today I go down the wharf and there's this new fishery, the orange roughy. Some of them are kept in perfect order and some of them don't care. You see them coming in with fish on the deck which is wrong. Now as I said to you earlier, I used to look after my fish. I considered I looked after them and particularly with shark where the ammonia can set in very early, I'd be tied up to the wharf unloading my fish and the boat would smell nice and fresh. If the wind was coming in the direction from the other boats, astern of you, you could smell their fish. The ammonia had set in and yet that fellow'd be selling to the same fellow as me and he'd get exactly the same price as I did. That's wrong. I know it's difficult for the person who's going to make the judgement but they do it on the Sydney market. They do it on the Melbourne market. If your fish is not up to scratch it's either thrown out or you don't get a quality price for it. That's always been one of the problems in Tasmania. There's no price quality.

Now because I had a young family, I spent a long time away from home weather bound working the west coast and we didn't have big powerful strong boats like they've got today because you had to buy second hand ones and they weren't always good so you spent a lot of time weather bound. I decided to move to Dover to live, 50 miles by road south of Hobart so that when I was weather bound I'd be weather bound at home with my wife and family. I don't know now that it was such a great move but anyway I moved down there and I lived at Dover for ten years. I wanted to be home more with my family growing up and my wife and even after moving to Dover I didn't consider I was home enough. I'd been fishing for some time then, I think maybe I was getting a little bit fed up with it.

I leased the boat out to a chappy and I was ashore for about six months and I decided I'd build a fish factory on shore. So I built a factory and built it up to a stage where we even had a cannery there. We were processing barracouta and shark and tailing crays for the American market, live crays to Melbourne, whole cooked crays to Melbourne and scallops; everything we were handling there. I leased, as I said, the boat out and a chappy was working it, working it hard and unfortunately she was lost on the south coast near South Cape. It was the first time for, oh many, many years that I hadn't owned a boat. I was sort of stranded and I missed the income from this boat and I wasn't quite happy the way I was going with the Melbourne market and dealers I had to deal with. Finally I sold 50% in the factory to a Melbourne fellow and finally he took over the lot and I went looking for a boat again.

I couldn't find one and at this stage I'd been tangled up with a well known Australian yacht called the **Astor** and she'd been winning a lot of Sydney/Hobart races and I was, because I was ashore, I was running a team of sea cadets down at Dover and Peter Warner, the owner, said he'd like to leave the boat in Tasmania 'cause it was a big problem to maintain in Sydney. I took it over and ran it while I was running the factory and ran it as a sea cadet training ship. We trained some sea cadets. We went in the 1964 Sydney/Hobart race and won it with a crew of sixteen year old boys which was marvellous but I couldn't continue to operate it and the factory too and told Peter. He sold it to America and then he wanted me to take it over. So I resigned the job from the fisheries, not owning it any more, and I'd given three months notice and I

wanted to get another fishing boat [and] go back to sea so I decided I'd have a trip around the world or halfway round the world and go to England [to] buy a boat. They were fairly cheap then. So I sailed the **Astor** to America and delivered her OK, flew on to London where I met my wife and three kids and we bought a 55 foot MFV, that's a motor fishing vessel, a lovely little boat and took seven months to sail it back to Tasmania.

When I got back to Tasmania I'd been out of work for eighteen months. I'd spent all my money and I had a problem with the Customs people [with] import duty on the boat and I fitted her out to go crayfishing but when the time came, I didn't have enough money left to buy any crayfishing gear. Abalone diving was a new thing just in then and I'd been playing with it a bit prior to selling the factory and I didn't think the boats were operating the right way. So anyway a team of divers came to me and said, "How about taking the **Kathleen del Mar** and we'll go diving for abalone" so I took on four divers. We did well. We did extremely well, so much so that the **Kathleen Del Mar** became too small and I bought an old river steamer here, the old **Rowitta**. She was built as a river steamer. She's now a museum piece in the Warrnambool museum in Victoria. You can still see her there. She's put back to her original state but I used that boat with six divers on board and I was in the abalone game for fourteen years. That old river steamer, I think I can safely say without fear of contradiction, that she caught the biggest load of abalone that's ever been caught in the world. That particular trip we only had five divers on board and we were away for five days and we landed 25 tons (not tonnes, tons) and it was an absolute magnificent sight. Then I think we were getting fifteen cents a pound for them and the load was worth $14,000. Now I think it would be worth close to $400,000 but abalone were quite thick then.

Now moving on to licensing, I was the divers' representative those days on anything to do with the Government licensing or what they were going to do along with a diver. It was decided to have licence limitation. At one stage it got up to about 250 divers in the industry and when they decided to bring in licence limitations, I think it was down to about 180. So at a fishermen's meeting we decided that 120 would be a good number to have in the industry and for a trial run for two or three years. It's interesting to note that it's never changed. It's still 120 divers. Now as it went on, divers considered [when] getting out of the industry they ought to get something for the effort they put in. I don't really think that was right because I was in the industry and I wasn't a diver but I put in a great effort into the industry and I was one of the fellows who battled to prove you could keep them alive in tanks. I had them in baskets and experimented with them and we had a system here where they were allowed to shuck them at sea like most other States and I was against that because they were bringing back stuff that had perhaps been shucked for two or three days. I didn't like it and my argument was we should bring the fellow back alive and he was fresh like crayfish. I couldn't see any reason why we couldn't. Anyway there was a big meeting, big arguments but finally.... I'm not going to say I got my way but the authorities agreed that we'd have a better product.

So that was when I got the old river steamer and put baskets in it. It was containerised actually. When we got back to port I think she used to have about 60 baskets and they carried about 500 pounds or more each. I know in the summertime we'd only put 500 pounds and in the winter time we'd put 600 when the temperature dropped a bit. That time we came back with the old **Sorrento**, (sorry I'm changing names 'cause she had three names this boat, I'll refer to her as the old river steamer) we had more than half the catch on deck with hoses running over them to keep them alive. Anyway they decided to limit these licences, which they did. That was alright and then some decided they wanted to transfer them which they did. I didn't like it. The older fellows wanted to get out of the industry and thought they ought to get out with something. Anyway they made them transferable and the first licence to my

knowledge that was sold was sold for $1500. Recently I heard one sold for a million. Now that's crazy.

I think the industry would have been far better off if they'd have left it as it was. You had to put your name down and you got in the queue. One fellow was with me, he picked up the last licence for nothing and just the licence then was $200; that was the right to go catching abalone through the fisheries and he only had $100 and I gave him $100.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B

TAPE 2 SIDE A

CUTHBERTSON This chap picked up his licence for $200 and today they're worth .....I heard the other day one sold for a million dollars. Now I think it would be far better if they had left it as it was, have a limitation of course, but have the queue system when somebody walked out of the industry, somebody else picked up their licence. Now the problem is that nobody's got a million dollars to go into the abalone fishery. They go to a finance company and they put up the money and this fellow works his butt off for a finance company. In lots of cases some of the fellows who have been in the industry have either leased their licence out or the fellow who wants the licence goes to a finance company and borrows half and the old diver keeps a half share in the licence. So there's three people actually getting a living, or better than a living out of that one licence.

Now I said in the earlier days they'd be far better if they left the.... The idea was to get some of the old slower hands out of the diving industry but they were getting a living and they weren't hurting anybody. When they did what they did, these fellows put pressure on the industry and they were working equal to, or are now, working equal to 200 divers compared to what they were those days. So I much rather would have seen to keep up the system where you couldn't transfer the licence and issue another 40 licences. There'd have been 160 men in the industry today. There'd be more people getting a living out of it. In fact I think it still would stand 200 licences and limit them to the tonnage they can take each year. A fellow can go away now and spend three or four days in the water and come home with $40,000 in a, what's supposed to be a public resource. It's really crazy when you think about it. I think I've covered abalone.

Now in 1966 when I came out from England in the **Kathleen del Mar**, that was when.... Oh right that was the year that they decided they were going to limit the cray licences, so it was late as 1966 because I got a licence (a cray licence) for the **Kathleen del Mar**. I think I was the last one to get [one]. They then also decided round that particular time that boats should be surveyed and the skippers should have a captain's ticket. I've got my doubts whether surveys and skippers having tickets have really done a lot for the industry 'cause I think statistics would prove that we're still losing the same amount of boats. The outcry was, just after the War a lot of blokes were coming home with their deferred pay and putting it into fishing boats. I remember there were three fellows in particular, they called them the big three. They didn't know a thing about fishing and they bought this boat and they went out and I think two of them drowned themselves. That was the sort of thing they were trying to avoid, which they have to a certain degree, but there's an awful lot of boats still going ashore.

They brought in the regulation of having bulkheads in boats. They had bulkheads in **Titanic** too. There was a boat ran ashore here recently. I think she had five water tight compartments, a big steel thing about 110 feet long. She still sank. She still didn't stay floating and there are few boats that hit rocks today, even though they've got these bulkheads, that they stay afloat. Just the occasional ones do and I question whether the fishing industry should have to stand this sort of cost and it is costly, all the gear they've got to have. Alright, have life rafts, life jackets and that sort of thing, but some of the sort of things they're getting [are] crazy. For instance the latest one they brought in is that they've gotta have fail safe gas rings. We've got fail safe ovens, fair enough. You throw the door shut, the gas might blow out or the boat could blow up with the gas, but for years all the fishing boats that have got stoves in them now, they can have gas detectors. From what I can find out, they've got to take all their stoves out and renew them with the four rings on the top with fail safe gas shutoff. That's gonna be expensive. I think the cheapest stove you can buy is about two and a half thousand dollars. I think some of the regulations are far too stringent. They're too tough, far too tough for the amount of lives and boats they're saving.

Over the years I've had problems with crews. It was difficult to pick up men with any experience. Most men, once they get a bit of experience those days, they'd earn a few bob and get their own boat and go fishing themselves. Fair enough, so you're always sort of picking up somebody who was just on the water front. Your crew member wouldn't turn up and we had a problem then because each member of your crew had to be a licensed fisherman. If you go down to go to sea on a Sunday morning and your crew didn't turn up and you grabbed somebody off the wharf, you'd be in trouble for having an unlicensed deckhand on board. So over the years we had the regulations changed and the deckhand's licence is incorporated in the skipper's licence so we got over that, but you get off to sea and you didn't know whether the fellow was going to be seasick or what sort of a hand he was going to be. I still believe that crews ought to start off this way, serve a sort of an apprenticeship and not stringent like it is on shore, and learn a bit about the sea; find out whether it's what they want to do, whether they get sea sick, whether they can handle the long hours and after they've done a year, perhaps a month on shore and do a bit of navigation and that. Certainly spend three years at sea before they can take a boat to sea. They've certainly got to have an experience in that direction.

Looking back now after 50 years in the fishing industry, and I failed to mention that rolling about over the years, one of my knees wore out and I had to get a stainless steel knee replacement. I sold out of the fishing industry in 1983 and I thought my leg came right but it didn't I found out and I thought I'd like to go and fish in warmer climes and I spent four years working out of Coffs Harbour on the north coast. A pleasant way to finish my years in the fishing industry but my knee finally was finished. I couldn't walk on it and I had to have a stainless steel replacement knee which my doctor tells me now I shouldn't go to sea and work on a boat in a heavy way.

Looking back over the years now after over 50 years in the industry, not long buying and selling (four years I suppose) but most of my time was spent fishing, a young man today couldn't work up through the ranks like I did. It's too expensive. There was no survey regulations when I came into it. I didn't have to have a skipper's ticket and yet I did serve a far better apprenticeship than I think anybody serves today because I was with older men in the trading ketches. I learned about sail. I learned how to rig boats and then when my father went fishing, 'cause he didn't know a lot about it, he took older fishermen with him. I had the benefit of their experience so when in 1966

they decided to have skippers tickets, I got a bit irate about it because I just sailed a boat out from London [laughs], what the hell did I need a ticket for?

As I said before, when I first started off with my father in the sailing trading ketches, I didn't even have an engine. We had a compass, a lead line and we had our cooking facilities [which] was a firepot on deck. To go from that today to coloured echo sounders and radar and sonar, modern diesel engines and hot and cold running water and gas stoves and refrigeration and all the things you've got to have today to compete, it'd be an unusual case where a fellow today could start off like I did and work up through the ranks unless he already had a father in the game before him. I don't think he'd ever earn that sort of money to buy into the fishing game.

Here in Tasmania a pot now, a 40 pot licence [is] $4,000 a pot. Consequently big companies must in the end take over 'cause everything costs you money. My first fishing licence was five shillings. It's now $170 and as I said, $160,000 I think for [a] cray licence. Then you've got to buy the boat so you'd probably have to spend many years and you'd have to be very, very keen to stick at it that long to buy into the game and then when you've got that sort of money, who'd want to go fishing anyway? So it's going to be a company game and I don't think its good. You can go down the waterfront here [and] you can see a few boats that are privately owned, they're beautifully kept, fish look good and that and then you see the company boats. The fellows, they come in, they just step ashore and go up to the pub and I think it's sad that it's gone from individually owned vessels to company owned. Something's gonna be lost in the fishing industry I think; sad but it's a fact.

JD Thank you very much for all of that. It's been a great interview. Thank you.

CUTHBERTSON Good.

JD But just before we close down altogether, is there anything else that you'd like to have recorded on this tape?

CUTHBERTSON Yes Jack. I've been sort of an historian all my life, interested particularly in Tasmanian history and way back in 1816 we had a very famous man here. He was Captain James Kelly. He was the son of an Irish convict lady and he was Hobart's first harbour master in 1819. Although they discovered then that Tasmania was an island, they'd only sailed around it in fairly big boats and places like Port Davey and Macquarie Harbour hadn't been discovered because [of the] boats, the boats with no engines. So Captain Kelly and three others took on to row round Tasmania. I think it was mainly to look for huon pine because huon pine was first discovered, naturally in the Huon River, and that it was all but cut out. He worked for a surgeon in Hobart, Surgeon Birch and he took a whale boat belonging to a Major Gordon (he was the Police magistrate for the Pitwater area) down round Sorell and that. So it was a borrowed boat and the boat was called Elizabeth. This is significant and it was named after Gordon's wife. So off they went and it's interesting to read his story about the trip, the amount of Aborigines [who] were around the coast in that time. He circumnavigated Tasmania in 44 days I think it was; discovered Port Davey, named it after the Governor of Tasmania of the day, Governor Davey and of course discovered Macquarie Harbour amongst a lot of other things and named it after the Governor of Australia then, Lochlan Macquarie. He had all sorts of adventures and finished up back in Hobart with seal skins to the value of $120, or pounds those days. I was always interested in this. I thought what great men they were, you know. Kelly started off whaling out of Hobart here and it's said that Captain Collins, who settled Hobart,

looked across the River Derwent here one day and counted 60 whales blowing in the harbour so it was a place the whales came once a year but they killed them out.

Anyway I was interested in all this sort of thing and I tried to interest the Government and other people (private enterprise) to build a whale boat and I'd do the trip. I couldn't interest anybody and when I slacked off a bit in the fishing industry I had my cousin build one of these whale boats. There was no plans of a whale boat of those days left but we had paintings and old photographs so we had a 28 foot six, five oared whale boat built. I paid for it myself. A sail maker donated the sails and another company donated the food to row round. We rowed round in 32 days and I enjoyed every minute of that. It was....

JD How many of you went?

CUTHBERTSON Ah, six. Five for a start, a young fellow who was going to go all the way with us. He was a political journalist and unfortunately our Premier decided to have an election [and] he had to stay back until the election was over but we picked him up up on the north coast. It was an absolute[ly] fantastic trip. I've just finished writing a book about it. It's [with] the publisher at the moment and the most exciting part about it I guess was in Bass Straight. We got caught up in a 40 knot gale there and it was a hair raising ride [laughs], believe you me.

At the moment I'm building a 50 foot cruising yacht, or rather I'm having it built and my wife and I hope to sail it round the world before I get too much older. I've always been interested in sailing. I've been a collector of historical things as you can see round the house here and I've got quite a little museum here so.... I've had other interests other than fishing boats and as I said I had a Sea Cadet Training Corps. I had 80 boys in that at one time when I was ashore. Ah, gee what else....

The other thing I did [which] I found interesting, [a] bit darn hard, I was always a lover of the old **Derwent Hunter**. She was a famous ship. She was owned by the CSIRO at one time and she was sold out of service and got into different hands and gradually run down over the years. I found her up in Cairns and she was an old schooner, I think nearly as well known as the **Astor** was in Australia. That was one of the things I did. My son started fishing with me. I didn't want him to and he ran the **Tasmanian Enterprise** for a while and I played with the **Derwent Hunter** but finally my son met a gorgeous girl and married and wanted to stay home just the same as I did. He now has the only abalone farm in the southern hemisphere. When he was with me he won a Churchill Fellowship and went overseas and studied the aquaculture of abalone and that's up and going. He's got about, oh fifteen million abalone [which] are breeding, growing now on the east coast just south of Swansea. So I've had an interesting life.

JD Yes indeed and thank you again.

CUTHBERTSON Right.

END OF TAPE 2 SIDE A

END OF INTERVIEW

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Verbatim transcript of an interview with TREVOR DIX

INTRODUCTION

Trevor Dix came from New Zealand and did research for the Tasmanian Fisheries Division for twelve years before starting his own aquaculture consultancy practice. Since then he has become much involved in the culture of Pacific oysters and Atlantic salmon with Tasmanian Atlantic Salmon Limited. In this interview Dr Dix gives an insight into the lifecycle, cultivation, harvesting, processing and marketing of both these species. He also introduces topics such as the importance of product image, value added processing and disease control On side B of the tape he touches on current developments and the culture of other species such as abalone, scallop and striped trumpeter.

Among our Australian States Tasmania is very much to the fore in the development of aquaculture and in that field Dr Dix is a leading figure. In this interview he introduces us to what must be considered to be a leading edge in the development of the fishing industry in Australia.

The interview which was recorded at Dr Dix' property at Franklin in Tasmania is part of Murdoch University's oral history of the Australian fishing industry. It was recorded on the 4th March, 1990 by Jack Darcey. Due to a technical malfunction there is a break in the recording between 062 and 104 on the revolution counter but the record of the interview appears to be intact. There are two sides of one tape. The interview starts at 022 on the revolution counter.

TAPE 1 SIDE A

JD Trevor could I ask you to record your full name, date and place of birth please?

DIX I'm Trevor George Dix. I was born in Ashburton in New Zealand on 27th August, 1945.

JD When did you come to Tasmania?

DIX Well I came here in the late '60s.

JD To this part of Tasmania?

DIX Yes. I came to the Fisheries Laboratories at Taroona with a State Fisheries organisation; spent twelve and a half years there in charge of the research laboratories.

JD What sort of research were you doing?

DIX Well research concerned all fisheries such as lobsters, abalone, fin fish as well as fish farming and shell fish farming.

JD And when you left the Fisheries Division you went into fishing yourself?

DIX Well initially I set up a consultancy business with a particular area of aquaculture. Then after about three and a half years I joined Tasmanian Atlantic Salmon Limited.

JD Tasmania is very much to the fore in aquaculture, is it not?

DIX Yes. Australia has a valuable aquaculture industry in pearl culture and the second biggest industry of course is the Sydney rock oyster industry extending from southern Queensland down to almost Victoria but then Tasmania.... We have the Pacific oyster culture and more recently salmonoid culture; this is Atlantic salmon and rainbow trout.

JD And you're currently involved in that salmon fishery and the oyster fishery, is that right?

DIX That's right. Tasmanian Atlantic Salmon Limited's a public company that was formed in 1985. Subsequently it expanded from its Dover farm and purchased a farm at Killala in the Huon River and then took over the assets of Tasmanian Shellfish Company which had another fish farm but also is the largest producer of Pacific oysters in Tasmania. Their operation starts right at the hatchery stage where we actually raise the oysters artificially. We take them through a nursery stage and then they're grown to what we call an intermediate size either on our own farm or by contract growers. We then get them to our deep water farm which is at Eaglehawk Bay in the Tasman Peninsula and grow them through to market size. We actually process quite a lot of our own oysters. There's a good and expanding market for frozen oyster that we process for.

JD Where is your market?

DIX Our market's, well throughout Australia for frozen oysters but our major market for fresh oysters is Victoria but we send frozen oysters as far afield as Darwin.

JD At this point there is a break in the recording. The interview resumes at 104 on the revolution counter.

DIX The Pacific oyster is a very hardy species and despite extensive testing, we've found no diseases in our stock so that is a big plus because as you'd realise in all forms of culture, disease can be a problem. We had problems I guess of a different kind early in the industry in that a number of farmers situated their farms in the Derwent River and it was found by CSIRO in the '70s that the oysters there had accumulated large amounts of zinc and cadmium This led us to test right round the State for these metals in oysters and as a result of that we now no longer grow oysters in areas such as the Derwent. In other words, all our farms are in unpolluted waters now. Of course we as an industry, both in oysters and fish farming, are very conscious of the need for unpolluted waters and I believe this is a very big selling point for Tasmania. Our lack of pollution [and] our clean waters is something we've got to protect at all costs because so many countries overseas such as Japan are facing severe pollution problems which are just incompatible with fish or shell fish farming.

JD Do you have difficulty in getting suitable staff?

DIX Our staff in the hatcheries are obviously qualified people. We have to culture larvae, measure larvae, assess their health and count and feed them the right amounts of the right food. We're lucky in that we have a number of people coming through the universities or the colleges that have the training necessary. The on-growing of oysters is done by people ranging from just family concerns to people who again have degrees or other qualifications. Basically it's a fairly skilled occupation but like so many things, there's a lot of hard work involved in that as well as the technical skills.

JD The oysters are actually grown in say rivers or estuaries in the ocean, are they?

DIX Most of Tasmania's oysters are grown in bays and inlets, not so much in estuarine situations.

JD Is the area leased from the Government?

DIX Yes. We have two vehicles for obtaining ownership or leasehold of areas for farming. One is a lease which is basically entitling a farmer to grow or occupy a part of the shallow water foreshore. The second is a permit which allows a grower to actually farm independently of the bottom. In other words they lease an area of water.

JD What sort of areas are you looking at for a farm?

DIX Well most farms are around eight hectares. Some range up a lot larger than that and Tasmanian Shellfish Company has leases of over 100 hectares but most farms as I say are around five, perhaps ten hectares.

JD What sort of depth of water is required?

DIX Well for the inter-tidal culture of oysters, that is where the oysters are in and out of the water as the tide rises and falls, that's shallow water and the farmer can work his stock when the tide's out. For the deep water culture of oysters you need a minimum of fifteen metres of water because the oysters are suspended from long lines, that's a row of buoys strung together with strong ropes, and the oysters there are in trays suspended under the floats of the long line.

JD So you'd then have a boat of some sort that you'd move along the lines to harvest and seed the trays?

DIX Yes. In fact we have a fairly large barge about twelve to fourteen metres, or in fact two of them, that we use with winch gear and so on to lift the trays of oysters out and sort them out, count them and ultimately sell them.

JD They're quite large trays then?

DIX The trays we put in modules of eight. They're about a metre square per tray; something like 120 oysters per tray.

JD You actually feed the oyster, is that....

DIX Only in the hatchery stage. When they go out in the nursery and then to the farms they're relying on the natural plankton that's in the water.

JD So there'd be some areas that would be suitable for oyster growing because of the feed available and others that would not be suitable I presume?

DIX Yes. We have areas which are traditionally good fattening areas and some other areas are pretty reasonable growing areas but the oysters will only be in harvestable condition for short periods during the year. This ranges from something like nine to ten months with our deep water culture oysters, to in some areas, about two months in the late spring.

JD And it's dependent on size I presume, as to when they're harvested?

DIX The size is important and more importantly though is the fatness of the oyster.

JD So you actually measure the fat content?

DIX Well what we do is assess that visually. Before we harvest any particular oysters we'll do a sample of the oysters and satisfy ourselves that they're fat enough because its very important. I mentioned before about the lack of pollution. Equally important is a clear image of quality for our seafoods. The oyster markets are very buoyant at the moment. In fact I'd like to have a lot more oysters but maintaining market is important; growing market is important and this must be on a basis of good quality.

JD Is your market exclusively in Australia or do you export?

DIX We have exported oysters to places like Denmark, to Hong Kong, into the United States. We've even had some trial shipments to Japan which is sort of coal is to Newcastle if you like. Our domestic markets at the moment are very strong so we're not actively seeking export markets but they're something we've been doing a little bit with because these markets always take a long time to develop. It's senseless to wait around till you need to export and then get in a panic about it. It's better to lay the ground work over a period of time.

JD Do you see expansion ahead for the oyster farming industry?

DIX Most certainly. Tasmania is going to be a significant producer of oysters relative to the New South Wales Industry. A more recent development in aquaculture in Tasmania is in salmon and trout. Now these again [are] species that have been introduced to the State. I mentioned the Pacific oyster came from Japan originally. Rainbow trout derived from stock that were in the Sacramento River near San Francisco. They actually were introduced to New South Wales. This is going back to before the turn of the century. They were brought to Tasmania and for a number of years they were raised in a hatchery near Bridport in the north of the State. They also were raised by a government hatchery and this hatchery of the Inland Fisheries Commission actually released the rainbow trout in a number of waterways for recreational fishing.

More recently we had the Atlantic salmon introduced here and I bought ova of the salmon, or eggs to Tasmania to a quarantine system in 1985. We I guess were repeating history in a way because there were extensive attempts to introduce Atlantic salmon to Tasmania from England actually prior to the turn of the century but whilst the rainbow trout and brown trout survived and flourished in the State, the Atlantic

salmon never did. So it was with this recent introduction that the salmon industry began to develop. Now we had to bring in enough eggs to actually make a foundation brood stock. This was done for three years and at that time we had sufficient stock to take to our own hatchery which is at Wayafinah in the Derwent Valley.

The salmon industry was, if you like, a master plan and the hatchery obviously was an essential part of the culture operation. Basically the salmon eggs are taken from the fish in late autumn, early winter. They hatch out in August. They feed, begin feeding and go through one spring, the summer, autumn, winter and the next spring. They turn into what is called a smolt which is the stage where they want to go to sea in their natural life. It's at that stage they are transported from the hatchery to the sea farms. These sea farms are all in the south east of the State and particularly in the D'Entrecasteaux Channel area. We have two farms at Dover and a number of farms in the Huon River and others in the Channel area.

The salmon are grown in their pens at the sea farms for just over a year. Harvesting begins the following spring to that which they were sent to the sea and extends through the summer. It must be completed by late summer because the salmon then begin to mature and they would naturally have to move back to the hatchery. So our harvesting is quite intense over the period October to the end of February.

JD How are they actually harvested?

DIX The salmon are harvested by, well firstly the fish are starved for about a week and this obviously makes the guts cleaner. It also helps firm the flesh up. They are simply brought alongside a harvesting facility and dip netted out of the harvest net. They are stunned with a mixture of CO2 and water and then bled. They then are put on ice and go straight into the processing factory where they're gutted. This enables us to produce a top quality fish. You can imagine a fish that's trawled at sea may be several hours on deck before it gets iced down. Our salmon is quickly out of the water. They're quickly chilled down and this produces a fish of excellent quality. We can, for our fresh fish for example, process this morning and have them in Sydney markets the following morning or in Melbourne markets the following morning in perfect condition. Just one more day and they can be in the Japanese market which is a significant market to us.

The salmon industry really has only had four years of harvesting and this, the fourth year, was the first time we had stock harvested from about one million smolt, or young salmon. This was a very significant increase in production and this has led to marketing problems this year. In the domestic market, our markets have expanded some 300% between last year and this but that's been insufficient to absorb all production. We have had to rely on export of fish to Japan and of course this year our Australian dollar is high in value and more significantly, Norwegian over-produced salmon which they've been seeking to find a home for in world markets. This has produced price pressures as well. Along with this, that's our fresh fish markets, we have very rapidly as an industry developed value added processing. Most of this is with smoked sides of salmon and generally sliced and vacuum packed. There's a fair amount of import replacement obviously in our smoked salmon.

JD Are the salmon that you're dealing with, they're not the same as the salmon that we catch on the beaches here which are sea perch I think, are they not?

DIX Yes. It's I guess embarrassing to have the Australian salmon, or what we call kahawai in New Zealand, called a salmon because it certainly isn't a salmon and it's nothing like one and taste, texture or anything like that. Our Atlantic salmon is, as its

name suggests, a species of salmon from the Atlantic ocean. It goes up rivers in various European countries and also the eastern part of Canada. The Australian salmon of course is an entirely marine species which doesn't go into rivers like the Atlantic or Pacific salmons which are common in countries such as Japan and the west coast of America.

JD Is the Atlantic and the Pacific salmon, are they different fish?

DIX The Atlantic salmon and Pacific salmon are quite different. Scientifically they are in a different genus but they've evolved in their own ocean basins and the Atlantic salmon's just one species which is fairly closely related to brown trout, whereas the Pacific salmon's diversified into a number of species, coho silver, etc.

JD You concentrate exclusively on the Atlantic?

DIX We grow just the Atlantic. In fact there were attempts to introduce quinnat or king salmon to Tasmania but like the early attempts with Atlantic salmon, these attempts were unsuccessful. They are grown in a number of places in Victoria for angling but not for culture for a fish farming industry.

JD What sort of areas would you have in size for a salmon farm then?

DIX Well most farms utilise somewhere between five and ten hectares. Now in our case we have three farming sites. Two of these are in the estuary of the Huon and that's very important for the early stage of the smolt growth because it gives them a chance to acclimatise from purely fresh water to a mixture of fresh and seawater [which] we call brackish water, then to a situation where they can withstand full seawater as they would do when they swim from the rivers into the ocean in nature. More significantly though this period in the brackish water controls a disease we call gill a which leads, if it's not treated or if the fish aren't in brackish water, can lead to considerable losses in the first summer the smolt are in the sea.

JD And you actually feed the fish?

DIX Yes the fish and the industry has meant a lot to the south of Tasmania. In fact the salmon industry employs more people than any other single industry south of Hobart. It's significant also in that the food for the fish is 50% fish meal. Whilst we've been forced, last year in particular, to import fish meal for our fish food, the majority of our fish food is based on a fish meal from our jack mackerel on the east coast of Tasmania. So that's a significant industry in itself which is supporting the salmonoid industry.

JD Are you in competition with overseas countries in the sale of your product?

DIX Australia has very rigorous quarantine laws regarding salmonoids and in fact no uncooked salmon should be permitted into Australia. The significance of this is considerable to us because our salmon don't have a number of viral and bacterial diseases that beset people in Scotland and Norway. Whilst I mentioned a gill disease before, we're just singularly lucky that we don't have things like bacterial kidney disease or some of a range of viral diseases. So we're very concerned that our quarantine measures remain in force to maintain our disease free or largely exotic disease free status.

JD These other countries that you mention, you mentioned Norway and Scotland.... are the fish grown by aquaculture there?

DIX Yes. The catch of wild Atlantic salmon now is only some probably 15,000 tonnes, possibly a little less. In contrast, the Pacific salmon is something like 600,000 tonnes per year, most of that being from wild fisheries; although people in western Canada are culturing them in sea pens now.

JD That Pacific salmon, is that the salmon that we buy here in tins called red salmon and pink salmon?

DIX Yes. The Pacific salmon, most of it ends up in cans.

JD Right.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

TAPE 1 SIDE B

DIX [first few words not recorded] ....briefly how we harvest our fish. Marketing of the fish is in several forms. Most of our salmon are packed in polystyrene boxes with ice and are air freighted either to domestic markets, primarily Sydney, New South Wales, or exported in fresh, chilled, gutted, head on fish. A number of the fish are frozen for off season sales and recall that I said the harvest season is very short producing marketing pressures of course. So frozen fish is certainly employed for off season sales but also for producing a range of value added products, smoked being the most important at this stage; although a couple of companies now are looking very seriously, in fact are actually doing, retail packs of salmon. These retail packs are either cutlets or steaks or more importantly I think, fillets. We in particular are producing now a boneless fillet which we believe with some fairly intense marketing work will be, you know, a big success in the retail trade. I guess being a new industry and having marketing pressures has meant that the development of these value added products has taken place fairly rapidly in an industry context. No longer are we just simply producing fish for fish and chips or bulk food. We're producing high quality products for both domestic and overseas markets.

I guess moving on from salmon and oysters, these obviously are the mainstay of the aquaculture industry in Tasmania and will produce a very significant component of the fishery income to the State, we have people looking at a number of other species. There are two abalone hatcheries in the State, both on the east coast of Tasmania; one at Bisheno and one at Swansea. At this stage they would be considered I guess pilot scale operations but as people well know, the harvest available from our wild fishery, whilst it's very significant in world standards, in fact Tasmania produces around a fifth to a quarter of the world abalone catch, that's a finite situation. We can't keep expanding that fishery. Simply we'd run into the problems that have been faced by Mexico, North America and so on in that the abalone is very vulnerable to over fishing. Just how successful culture of abalone will be in the future, remains to be seen but as technology develops and we're knowing more of the animal, I'm confident that that will be a species we culture in Tasmania and possibly whilst no other states are really suitable for salmon culture, there may be other states such as South Australia, West Australia, Victoria [which] could be cultivating abalone in the future.

The fisheries organisation, Department of Sea Fisheries, or Division of Sea Fisheries as it now is, have with the Japanese assistance, been doing a large amount of work on scallop culture in recent years. In my years in fishery we actually raised for the first time a range of scallops, in fact three species of scallops in the hatchery but hatchery production, except for small numbers of scallops, hasn't been part of development of culture. Instead the programme supported by the Japanese and the fisheries organisation here, has been attempting to catch the scallop spat (young scallops) in collector bags in the sea. Some ten million seed or scallop spat have been collected this year. The plan is to ranch these or release them onto the sea bed.

This of course raises the issues of leasing or giving rights to people to farm the sea bed and there's intense discussion going on with industry at the moment as to how best to give rights to the various groups which may be fishermen, it may be fish farmers, to actually utilise large areas of sea bed and for the ranching of scallops. The areas must be large because Japanese experience and the Japanese produce large numbers, very large numbers of scallops by ranching, the areas must be large to be economically viable but also to avoid problems of predation by things like starfish. It's a bit like a paddock of oats or something like that; if the paddock's very small then the wallabies will knock the whole lot off but if it's a very large paddock then they'll be happy just fossicking around the edges and that's the case with scallop ranching.

The economic viability of scallop culture has to be proven in Tasmania. It's early days but I would feel that the industry certainly will develop over the next few years. Shellfish aside, there have been some attempts recently to grow a species of fish called the striped trumpeter. This is a remarkable fish which swims around in the oceans as a young fish. It then descends to live in about 80 fathoms of water but you can hook them out of 80 fathoms, put them in a live well of a boat, bring them into shore. They adapt quite readily to growing in our net pens that we use for salmon and after a while you can wean them off live food or chopped up fish and so on onto fish pellets the same as the salmon. At the moment they don't fetch a high enough price to justify immediate culture but they certainly are one to look forward to. We've had [a] particularly good response for example from the Japanese who believe it's a very good sushimi style fish. It's got sufficient oil and the right characteristics of the flesh for sushimi. So that is some five years down the track I'd imagine but it is there for the future.

JD Thank you Trevor for a most interesting talk.

That is the end of this interview with Dr Trevor Dix, aquaculturalist of Grove, Tasmania.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW

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Verbatim transcript of an interview with DESMOND FRENCH

INTRODUCTION

Des French started fishing during the World War and after service overseas with the Australian Army, attended the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme's Fishing School at Cronulla in New South Wales. Subsequently he spent most of his working life in the fishing industry in Tasmanian waters. He fished for many varieties including barracouta in earlier times and more lately crayfish.

On this tape Mr French discusses many aspects of fishing including weather conditions, prices, size of catches, fishermen's organisations, co-operatives and the organisation of government departments and their management techniques. Des French has been retired for some five years and has not retained close links with the industry. His account of the industry is thus orientated towards the 1942-1985 era, a period he clearly knows very well.

The interview which was conducted by Jack Darcey in Mr French's home in Stanley, Tasmania on the 26th February, 1990 is part of 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 Des would you please record your full name and date and place of birth.

FRENCH Desmond Charles Andrew French; born Wynyard 3rd September, 1925.

JD And have you spent all your life in this part of Tasmania, this north eastern part I suppose you'd call it?

FRENCH Oh north west.

JD North west, rather.

FRENCH Here and Hunter Island barring a couple of years away in the Army.

JD You're with the AIF were you?

FRENCH Yes.

JD Where did you serve?

FRENCH New Guinea.

JD You went to school here then and did you go into fishing immediately after leaving school?

FRENCH No I went to school.... Dad was a farmer and he was on a dairy farm, oh just out of Wynyard I went to school, a little country school, Seabrook till I was ten and then we shifted to Hunter Island in Bass Strait. [for] A couple of years there was no school and then we got a subsidised teacher. There was, oh about six of us; there was four or five in our family [and] a couple of others to make it up. I did another couple of years catching up. I actually left school equivalent to [aged] twelve or fifth grade which has been a handicap over the years at times.

I went to work on the Island then until I was about seventeen. Bred a lot of cattle there for fat cattle and stores [and] shipped off. It was quite an interesting part of my life shipping cattle off the beach, boating them off, swimming them out. That's how I become so well acquainted with boats. Most of our contact were fishing boat. Our mail and food came on fishing boats. Sometimes we would be eight weeks waiting for it. They weren't like they are now. I remember mother came up for some reason one time and they were fourteen hours from Stanley to Hunter Island. Now they run down there in an aeroplane [in] about twenty minutes. We also did a lot of snaring. The last year we were there we got 3000 wallaby. The year before there'd been a pound a skin and that year I think they brought 120 pounds for the 3000.

I went fishing straight off there. The boat that brought us off was [a] fishing boat, **Jean Nichols**, [owned by] Mr Nichols. I went straight fishing with him. We were shark fishing in those days. The Americans came around after anything that floated. We thought we were alright because she was a brand new 55 footer, with for those days a massive 80 horse National diesel. Because we were shark fishing it was a no no. Liver from shark contained vitamin D. We were going to sign on as crew but we didn't get our trip that way. I fished with Nichols till I was, oh a bit over eighteen.

We had a bit of an argument [and] I joined the Army. Done my training in New South. I was at Cowra when the Jap prisoners of war broke out there. I can always remember that because we thought it was a joke. It was a standard thing, "Oh the Japs are out". This time it was fair dinkum. At 3.00 o'clock at night and we just pulled our great coat over our pyjamas (those that wore them), slipped our boots on with no socks and charged out on parade. We were marched straight up.... My particular section was marched straight up to keep guard on the hospital. I thought it was cold. It was absolutely white with frost. Of course Cowra is a very cold place in the winter time. Anyhow what didn't get shot over the wire or committed suicide and various other ways, we rounded them up and put them back where they belonged. I went from there to Canungra to Commando Training School. I had a couple of months there and then we went to New Guinea [to] Boican area, Weiwak, round that part. We took a lot of prisoners. When the fighting stopped [we] stuck them out on an island and we were signed up to go to Japan because we had [a] very low priority [for] a discharge. The next thing I knew about it, I was back in Brisbane. I'm not quite sure what happened but [I got] malaria and that turned to something else and I was invalided out so I came back fishing.

I started back fishing with Joe Burgess. He was at Devonport at the time; one of nature's gentlemen. I shark fished in Bass Strait with Joe for, oh close on twelve months. He had a Danish seine, **Miss Geraldine**, built but he couldn't make a go of it. There was too much rubbish so he went back shark fishing. A thing came out in the Fisheries Newsletter about the school at Crunella, the Commonwealth Fisheries School.

So I applied and had to go to Hobart for an interview and it was one of those things that still happens, only worse now I think but there was some little toad that knew nothing about anything and he said no I could never be a fisherman, I might make a school teacher or [I've] forgotten what the other thing was. When I asked how he'd account for the fact I'd earned my living for about four years fishing, he couldn't answer that.

There was another one of nature's gentlemen in charge of that school, Captain Johnson, an old North Sea, Shetland Islander he was. He brought the first trawlers to Australia for Red Funnel [in] Sydney and they supposedly fished the fish out but I notice there's still big trawlers catching fish so that's how things go. They were the old steam trawlers, side[?] trawlers. He said, "Well I want you up there French". He said, "I want someone who knows something about fishing with all these rookies". So he said, "You come to Sydney and we'll see about it". So I went to Sydney to Cronulla to the training school and I was there for eight months. I never heard any more about not being able to be a fisherman.

We had our good times there. It was a good school but it just didn't go far enough. There was, I think, 500 pounds available from some sort of a silly grant when you finished the school. Didn't matter what your qualification [was] so that set you up in a hell of a big fishing boat, as cheap as they were those days [laughs]. You could buy a dinghy and a couple of nets! While I was there I learned a lot and I got confidence in myself that I reckoned I could run a boat if I could get hold of one. I met my wife there. I came back home and....

JD Des, just before you go off the school, what did they actually teach you there?

FRENCH Oh well now the school was.... I was [unclear] twenty or 30 years ahead of my time. Why I went to the school was to learn trawl fishing both board trawl and any seining and how to repair and build and all the rest. Captain Johnson was an expert at that and he taught those that wanted to know. We had, (and no reflection on the Air Force) an ex-group captain out of the Air Force as a teacher of navigation and what he knew about the practical side of it, you could put on a postage stamp. He had three or four mates out of the Air Force that could navigate his way and that was all he cared about. We learned nothing. A lot of us pulled out. I said, "Well when I want to know the sort of navigation you're trying to teach I'll be able to employ a bloke to do it". [It was] great circle sailing and all this bull dust when we're coastal fishing. I said, "I'll go down to the boat shed and learn a bit more about nets [which is] what I came here for". Captain Johnson taught us more of the practical coastal navigation sort of thing that we required on the boat shed floor with a piece of chalk than Mr Graham ever taught us. But that was just one of the sidelines.

There was another little bloke, he did the first school and they put him on as a boat boy looking after dinghys and things. He thought he knew all about it because he'd had three months there. The first school didn't run very long. I was busy baiting up a shark line this day and Johnny came along and he started telling me how to bait the hooks like he was going to catch these fresh water trout. I sung out to Captain Johnson, "How do you want these hooks baited Captain"? "Oh French" he said, [with accent] "You know how to bait the bloody things". I said, "Well you tell Johnny will you". "Johnny" he said, "Come out of it. He's baited more bloody hooks than you'll ever see". [laughter] So I was sort of.... not popular with Johnny. Then I got the run of the eighteen foot runabout that upset him a bit more but I don't know what became of him. He bought a little boat against everyone's advice and the first time he bumped

the bottom it fell out of her. She was rotten with worms. I heard that he went back saw milling. He should have stayed there in the first place.

We had a lot like that. I think there was about five [who] actually went fishing. A mate of mine, he went with the Victorian Fisheries Department as an inspector but he said they were too rough for him. He didn't last very long at that. The sort of things you had to do with them was not his idea of treating a man. He took on various jobs. I still keep in contact with him. There was another chap, Nick Nicholson. He went to New Guinea with the Fisheries Department there. He was there for many years. Noel Pearson, from Western Australia, he went back with the Fisheries Department in the West and was there for many, many years. I think he stayed with them until he retired. His purpose coming to the school was to sort of get a background of what went on in other States and what sort of fishing was being taught. He always intended to go back to the Department. One of the greatest no-hopers used to drink a bottle of gin a day when he could afford it. We gave him very little hope. He turned out to be a dammed good fisherman down [the] New South coast. I don't know what happened to him. He got injured or he died of some natural causes or something but he disappeared.

The others, I've lost track of them; I don't know. Some I kept up with for a while, bus drivers and taxi drivers and things like that [laughs]. They weren't fishermen. I had one of them here with me for a while. The last I heard of him, he was a coach captain. I think that's pretty important. They kill a lot of people [laughs] if let go but it was a jolly good school. We lived in huts that I'm not sure what they were for in the first place but oh they could have even been built for us. I don't really know but they were turned over to the Immigration Department after that school. There was a couple of small schools run but they were only run on the boats. Don't know what they did with them when they were ashore.

I came back from there. I met my wife there and I came back and went back to Joe Burgess. I said, "I want to go back and get married" and he said, "Well what about a boat of your own" and I said "Yeah". He said, "Well there's one on King Island I'd like [you] to have a look at". He said, "I'll back you". So I went back over to New South and got married on the coldest night of the year I reckon, the 22nd June up in the New England district, and minus twenty degrees [laughs]. When I came home I went to King Island with Joe's brother, Jack. He used to fish out of Currie at the time. We lived on the boat for about a fortnight - Jack's boat. The one I was after I didn't like but Joe wanted it brought home, a 30 footer. Between the weather and trouble with the engine, we flew home in the finish. That was good. I'd only been married about a fortnight. I left my wife stranded in Stanley while I was on King Island for a fortnight or three weeks [laughs].

I messed around. I was dickybirding on the wharf for a few years when they.... We used to load [an] enormous amount of spuds here and swedes and timber and all that sort of thing. I used to get a lot of spare time work there but in the meantime, shortly after this King Island episode, a 30 footer, an excellent couta boat, one of the old washboard ones, [a] clinker built huon pine thing, came on the market. I went to Joe about that and he said he'd go guarantor for me. I'd got all the information the bank required. So while the couta lasted she was good. I caught a lot of couta with her. A lot of trouble, the old diesel that was in her, an old Lister but I caught a lot of couta with her. They weren't worth much. They got down to two pence halfpenny a pound at one stage. What's that, two cents or something [laughs]? They never were above five [pence] a pound in my time.

JD Was that fishing around these parts?

FRENCH Round these parts, between here and the islands and went right up against the wharf some days. I was getting a hell of a go. I was on my own there one day and [there was] a young bloke standing on the wharf and I said, "Come on, give us a hand". "Right oh" he said so I pulled the outrigger up so I could get close enough and he jumped on my rig and came down. I've forgotten how many boxes we finished up with. It was a lot.

The record catch here, that I know of and I don't think it's ever been beaten.... A four man boat went out to where Port Latta is now one morning and two of the crew had been to the dance and they missed them. There was only two of them and they put one fish aboard every ten seconds for twelve hours. [laughs] Work it out how many fish, I've forgotten. One of our mathematicians came up with this figure. They were there next morning still cleaning them. They other two crew had turned up when they came back in at dark with the haul. That's what happened to the couta industry really. There was fish treated like that and half of them weren't any good for pet food even. They were rotten and just ran out of the boxes. They sat on the wharves, the blow flies got at them and they all went in the cans. The cannery at Ulverston had two shifts because half of them were off with poisoned hands half the time and this sort of thing. I know one shipment went to England and they wouldn't even let them sell them for pet food there. That was basically why the couta were canned because after the War they wanted the calcium, I think it is, from the fish and the couta had the more bones than anything else that ever swam in the water and that's why they were sending them to England.

JD Des the couta seemed to disappear didn't they?

FRENCH They disappeared completely. For some unknown reason, they've never been back like that. When I went to work for a chap here a few years back, he'd had a young fellow with him for six years and he'd never seen a couta caught in six years. Now we used to always catch couta for bait whenever we wanted for sharking or craying. There's a few about again now I think. There's little stuff down here at the wharf. The little fish always hung about here. We came in one time from a trip and the mutton birds were right up in the breakers and they were picking these little couta up, about two or three inches long. The mutton birds were picking them up and feeding on them but we never ever caught any couta. They went deep because a hell of a lot of them were caught in the trawls up the New South coast after they disappeared from here and just mainly dumped because no one wanted them. You wouldn't sell them now I don't think, not in any quantity because there's too many boneless fish about now. There's no way you can get the bones out of a couta. That's one of his downfalls. They're big bones, they're easy to pick out but nobody wants them.

JD That couta boat was a very specialised sort of boat was it?

FRENCH Well yes. They were half open or if they were decked in they had a cockpit so that you were down pretty close to the water, after the idea of the old.... I mean this was before the tuna boats but you know the New South tuna boats, pole boats ..... I don't know whether they still do but when they started they had a cage thing they put over the side so you could act as a pivot. You didn't have to lift them, you'd just sort of use your couta jig stick for a pivot. If you were using the line well it was only a short distance to swing them out of the water [and over]; unhooking boards we called it. All boats were couta boats if they were.... but these particular type of boats, they did a little bit of craying and mainly coutaing and they were handy little things. You could work them on your own if necessary and they were close to the water and couta

followed them better. I don't know why. There's all sorts of stories. We used to change the colour of the paint and change the colour of the jigs. One day I'd catch them and the next day [unclear] in a different colour boat. It didn't seem to be any real basis for that argument.

When the couta disappeared I went back decking and I lived on boats and dickybirding on the wharf. The bank got a bit pushy for their money. I couldn't even keep the interest up so I wrote them a pitiful story. I said if they lent me enough money.... She had concrete in her. The people before me had half-filled her with concrete [and] took the well out of her. So I wrote to the bank and I pitched them a story; if they'd lend me the money to convert it to a cray boat because the crayfishing was just starting to get off the ground here. There'd been cray boats for many years but only in a small way. There hadn't been any.... The Burgess brothers used to get their loads and take them to Victoria and sell them. The odd small boat here would get a load and come in and flog them along the coast off the wharf but there was no real cray industry as we know it now.

So low and behold, within about a fortnight back came a letter, yes, request granted. So I go to the fellow that used to do the boat work here. His name was French. We reckoned he was no relation but since we found out he is and everyone in Australia is [unclear] through our book [laughs]. We were five and half months fixing her up. I went craying and I got a few but the old lister that had always been a burden was still a burden. It couldn't handle the tides when we got down round the Islands and the north area where the crays were and the tides were bad. If you couldn't get a bit of sail on you wouldn't go anywhere. So I wrote them another pitiful letter at the bank.

Along they came with the money for an engine. We got [a] 50 horse, four cylinder Fords which was all she could take and that made quite a good boat of it except the old cow that converted them, he put a gear box that wasn't big enough and you'd wreck one of them. About every two or three hundred hours you could back it in. So they come up with a better gear box and I went up this day and he come on to me. I hadn't paid him for the gear box. He said, "You haven't got an echo sounder there". I said, "How the hell can I afford an echo sounder dealing with a bush ranger like you" [laughs]. I said, "Three gear boxes and a bloody new engine, there's no money for echo sounders". Well you couldn't insult old bung eye. He rushed up the other end of the shop and came back down with this echo sounder and stuck it in my car. So I went to the trouble of arranging finance and paid for that but he still didn't get paid for his gear box for twelve months because I reckon.... If I'd had the money I would have taken him to Court but there was quite a number of them had trouble with these things. Once I got the gear box then things went along pretty good.

JD What sort of prices were you getting for the crays?

FRENCH Oh. The first time I went crayfishing was in 1950 with a boat I had on lease. After I bought **Lady Phyllis**, when she was broken down, I leased a boat for a few months, a 40 odd footer. We went sharking out in Bass Strait but we got sick of it. She had no ice box and shark were nine pence a pound I think and a liver got up a bit higher than that. It boomed for a little while and then went off the market, shark liver. That had been a big product. That was really why the shark boats were protected during the War; they wanted the liver to replace the cod liver oil.

I said to my mate, Danny O'Brien (he'd done the Cronulla Fishery School after me and he came down here to go fishing with me and twelve months later he actually got a job with me), "What do you reckon about going craying"? So we bought six pots, chopped our shark board lines in half and went out to the Albatross and the Pyramid.

We lost one pot the first day and we went down to the Pyramid the second day and I think we came home with about 40 dozen. A day's work for five pots [laughs]. So she's alright this crayfishing. So I bought a few more pots and we went back and had another go and we got a nice few. We decided then we'd go down south. The reason we wanted to go down there, in the winter Joe Burgess.... Not Joe, Jim Burgess, old Jim. He'd been down there the year before with a boat from here and had some fantastic catches, something like 200 dozen a day. So we rigged the **Molly R** up with a fleet of pots (I think it was twenty) and the licence for those twenty pots those days was ten bob and you could go anywhere you liked. You could have a hundred pots if you wanted to and [it was] still ten bob. There was no limit on the number of pots and there was the size limit and the spawny (she's female) which are still protected. While they do that there'll never be any shortage of crays. They might get hard to catch. They're not stupid. They know when you're taking them away but while that spawny female and the little fellow's protected, there'll always be crayfish. You've only got to talk to the divers [and] they'll tell you what sort of crays are down there. We can't catch one.

So away we went down south in the **Molly R** with "Dodger" Long in the **Sand Fly** [as] she was known then. No radio; radio was unheard of in those days. We got weather bound in Port Davey for about a week. There was an old chap, his descendants still live up in Port Davey in Bathurst Harbour.... We went up there in the **Sand Fly** because she drew a bit less water than the **Molly R**. There was no one home when we got up there but we knew that they had this radio and we left a message. When they got the message at Stanley from Melaluca Outpost Radio on the thing and they were none the wiser where we were then. [laughs] They got this telegram. My wife had gone back to New South. She wasn't worrying about us too much but the locals here [wondered] where the hell had they got to. We came round then and we got our load and went into Research. We had to pick up the post mistress on one side of the harbour and and row her across to the post office on the other side in a cataraman. That was another outlandish name. I still didn't know where we were [laughs]. I got a telegram.... Anyhow we got up the channel a bit and we rang up.... The arrangement was we'd ring from down the channel and our truck.... We had a co-op here then [which] just got going. It'd come down and buy them because he was paying eleven pence a pound and the local price down there was ten. So he'd come down for the fish and the two boats. We had two or three trips and the weather and the season had more or less finished. July I think it was we finished up.

JD Des among the problems that face fishermen in this part of the world particularly must surely be weather? Would you like to talk about the weather conditions here?

FRENCH Well yes our weather's very unpredictable. We go crook about the weather forecasters. Well if they give you [a] forecast that's Tasmania wide out, and out a long way. I mean by that if they say there's light winds and so on and so on, you get a gale of wind, and you get it all round the State, well then it's time to go crook at them. I've been, not once but hundreds of times fishing along, particularly the west coast, and where I was based for nineteen years was Temma which is down, oh fifty miles south of the north west point. I've been fishing there and ten miles down at Sandy Cape and they've said, "Oh it's calm". I've been at Sandy Cape in a screaming east wind and I could look down and I was two or three mile down [with] the boats working there and a [unclear] came up. Now a forecaster's got to be pretty good if he can tell you that. I was out at Albatross another time and we'd had a magnificent day. A mate of mine was seventeen miles down at Pyramid and he'd had a screaming gale and I could see that white water going about beside me. Well there again that was just a local strip.

It's not good [for] the bloke that was in it but I mean you've got to be.... Well I don't think they'll ever be able to forecast that sort of thing.

The other thing that used to trap us a lot on the coast and still does is the roll. If you're working in shore, particularly if you've got your pots hard in which you normal do if it's a nice calm day (well we used to), and a big roll makes quickly, you can do the lot. I did a whole fleet as I misjudged it and it came up through the night in a hell of a sea and I never got out for about three days through this big roll. No wind; no wind with it at all. What they need is these stations a way off where the weather comes from. They have them in the Northern Hemisphere but we're too poor down this end of the world. They have a thing at Port Sorrell now, an automatic roll reporting buoy. That was brought in after I stopped fishing but I've spoken to the young chap that works out of Temma Harbour and he said that when that thing's reporting, I think he said a four metre swell, it's time to get out of Temma... no it must have been five because you can get out of there, up to about three fathoms you can get out with the greatest difficulty. Anyhow that's one thing that is a help. Coast reports, oh they're pretty unreliable. I've been laying down there at Tasman Island and they're reporting it calm [and] it's been blowing us flat in the water. The same with Maatsuyker. They're mud again if they're under the lee of the hill [laughs]. It's different to being out there in the open. They've improved a lot. [they organised] Themselves at one stage into a Fishermen's Guild. I wasn't too involved in that so I don't really know what happened and how they got on with that but somehow they were all dissatisfied with the operations and the returns for their efforts.

That is the Royal family came out here and they had destroyers and God knows what away down near to the Antarctic and right across to Western Australia reporting through that gap. Our forecast was spot on while those boats were there which is a sure thing that if they had the weather reporting bouys down to the west and sou-west of us and the south of us, that they would improve their forecasting a lot. In spite of the satellites, the satellite pictures and photos of clouds and that, I don't know. They don't seem to be all that good.

JD Does the weather cause many accidents and loss of vessels?

FRENCH Oh quite a few. I had a brother and his son lost at Sandy Cape. He set the gear pretty hard in and it blew like hell through the night. Then the roll got up and he went into pick up one. We don't know what happened but an educated guess [would be that] he went into pick one up that was in pretty close and one of those big old west coasters about God only knows what height, came down on top of him. She was 50 odd feet and it just put him straight to the bottom and smashed it to pieces. We were there next day and the solid rock was shaking when these came down. We know that's where he went because the boat remains on the bottom, the engine [and] everything was sitting there when the divers got down. We never ever found him. We found his son, or the remnants of him. Oh we've had a number like that that's been caught too close or dragged through the night or other things. They've got too tired.

The first drowning fatalities we had here in my time, they'd been to Burnie selling crays before the co-op set [up] here to take the crays and Burnie was the best place you could sell twenty or thirty dozen over the wharf. They're a pretty reasonable price. The weather was right and [they] decided to come straight on back down to Woolnorth. We reckon they went to sleep at Robbins Island ran ashore there and drowned him and his crew and his son, seven year old son. You couldn't blame the weather altogether for that. It was just desperate times and trying to make up the leeway he'd lost in the bad weather.

JD With the improvement in boats and engines and that sort of thing, has the accident rate come down would you say?

FRENCH I don't really think so. They're getting gamer and more daring and they hang out in worse weather. Every now and again.... There was a double fatality a little while back at Pyramid Rock I don't know the real story but the two crew, one was swimming and another went into rescue him, or they both fell over or some such thing but there was two there. There was a thing went ashore down the west coast two or three years ago straight up under the West Point Light. The boat put itself there. They took to the life boat and some of them got to shore and some got drowned getting ashore. If they had stayed on the boat on that occasion they could have stepped ashore dry footed but they weren't to know that.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

TAPE 1 SIDE B

FRENCH Well the weather there, it's much the same story 'cause I see on the news today where they've got a big, one of those bauxite things up north. She got blown ashore in a gale of wind. Well they can't even stop them going ashore so what hope's a fisherman got? But they have got, they've got all this modern gear now and most of them've got television that they can receive in a lot of places. They've got the fax machine so you get the weather chart. They've got umpteen weather reports all hours of the day and night that we didn't used to get especially designed for various areas. I see they've renamed it now Southern Bass Strait and I don't know whether that's improved their forecasting. You get used to where they're talking about. The barometer's still a pretty good guide. You've got to keep your eye on that; a bit of common sense. If you haven't got too big an overdraft you get in out of it when it looks nasty. Some of the old hands are sitting pretty and just making a normal fishing living out of it. You don't see them stuck out there in gales of wind. Some of them, they work with the crew clipped to the life line up to their neck in water when she rolls in [laughs]. That's only suicide. They'll get one before they're finished. There's gonna be one hell of a bust on this west coast and they'll be.... Like the pearling fleet in the northern area of Australia years ago when they were caught in a storm. They'll go the same way.

JD Des, to come back to your own career, you spent most of your fishing career in crayfish and sharking?

FRENCH Yes I didn't do much sharking after 1960. We'd catch a few when we were working out of Temma to bait; oh the heads for bait. Naturally you sell the bodies. They were a pretty good proposition but oh I could make enough crayfishing. Sharking's a bit like scalloping. You have to start in the middle of the night and then the long lines went out. In my time it was all hooks. We worked up to a couple of thousand hooks. They switched to the nets which we fought against for years and the conservation measure and I think they'll find now that we were pretty right, us old-timers that wanted to ban them. They're the greatest murderer of fish because they lose a fair percentage and they don't rot. They just sit there and float about and catch fish for ever and a day. The fish doesn't have to be hungry. He's only got to use his tail and a shark's got to use his tail all the time to stay alive. The only thing with them, the little fish get through the mesh where the little fish used to get on the hook and he wasn't much good to throw him back if he'd been damaged. He wasn't much good to put him in the catch either but he was just wasted. The nets do conserve them but, oh well they've made a mess of the fishery. She's a sad story now since the net's got in.

They put a wall of net across half of Bass Strait and anything that swims within that area of the bottom, he's gonna get caught. He's got no choice.

I crayed on till, oh about must be years, ten or eleven years since I left Temma. The boat I had there, I was leasing it off a chap and his son got married and wanted a boat of his own and he bought that boat and I took his job as a deckie on the **Cindy Hardy**. She was a 80 footer and I was, I gave myself three months with Max [laughs] but I stayed there for six years and made more money that six years than I ever made. Of course the price of crays doubled and they've trebled since then. I think the best I got for crays was about, oh I can't even remember now. They're up to over $20 in the winter now, a kilo.

JD Has the catch gone down though?

FRENCH The overall catch I don't think has gone down. Going on statistics, the overall catch has remained pretty steady but they're such big boats there now and there was a lot of licensed boats one time that didn't fish. Then they got the bright idea if they didn't fish they'd take their licence off them. Then they started selling the licences for some ridiculous price. So that whoever had a cray licence had to work. He had thousands of dollars invested in the licence alone and the boats got bigger and they're damn near all 40 pot boats now, where there was a lot of 20 pot boats and 25 and 30. The pressure on the fishery is far greater. There's colour sounders now [and] they can nearly tell them where a crayfish is. The only thing that's still saving the crayfish is the size protecting the females when they're in spawn and the fact that a crayfish only ever walks once. A bull cray walks once; that's when you catch him. He might sit there for 50 years before he walks into that pot. There's still enormous great cray being brought in here from areas that have been fished ever since I was a boy. So they've been there all the time.

I'll quote an example. When the abalone divers first came about, I knew this little hole at the mouth of Temma Harbour. I'd caught a lot of fish out of it and I'd been putting a pot or two there and getting nothing of it. I thought oh well I've finally caught them. One of the divers came in one day and he said, "There's that little hole out there, it's five fathoms at the mouth of the harbour". [I said], "Oh yeah, I know it". He said, "There's 30 odd crays in there". I said, "What little rats"? He said, "No beauties". He said, "I never counted the little ones". Ah, so I patched up two old pots (strictly illegal), that was two over my quota but I left them there for five days and I never got a sight of crayfish. On the fifth day I got those 32 fish and God knows how many little ones. They were there all the time, they just weren't hungry. There's no reason.... If you're not hungry you won't eat. That's what happens with crays. I've had divers come to me repeatedly [saying], "Oh just up in (so and so) there's thousands of them walking about". Rush in with the pots and you wouldn't get a feed. It's only when they're ready.

JD Des is pollution a problem along this northern coast of Tasmania?

FRENCH The only time I've ever had a problem with pollution is [when] some clot pumps his bilge out right where you're laying at anchor. For some reason the oil goes straight into your well and crays don't like that. We had a problem here for a long time in the corner of the breakwater where the mill used to pump its sap out. They had big drying kilns there and they used to pump the sap out. If you came in there with live crays you were in trouble. I can't honestly say that I've ever struck anywhere at sea that pollution's been a problem. A few plastic bags are a bit of a curse some times.

You get one sucked into your intake or round your propeller or something like that but I've had jelly fish do that so they're natural.

We had a couple of occasions [when] the abalone died on the coast, on the west coast, dropped off the rocks. Extremely low tide; extremely high temperatures. Same thing happened with the crayfish. If we went into that shallow water with them in the well, they'd keel over quick. They don't like a quick change in temperature. That's just nature. There's no pollution in there. You get all sorts of damn newspaper stories when these things happen. There were millions of little fish washed on the beach here twelve months ago, did a damn good job of my garden. No one ever came up with the answer. They don't belong in this area. They're deep water fish so for some reason they came round here in the bay and they washed ashore in their, well billions, I reckon. No one ever told us what happened, whether it was pollution or.... I brought a lot of them home and put them in the garden.

JD Des, have you been involved in the fishermen's organisations at all?

FRENCH Oh yes [laughs]. I was a member of the Professional Fishermen's Association for, oh I'd hate to try and even remember, 30 years I guess. It was a different name originally and we changed it to that for some reason. I've forgotten, it was immaterial but I was in an executive position for about fifteen years. I was State President for six or seven years. Oh I don't know, we did a lot of battles. We had some good ministers and not so good but at least we could always get to them. They wouldn't always take notice of us but we always had contact with them and they'd listen to us. There was other little tuppeny halfpenny shows started up and went by the way.

Now that Association is still going but they've hung themselves, the fishermen. They've got the Trawl Fishermen's Association, the Scale Fishermen's Association, the Cray Fishermen's.... every damn tiddly that's caught, they've got an association for them. Now the Government loves this. Jack in the Trawl Fishermen's Association comes along with a story. Bill in the Cray Fishermen argues about it. Tom in the Scale Fishermen says that the other two are doing the wrong thing. They love that. If they can get you fighting against each other, they don't have to give an answer. That's politics. You want to butt their heads together when you try and listen to them and you can't get the message over, "For God's sake stick together. Have your fight in the cow yard but when you go to face those fellows, go with one voice".

I've had a lot of fun. I learned a lot. It cost me a hell of a lot of money. When I should have been fishing half the time I was down fighting battles for someone else but never mind, that's water under the bridge. I also had a lot of years in the Stanley Fishermen's Co-Op. I was chairman and director of that for a number of years. I was a committee man for a good many years. That was a good show but we didn't know enough about business. Fishermen can't do both. They can't be at sea and run a business and when the crayfish particularly, and shark as well.... There was a lot of shark caught here those days. We got holding half a million dollars' worth in cold storage waiting for the good price. Well we just didn't have the money. The banks wouldn't come to the party. We had to take in a partner and finally we had to sell out to the partner. He swallowed us; it was a take over in other words. We just didn't have the money. That factory is still operating. It's still got the same crew, same manager but it's now a private thing.

There's a couple of others here in the District, one in Stanley and one in Smithton. If Stanley Co-Op had been run right from the start there should never have been room for anyone else to start up. It was our own business; our own show but fishermen, being such individuals it just had to go and it went. Course [there's] not many left now

that were mixed up in it. There's only one or two. They're all young chaps that don't know much about it really.

JD Des in Tasmania, is there a separate Department of Fishery or is it part of a bigger government department?

FRENCH Well it was always attached to the Agriculture Department. Just what they've done with it at the present time, I'm not too sure cause they've had another change. The Fisheries Inspectors were always part of the Fisheries Department. There was such a hullabaloo went on from the fishermen that they attached them to the Police Force. Well fisheries inspectors were great friends of the fishermen most of the time, particularly if they've been a bit of a help and he'd be doing the right thing. They were great blokes, most of them; help you.... When you call a policeman up, [you don't] give a bugger who he is, he's a policeman and if he comes along to tell you something about what's wrong with something you're doing, if he can help you and spots something wrong, he's obliged to book you for it, well it doesn't make sense to me.

JD That connection between the Fisheries and the Police Force still exists?

FRENCH That's the present day set up. It's only happened recently. There's a Minister for Fisheries, although I've got an idea they've even changed that recently but it used to be Minister for Fisheries and Agriculture; Department of Fisheries attached, or a break off piece off the Department of Agriculture. They tried to mix up sea fisheries and inland fisheries. Well I think that's still separate. There's two different ministers for that but just what they are at the moment, I don't really know because they've had so many changes in recent years. They brought a guy from New Zealand [who] was gonna show them how to fix things. Well he put on a good show. He played hell in New Zealand according to stories. He played hell here too for a year or two and went back to New Zealand with some one else's missus and [that's] the last we saw of him. Why we've always got to bring people from [the] other place like the cow looking over the fence, the grass is greener, I'm damned if I know, when we want to fix a problem. Seems to be the thing.

The trawl fishery now's a pretty big show. The scallop fishery's gone by the board for the time being. There seems to be a lot of bloody nonsense going on with that too. They're trying to breed them in captivity and then seed the beds. In the meantime they won't let the fellows have a go to find [them]. There MUST be big beds out here still; always has been. Some of the fishermen say they know where they are out here and they're not allowed to catch them. They had a survey last year and I know personally one of the blokes that went to do the survey, they wouldn't let him go where the scallops were. They got five boats at least to do it this year. I saw it advertised in the paper and they've given them a week to do it. Well anyone that's ever fished knows damn well you can't start from scratch and do any good in a week, what ever it be. The weather might'n even let you out the gate in that time.

I wouldn't go back fishing. They got themselves tied up with red tape and the ridiculous things they're paying for a licence, a piece of paper. I mean the licence is worth as much as the damn boat these days. I wouldn't have one at any price.

JD Is the licence sold on the open market?

FRENCH Yeah; [to the] highest bidder. The last abalone licence I heard of sold was a million dollars. The result of that is that the fish buyers own most of the licences.

JD Must be pretty difficult for a young bloke to start off fishing.

FRENCH He's got no bloody hope in the world with the present rate of interest. He's up to his ears because boats are not cheap. I see cray pots advertised in the paper: small pots $50 and thereon up each. It's just a pot and if you made your own you wouldn't get them much cheaper because the price of wire and cane and that sort of thing now is pretty high and he could lose a fleet in a day. Well if he's up to his ears with interest.... it's got me beat how some of them survive. No wonder they fish in such shocking weather. $300,000 for a boat and another, well a 40 pot licence is $3,000 a pot. I think that's the going price now, $3,000 a pot.

JD Does that mean that it's becoming a company dominated fishery?

FRENCH Well it is, yes. The Fishery Department, now they're licensed before you can start work. Between them, the Radio Survey and the Marine Survey, I think 40 or 50 an hour; it's about $1800-$2000 before you can start work each year. For nothing! Just for nothing. They don't do anything. They don't find any fish for you in spite of what they say sometimes. They don't police it too good either. I know there's still rogues getting away with things they ought to be thrown out of the industry forever.

JD Is there enough supervision of the industry?

FRENCH Not where it counts. Plenty of supervision around the water front and bloody silly forms to fill in but get out where the fish are and the fishermen are, there's very little. I don't think there's much. Never was in my time. I never saw an inspector for ten years.

JD Ten years?

FRENCH I didn't see an inspector, only when I met them socially.

JD Is there a problem with amateur fishing?

FRENCH Oh yes. There's a lot of "shamateurs" - unlicensed professionals. I know down the west coast we had a hell of a lot of trouble with them and I don't see any reason why they would be any different now. They catch the odd one but the price of crays now, they take the risks. I know there's a lot of diving done; their five crays limit. [laughs] I don't know how this works but if they're getting five crays a day and he's worth $15 a kilo and he's weighing a couple of kilos, they're not on a bad little wicket are they?

JD They're selling the catch?

FRENCH A lot of them are, yes. There's pots.... I don't know whether it's still the same (as I say I've been knocked off five years) but in my time down the west coast when it was a bit reasonable you'd go in close to set up and you wouldn't be able to get near the place for amateur pots or "shamateur" pots. I don't mind an amateur getting a feed, he's entitled to it, but when you see him come out with a hundred crays and 120 and they share them with their family, well you know damn well what they're up to.

JD Do you think under sized crays are taken very frequently?

FRENCH Definitely. The east coast are noted for it because there's so many little fish there right in shore. There's billions of the sods. You see that cray that's a bit under the measure's very popular with the restaurants and the food places. They split him in half and serve half on a plate and its, well what's a cray a bit under size, weighs about a pound; there's half a pound of cray for twenty bucks a serve. Not doing to bad are they?

JD Des what other problems do you see facing the fishing industry?

FRENCH Oh I'm a bit out of touch with it really. I heard a hell of a lot at the conference I went to recently but a lot of them were only problems they brought on themselves which we solved for them twenty years ago and then they just brought them back again. No I'm not enough in touch now to really say I know what the problems are and I've kept well away from it. I rarely go near the wharf. When I gave up fishing, I gave it up. I've got a fishing line down the shed [which] hasn't been worked for two years. The only reason I bought that [was] because my grand daughter came over here and wanted to go fishing off the wharf. So I'm clean out of touch with fishing, you know, at the present day.

JD If you were a young bloke, would you go back into it?

FRENCH No, not under the present set up. Too many restrictions and too much red tape. I don't know.... Now I went to the Cronulla School. I don't know what they're learning up there in the marine college at the fancy school. We fought for something like that but I've got an idea that's gone overboard and it's damned expensive.

JD That's the Marine College is it?

FRENCH The Marine College. What it's done is made it.... I think it's almost compulsory now (I'm not sure whether they've fully got it in) for anyone that wants to get a ticket now, has got to go there for X amount of time. Well I earned my ticket the hard way. I served it on deck and I went to sea and got my experience. If I made a mistake, that was my trouble. Of course the theory is and what they say now, "Oh well you've got other blokes with you. You drown them its...." (you know). I survived for 40 years without one of those things. As I say, when I went to Cronulla they tried to teach us great circle navigation. Well they still don't need it because they've got all these satellite navigators and bloody great radars and you name it now. They wouldn't know what end of a sextant to pick up, most of them, and don't need to. We've got to advance with the times. The modern gear they've got now, they don't need that.

I do think a bit of schooling [over] all, that's a good thing because I had a sounder and I got a radar just before I knocked off and I had to learn that the hard way and I made a hell of a lot of mistakes that if someone with a bit of skill could have shown me, it would have been much to my advantage. Just what's happening at the Marine College, I couldn't say. I know there's some of the fellows who come out of it are no good. They were a real menace in the industry but that's not necessarily the fault of the College. There was a firm that built a hell of a lot of boats and put a lot of college trained blokes in them and they went through the hoop pretty quick like a lot of those get rich quick schemes that we've still got. For some reason our State Government always seems to find money to lose with these people. The figures never came out but they had a hell of a lot of money mixed up in two or three of those fish factories and fish boat crowds who had a fleet of boats has gone broke owing millions. A lot of it's been State Government money.

JD Is there much in-flow of money from overseas into fishing in Tasmania?

FRENCH That I couldn't tell you. I don't know. There would be in the factory side I imagine, the production, what do you call it?

JD Processing?

FRENCH Processing side. Oh I think there's a hell of a lot of overseas money in the processing. Certainly a lot of interstate money in Tassie.

JD Des before we finish is there anything else you'd like to have on this tape?

FRENCH Oh there'd be a hell of a lot after you've gone [laughs]. Thinking of it, trying to gather up 40 odd years in one hit. I've tried it recently on another subject and after the person had gone.... No I've had a lot of good friends and a lot of fun in the fishing game. While I was a fisherman I never wanted to be anything else but gee whiz what's happened in the last five or six years, I just...

I had a bloke in here the other day, he'd been an old fisherman. He came over to visit me from out of Sydney and sailed home in his little yacht. He said, "Well, cost me ten bob for a licence when I started". He said, "I could catch anything I wanted to and no one interfered with me and look at it today". I said, "My God mate, you're dead right" and that's what it cost me, ten bob for a licence and I could catch whatever I liked provided it was legal size. That's how it should be today. We made provision to learn to catch different sorts of fish. When one fish was off, we could go and catch the other ones [with] safety.

Now if the crayfisherman suddenly is closed up and they're closing themselves up now for four months of the year, if they've had a bad run, the engine broke down or something while it's reasonably good, they're buggared. They can't do shark, couta, net fishing, anything. Hell of a lot of them used to turn to scallops in the winter [to] subsidise it if they'd had a bad year. They can't do it any more. They go on the dole or something. Well if that's progress, I don't want to be in it.

JD Alright. Thank you very much for this interview and may you have a long and happy retirement, Des.

FRENCH Thank you. I'm trying to [laughs].

JD You're doing alright.

FRENCH Cheers.

JD Bye.

That is the end of this interview with Mr Des French, retired fisherman of Stanley, Tasmania.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW

Disclaimer

Verbatim transcript of an interview with TONY HARRISON

INTRODUCTION

Anthony Harrison is the Deputy Director of the Fisheries Division in Tasmania. He is also Tasmanian Project Officer for this oral history of the Australian Fishing Industry that is being conducted by Murdoch University. The interview was recorded in Mr Harrison's home in Hobart on the 3rd March, 1990. The interviewer is Jack Darcey.

In this interview Mr Harrison outlines the organisation and policy objectives of his Division together with some of the management techniques employed. He deals with many aspects of concern in the industry including fish stocks, marketing, transferability of licences, the research effort, relationships and communications within the industry, aquaculture and inflow of overseas capital. He concludes his account of the industry by acknowledging some of the outstanding personalities of the past and present.

Tony Harrison has made a very considerable contribution to this project. There are two sides of one tape. The interview starts at 021 on the revolution counter.

TAPE 1 SIDE A

JD Tony would you first of all record your full name, date and place of birth.

HARRISON Right. My full name's Anthony James Harrison. I was born on the 13th September, 1939 in Queenstown, Tasmania.

JD And have you lived in Tasmania all your life?

HARRISON Yes, pretty much all my life.

JD And you're now with the Fisheries Division which is a division of a larger department, is it not?

HARRISON Yes. I'm now the Deputy Director of Fisheries in the Fisheries Division of the Department of Primary Industry.

JD Right. Is that a fairly new arrangement of departments?

HARRISON It's new in one way, it's old in another. It's new since June of 1989 when we were absorbed into the Department of Primary Industry after being a separate

department of Sea Fisheries but when I first joined Fisheries in 1964, we were also the Fisheries Division of the Department of Agriculture which is how we've come full circle.

JD Does your Division look after inland fisheries as well?

HARRISON No. We only deal with sea fisheries. In Tasmania there's been a separate inland fisheries organisation for all of this century and for a portion of last century. It's been a traditional feature of Tasmanian fisheries that the fresh water anglers to a large extent run their own quasi independent organisation.

JD Could you, in brief, outline the organisation of your Department? There is a director, is there not?

HARRISON Right. There's a director and a deputy director and two assistant directors, one for fisheries and one for marine farming. The Division is therefore divided into two branchs. One deals with fisheries in the traditional sense. The other branch deals with marine farming which is quite a big industry now in this State and almost half our resources go on marine farming.

JD That's aquaculture and mariculture?

HARRISON Well it's all mariculture in our case, primarily oysters and salmon and trout but to a lesser degree we're involved in mussels and we're about to embark on a large scallop culturing programme as well.

JD Do you have district officers?

HARRISON No. Tasmania's a fairly small State and when the Department of Sea Fisheries was established the Government felt it was not necessary to have district officers, so for most of our history we have operated simply with one central office and people moving around in cars to the various ports.

JD Who are the people then who move around in cars?

HARRISON We try and encourage our officers to be responsible for all aspects of the fishery on which they're working. We have in the Fisheries Branch of the Division a number of people we call industry specialists and they're responsible for everything we do in their particular fishery. So we have a rock lobster industry specialist and a scallop industry specialist and a jack mackerel industry specialist and they're responsible for our management and research and liaison activities for that fishery. They have a varying sized group which supports their activities and part of that activity involves liaison with the fishing industry.

JD When it comes to enforcement, who is responsible then?

HARRISON Since the establishment of the Department of Sea Fisheries, enforcement has been a function of the Tasmania Police and all the previous specialist fishery inspectors were incorporated into the Police Force at that time and so we're probably now unique in that fisheries enforcement is a straight police matter.

JD Who is responsible then for the educating role of the Division?

HARRISON Education of fishermen is the responsibility of a number of organisations. We have a role in education and we have field officers who participate in that role

along with an extension role. There's a Fishing Industry Training Committee, as there is in other States, which runs courses. We are also fortunate in that the Australian Maritime College is located in Tasmania and a fair degree of our fisheries education is conducted by them.

JD Is there a connection with the TAFE colleges?

HARRISON Yes but not.... I have the feeling that TAFE have been less involved in fisheries education in recent times as both the Maritime College and the Fishing Industry Training Committee seem to have taken a slightly higher profile.

JD Tony, could you outline the policy objectives of the Division?

HARRISON Fine. The structure of the Tasmanian fishing industry has been overwhelmingly to encourage diversified multipurpose fishing. It's been our objective to encourage fishermen to participate, or have access to, as many fisheries as possible. We have been somewhat unique in this regard in that we have not developed specialist fisheries where one fisherman belongs to just one fishery. We have always maintained the view that fishermen should have the opportunity to go into other fisheries when [the] market's depressed, the stocks are down, or whatever. So for the last 70 years, perhaps a little less than 70, say 60 years, the rock lobster fisherman has been the core of the Tasmanian fishing industry. Those fishermen have primarily fished for rock lobster but at other times of the year they fish for shark. They would gear up the fish for scallops. They would do some drop lining for trevallar. So far as we have been able, we have maintained that policy throughout. Inevitably some specialist fisheries have evolved. Deep sea trawling is perhaps the classic example, shark netting to some extent has followed that line. Commonwealth management strategies have tended to force fishermen to specialise in one fishery but our philosphy and the industry's desire is to maintain as much flexibility as possible.

JD It seems that every fishery has a concern to conserve the resource and management policies seem to be implemented aimed at that objective. I'm sure that would be the case in Tasmania also. What are the management techniques that you employ to achieve that?

HARRISON Well we were one of the pioneers of limited entry fisheries management but in our State that was never introduced with a conservation objective in mind. It was always introduced to provide bigger shares in the fishery to the remaining fishermen. Our conservation measures have really been the classical ones of minimum size regulations, gear restrictions and the like. For example, the crayfishing gear in Tasmania is the hemispherical crayfish pot, originally a Cornish fishing equipment brought to Bass Strait in about the 1870s. Our fishermen were concerned that this new form of fishing gear was destructive and for many years it was banned in favour of what in Tasmania are called crayfish rings, which are actually small nets held in the hand. Crayfish rings were the legal method of fishing for the first quarter of the twentieth century. Then when crayfish pots were finally authorised, they were strictly limited with the result that we have the smallest pot allocation scales of any of the lobster fisheries in Australia. The maximum number of crayfish pots which can be used on any boat in Tasmania is 40, whereas in other States there can be 100, 200 even. As a consequence of that our fishermen have developed particular techniques to cope with that small allocation of pots. They're very skilled at individually targeting each pot. They make considerable use of sophisticated echo sounding, fish finding equipment. They know their reefs and they know how to aim their pots.

The primary conservation tool for crayfishing has been the minimum size and we are fortunate in that we have sufficient spawning individuals below the minimum size to protect all our commercial fishery, so our fishermen can take all fish above the minimum size without threatening the stock with over fishing.

JD Are the stocks being maintained?

HARRISON Largely the stocks are being maintained. We have a highly volatile scallop fishery for which the population fluctuates naturally to a considerable extent. At the moment we're going through a period of both natural low numbers and low numbers caused by very heavy fishing in the 1980s. So at the moment there is no scallop fishing but the scallop stocks will return as they do in other places but it may be some time.

Our lobster fishery is still as productive as it ever was and we're still getting record catches. We have expressed some concern about our abalone stocks and have applied not only minimum size rules but a strict individual catch quota and we have lowered that catch quota some 35% over the past few years.

Of the other fisheries that we manage, reef stocks are probably quite substantially below their optimum level. That's largely because we have a very large recreational net fishery. We're one of the few places in the world where recreational fishermen are allowed to use nets and we have many thousands of recreational nets intensively used around the coast.

JD Is there evidence that the recreational fishermen sell their catch?

HARRISON To a small extent and enough to cause us to require sales of fish to be accompanied by receipts in the last year. We now require a person selling fish in quantities above the amateur daily bag limit to issue receipts and those receipts have to be checked. Where you have a high priced fish like rock lobster you will inevitably get some sales of people who go about their recreational fishery in a fairly commercial manner but these fishermen are probably not recreational fishermen in the true sense. They're unlicensed commercial fishermen rather than recreational fishermen so the true recreational fisherman doesn't sell his catch but on the other hand he does give away a lot of fish and that does have a very substantial impact on the marketing of fish in Tasmania.

JD Is there evidence of poaching in the abalone industry?

HARRISON Yes. Once again where you have a very high priced product and a very small number of licensed operators, you're bound to get some who will not bother to obtain a licence. It's my personal view that in Tasmania this poaching is not sufficient to affect the stocks but it is sufficient to cause a considerable amount of disruption and unpleasantness in the industry. It is very important for our inspectors to be seen to be stamping out this practice in order to make sure everybody else complies with the rules. So whilst the few numbers of poachers may not affect the stocks, their very presence and activity is a threat to the overall integrity of the management scheme.

JD The question of transferability or sale of licences between fishermen, is that prevalent, is it done in [Tasmania]?

HARRISON Yes. We have never really made any attempt to prevent people selling their limited entry licences. We bought in limited entry licensing in about 1966 and we always recognised that the major problem with limited entry licensing is that you need

to have a mechanism for redistributing the limited numbers of licences. There seemed to us to be no mechanism whereby government officers could better redistribute licences than the market place. So except for some years when abalone licences were not transferable, we have almost always had a policy of allowing limited entry licences to be bought and sold except where we wanted to reduce the number of licences in a particular fishery. For example in scallop fishing where, through circumstances, we got too many vessels in the fishery, we imposed a non-transferring policy and substantially reduced the number of licences in the scallop fishery as fishermen transferred their other parts of the package and dropped off their scallop licence.

JD Has it had an influence on the ability of new fishermen to come into the industry?

HARRISON I think one has to answer, yes to that question but there was really no other alternative. I mean had we not had limited entry licensing, then sure, fishermen could have been able to come in, but they would have been coming in to a far different fishery to the one that they're entering today. So they're not paying more than their place in the fishery's worth. I think that's the point that has to be clearly understood, is that the high entry prices are a reflection of what the fishermen believe is the value of being in the fishery. So if you pay a million dollars for an abalone licence, it's because that's what a place in the abalone fishery are deemed to be worth, not by the Government or not by some economist but by the practising fishermen. Now we may debate as to whether or not it's an exorbitantly high price but nevertheless that's what the market says is the value of that situation.

Now it is often argued that young people can't go into fishing because of the high price but they can't go into farming for the same reason. They can't go into the hotel business or manufacturing or whatever. There's a price to be paid for anything that's of value. If the Government desires young people to enter the fishing industry, then there are mechanisms that they can employ which will allow that to happen. We have seen young people going into the fishing industry but not in the same way as they did in the past. Many young people still go into the fishing industry, into their family business which is the traditional way for young people to go into any business. We've also seen young people go into company operations, particularly now in the trawling field where company operations are more common. The graduates of the Maritime College and other places find ready places in the industry. Not as owner/skipper any more perhaps but as employees and as a share fisherman in their operation and perhaps gradually they work up to obtaining a vessel themselves. The period of time, say in the 1960s, when young people could get cheap loans and go straight into fishing were probably always an aborration, probably never the real situation over time.

JD It's becoming then rather contrary to the owner/operator policy is it?

HARRISON Well we're still very deeply wedded to the owner/operator policy and so is our industry but where you have very large vessels such as in the deep water trawl fishery and in the jack mackerel fishery, then it is most unlikely that you will get owner operators. It is far more likely that you will have company owned vessels where the operator will at best be a part owner but we're still deeply wedded to the owner/operator tradition and we would attempt to do it if we could, maintain it if we can.

JD Tony do you feel the resources allocated to the Fisheries Division, are they adequate?

HARRISON Well everyone in my position will say no to that question but bearing in mind the relative value of the fishing industry and the proportion of funds that we get compared to that, then we're not deprived of resources. We could do more if we had more resources but governments and the fishing industry are prepared to allocate only a certain amount. I think that we can't complain too loudly.

JD Is your Division in any way involved in the marketing of the product?

HARRISON No. We're not involved in fish marketing at all. In fact Tasmania's been quite unique in this regard in that we've not even had a local fish market for well over 70 years. At that time it was operated by the Hobart City Council and was considered to be a bit of a joke even then. We seemed to have developed a system of sale by private treaty in that the fisherman has his particular buyer or processor and he delivers his catch either to their depot or they come to the port with their truck and pick up his catch. In return the processor is a kind of a short term banker, that he might provide bait and some fishing equipment and he would probably advance him money on his sales. There's strong competition between the processors for, particularly supplies of crayfish and abalone, and in the past scallops. So right from the 1930s it became the practice for fish buyers to advance money, loans for boats, loans for fuel, for gear and that seems to have reinforced this private treaty sale. There's been little or no pressure for Government intervention in the marketing of fish right through that time.

JD Do processors take all the catch?

HARRISON Yeah.

JD Yes. What about the research effort? Is your Department or your Division involved in research?

HARRISON Yes. My appointment in 1964 was as the first research officer. Prior to that time fisheries research in Tasmania had been conducted by CSIRO from 1941 until 1964 and it's always a very close relationship between CSIRO and the Department of Agriculture which I think stemmed from a personal rapport between Harold Thompson and the then Minister for Fisheries, Tom Dalton and with the secretary, Leo St Ledger. Through that relationship Thompson located some of his officers in Hobart and the research that was done in Tasmanian fisheries was done by CSIRO. As CSIRO restructured, it became necessary for the States to begin to do their own research, not just in Tasmania but elsewhere. As the result of a Legislative Council Select Committee in scallops, the Government decided to establish a research programme initially in the scallops. I was transferred from the Education Department to start that role.

Since that time we gradually expanded into other fisheries with the objective of having a research team in every fishery that we're responsible for managing. We don't quite meet that target but we have research teams in most of the fisheries and in all the important fisheries. Since 1970 we've also had a big research effort into aquaculture and I don't think there's much doubt that we're the leading aquaculture State and the developments in salmon in the last few years and the coming development in scallops will continue that tradition.

JD How is duplication of effort avoided in research?

HARRISON Well since the signing of the Offshore Constitutional Settlement the question of duplication is gradually disappearing because particular fisheries now

become the responsibility of either the State or the Commonwealth. What I think we will see is that the fisheries which are arranged to go under Tasmanian management will be Tasmania's responsibility and we will do the research. The fisheries which are adjacent to Tasmania but for which the Commonwealth manages, although jointly managed, will be financed by the Commonwealth.

At the moment there is joint research in trawl fishing and that is co-ordinated through a group called the Demersal and Pelagic Research Group which integrates and co-ordinates research into demersal and pelagic fish stocks in the south-eastern States. There is very little overlap in any fields of fisheries research today.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

TAPE 1 SIDE B

HARRISON We just don't have the resources to duplicate or overlap other people's research activities.

JD Could we turn to labour relationships within the industry? Are there problems there?

HARRISON Well if you mean between skippers and crew, I think that there are no more than there's ever been. The relationships between the different segments of the industry are also, I think, fairly standard. I mean I've been in fisheries now for quite a long time and the relationship between the various segments in the industry and between the industry and the Government waxes and wanes, largely I think with the personalities of the people involved. You might find there are ambitious industry politicians or rather aggressive bureaucrats and circumstances are a bit difficult for a while.

In 1986 I think it was, we made an attempt to establish a new structure by establishing the Tasmanian Fishing Industry Council which is structured to produce a peak body of representatives from each of the major fisheries and each fishery has its own committee structure. There's the Rock Lobster Fishermen's Association; there's the Shark Fishermen's Association and they each elect a director to the Tasmanian Fishing Industry Council. By and large that system has worked well because it is supported by funds collected by the Government to finance it and to pay a full-time executive officer in the same way as the system operates in other States, or some other States. I think that that has produced an improvement in relations between the industry and government.

There is and always has been clashes between certain groups of fishermen, whether one group is overlapping another one's fishing techniques and they're going to use a new gear or they have fishing with a different fishing practise. Sometimes it's geographical, sometimes it's gear oriented but the Fishing Industry Council seems reasonably well able to resolve that. There are some difficulties at the moment in co-ordinating marine farmers because the salmon industry has grown up after the establishment of an oyster industry and the salmon industry is highly capitalised large ventures unlike the rather small scale operations of the oysters farmers. There are those kinds of problems which will be with us.

JD Is this question of large capital inflow which is there of necessity in some aspects of the industry, is there a way in Tasmania that that can result in overseas control?

HARRISON Yes. There's an underlying concern for that. We're about to embark on a large scallop re-seeding exercise and in order to do that we will need several tens of millions of dollars and that money for this kind of venture is just not available in Tasmania (and I suspect it's not available in Australia either). So it will come in one form or another from overseas as part of the major capital inflow which builds our foreign debt. By and large that has not caused too much concern in Tasmania, as the people who overtly control the operations are seen to be local Tasmanians or Australians. To be a non-Tasmanian is just as much foreign [laughs] as to be a New Zealander or an American in this State. I guess that we're as parochial as the next group but we haven't had that much of a problem. There are fishing operations which are foreign owned or foreign part-owned but they seem to get along with the others without too much trouble.

JD What about communications within the industry, say between the fishermen and the Department? Do you have suitable vehicles?

HARRISON We have been experimenting for a few years with a joint industry Government publication called **Fishing Today** which is produced privately, after tenders were called, and this is part financed by the Government, part financed by the industry. It's a very professionally produced journal and it seems to be very well received. My personal belief is that fishermen really don't learn things through reading journals or newsletters or letters from the Department and they learn by word of mouth. The surest way to get a message around the fishing industry in Tasmania is to send a telegram to a ship at sea (from us to one of our patrol boats at sea) [which] will ensure that 70% of the industry knows tomorrow what was the contents of that message. So we have the same problem I guess of communication as most fisheries organisations [which] is that fishermen will always complain that nobody told them that [a] certain thing was going to happen. In many cases they were told, it's just that they chose not to read it or to forget it or they heard about it but they didn't do anything about it and now it's too late, but I think that if there is an area where we might have done more, I think it is in the use of radio for communication. I don't think we've really taken advantage of the fishermen's almost 24 hour a day obsession with coastal radio.

JD Is there anything else that you'd like to have recorded on this tape?

HARRISON Well I think that we should perhaps pay tribute to some of the figures who have played a major role in the development of, certainly of Government fisheries today. We have been very fortunate, I think, in that we've had a number of people who have made major contributions. There was the first Fisheries Inspector and Director of Fisheries, a man called William Saville-Kent who was brought out to Tasmania from Britain in 1885 and stayed for some years; laid the foundation of oyster culturing in Australia; later went on to write a major book about the Great Barrier Reef and was a substantial publicist for Australian fisheries and marine life in Britain. He later became Inspector of Fisheries in both Queensland and in Western Australia.

Its perhaps not widely known that the film actor, Errol Flynn's father, Thomas Flynn, was a professor of biology at the University of Tasmania and he was a great supporter of fisheries. As well as a researcher he was an entrepreneur and had a scheme in the 1920s to transplant a Scottish fishing village from the Northern Hemisphere to St

Helen's complete with their boats and fish factory and wives and children and so forth. Unfortunately it failed to raise the capital at the beginning of the Depression.

We had a famous fisheries inspector called Tom Challenger. Tom Challenger was literally a living legend in Tasmanian fisheries being responsible for enforcing all the fisheries' laws in Tasmania single handed for almost 40 years. We fortunately have some history of Tom Challenger's exploits but perhaps not all of his more colourful activities.

In more recent times we've been lucky to attract eminent people in fisheries. Much of the foundation of our aquaculture industry is due to a New Zealander, Trevor Dix, who was our senior research officer for many years. I hope that we'd find some recognition for these people in the history of fisheries in Tasmania.

JD Indeed. Thank you for that and thank you for this interview.

HARRISON OK; 'bye.

JD That is the end of this interview with Mr Tony Harrison, Deputy Director of the Fisheries Division in Tasmania.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW

Disclaimer

Verbatim transcript of an interview with JOHN JACOBS

INTRODUCTION

Mr John Jacobs became the manager of Stanley Fishermen's Co-Operative 31 years ago. He remained as manager when the Co-Op went into partnership with a fish processing and exporting company and when the company finally took over the enterprise and operated it, as it still does under the name of Stanley Fish, he continued on as manager.

During his time in Stanley Mr Jacobs has seen many changes in areas fished, the species handled and the markets serviced. As he explains in this interview, rock lobster and orange roughy are the main fish his plant deals with now. During the interview Mr Jacobs discussed many aspects of Tasmanian fisheries including presentation of product, fisheries management, determination of prices and prospects for the future in the industry.

The interview was conducted in Mr Jacobs' office at Stanley Fish in Stanley, Tasmania on the 27th February 1990. It is part of Murdoch University's oral history of the Australian fishing industry. The interviewer is Jack Darcey. There is one side of one tape and the interview starts at 022 on the revolution counter.

TAPE 1 SIDE A

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

JACOBS My name is John Lawrence Jacobs. I was born in Stanley in February 1933 and I've lived here all my life.

JD All your life? Well you couldn't live in a nicer place.

JACOBS No; very nice. [I] Like it.

JD You went to school here obviously?

JACOBS I went to school at Stanley in [the] Forest Area School. I went to work at fifteen years of age in the produce trade for ten years and in 1959 I came to Stanley Fish as manager of Stanley Fishermen's Co-Operative.

JD You came straight in as the manager?

JACOBS I did, yes.

JD And how long did that Co-Op last?

JACOBS Well a brief history of the company (the Co-Op): I was manager of the Co-Op from '59 to '65 when Stanley Fish Proprietary Limited was formed in partnership with Craig Mosman & Company. [the] Co-Op then retained 51% of the shares and that continued on until the end of 1984 when the Co-Op sold out to Mosmans who now own the business 100%.

JD Did you have many boats fishing for the Co-Op?

JACOBS When I came there were a lot of small boats. There was couta still being caught. Sharking was the biggest industry that the Co-Op was doing. As we branched into the '60s that changed and the boats started to change. Bigger boats and the lobster fishing became the biggest part of the operation.

JD And lobster is still your major product is it?

JACOBS Lobster is still our major processing at this stage but we've had a big change over the last two or three years now with the advent of orange roughy and that is by far the biggest catch of fish in the State at the moment.

JD That's landed here in Stanley?

JACOBS We have had some landed here. It started on the west coast; the fishing started off the Tasmanian west coast then went over to [the] Victorian coast [and] South Australia. For the last twelve months it's been caught all round Tasmania fairly heavily.

JD And the trawlers call here and unload their catch?

JACOBS Last year the main of our catch was brought in from the east coast [where] they closed the beds and won't open again till May this year but they have been catching a lot of stuff to the south of Hobart and this is where the supply comes from this time.

JD So you handle lobster, shark, orange roughy.... abalone?

JACOBS We were quite big in abalone but we haven't handled any at all in the last two or three years. We've just gone out of business.

JD Is that because the abalone fishery is not here or because you've chosen not to?

JACOBS No the area is quite good, one of the bigger abalone areas but we've just drifted away from it and people like our opposition in Smiths and Tasmanian Seafoods, [they've] got into it in a very big way and we just don't bother any more. One thing that we've done in the past in a fairly big way was scallops but [there] hasn't been any scallop fishery now for two or three years and it's drifted....

JD None at all in this area?

JACOBS It's been closed completely for the last two years.

JD What about scale fish other than orange roughy?

JACOBS No. Scale fish.... We hardly see any scale fish in this area apart from when the trawlers were fishing the west coast and it was all from deep water, that type of fish; but [there is] no scale fishery as is.

JD Has there ever been a scale fishery in these waters?

JACOBS Some years ago there was some experimental fishing done on flathead and flounder in the area at that time but [it] was said that there was probably enough of that species to support one boat but it's never been fished really commercially.

JD No. Do you have boats that are sort of tied to your company?

JACOBS No. The boats are all independent. The company owns no boats and has no shareholding in boats. We buy off anybody but fishermen tend to stick fairly well to whoever they're selling to.

JD Yeah. Do you undertake to take all the fishermen's catch?

JACOBS We do. Yes we guarantee to take.... We don't knock back anything. When I say don't knock back anything, at this particular time of the year, at this period, we're very heavily into the lobster fishing and we can't handle orange roughy.

JD So if we look at the lobster for a moment, it comes ashore, you process it here. Do you tail it?

JACOBS The lobster comes ashore live. We have live tanks which we can keep lobsters in. We cook for the local market, Melbourne/Sydney market and we do a lot of tailing for the United States mainly.

JD Do you export live?

JACOBS We do do live fish interstate but we haven't yet really been into export of live lobster and I think Tasmania is fairly well disadvantaged in that respect. It has to be in Melbourne first before it can go on a plane and we lose the vital time.

JD You can't fly direct from Tasmania to Japan?

JACOBS No. There's no direct flights at this stage. Hobart are even in a bit better position where they can get it on to early morning planes and into Melbourne but it's a very difficult operation out of Tasmania.

JD Does your company collect the catch from out ports and bring them in for processing?

JACOBS Yes but when the lobster season opens in November, we do go as far as Hobart and the south-east coast to collect the lobsters and bring them back to Stanley. A big part of our fishing now is done off the west coast in small boats, something like the operations in Western Australia. We collect crays (or lobsters) from there most of the time on a regular basis two or three times a week.

JD That's a fairly new development isn't it, small boats on the west coast?

JACOBS That's reasonably new. They've been fishing from the west coast for a lot of years. The bigger boats travel round there. There's been some shore based facilities but in the last three or four years it's become a lot more popular to have small boats operating from the coast.

JD What are some of the ports down there that they fish from?

JACOBS Your main ports from the west coast, from here, and they're not really ports but Tema Harbour is probably the biggest where there's about three or four people operate. You come back up to a place called Couta Rocks and the Sundown River, there's a base there. Then you come up to West Point Light where there is another group of fishermen based.

JD They're more anchorages than ports are they?

JACOBS Small bays and anchorages.

JD Yeah. The weather's a bit of a problem out there isn't it?

JACOBS Weather we used to say would look after the west coast fishing because when it came real bad the boats had to get off but that's even changed, I really think, in the last few years with the advent of bigger boats [which] tend to stay out in more weather and fish more.

JD And better aids and that sort of thing too I suppose?

JACOBS Oh much better. The offshore fishing (the deep water fishing) has become a much different thing over the last couple of years with the advent of satellite navigation and things like that.

JD John you'd have seen a lot of changes in the industry. One of the changes I imagine is the type of person coming into fishing, is that so?

JACOBS Yes I suppose you could say that. I believe that in the last few years with the advent of bigger money and more expensive boats you've seen people come out of other things and go into fishing. The east coast is a fairly good example I believe. People - school teachers, lawyers, doctors, that type of thing, they've got into, well abalone fishing, and into the lobster business.

JD And actually do the fishing themselves or do they simply put their money in?

JACOBS Yes. Fishermen themselves tend to own everything they've got. A lot of them are on money borrowed from agriculture bank set-ups and things like that but the main of them own their own outfit.

JD Yeah. John from your point of view would you say fish generally are well presented to the customer?

JACOBS Yes [it's a] fairly difficult question. We don't really present fish to the public as such as a processor. I do believe that the New Zealanders give us a fair hiding in presentation of fish that we do do in Australia. We can't compete for some reason.

JD Does it worry you that apparently rather poor quality fish is often sold under a high quality product's name? Barramundi for instance; there's far more barramundi sold than is ever caught I'm quite sure.

JACOBS Yes. I suppose you could say that. Barramundi brings good one to mind; our trevally or blueye as it's called. I believe it's equally as good, if not better and I know it's been marketed as barramundi for a lot of years. I think it's a pity because I think it should be marketed under its own name and would be just as competitive.

JD Yes. It sort of puts public confidence in the industry under some pressure, doesn't it?

JACOBS It does I suppose. I hear a lot of people talk about barramundi which, you know, I've eaten in the past but I always considered [it] to be muddy. I don't like river fish much anyway but that's [my] personal opinion.

JD Do you handle any fish that's a product of aquaculture?

JACOBS No. We don't handle anything out of aquaculture at this stage but our company owns another company, West Coast Fisheries, which is also owned by Craig Mossen & Company [who] are doing trout for one of the aquaculture companies.

JD Are government regulations, as they apply to your industry and your part of the industry, are they acceptable to you or....?

JACOBS Well the main government regulation that's applied today is if you're in export and you're registered under the Department of Primary Industry (DPI). That's a pretty stringent sort of regulation and once you're under that you have no trouble from other things like Health Departments, local councils etc.

JD Do the other departments accept the DPI's.... ?

JACOBS Oh they still come in but if you're under DPI, you're under inspection the whole time.

JD Do you have a resident inspector?

JACOBS The local inspector now is resident [at] Burnie. He does an area to the west coast, to the north and down in this area. We see him two or three times a week on a regular basis.

JD So they regulations are not particularly irksome?

JACOBS No, no. Not irksome. We have rather good relationships these days with authorities.

JD Does your company do such things as operate a shore based radio?

JACOBS We've operated a shore based radio here for, oh I would say now, probably the last 35 to 40 years. It's been in operation since I've been here. It's been changed two or three times and a few years ago with single side band radio. We put in a base station which is not on the wharf area and can be operated from the factory foreman's residence or from the factory.

JD Could you explain how price to fishermen is determined? It's not auctioned through you is it?

JACOBS No. The price to fishermen as far as Tasmania's concerned is very much.... well it changes day to day virtually in the season. You start off, the season opens and the price [is] probably set for a figure [of] $12.00. Next week it might by $12.50 and so it goes on. It changes with markets. It changes with the dollar very much. I think the tail market in America really controls our market system.

JD So it sort of comes down the line from America as to what the products bring?

JACOBS Based very much on what's been exported. West Australia naturally are the key to the lobster business with the amount they catch and whether they're selling heavily into Japan and Taiwan. Whether they're tailing for the State's market has a big effect on the rest of Australia.

JD Do you gather together supplies for the fishermen? Do they order through you, their bait and fuel and that sort of thing?

JACOBS Years ago that was quite evident when we used to go to the west coast to pick up fish and they'd stay out and fish and get supplies but these days the boats they've all got freezers. They all carry enough supplies for a month at sea so we just don't get much of that at all these days.

JD What about bait?

JACOBS Bait; we carry the supplies of bait all the time. One of the things that's very much evident in the last couple of years has been the mackerel fishery in Tasmania which was mainly started as a meal project and doing food for the fish farming operations but it's become a very, very big market for bait for the lobster fishing.

JD Is there any evidence of reduced catches in the fisheries that you're involved in?

JACOBS Well, as I said before, scallops have been closed for the last two or three years. There is some experimental work going on in scallops now and they say they may be open for a limited season in the next two or three months. Shark has been very up and down. One of the reasons we don't handle the amount of shark we used to before [is because] the fishermen tend to send it to the Melbourne market themselves. That came in with the mercury scare in shark some time ago and they were only allowed to catch gummy shark to be sold in Melbourne. It started the thing, bodies being flown into Melbourne. Fishermen have tended to stay with that. When the market's high they send it themselves. When they can't get a big price for it, they sell it to us.

JD What about crayfish?

JACOBS Lobsters rose up as far as we're concerned in the past, they got to their peak in the early '70s, '71, '72. Then we had other processors come in talking about this area mainly. Our catch rate naturally went down. I don't say that the total went down. We dropped right back and then from the early '80s up till now we've had quite good seasons. The level has gone up again and we're handling what I would say [is] a sort of level catch over the last five or six years.

JD Have the number of people fishing or number of boats operating in this area changed much?

JACOBS Oh yes. The boats have changed from.... When I started there was a lot of small 30 foot wooden vessels. There's nothing of that type fishing now. [there are] Mainly steel boats in the bigger sizes; still some big wooden vessels operating but the size of the boats have changed fairly dramatically and we would now be looking at average between 50 and 65 feet.

JD Quite large vessels. Do you see pollution as a problem?

JACOBS No, not really. We've just recently as everybody's probably aware, we've had our pulp mill debate in Tasmania and it was stopped because of the pollution going into Bass Strait. Personally speaking [of] my time in the fishing industry, we haven't really had a commercial fishery in Bass Straight and I don't think the pollution.... We've had plenty of pollution going into Bass Straight and I don't think it's ever affected the fishing. I can go back to when the acid plant was dumping six miles off Burnie. One particular fisherman, that was his pet shark shot. He still caught sharks there for the years it operated. I don't think they'd have stayed there if there had been a pollution problem.

JD What about litter? Do you ever get any fish that show evidence of bait bands and so on entangled around them?

JACOBS No. We don't see fish like that. As I say, the shark fishing changed complete really over the years. When I first started it was all long line. There was no such thing as a shark net. Then shark nets came in and the older fishermen tended to stay away from it but finally said if you can't beat them, join them. There was problems with net shark in the early days [which had] been left too long and [were an] inferior product but that's changed quite dramatically in the last few years.

JD Talking to the professional fishermen, there's a lot of concern about the catch that the amateurs take and they say sell. Is there evidence of that?

JACOBS Well I think that probably somewhere the Government made a bad mistake in the past when they allowed amateur fishermen to catch ten lobsters a day legally. Now, you know, a lot of those divers can get their ten a day.

JD Do they sell them, do you think?

JACOBS I think they probably do and I think if I was an amateur fisherman I would tend to sell them myself at the price.

JD Yeah. Abalone even more so I presume?

JACOBS Abalone, I don't know whether the amount of abalone one can take, whether that's such a saleable item for an amateur diver but they are allowed [to] get their ten a day and could make a lucrative living if they were operating that way.

JD Yeah. Would you say that the fisheries generally are well managed in Tasmania?

JACOBS I think that the management over the last few years has changed to the extent that fisheries are fed to groups of fishermen whether they be lobster, shark, trawlermen. You form your own operation and come to us with it and we'll go along

with it. I don't agree that that's been the best thing in fisheries over the years. I think some of them have deteriorated through lack of control and I don't mean control where they should be cut back but I don't think it's been in the best interests of the fishery to let some parts of the fishing industry dictate the terms. Lobster fishing I think's been proven itself over the last 25 years. We've never altered our size (our pot limit) and we've had seasons. I think in a system like that we must have a sustainable catch over the years. Just recently they've changed the laws on time. I don't think they should interfere with it at all. You look at the records, they're pretty good.

JD Do the fish processors and fish marketers have representation on the various committees and councils and so on?

JACOBS Fish processors have an organisation called the Exporters Processors Association of which one of their members is a member of TIFC which is the operative body in each state today but I'm afraid that the Tasmanian processors and exporters is in a sad state of affairs at the moment.

JD Why's that?

JACOBS Well there's just lack of meetings. Some people are members and some people are not. It's just gone back in an organisation to what it was five or six years ago.

JD So this part of the fishing industry doesn't speak with a unified voice?

JACOBS No, no. The processors and exporters haven't really had a voice [and] haven't had the impact that they should have in my opinion.

JD Yeah. What do you see as the prospects for the future in fishing generally?

JACOBS Well the future looks reasonably good to me as far as.... As I say the lobster fishing looks really fairly well settled and has done for a number of years. Orange roughy's a very, very sizey new thing and if we look at some parts of it, New Zealand have been catching it for ten years. I did see an article recently where a British organisation did a research and say that they've got no worries with their orange roughy fishery for some years to come. If you look at that and the places we've caught them in Australia, I don't think we've found all the spots where they exist yet. I would say that that's going to be a big future one. Plus government tend to get madly excited over aquaculture. I'm not that keen on it yet. I've seen a lot of aquaculture products. I've read a lot about it in other countries and it takes a lot of getting off the ground. I'm not really saying.... They're saying it'll over-take fishing in the wild by the end of the '90s in the year 2000. That's yet to be proven in my book.

JD Do you think they're doing enough research into the stocks?

JACOBS It's fairly difficult I suppose on a State basis. CSIRO have been the leaders in research and I think it's done a fairly good job with limited funding and things like that. West Australia of course have led the way in research as far as their lobster fishery is concerned and can really predict what's gonna happen a couple of years ahead of time. Tasmania are now into a very heavy tagging programme on their lobsters which they say will start to come forward probably in the next year or two. It's a fairly.... I don't suppose we really know enough about anything. Abalone I think's

been one that's being going for a lot of years now. We probably don't know enough about it.

JD Is there a need for more research into the processing and marketing of various products?

JACOBS I don't believe so. I think when you talk about marketing, marketing research, I think all companies and there's a lot of big companies involved in the business in Australia today and I think all companies that are involved in their own marketing and research.... I really believe that it's pretty well done.

JD Any other comments that you'd like to make Tom before we finish?

JACOBS Oh my only comment is I think the fishing over the last few years has been very good to the fisherman. I think it's gonna continue that way. Anybody that's works hard in the lobster industry, the abalone industry and I think now the trawling industry. I think that probably they'll have some good years ahead.

JD You spent 31 years in this job. How many more years are you going to spend?

JACOBS Well I'm 57. I don't know. I'd like to think I'd retire but I like it. I've liked it the time I've been in it and I don't really think in the near future I'll be changing.

JD You'd stay in Stanley anyway I presume?

JACOBS Oh yes I own a nice bit of farmland up on top of the hill and I don't think I'll be leaving in a hurry [laughs].

JD Right. Well thanks very much. It's been nice to talk to you.

JACOBS Thank you.

That is the end of this interview with Mr John Jacobs, manager of Stanley Fish, fish processors and exporters of Stanley, Tasmania.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

END OF INTERVIEW

Disclaimer

Verbatim transcript of an interview with CECIL LONG

INTRODUCTION

This interview with Cecil Long, commonly known as Dodger Long, was recorded at his home in Stanley, Tasmania on the 26th February, 1990. The recording is part of Murdoch University's oral history of the Australian fishing industry. The interviewer is Jack Darcey.

After Wartime service in the RAAF and without any experience or training in the industry, Mr Long bought a small boat and went fishing. Not unexpectedly he was not immediately successful but with persistence and the help of more experienced fishermen, he ultimately did become a successful rock lobster and long line shark fisherman. He fished the notorious west coast of Tasmania and in parts of his recording tells of men and vessels lost in the area and some of the sea rescues in which he was involved. In this tape Mr Long talks of many aspects of fishing in his day and concludes with a tribute to his wife as he reflects on the effects of fishing as an occupation on family life.

Dodger Long has been retired from professional fishing for twelve years now but still takes a very active part in the community of Stanley, his home port.

TAPE 1 SIDE A

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

LONG My name is Cecil Claude Long. I was born on the 24th November, 1922 at a place called Wynyard in Tasmania on the north west coast of Tasmania.

JD And you're commonly known as Dodger?

LONG Commonly known as Dodger, yes. It goes with the name Long.

JD Dodger Long?

LONG Yeah.

JD Right. Have you lived all your life in this part of Tasmania?

LONG Only since World War Two. I came here in January 1947 in a fishing boat for shelter. It was blowing very hard and I came in for shelter. It hasn't stopped blowing so I've been here ever since.

JD Wynyard is fairly close here though, isn't it?

LONG Yes, yes. That's right, yes. That's right but my father worked on the railway and we moved round Tasmania, you know, all over Tassie until after when the family broke up after the War and I decided to come fishing and this is where I' ve made my port here in Stanley.

JD You went from school into what occupation?

LONG Ah, I was with an auctioneering firm as an auctioneering clerk and at the age of eighteen and a half I joined the RAAF. After serving four and a half years with the RAAF I came back to my pre-war occupation and found that due to the effects of the War I couldn't settle down behind a desk so I decided to go fishing [laughs] but, you know, without any experience; just a thought and away I went.

JD What did you do to get into the fishing industry?

LONG Well deferred pay from the Air Force was 200 pound so I went down to a place, a port in Tasmania called Devonport and bought my first vessel for 150 pounds. That was sixteen foot eight and I called that the Dodger One. In those days of fishing they were catching barracouta and occasionally we were catching edible sharks which is known as flake on the market. So after twelve months and nearly starving at this particular fishery I decided with another chap who was a friend of mine that we had to go bigger. So between us we bought a 41 footer which was known as **the Sand Fly**, that was the name of the vessel. Everybody used to call it, "the Bot Fly, Blow Fly or Maggot" [laughs], associated with the flies. So this vessel was built in 1897. It was built out of New Zealand karri and the planks were the one length from stem to stern so you can just imagine the size of the tree that it was cut out of. It would be fantastic. The ribs of the ship were made out of blackwood and most people have said that blackwood wasn't any good for timbers or ribs of ships but lasted in this particular vessel till I got rid of it for 63 years so it was a pretty good add for it. Tasmania timber of course, that blackwood.

Anyway the gentleman that I went in halves with (in partnership with) in **the Sand Fly**, after the first trip, (he was an ex- Merchant Navy man, he knew a little bit about the sea) he became ill and couldn't carry on. So it was either carry on with the fishing on the boat on my own or buy his interest out or to get out of the fishing game altogether. So anyway I persevered and that's how it all began, from 1946 onwards until I retired in '78.

JD And what were you fishing for in this larger boat?

LONG In the larger boat, mainly for rock lobster (which we call crayfish here but I think the correct terminology is rock lobster) and we had to go to the Three Hummock Islands and beyond; that's about 30 miles west of Stanley. As the time progressed we ventured down the west coast of Tasmania which in those early days was taboo because most of the vessels that had been on the west coast up until that time were sailing vessels and they had to have a fair bit of wind to get around. As you know, wind causes waves and everybody was frightened of it. We had power which made it a lot easier. When the weather conditions were favourable, blowing from the east, the west coast of Tasmania was a pleasant place to be really. So that's what we were after in those days.

Also we used to go for the school shark, getting back to the flake again. We used to catch those not with nets but with hooks. We'd have as many as 1800-2100 hooks to

bait up prior to going out and setting these. 2100 hooks would cover an area of about seven nautical miles, so once you put all these hooks down, irrespective of what was down below to get on the hooks, you were involved for seven or eight hours. That was your day's work, win lose or draw. Sometimes you'd be lucky and sometimes you wouldn't be. We didn't have any sophisticated equipment to pick up shoals of fish in those days.

JD Did you fish for rock lobster for part of the year and then turn over to shark?

LONG Well in this particular area there was, I think about one month of the year in those days, when we couldn't fish for rock lobster all the time. As time progressed and more boats came into the industry they realised they had to have a closed season for the female species so that was usually, oh around about October, November, there used to be a closed season. I understand now there may be four or five months closed season. We could catch, providing the weather was good and we could get to where we wanted to go, we could in those days catch them all the time. Price was terrific in those days. We used to get about six pence a pound a crayfish and three pence a pound for couta and I think about six pence a pound for flake.

JD But you caught a lot of fish, didn't you?

LONG Caught a lot of fish, that's for sure, yes. My word we did, yes. I'll never forget the first trip I ever went on with the bigger boat, the 41 footer, I had a young chap with me on board who was.... We used to pay by the wages and a little incentive on the catch and due to my inexperience we were away for six weeks. During that six weeks I caught six dozen crayfish and when we came back to port I sold those for twenty pounds and his wages was nineteen guineas so I had a shilling for myself and in a whole six weeks [laughs]. That's a fact too.

JD Six weeks at sea?

LONG Six weeks at sea, yes.

JD Was that normal?

LONG Ah, no it wasn't normal I say six weeks at sea with this reservation: We were down at the islands where we could go ashore and during this six weeks' period, through inexperience, I lost a whole fleet of pots and we went ashore and made another fleet during the six weeks. There was a family living on the island, Nichols which were very well known in Stanley for their seafaring activities. They're probably [known as] Ma and Pa Nichols and they were very friendly and they used to give us tins of jam and cabbages and potatoes out of their garden and showed us where the crayfish pots sticks were so we could make the new fleet. All this was due to inexperience when I started off going straight from an office where the sensible thing would have been to have gone with a qualified fisherman for the initial period of twelve months till I found out what was what.

JD Did you get any other assistance from experienced fishermen?

LONG Ah yes. Well one man in particular was Mr Vic Hardy, a much older fishermen or longer in the game than I was at that time. He was a man if he was alive today would be in his '80s. He would be about ten or twelve years older than I am and had been fishing from a boy and he was one of the successful fishermen in Stanley and he took me under his wing. One time when my engine broke down he was with me when the engine failed and I had to get a new one and he said to me, "Dodger" he said, "Tie

that boat up and I'll go and show you how to catch a few" [laughs]. So away we went and first of all with the cray pots and I think within three days he'd caught 80 dozen crayfish. He said, "That's how to catch them boy". Then the next week he said, "OK we'll go sharking". So out we went with the long lines and I think the first day we caught 100 boxes and in those days a box of fish was about 50 pound in weight so that was great. After that I had some idea of what was what and what was happening. Often I'd set crayfish pots on sand wondering why the crays wouldn't get into the pots and I realised after being with him that you had to set them on rock bottom where the crays were.

I'll never forget another time during this period of inexperience when I set 900 shark hooks which was three mile of line and for buoys I used four gallon empty drums (petrol or oil drums) in a place where there's a very strong tide. So the idea was you set the lines and then you would have yourself and another fisherman on board and you'd ask him to keep his eye on the flags you dropped to go back along while the other person cooked the breakfast. It was my turn to cook the breakfast and I said to the other chap, "I'll call you when it's ready". I just started on the breakfast and he said, "Dodger, I can't see those flags". I said, "Well that's a funny thing". I gave him a reciprocal course to steer back on. Anyway we never found them. What had happened, the drums had gone down in the tide and collapsed and we lost the lot. That was inexperience for you [laughs]. It [was] just hopeless.

JD Dodger, the weather is notorious in this part of the world. Is it a problem for you?

LONG Well the main thing to do was to respect the sea and to realise just what could happen. A great guide for weather in Tasmania was getting the reports from Cape Border and Neptune Island in South Australia because in the summer time in particular, what weather they had today, we got tomorrow. So that was a good guide. As far as fishing on the west coast was concerned, easterly winds were ideal because naturally the west coast would be sheltered where in reverse, if you had westerly winds, you got off the west coast. Always at all times I always found that the glass was your bible. Even though you get a met report, they were sitting in an office; didn't matter to them whether it was blowing a gale or whether it wasn't. One of their great terms was "fine elsewhere" but we never ever found "elsewhere" [laughs].

JD And the weather could change quite suddenly, I believe?

LONG Yeah, particularly with the glass low, you were always a bit careful or very careful but a high glass in the summer time, usually the wind would come out of the sou-west and go into the easterly direction. That's what we wanted in order to go after the rock lobster on the west coast. That's mainly where the fishing grounds were because they hadn't been touched over all the years on account of the weather and the sailing ships.

JD Were many vessels lost on that west coast?

LONG Yes. Over the period of time I think we were very fortunate. From memory there were only.... [in] 1958 we lost one cray boat, one fisherman by the name of Don Vickers and one of his crew. We never, ever found [a] trace of those again. Another time during an easterly gale one of our fishing boats was going from Stanley to the fishing grounds on the west coast and the sea was behind him. It was reasonably safe but it was night time and he didn't have radar and he ran into an island and the crew were lost and the boat. The whole thing was wrecked. Another big tragedy was in 1972 at Sandy Cape which is 50 miles down the west coast when one of our local fishermen and his son were drowned and the boat were lost but generally speaking

over a period of 32 years, the fatalities from the local fishermen were reasonably light, I feel, for the occupation we were in.

JD Things have improved a bit in terms of the vessels and the power of the boats and surveying of vessels and that sort of thing, [unclear].

LONG Oh yes, yes and a big thing has been the sophisticated electronic equipment. When we started we didn't have any aids. Echo sounders we didn't have. We didn't have any automatic pilot. We didn't have any radar. We didn't have Statnav which they have now and all these things have made it harder on the crayfish, naturally because you can find them a lot easier; find the grounds anyway easier. You can get around of a night time where it was just like flying by the seat of your pants really in those days. I'll never forget we were out sharking in these early times with a chap I had aboard [who] was rather a nervous gentleman. We left the bay at the Hummock Islands in the dark. We were away fishing all day and came back in the dark again. The the next (following) morning it was too fresh to go again and he looked out [and] he said, "We're in the same place as we were the night before". He said, "How did this happen"? [laughs] He was amazed but you just sort of knew where you were and what have you.

JD Has this increased technology put the resource under pressure, do you think?

LONG Oh yes, definitely, yeah I definitely feel so, yes because in the old days all we had to find out, or to find what the bottom was like for rock lobster. If you can understand, rock lobster live on rock bottom and we used to swing the lead as they did in the old sailing ships for soundings. The lead had a concave in it and you put fat in the concave and when you threw it down, if it was a rocky bottom it'd have an indentation in the fat or whatever you had in it. So if you had 40 pots on board (which was all we were allowed to have), say the first ten pots you'd throw the lead and get sick of it because it was rather [a] tedious business. So the first ten pots would be on the rocky bottom and the other 30'd be on the sand so they wouldn't catch anything, only sea lice or something which was no good to you. The new technology certainly in my opinion, anyway has been hard on the stock.

JD Has the total catch stayed about the same or has it....

LONG Well this I couldn't answer. You'd have to get this from the people who are buying the fish. I couldn't answer that. You'd get that from down there at the co-op or something like that.

JD What about shark, has that stayed fairly stable?

LONG I would say since the introduction of nets, the shark fishery has depleted considerably and I mean considerably. In the old days we used to just use the hooks and a lot of grounds where you fished for shark with hooks, there was a lot of vermin (sea lice and small leather jackets) and you'd no sooner put the hooks over with the bait on it than the bait would be gone. So you more or less had to drop it in the shark's mouth to catch one but now with the nets of course they've got no choice. If they're there they swim into it, they get caught and that's it. I think they have been a detriment to the stocks, the depletion of the stocks, yes. That's for sure.

JD Is there a scale fishery in this area?

LONG Not to a big degree. They have found scale fish over the Continental Shelf, the orange roughy I'm quoting now, but you're getting out offshore onto the edge of the

Shelf. I just don't know. I'm not up on trawling. I don't know what depths but it's over the Continental Shelf and there is a little bit of controversy now about that, whether they're getting these hot spots, whether or not they'll deplete the stocks so quickly or whether there's enough stock to replenish. We don't know. I don't know that. Perhaps the scientists can answer that.

JD That's a deep sea trawl isn't it?

LONG That's a deep sea trawl.

JD There's no inshore....

LONG Well you'll get the odd trumpeter and things like that. Some boats.... There's a boat out of Devonport, the Ritchie brothers, they go for salmon in the bays at times, schools of salmon. They have spotter aircraft and they pick them up in the nets but not a great deal of other fish caught in Tasmania. In the early days there used to be a lot of barracouta caught but they disappeared for some reason which I'm not aware of.

JD What about abalon[e]?

LONG Well I'm not, as I say, I'm not up on the other types of fishery so much but I would image that the stocks would be depleted because they're a static fish in a static area and if you can get at them, naturally you'll deplete them. The thing that would be conserving them would be the size limit and the same applies to rock lobster, is the size. We have a size scale here and I've been after rock lobster in the southern parts of Tasmania where you can get a pot with up to eight or nine dozen rock lobster in it and not one big enough to put in the well and that's a fact. You get hundreds and hundreds of dozens of fish and you've got to throw them back again.

JD Do people go for scallops here still?

LONG I don't think that there were any scallops caught in Tasmania last year because the beds that they did find around Flinders Island have been depleted and raked over to such a degree that they're non-productive any more. There is a scheme going now I believe where they are starting to farm them down the east coast but just how successful this will be I suppose only time will tell, you know.

JD This depletion of stock in fisheries pretty well all round the world is a real problem, isn't it?

LONG Yes I believe so. Well it stands to reason really, doesn't it. I mean a farmer, he goes out and he can plant his seed and get his crop up but as far as the fisheries are concerned, whatever stock's there, and if you take it away, it's not being replenished, is it really?

JD No. It's very fragile isn't it? What about pollution? Has that been a problem in these waters?

LONG As far as we were concerned as rock lobster men, pollution hasn't had any affect at all because where we fish, we're well away from heavy industry and Tasmania is a very lucky part of the world on pollution. We have the odd hot spot but not really to affect fisheries. It may affect them in the river somewhere, I don't know about that.

The Derwent River perhaps and the Tamar but as far as the ocean going species is concerned, I'd say no; very minimal, yeah.

JD During your time in the fishing industry you'd have seen big changes in licensing and management procedures?

LONG Yeah well particularly on the licensing scene. When I first started fishing I could catch any species I wanted to for 24 shillings. That was a complete licence including the boat licence, the particular fishery licence you're engaged in and your crew licence and your boat, everything was for 24 shillings. You know it was great but just what the charges are now.... I've been out the fishing for twelve years. I think they are astronomical really to what we used to have to pay for them.

JD And they're all limited entry fisheries now I believe?

LONG Yes, protected, yeah that's right. A craypot licence now I think (just in Tasmania I'm speaking of).... The last quote that I had, for each pot that you had, it was 4000. I'm sorry, I'm confusing things here. Not the actual licence to get them licensed each year but to purchase a crayfish licence, a 40 pot licence now would cost you $160,000, whereas when I sold my boat in '78 you could get a 40 pot licence for $4000 so I mean that's a terrific escalation just on your pot.

JD That's a sort of a market value [unclear] of a fisherman selling a licence to another person coming into the industry?

LONG That's a market value of the equipment. Yes and this doesn't include the cost of the vessel which would be on top of that. It is restricted in Tasmania to the number of pots in the fishery. So you can't come in with a lot of money and get a great number of pots for a particular boat because the boat itself is restricted to the maximum of 40 pots. Smaller boats get a smaller allocation of that 40.

JD Is that designed to stop the fishery becoming dominated by companies, is it?

LONG Well I think it's more or less to conserve the species and to stop over fishing. I think that the scientists have worked out that it'll stand so many pots or so many units in the fishery and so they've restricted it to whatever number they think's applicable to that end.

JD Dodger, are the fishermen's organisations effective, would you say in dealing with government or negotiating with government?

LONG Well again I can't quote modern times but in our day we did feel that being old fishermen coming in the early days that the Government restrictions were a bloody nuisance because they used to tie our hands. We could go fishing for any specie. We were fishermen. We weren't tied down to a specific fishery. If we got sick of going after lobster we could go after shark. If we got sick of that we could do something else but nowdays it's more specialised. The crayboats are set up in a particular way and the shark boats are set up now for netting. I suppose with everybody coming into the fisheries and seeing the amount of money that could be made, particularly with the American market which was the backstop for the rock lobster industry because no way could Australia absorb all the rock lobster that were caught in Australia. We had to have a backup and that was always the backup, the American market. Their bottom price or their price stabilised the Australian price.

JD If you had your time again would you go fishing?

LONG [pause] I think so but I'd do it differently but only in my time, not in this era because of the cost of going into the industry and the interest rates being what they are at the moment.

JD You've been out of the game now for twelve years?

LONG Yes.

JD You've become a member of the local council?

LONG Yes that's correct, yes. They ran out of people to go on council so....

JD Anything else you'd like to have recorded on this tape?

LONG Well during this twelve year period since I knocked off fishing.... I'd been knocked off fishing for about twelve months and they came along from the local golf club and they said, "We're in a spot down here. We need somebody to take over as manager of the golf club". I said, "OK I'll have a look at it for twelve months for you". So after three years I said "Barley". I said, "I only came down here for twelve months and I have retired" so I got out of that one OK. It was different to fishing, I tell you [laughs].

JD Dodger were you ever involved in any rescues at sea?

LONG Yes periodically we'd be called on to help people in trouble at sea. One I particularly remember because it upset our festivities for the new year. Mum and I were down at the golf club all ready to have a night out and welcome in the new year, about 9.00 o'clock and along come the local senior constable and he said, "Dodger, I want you". I said, "What for"? He said, "Well there's a boat in trouble off the Hummock Islands, about 40 mile out". I said, "Why me"? "Well", he said "Yours was the biggest boat in the dock and I'm a bad sailor, let's go". So there was a couple of other fishermen friends there with me celebrating the evening and they were good enough to come out. What had happened, this fellow was coming across from Victoria. There were two men in the boat, about a 30 foot boat and they had a diesel motor. All that was wrong, they'd run out of petrol or out of diesel I should say.

Fortunately they had aboard a two-way radio which was still operating but the unfortunate part about it, these people radioed early in the morning that they were in trouble and they needed assistance but they didn't know where they were. So the first thing that had to happen, they get in touch with the airway people and they had to send out a plane to locate the boat before we could know where to go and find it. Anyway we goes out there and we were rather proud of this because being dumb fishermen we travelled for about 30 miles out to sea and we weren't really sure of the actual direction but I asked this chap who was in radio contact.... He was out off the Hummock Islands and I said to him, "As it come on to dark, could you see the Hummocks"? and he said, "Yes I could see the three hills". I said, "Was the land joined up"? He said, "No". He said, "The land wasn't joined up. I only saw the three hills". Well that gave me an approximate distance off shore they would be. This was about midnight when I asked these questions and I said, "OK". I said, "At midnight I'll send a flare up. If you can see the flare, give me your reciprocal course to us"; which he did. We were very proud. We altered the course after three hours' steaming three degrees and went right onto him but he was very, very concerned about salvage rights. He made sure that we handed him a rope and he didn't hand us one because I believe in

the old maritime law, if he hands you a rope, that he is liable for salvage but we weren't concerned about salvage, we were more concerned about losing our New Year celebrations. Anyway we towed him in. We got back into harbour at 6.00 o'clock in the morning and he never ever said thank you or anything. We never saw him again.

You get people that'll do these sorts of things and also, I found through the fishing life in Stanley, that people'll get into trouble through silly things. They'd go out in boats....

JD This interview continues on side B of this tape.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

TAPE 1 SIDE B

LONG People'll go out in dinghys with not enough lifesaving equipment aboard, no life jackets and one of the worst things they used to do, as I found, is that you'd get a call to go out and rescue somebody that was drifting off shore. What used to happen, they used to go out with their outboard motors and throw an anchor line over and fish away and then, "Oh well it's time to go in now". The first thing they do is to pull their anchor up and then they find that their motor wouldn't start so by the time that they realise that they were drifting off shore with the wind off shore, they go to put their anchor down, they didn't have enough rope to reach the bottom and they were anything up to two or three mile off shore by the time you got the call. Often they'd be quite a distance off just through silly things that they'd do. All in all over the years, as far as Stanley's concerned, we've had a good run with tragedies and fatalities at sea. It's been good really.

JD Do fishermen, like yourself, who answer these calls for help, you do that out of your own expense?

LONG Yes. In that particular one I mentioned, out off the Hummocks, I did put a bill in for the diesel fuel that we used. I think at that particular time it probably [was] about $10 worth of diesel we used. We didn't charge anything else at all.

JD And you didn't even get thanked for [it]?

LONG Didn't even get thanked for it but we didn't look for it because it was a great esprit de corps amongst fishermen. We helped everybody or anyone in trouble at sea. We used to go to their rescue. We didn't ask any questions. There was only one time that I refused to go to a rescue and that was.... I had a call from the Maritime Rescue Service in Canberra to look for an aircraft (this was at midnight) and I we were anchored at the Three Hummock Islands. They said the plane was down on Trefoil Island which is situated in a very dangerous locality as regards shallow water and being pitch black dark.... I'd only come through this particular area a few hours before and it was quite dangerous for us to come through and there was no way I was going to risk my crew or my vessel at midnight. So I refused to go which was my perogative as skipper of the vessel. We went down next day and fortunately the plane had crashed on Trefoil but everybody was A-OK so that was good.

JD Dodger, fishing's a pretty hazardous occupation and in your case you were at sea for long periods sometimes, what do you think the effect on your family life was?

LONG Well without a good lady as a wife it would be terrible but I was very fortunate that my wife, Pearl, has stuck with me at all times and through thick and thin and whatever our financial position has been, she's been right beside me and I'm very fortunate in that regard. There is one regret I do have, perhaps with the children. Being away so long, irrespective of how good the mother is I think the father.... they do miss out in educating their children, perhaps in the sphere of being more concerned with their education. You don't have the time, you're worried about what you're doing and you're away and mother's got to make all the decisions which is very hard on her. We've been married for 38 years and we've yet to have a cross word. Mother said it's coming and when it does it'll be a beauty [laughter].

JD Did you have sons?

LONG One son, yes.

JD Was he interested in fishing?

LONG No, no. He could have had a boat but he didn't want it. He missed out, yeah.

JD So you sold the boat and licence?

LONG I sold the boat, yes. That's right.

JD And got out altogether?

LONG Yes got out of the industry mainly because the children had grown up and left and I could spend more time at home and time I'd missed out on being at home.

JD Do you do any fishing at all now, even recreational fishing?

LONG Oh I may go out to the river and try and catch a black fish and watch the float bob up and down but I'm mixed up in a lot of things in the town, yes.

JD Well look, thank you very much for this interview. It's been good to talk to you.

LONG I've been talking like a parrot, haven't I [laughter]?

JD That is the end of this interview with Cecil, commonly known as Dodger, Long of Stanley, Tasmania.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW

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Verbatim transcript of an interview with BILL PARKER

INTRODUCTION

In many ways Bill Parker of Triabunna on the east coast of Tasmania tipifies the old time crayfisherman of Tasmania. He is out of the industry now as are his four sons, all of whom fished with him one time or another.

On this tape Mr Parker tells of the difficulties faced by the fishermen of his day, the boats and gear they used, the prices they obtained for their catch and how the catch was transported. He also discussed the decline in catch, predators and pollution and advances in technology. On side B of the tape he speaks of the loss of his brother at sea and recalls some of the personalities he has known in the industry.

The interview was recorded in Triabunna in Mr Parker's home on the 7th March, 1990. It is part of Murdoch University's oral history of the Australian Fishing Industry and the interviewer is Jack Darcey. There are two sides of one tape. The interview starts at 022 on the revolution counter.

TAPE 1 SIDE A

JD Bill would you please record your full name.

PARKER William Henry Parker.

JD Where were you born?

PARKER Dunalley, 1928.

JD Were you brought up in Dunalley?

PARKER Ah we left Dunalley when I was five years of age and [went up] to Triabunna.

JD Have you been at Triabunna since?

PARKER Been here all me life since.

JD Yeah? Was your father a fisherman?

PARKER Yes he was at that stage, working out of Dunalley and oh we didn't think it was a good enough place.... harder to handle fish down there, you know; like a lot of

warm water in the bay and that. You'd have to cough them and that so we moved up here. We thought it was closer to the fishing grounds.

JD What were you fishing for there?

PARKER Crayfish.

JD When did you join the fishing industry?

PARKER Oh, be '1939, I think it was. I got exempt from school; '41 must have been. I was thirteen years of age.

JD That was in the early part of the War, wasn't it?

PARKER [yes] Me brother, Max, he had to go in [the] Army. When he got to Darwin he couldn't seem to get any further so he got out of [the] Army and he bought a fishing boat. I got exempt from school at the time. That's because mates sometimes were pretty hard to get, you know and I went fishing with him then.

JD With your brother?

PARKER With me brother; started off with me brother. Didn't have much power, I think [she had an] eighteen horse Lister engine in the boat. She [was] a 50 footer. He had her for quite a few years.

JD You were acting as deckhand on....

PARKER I was deckhand for him for a few years and then I went on the **Lial-E**, on me dad's boat. Took over running of her.

JD What were you fishing for then - crayfish still?

PARKER Crayfish mainly, yeah and I used to catch a few couta in the winter time when there was nothing else much doing but we'd have to work from here; like the truck only went to town once a week. Had to catch the ferry from Bellerive reef over to Hobart. We was only getting eight and six a score. That was two dozen to a score then like they counted [an] extra four in or something for breakages or dead ones you see. We've always counted two dozen to a score ever since. Well they still do here, a lot of them.

JD They're not still sold by the score, are they?

PARKER No. Sold by the kilo now. Then it was eight and six a score and went up to twelve and six and then perhaps if they weren't too thick in the winter time or anything, they'd put them up to seventeen shillings in July and August. We fished for Casamatti in Hobart for 26 years.

JD They were big fish buyers, weren't they?

PARKER Big fish buyers; had a fish shop. They used to send all their fish mainly to the Sydney markets and that. They had a big place there opposite the dock in town next to Gorringe's wood yard and they used to process them there. I worked there with him sometimes down Casies when we've been going on the slip; take a load through, you know, like give him a hand to do them. Worked right through the day into the night till

you got them finished up. He was a bonzer bloke to fish for, they were. A good name and honest as the sun. Perhaps we would never square up with him for three months. He'd put a bit of money into the bank for us to keep us going [laughs].

JD I believe his widow is still alive?

PARKER Yeah.

JD That's Nita, was it?

PARKER Mm?

JD Nita, was that her name?

PARKER I'm not too sure what her name was now but we used to always have a day with them. He'd come down and pick us up of a Sunday morning, off the slip at Battery Point and take us up to his place up North Hobart; have lunch and he'd take us for a drive somewhere like out round Richmond. He had farms there and Collinsvale and places. He was a champion old fellow. Went deer shooting with him one year. Really enjoyed that.

JD Bill, during the War there was a big demand for shark livers. Were you involved in that?

PARKER Yes. I'd be about the second one. Ratenberry, he started fishing on the Shelf for shark and we started. We used to use about a thousand hooks, twelve hundred hooks. The shark were very good out there, them times. You'd get a tonne, a tonne and a half a shot.

JD That's out of Triabunna?

PARKER Yeah. Go out about fifteen mile, the edge of the Shelf, off Schouten Island, and Maria Island and up towards Bicheno. We got nine pence a pound for shark, five and three pence for the liver. The liver was worth more than the shark at that present time. They used them in aspros or something or oil or something like Nicholas or whatever the crowd was who made aspros and stuff. Then of course some of them started getting a bit greedy. They'd put skate livers in and all like this you see. They could knock things down a bit. We used to have to grade the shark. You got a better price for the snapper livers than what you did for the gummys. There was only two sorts [which] would sell.

After that of course more boats come into it, refrigeration and that. We had no refrigeration. You'd have to go out and have your shot and then back in that day you see. We had a government cannery, owned more freezers round there they built during the War. No refrigeration on boats them times. Hardly thought of ice boxes or anything.

JD Were you in crayfishing before pots were legal in Tasmania?

PARKER No.

JD No, that would have been in your father's time?

PARKER Yeah. He was the first one that started it. They got caught with them [at the] south end of Maria [laughs]. I think they had twelve pots. Jack Challenger, he was the Police inspector at the time. Pretty hard man, old Jack. I remember him alright. They caught them 'cause they weren't legal. You was only allowed rings at the time. Then after a while.... 'cause it got OK'd and they was right then, the pots. We only used to use eighteen pots when I first started. That was enough, like fish were that thick, mainly. We went to 24. We stopped on 24 for years. All pulled by hand. Deep water too. Some of them 30, 40 fathoms; still pulled by hand. Double up on them perhaps at times.

JD How many crew would you be having?

PARKER Mainly three of us and then it got down to only the two, then me boys and then me other brother. We only had three shots a day; day work. Then other times perhaps you'd just [be] working out of your motor dinghy. We had fifteen foot dinghys; like cray boats, a dinghy; worked off the big boat we had. Sometimes we might do a week or a few days and you wouldn't run to all your lines hardly. They'd only be about four or five fathom. You'd get a good go and that's the depth you'd only work. The best shot we had was 22 score [unclear]; a good day them times. Anything over 25, 30 score a day perhaps, you'd load up in three days; home and when you come in perhaps.... Like today, [the] truck wouldn't be going perhaps till the next day you see. Only going to town once a week.

You'd have to unload half your well, put them in pots and hang them over the side. Put a score and a half in a pot; just hang them over under the water a bit to lighten them up in the well. Used to have pieces of apple case, thin pieces stick straight through the neck so they couldn't come out. You'd always used to put them in your good pots, like, so they couldn't get through the sides or anything. Started about, oh half past one in the morning and like tomorrow morning you'd have them bagged up ready for him to load onto the truck straight to town. Nine pence a bag [unclear] freight them times. Didn't leave much out of eight and six score [laughs] after twelve [unclear]; but they were the better days I think. Cigarettes were three pence a packet or something and beer six pence. Enjoyed it better I think, money.

JD Bill, you ultimately bought your own boat. Did you have it built?

PARKER Yes. Dad had the boat built [by] Charlie Lucas at Battery Point. She was built in 1928 [for] 250 pound Hull and Spars launched. All huon pine; huon pine ribs; huon pine planking; the whole lot. It was all huon.

JD Is that the boat you used?

PARKER Yeah, that's the boat I used right through me fishing career, apart from when I fished with Max on the **Coroner Astron**. Well he sold her. She went [to] Port Lincoln.... Ingham I think it was [who] bought her, one of the chicken magnates or something over there. Had a GM in her bought after the War. There was a few kicking around or something in Queensland. It had water through it but being brand new GM, dumped by the Yanks I think (or something) and we got it up in Launceston and rebuilt the gear box up a bit. The motor was alright. The gear box went no troubles afterwards because when he sold it he said, "Oh don't go much on [the] GM in her" but they still had the GM in her when they lost her.

JD She was finally lost?

PARKER Lost at Port Lincoln, yeah. They reckon they busted her but there was a few doubts about it I think. [They] tell me there was a bit of drug running and all this going on over that area at the time.

JD The weather's a problem, isn't it, in parts of Tasmania, anyway (Tasmanian waters)?

PARKER Yeah. This year, oh not so bad on the east coast. Once you get north of Tasmans Island and then you seem to get a different pattern of wind and weather till you get to Eddistone and then it's different up there because it'd draw through the Straits and might draw there for a fortnight all the one way, like south east or something; funnel through. On the south coast or the west coast too your prevailing westerlies, sou-wests, like, that's a lot of it. Then you get up towards Strahan and then you sort of run out of the worst part of it again I think. I've never fished past Maatsyker Island meself but what you can hear, what the other fellows saying, what you hear on the radio and that. The weather seems to be.... It's a different sort of weather.

When we used to go round there the best time was between Christmas, January and February. That was the best weather for round there but all weather's changed, patterns have changed and everything like to what it was.

JD There aren't too many safe anchorages in that part of Tasmania, are there?

PARKER No, not round on the coast, round that way there are. Up here's not too bad. You might have to travel an hour for an anchorage. Mainly about an hour I suppose from when you're craying. You're pretty right then.

JD Do they still lose many boats?

PARKER No. Gee we haven't lost one now up this coast or anywhere for years I don't think. I can't remember it. Course there was plenty of kelp about then too. There was tonnes of it before the kelp factory got going. They used to get a terrific lot of kelp. Had the factory over here at Louisville and some of them blamed them for the fish going off, for the kelp sort of gone off where they.... [unclear] where they haven't even cut the kelp. Then a lot of the sea urchins have got very thick. They reckon they're cleaning the bottom up pretty bad, like the crown of thorns is doing to the Barrier Reef. Course the kelp was one of the best things that'd hold a trumpeter and hold all the shrimps and spawn and everything and it'd grow out, oh hundreds of yards off the shore. Thick as anything and you could clean the bottom of the boat off; all weed or anything. Just had to lay in the kelp for a couple of hours and she'd come out like a shiney bit of glass. Do her good.

I think that's a lot to do with the fishing, especially on the coast here. The net stuff, like trumpeter and that, they're getting pretty scarce now. Then they set in and they go again but you get a lot of nets after them, like weekenders and that. Runabouts are getting like Holden cars now, there's plenty of them about [laughs]. Everyone's got one. You can't blame them. It's good relaxation. They enjoy it, have a bit of fun 'cause you've got so many good places to go to here on the coast; Maria and all the Schouten Island and beautiful places; good beaches.

JD Do you reckon the catches have gone down over the years?

PARKER Yeah, definitely gone down. Oh well 'cause when we came in we was the only boat fishing out of here for a while. Used to get a few boats in the winter time'd come

up from Hobart on the couta run. Like couta wouldn't start till after Easter. They'd catch them for Ross Trevor, for the Orchard and plough them in, two pound a tonne [unclear] Orchard. It was a few years before any cray boats came, [unclear] get about but you can notice them going down; even when I fished for Luke Wright & Son for a while and we had crayfish even floating in the well. We didn't know much about it and we'd put a new hauler in and pull them too fast off the nuggets in about 40 fathom. They'd float in the well. I think we busted their liver or done something to them and when they cooked them [their] tails went black. We lost a terrible lot out of them.

I think that's a thing that's happened nowdays. It's a bigger rat race I suppose; getting your gear up quick and getting it in again. Always been my idea we could have been pulling them too fast; give the fish the bends I think, the same as what a diver gets or something. There's a possibility in it. We done that with the scallops off Scamander [pause] when we was up there. Like they'd blow off a tray nearly with a bit of a breeze out of shore a bit; big four wheel drive diffs and gear boxes on the winches. They have them back into third gear and bring them up. I had a lot to do with it because fish wouldn't keep either not like it used to be out here like Coles Bay stuff, Oyster Bay. Fish would last a couple of days in a bag as lively as anything but up there, no they'd chuck her in quick. [unclear].

Now no one catches any bait, even on the crays. Nearly all frozen bait. You don't know whether it's the ammonia in the freezing or anything [which] could have some affect on the fish. Hasn't been proven. You've got to take all this into account. Single pot them and double pot them and you'd travel from pot to pot. One bloke would be cleaning his pot out, like your deckie, he's cleaning your pot out as you're steaming up and you steam up and pull the next pot and throwing them over the side. There's a terrible lot getting cut up by the propeller. I've seen them come out like mincemeat when you go astern. That happens all the time. That brings more octopus on the cray grounds, sharks' things and whatever they pull them in on the grounds, starfish and everything. We've noticed the starfish set in a lot worse than the shark. If you get a shark, he's no good for anything else, he's just all gristle and stuff. We call him a nurse but a grey looking thing with a big head and [unclear] and spot. They're getting pretty thick around the cray grounds and places, plus the ockeys. This year they tell me its been one of the worst years they've had for octopus, like talking to the local blokes fishing out of here. Said they've been very bad.

JD They don't market the octopus?

PARKER No, they don't seem to bother with them. He had some of them oh, they might save them for some of the boys that are doing a bit of drop line fishing or shark fishing so they use them for bait. About the only thing they use them for I think.

JD Bill were you in crayfishing when they started exporting the tails to America and the prices went up and up and up? Must have been a pretty exciting time for crayfishermen?

PARKER Yeah it was.... Well it was a good price. I never had much faith in it meself though 'cause dad never. He maintained, he said once you lose your Sydney market it's hard to get back in again and we was competing against South Australia and Western Australia. If they got a good bumper year there, you'd see them knocking Tassie about with their handling and freight I s'pose. We always liked to maintain our local markets like Sydney and Melbourne. It's when it's open on the 15th October (I think), give us a bit of a break for a couple of weeks like. You had your Melbourne Cup week coming up, was a good week for Melbourne, like get rid of a few crays. All the merchants seemed to. Now of course when I went to the.... start the 1st November

now, like the season opens you see, they're missing out on a good fortnight's catching. They could practically handle them nearly all in Melbourne, that sort of thing. [unclear]. A good time of the year for them too with salads and stuff starting, like in spring. I can get [unclear] on it too.

JD Bill, do you think chemical pollution's a problem in the waters in Tasmania?

PARKER Oh I think it's got a lot to do with it. Even in the channel area like carbide works and all that was going there, I think. When the scallops used to be thick in the channel.... Oh I don't know, we only had a few years there, three or four years meself I s'pose. I heard them say years ago if they had the snow, like on Mt Wellington and the hills beyond, it's a better year for the scallops, like they get the run off with the fresh water. Fresh water does something [for the] fish. If you get a good year on the land, it's mainly a pretty good year on the water. We've always took notice, like if you get the rains, it seems to help something. I don't know if it's oxygen it brings down with it or.... It helps the fish, my word it does; crays and everything. We always said that. When you get run off from these big rivers and that, she does good.

We never noticed the pollution so much about here see, we haven't got that much going. I don't think it lasted, oh a year or two with the algae played up in the bay locally. They were using about 500 gallons of sulphuric acid a day, all going into the water here. You couldn't swim in it. It'd sting the eyes of the kids and turned the rocks black. Now I don't know how I'd go with a fish meal. It's a good thing for the township and industry but they're putting a fair bit too much in the bay here for my liking. These new factories ought to be.... Well of course they're having teething troubles I suppose. Once they get going, give them three months they might be able to handle it better but I'm not too sure of it myself. Even the fish stocks. Years ago we would [unclear] and get out the whales that killed out the couta industry and everything. We'd like to see the whales about. We reckon if the whales'd come back, the couta would come back. In six years we'd never see a couta on the east coast here. Whether it's just the cycle or what hit them....

JD They're starting to come back, they tell me.

PARKER Oh yeah last three or four years they've been good. My word they have. I went six years before I sold the boat. I never even caught a couta, like and they were always out and about up here and about but even the boys down Fortescue or down off the Neck. Maybe there just wasn't any about. Might be like the blue fin. They reckoned they were all gone till a year ago or something and they started to come back a bit. They're getting a few. They'll never come back to the quantity like they used to be; no way, never.

JD Do they go for tuna round these parts?

PARKER No well now I don't think they're allowed to catch them for any quantity, only for a bit of charter work or something, what I could follow of it.

JD Bill your sons went fishing with you, didn't they, for a while?

PARKER Yeah. I've had the lot of them. All four of them have been fishing with me.

JD And they've all gone out of the industry?

PARKER Um, yeah [unclear]. We had my eldest bloke fishing with me up to ten years or more I suppose, about fifteen years. Another one come along and he went with me. They've scattered up around the place. A couple of them work at the chip factory. Another one up at Boya. Another one driving a fuel tanker. One's in the Forestry, a pretty good job there. Oh they've had some good mates about here, like some of the boys and young blokes. There's some young blokes about now'd make good mates. My word they would. It's a good game to get into too, good clean air. Can't beat it [unclear].

JD A bit difficult for a young bloke to start off and get his own boat nowdays is it?

PARKER Yeah, well [the] price you've got to go into it and it's getting worse, I think, the game. You've either got to get in big, have a plunge now I think to make a go of it. They don't seem to be catering for the smaller boats like they were.

JD Licences are very expensive to buy aren't they?

PARKER Yeah; too dear now.

JD This interview continues on side B of this tape.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

TAPE 1 SIDE B

JD We were talking about the difficulties of young men starting off in fishing now and hoping to get their own boat. What about the advances in technology? The boats they have now have got all sorts of electronic gear on, haven't they?

PARKER Yes she's certainly gone out there now. The old fish, she hasn't got much chance [laughs] with all this electronic gear and that, you know, like what had come out when we started. All we had was a fishing line and you had to feel the bottom with a lump of lead and a piece of fat in the bottom of it; like it would dent the bottom of the fat you see and you can tell whether you was on sand or rocky bottom for crayfishing. Normally in deep water when you put a line down you was always catching red gurnard. If we caught a gurnard or something like that you knew you was on the rock bottom. Then you got used to it; you could practically set the edge of the bottom in some places, 30 fathom and that. You took more notice I think then than what you do now. You just look into the wheel house and you've got your coloured sounder going [and] you can see everything. A marvellous invention, radar whatever you want. She's all there.

JD Have the pots changed much?

PARKER No. Still making the same. Oh they use a bit different timber at times, pencil wood. That's one that's got a pink strip down the middle, up out of the stick, dogwood, tea tree, like melaleuca or tea tree, pear wood; sticks of about fourteen foot and eighteen foot, some of them. Have a day out in the bush and get them. Get a permit off the Forestry here, like for so many. 'Cause that's helped us out a lot getting sticks too with all these new roads they've got in. One time hunting for them [would] take you a day. You'd be carrying them out.... a full day to go and get three or four

hundred sticks. Now you go and get a couple of thousand in two or three hours like, sort of [unclear].

JD Do the pots have escape gaps?

PARKER Yeah. Don't know how long they've been in, eight or ten years I suppose. Talking about making them bigger now I think. They're gonna make a bigger gap or put two in I think round the bottom. I don't know whether it makes any difference to them or not. I think if you put the bait in the fish are still gonna stop there. Some places you might work, a lot of the pots, the size between your sticks was nearly as big as a gap. They could go out if they want to, you know, or we always reckoned they would.

JD Bill, you've given up full time fishing now, haven't you? How do you fill your time in?

PARKER Oh pottering around here at home and mess around with some of these other blokes. I was going to do a bit of shelf fishing with an old bloke here, used to go to shelf [unclear], drop a line now and again. I've got me own dinghy. Go out and get a feed of flathead; grab a pot. Day seems to go. I fill the day in alright.... gardening....

JD Have you got a licence?

PARKER No not a commercial licence. No I'm only licensed, a runabout licence now.

JD You do have a beautiful garden. You must be a keen gardener?

PARKER Yeah. The TV puts a bit of time in too I suppose, special when the cricket and that's on. I like that, the sport; anything on the sport I'm pretty keen watching that.

JD Bill if you had your time again would you go fishing?

PARKER My word I would. Yeah wouldn't hesitate and I'd do the same things I suppose over and over again. Had a few close calls. Got washed ashore a couple of times. Dinghys are filled, can't swim a stroke but I think nine out of ten can't swim, fishermen at any rate. Quite a few of them couldn't.

JD You lost a brother at sea, didn't you?

PARKER Yes. Keith drowned at Black Rocks, north of Port Davey. Just a freak wave come out of the blue. They seem to pop up every now and again anywhere. You don't know where you're gonna get them, on a barway or Eagle Hook Neck[?] used to be a good place for them to [unclear]. It was noted [unclear]. On a calm day one would pop up. I think that's what's happened down there. The weather was pretty good when they was working there but just got a freak one I think.

JD They were working out of a dinghy?

PARKER Yeah, sixteen foot motor dinghy; had a Simplex in it. Pretty good motors they were like for a cray dinghy. They used to go alright. We had them in our dinghys, invincible[?]. [laughs] During the War there we had a [unclear] five gallons a month had to do us, like we had a motor dinghy. We never ever had petrol coupons, you see. We didn't wake up. Sort of after about twenty we never had any for our old jalopy then to run around with, us young blokes. Would have to mix a bit of petrol, a bit of

diesel [laughs]. The smoke would come out of her a bit but she'd go alright; old 28 Dodge.

JD Bill there's a lot of characters in fishing? You'd have known a lot of them?

PARKER Yes. Oh yes. Old Ratenbery. He only died last year, I think, Harold Rat. He'd be 86 or something, 87. Another bloke here, old Tommy Norris, a good old bloke. Real great. Good times with them. One night on the beer with him and you'd never knock off laughing or anything. Jokes would come up [unclear]. Oh you'd still pull your pots and put something in it and fill it up with spuds and books or something, cans and bottles now. [unclear]. Them times though you'd be up the Schoutens Islands and you wouldn't see anyone perhaps for four or five days. Hardly any boats would be out. All friendly and always come past you and say, "I'll be back in a couple of days, [do] you want anything bringing back, a bit of fresh bread, bit of meat".

We had no fridge then to keep anything in. You'd hang it up in the rigging or a bit of corned beef hanging in the well in a bag keeper. Otherwise we'd rely on tinned stuff; make a stew out of it; do anything with it. Main thing was I think, as long as you had your spuds. They were a good backstop; spuds and onions. When the chap [unclear], fellow by the name Athol Cook, he lived on the Schouten Island there for years running about 800 sheep. Had a beautiful garden. We'd take his stores up and his mail. Oh he'd grow stacks of onions and they were as hard as rocks. They'd keep all the year round. He'd kill a beast up there and we'd bring it down; pick up the morning we was coming back down for the butcher over here. He'd kill it the day before and put him up in quarters, in chaff bags and he'd bale us up and we'd bring it down for him you see, some for the butcher.

We always took the mail up not unless.... Well when we wasn't fishing the barge used to take the food. Used to go up, timber from St Helen's Town, [unclear]. Beautiful barge, the **Lena**. There's a photo in the bar of the pub over here. Worth having a look at her. I think [unclear] at St Helen's wharf. Old Ern Ford had her for years. I used to take the mail up if he wasn't going to make it during the winter. The young bloke, he went in the Navy. He used to catch a few crays. We'd bring them down for him too, you know, bit of pocket money for him. We'd give him the old pots and that or something. He'd have seven or eight pots there in them times. Catch a few cray, a few [unclear]. We'd bring them down, send them down to Cassies. He'd take them all.

JD Anything else you'd like to put on this tape before we finish?

PARKER No, I don't think so.

JD OK then. Thanks very much for this interview Bill. It's been nice to talk to you.

PARKER Right oh Jack.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW

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Verbatim transcript of an interview with KEN PETITH

INTRODUCTION

Ken Petith started abalone diving in the early days of the industry when equipment was primitive and the fishery was uncontrolled and unorganised. Although he has now been retired for some four years, in this interview he gives an insight into the equipment, methods and hazards of diving as they were and in some respects still are. He also discusses management and marketing techniques that apply in the industry in Tasmania. Licences, quotas, processing and marketing as well as poaching and agriculture are dealt with.

The interview was recorded in Mr Petith's home in Hobart on 5 March 1990 for Murdoch University's Oral History of the Australian Fishing Industry. The interviewer is Jack Darcey. There are two sides of one tape. The interview starts at 021 on the revolution counter.

TAPE 1 SIDE A

JD Ken, would you record your full name and date and place of birth please?

PETITH The name is Kenneth Joseph Petith, 28.11.40, Waratah, New South Wales.

JD You were brought up in New South Wales presumably?

PETITH Yes, my father was a police officer and mainly up until the age of 21 I spent all my time in Sydney, central Sydney.

JD When you left school what type of employment did you go into?

PETITH I matriculated in 1958 and I went to University which interfered with my diving sport and [laughs] I then went [to] various jobs from truck driving to labouring and ended up driving taxis because it gave a flexibility that I wanted to go diving; and that's where I became associated with commercial abalone diving and sea urchins at the same time.

JD That was in Sydney?

PETITH In Sydney from Sydney, yes, and we'd dive as far north as Port Stephens or as far south as Eden in the Victorian border in any one line at the long weekend... go north or south.

JD So you came into the industry first of all on a part time basis is that right?

PETITH Yes. We used to catch... Get the abalone and sea urchins and bring them back to Sydney and sell them round the Chinese restaurants, round the Haymarket.

JD Do I understand you say you'd sold the sea urchins?

PETITH Yes the sea urchins were in places far more prolific than the abalone and just to remove the [unclear] from the shell we use to make it... The target was a square Eta peanut butter jar full and that would be about 2 kilos I suppose, and a bin of abalone would be oh, 50 kilos and that would pay for the weekend's expenses.

JD When did you go abalone diving full time?

PETITH June 1964 in Hobart, from Hobart.

JD You moved over from Sydney down here to Hobart?

PETITH Yes. One of the people I went diving with was an ex Navy diver who worked for Peter Warner of the Asta Electronics Company and they had the McSimmons Sports Store in Sydney and he was [unclear] diving counter. He had left the Navy and he said that Peter wanted people to go down to go diving in Tasmania off various boats that Warner owned here at the time, the **Asta**, the **Just David** and a couple of the fishing boats, and Bern Cutbert[?] was working as Manager for a fish factory in which he had an interest I believe, and Bern was managing his fleet of boats for him. That's how I got into it.

JD Ken, would you outline the methods that you used and the gear that you used in those days?

PETITH The methods and gear by today's standards would appear quite, not to say laughable, the ... Initially there was so little money in it for us that we dived without compressed air using snorkels, but abalone was so prolific that there was no problem in earning a living doing it that way. But then when we did start to use compressed air a lot of people used aqualung tanks which were somewhat of a logistics problem getting the air... enough time out of them and refilling them and we started using compressors on the surface and hoses and the amount of difficulties involved in the hoses that were available... We were buying hose from CIG that sank, tangled up in weed and we had to put little buoys on it so it would float. The compressors were converted air paint spraying compressors and not entirely reliable. One of the... Without wishing to give a commercial but one of the things that revolutionised the diving industry was the introduction of the Honda motor - they seem to work under the most adverse conditions whereas others although they were excellent motors on shore, they just couldn't take the salt air.

The boats we dived from were whatever we could beg, borrow or steal from relatives or from fishermen who weren't using them and very poor for the job. Like an 18 foot wooden cray dinghy with a 5 horse power petrol simplex motor in it doesn't really hold very many people or cart very many abalone and when abalone are only 5 pence a pound, you need to get a lot of them to make any money. The suits that we wore were suitable for New South Wales or much warmer water than here and hypothermia was something which every diver would suffer daily, they'd come out of the water blue and have to sort of warm up so that we usually dived in teams of 3 or 4 with one person on the surface probably rowing around this great heavy cray dinghy whilst ... and that warmed him up while the other three dived and the catch would be split between the three.

Abalone irons, or the instruments used to remove them from the rocks were made sometimes.... Dad was a farmer, had a apple orchard he'd make it in the shed out of a bit of a car spring. Now of course, they're all stainless steel and remade but it was a ... from every aspect it was developmental down to that, such minor details as that. It wasn't until we approached the Nylex Company and demanded a hose that would float on the surface of the water. But we had to stop using water hose, garden hose because garden hose at least would float on the surface although it wasn't very safe if some people have tried at times to get it the cheapest, cheapest they possibly could and bought it from Coles or Woolworths. Although I'm not attacking the quality for the price, it didn't suit the purpose and you'd end up on a hot day.... on a cold day it was alright, but on a hot day you'd end up with a series of what looked like a long row of green sausages on the surface of the water.

JD Kinks in it?

PETITH Not just kinks no, there would be sections that would be worn and they'd expand with the air pressure and, of course, we didn't have the valving and pressure control systems that are just commonplace today and that probably.... Instead of having 70 or 80 pounds per square inch pressure in them there'd be 120, 150 so the hose you'd bought on the Friday and used over the weekend would be thrown away. But there were several companies that then started to bring out a hose that floated and was a yellow colour so it was quite visible to other vessels. In the early days of diving there were quite a few potential accidents where fishing boats would just drive over the hose and wind her up in their propellors because it was ineffective gear. But the boats that we could use... People would get somebody's uncle's half cabin runabout with its converted Morris petrol engine in it or Ford Prefect or whatever and the inevitable fires, breakdowns, very much a developmental industry with no... Nobody ever thought that you could make a lot of money. One fisherman, Larry Markey, who's now involved in the orange ruffy fishery in a big way, he offered me a job as a deckhand because I... on his crayboat at the time because I would have made a lot more money than I'd make diving so we were in a... very much the poor relative of the fishing industry. If you walked into the bank and asked for $75 I asked for, for a loan to put a new short motor in a FB Holden Utility and the bank manager was very sceptical that I could possibly pay it back.

JD Things are different nowadays aren't they?

PETITH Well things are different nowadays, I'm not saying they were the good old days or the bad old days or that there's anything wrong with today its just that they certainly are different. The bank manager nowadays would tend to roll out the red carpet although I fail to see why, seeing that of the 125 abalone licences presently issued, less than 20 are actually owned by the divers that are working them.

JD Who are they owned by then?

PETITH They're all owned by factories. One factory in particular owning almost 30 and the economic common sense of that I fail to see. I don't think that any factory or any manufacturer should be allowed to have full vertical integration because it gives them far too much power over the fishery.

JD The licences are held in the name of the diver but in fact are owned by the factories?

PETITH Yeah, it's a mere technicality, the diver's so tied up with contracts instead of getting the $300,000 plus which a licence is capable of earning. They'll be lucky to get

$50,000 and I'm quite sure $50,000 isn't enough to dive for. It's not the sort of industry where you want to earn wages but some people like it, the lifestyle and the kudos, the reputation they get and they're willing to do it.

JD To come back to equipment Ken, in the early days did you have a problem of exhaust gases from the engine driving the compressor going down to the diver?

PETITH We had lots of problems at that stage. Most of us who did it managed to do it properly. I was lucky, Peter Warner, who I spoke of before, paid for my first compressor and we made quite sure that it had a remote exhaust... A remote exhaust and a remote on a flexible hose and that it had a remote air intake for the compressor which was up in the air - some 3 to 6 feet above the compressor itself so you've separated the gases as much as possible but there were the one or two deaths that have been caused through diving equipment failure that had been in the diving industry and I'd like to stress that it's, in my opinion, been a very safe industry despite the somewhat higgledy-piggledy nature of people entering it and regulations and all the rest of it. The two people who did die were as a result of equipment malfunction which they couldn't have stopped because they were diving alone and they perhaps shouldn't have done that, but then you couldn't afford to hire a deckhand at that stage anyhow. You either had to do it by yourself and in any case, our statement at that stage used to be, "what's the deckhand there for anyhow, he's only there to bring the body back".

JD In present day diving in Tasmania, do they dive in pairs or single divers?

PETITH Single divers. It's always... Some may dive from a boat with another person but I couldn't say with any accuracy what they do in the past couple of years; but it's always been the one diver, and the deckhand above following the diver gives you the opportunity to cover the bottom and keep what's there for yourself rather than compete rather inefficiently with some things. It's inefficient to have somebody else on board who's going to be.... It used to be fairly common in the early days when people would get competitive. There would be3 or 4 of us diving from the one boat on perhaps 100 metres of hose each and they'd start leap frogging each other. They'd come up to him and then they'd leap frog him because he might have found a thicker patch of abalone so they'd leap frog him and it's basically inefficient. The best idea is to go to the end of the hose in the opposite direction and if there's none there then to come back and do it and move the boat.

Although there were no really suitable pieces of equipment such as wet suits of sufficient thickness and a design that would keep you warmer, at the time nobody went in for techniques such as hot water circulation or anything like that because the technology was too expensive and couldn't be afforded. It just gradually evolved into a bib and brace overall type pants and a top suit with hood attached, of probably twice as thick as a normal sport diving suit because there were times for instance when I can remember working on the Kathleen [unclear] (Bern Cutbert's) and we started before 8am in the morning and we were still in the water at 8.30pm that night. Bern would go round in a dinghy and pick up abalone, bags of abalone in ex fertilizer, hessian fertilizer bags they were, and he'd pick the bags up out of a truck inner tube floating on the surface with a net suspended from it and we... In the summer that was bearable and you were working so hard that you provided the heat and we certainly used to eat to make up for it. The amount of food consumed was something incredible you know. None of us got fat, lets put it that way, we got thinner and thinner but certainly in later times with the introduction of dry suits and better constructed

modern suits with their full bib and brace, that type of equipment has improved enormously and has made life far more comfortable.

JD Do you use oxygen?

PETITH Oxygen is a no no for compressed air diving although it's an aid to recompression and it's one reason why I left the abalone industry. I could see that the diving was becoming deeper and deeper and I always said that if I ever had to recompress that I would leave the industry because the risk was far too great to... The rewards weren't there, not paying at the same rate they are paying salvage divers on oil rigs with the conditions and the back up that's there. There's no back up here, if you get into a serious situation on the west coast of Tasmania and the weather just happens to crack up and become bad, there's no rescue opportunity available, there's absolutely none. There's so few harbours and air strips and if the weather does come in bad a helicopter is useless so you're risking your life and limb, but there are others that may disagree with me. People do it I know but it's...I just put that as a [unclear] When we started to.... in the early 80's when people started to dive deeper it meant that they were top guns and they were always getting the big catches. There are a number of people who suffered very serious accidents which were life threatening and their injuries will go with them; for the rest of their lives they will never walk properly. A number of people who failed to take note of this within the industry are suffering bone necrosis which, if they had talked to anybody who had a hip replacement or arthritis, they'd never had done, but people whose elbow joints, knee joints, hip joints are just a chalky mass and they can hardly walk.

JD Ken, were you ever bent?

PETITH Well, I'd never... I suppose the result of being intensely interested in diving as a sport and reading everything I could find about it and studying every basic law of physics and chemistry that covered the behaviour of gases under pressure from the sort of, not fanatical, but the intense interest that a lot of people get with a hobby. A lot of people who started diving in the early days knew this and because of their own sort of interest but a lot of people who saw and liked the lifestyle and thought that diving was easy would... Often an ex deckhand and they would let him dive and show him how to do it and train him up a bit, they would have very little knowledge of it and a lot of people were bent. Probably the goad of greed is... Probably it's a bit unfair but to go that little bit deeper to get the ones you could see much further down and sometimes people would lose track of depth and time but surprisingly few people really were. But still enough to annoy the doctors at the Royal Hobart Hospital who were in charge of the recompression chamber and that promoted a series of lectures at the hospital on diving safety which improved things considerably. But nowadays I've noticed that and, again I'm not criticising them because they're doing it now and they're the new blokes, I just offer the observation that if you've got to dive then carry an oxygen bottle so that you increase the.... [correction] or rather decrease the lack of risk involved in recompression. I wonder if it wouldn't be better to choose some other method or to go some other place and find some abalone in a shallower area because the risks involved are very great.

I don't know that it is currently the position, but up until 12 months ago there were, you could see, on a lot of larger diving boats, large oxygen cylinders and most people think that.... when they think of diving they think of oxygen but it's not, its compressed air. That's the difference, you've got to make the difference, and oxygen merely flushes the nitrogen out of the system quicker if you breathe pure oxygen but it can only be done down at the depths of 30 feet and if you... even then people might do it for twelve months and suffer no ill effects but they might do it the very next day

and black out because there is no regular performance with it. People's reaction to the oxygen may change without warning, that's the last medical opinion that I heard, [laughs] it may be a different one now.

JD Before licence is issued to an abalone diver does the person making application have to show evidence that he has been through some sort of training?

PETITH No. It's a rather vexed question. I suppose training is rather a good idea, there are numerous courses and groups that do it accredited to various organisations but I think that the general safety record of the abalone industry compared with the diving industry in Australia in general, including the armed forces, the Navy's record would be very poor compared with the Tasmanian abalone diving industry. They've killed far more people and had far more accidents. Friends that I had in Sydney are in the Navy diving scheme at HMAS Rushcutter, I think what they did to them was criminal negligence. So, I don't know that a training scheme as such does that much for it, the only test that there is, is that they must pass [a] medical but a medical's a medical and it doesn't prove anything really as any doctor will tell you; you can walk out of the surgery and collapse from a heart attack five seconds later and a lot of them I think.... If a person was suffering some illness which was life threatening there would be no way that they could enforce taking a licence away from a person or refusing to issue it and there's no way they would. They wouldn't have the bottle to do it because if you have a licence worth $1,000,000 and someone tells you you can't do it, you're going to go and do it whether they like it or not.

JD The licences of course are transferrable aren't they?

PETITH Yes, transferrable absolutely and intermittently and in any way they feel like because it's supposed to be something you've got to keep for 3 years but anybody can produce a medical certificate. I can go tomorrow to any doctor and say my back hurts and let them prove otherwise.

JD Turning to the marketing and quotas and that sort of thing. There is a quota system operates is there in Tasmania?

PETITH The quota systems varied slightly over the past few years, we tried to introduce this many years ago and at the stage when we introduced the Professional Fishermen's Association of Tasmania had restricted the number of licences to 120.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

TAPE 1 SIDE B

JD Ken, would you like to comment on the management of the fishery?

PETITH Well initially the management was non existent and it required a great deal of effort on the part of individual abalone divers. Unfortunately not in a concerted fashion until a group of us joined the Professional Fishermen's Association of Tasmania, which was then the sole representative of the fishing industry in Tasmania and it was a [plank?] of both political parties that that was so. At that stage we managed.... Would have started in 1966 and it ended up in 1969 where we managed to get them to restrict the number of licences to 120. Now this was done against some quite vigorous opposition by certain of the bureaucrats running the industry. They said it didn't need it, it was against free enterprise, all sorts of stuff like that, but the general impression

I had, the fishing resources are State property and it belongs to the people and should be preserved as such.

We managed to convince them that there were too many people doing it and it would lead to over-fishing and the collapse of the industry. Management at that time vigorously opposed it and you've already spoken of the name of one person but I won't mention the name on the tape. He opposed it very strongly but we managed to get it in and at the same time we also wanted quotas - but that was a little too revolutionary for the times because California had gone from 2,700 tonnes production and within 2 years it had dropped to 600 tonnes because in the land of free enterprise, the land of the free and home of the brave, anybody is allowed to do what they feel like doing as long as its legal. That allowed anybody to do it and it became so over-exported that it did collapse to that nature and to the best of my knowledge it was not blamed on anything else like pollution, or over-fishing. It was over-fishing entirely that did it and we wanted to stop it here.

The problem being that abalone spawn in response, it's thought, to water temperatures and the population density on the bottom has to be right, and once the lava float around they then grow a shell and sink to the bottom and they fossick around until they find the slime trail, that's of course realising that an abalone is actually an underwater snail. They follow the slime trail and the mature abalone back to the accretions, the groups or the patches as people call them, and if there aren't sufficient adult abalone on the bottom, they die. This was something that was put forward to the Fisheries Department at the time and they refused to accept it and yet their own research, completed 2 years ago, proved it happens just the same in Tasmania. Luckily I think that they probably have brought in enough restrictions early enough for it not to collapse like other fisheries have done in the State. I don't believe there is any danger in the crayfish industry for instance, there is just so many of them spread over such a wide area. The abalone being exploited throughout their main depth ranges by a larger number of people without a quota could quite possibly reduce the population density on the bottom to such an extent that it would not have been replaced and it could have done a California type collapse. But probably, if they stick to their quotas and don't operate outside them, they probably will continue on ad infinitum until the effect of farming is felt. Abalone farming that is.

JD Is there evidence of much poaching in Tasmania?

PETITH I don't think there's as much poaching as people say there is. There are a number of people who do it, more or less as a full time [laughs] occupation, but I don't think that the amount that they take is a dangerous thing. The islands north of Flinders perhaps are prone to poaching from Victoria but then again, it's an area if there are abalone there, it's not the fault of the Fisheries Department it's the fault of the divers in the State for not working it. I mean it serves them right if somebody else takes them, and they take size fish and if it's not over-fished I don't think it really matters. If a poacher doesn't adversely affect the population then what really is wrong with it is that's illegal. I think there is, this is probably quite controversial, there's as many illegal abalone taken by the licensed abalone divers as there are by poachers.

JD Taking more than their quota?

PETITH Taking more than their quota. It's the same in any fishing industry. I've heard the crayfish industry complain for years about poachers and yet I've seen the overwhelming majority of crayfishermen will eat undersized crayfish on their boats, will take undersized crayfish home for their friends and relatives. That's not necessarily threatening, I'm not saying that in any derogatory, moralistic fashion. It doesn't

necessarily adversely affect the population of fish themselves. The fish will survive that. There is probably more damage done to the fishery by mishandling on boats. For instance in the cray industry by knocking the crayfish around, roughly handling them and in the abalone industry by bringing them to the surface, measuring them and then throwing them over the side. Although now I don't know of any organised or large scale poaching at some stages, at one stage there was a very well known Eden trawler went to Babel Island and cleaned it out, splitting the abalone out of the shell when it was illegal in Tasmania and because every abalone in Tasmania has to be brought ashore alive and in the shell. They were spitting them out, freezing them and taking them back to Eden. That sort of thing is very bad for the industry but it's amazing how well it recovers if it doesn't go on for a long period and presently I don't know of any large scale poaching at all.

The people who do do it that are well known for it, seem to have been caught enough times to slow them down somewhat. But my information may not be up to date, I have after all been out of the industry for 4 years but to the best of my knowledge, no, poaching is not the problem it's just a catch phrase. It's something that they whinge and complain about, but I would suggest that a lot them should put their own houses in order. One particular gentleman who was active in the administration of the abalone industry through [unclear] yet I know that for 2 years he dived illegally, taking undersized fish because I saw him do it personally, underwater, yet he was most vociferous about these terrible poachers. I wonder how much his poaching hurt the industry.

JD There's a market for undersized fish is there?

PETITH Well when a fish is worth $20 a kilo and you get approximately a third recovery which means it's $60 a kilo flesh weight. I'm sure there must be umpteen places that would like to pay you $40 a kilo for flesh weight and there used to be, I don't know if it still applies, there were premium on some small abalone for various reasons, but I don't think it applies any more. The market for something that is worth that sort of money has obviously got to be there.

JD Most of our market is overseas is it not?

PETITH Most of it. Mostly to Japan. There are dribs and drabs go all over the place, I'm not up with it at the moment, but Singapore, Hong Kong, California, Germany even. All over the place. One thing I could criticise the fish buyers for. I can remember being in a meeting between divers and fish buyers in the current fisheries building with their top salesman who had just come back from Japan. We were being paid $4 a kilo and they dropped the price to $3.50, $3.30, something like that, and we were suggesting we were being underpaid and he made the prophecy, "Oh they'll never go past $5.00". Well within 2 years they were $20 so I will suggest that their marketing expertise is somewhat lacking.

JD Is it the price is so high because they're in short supply?

PETITH The reason the price is so high is that they're in short supply all over the world. Various fisheries have collapsed - South Africa. Japans' live fishery is, despite their very, very stringent controls, very shaky to the best of my knowledge. Again, at the moment it is sometime since I kept up with all this. The actual culturing of abalone is a lot slower than say oysters or scallops and the feeding of them is the problem. To get the feed for instance, at the moment in Tasmania, I believe the re-growth of weed has been so slow that they are finding it very difficult to harvest it and they're having to work out a synthetic, not synthetic, but some kind of manufactured feed for them

and they have done that. Unfortunately there are blue stripes all over the shell but then again that might turn out to be a blessing in disguise. The shell might be worth more money, who knows.

JD Tasmania's very much to the fore in agriculture of abalone isn't it?

PETITH I don't know too much to the fore. I think it's probably the place where it's most organised. People have been talking about it on the mainland long before it was actually done here but I wouldn't like to comment on it, I just believe that historically the commercial aqua-culture of any species leads to the decline of the wild fishery and I believe that's quite possible to happen here but the market is a little more complicated and perhaps it won't happen, certainly not over a short space of time.

JD Ken, when you left abalone diving you went into the crayfishing industry did you?

PETITH That's correct, yes.

JD Are you still in it?

PETITH No I sold the boat. I can without making a political statement, claim to be a victim of the interest rates. Plus a number of disastrous breakdowns, plus the fact that I think after 30 years I'd had enough of being away from home. Some people like it, it's their lifestyle, they've done it all their lives but I could never stand sitting around in harbours waiting for 4 or 5 days for the weather to improve and then continuing the fishing, to make a trip which would last from anything from 14 days to 28 days so it was too much of a shock for me to suddenly have to be away. Instead of being away for 3, 4 or 5 days at the outside in abalone, to go to crayfishing and find that you had to be away for 4 weeks and I don't think that I was quite cut out for it. It was probably a bad move to go into it but I did it to try and keep the lifestyle but avoid the diving but it didn't work out that way.

JD So you're out of fishing altogether now?

PETITH Altogether. I make the statement that if anybody sees me going to buy a fishing boat and if it's any bigger than a 14 footer, I give them permission to take me up to New Norfolk and have me certified.

JD Just before we finish, is there anything else you'd like to have recorded on this tape?

PETITH There are probably lots of things I'll think of once you're gone. Mainly that it was an industry that was started and developed almost entirely (and I don't think I'm being inaccurate or unfair to fish factories), but almost entirely by the push of the people that were doing the diving. The factories themselves were less than expert in discovering a market, marketing it and selling it. In fact, most of the stop go nature of the fishery which led to our being poor one minute and rich the next in the first 15 years of the industry, I believe in no small part [was] due to very, very poor processing, very, very poor handling in all respects. At one stage for example, the Fisheries Department in conjunction with Bern Cutberts I believe, sent abalone to Japan alive and at that stage we would have achieved about four times the price that we could get from a fish factory after paying transport, insurance, and all sorts of costs that were involved in the packing which had to be just expert. The Japanese being very particular about the sort of packaging and fair enough, they were paying a very high price for the product and it should have been presented like it had just come out of the ocean. Now this was done and it wasn't I think... It would have been at least

5 years before any fish factory took it up and followed it through and even now I don't believe they are doing it enough.

JD There is a live export market?

PETITH Well, there was the last time I heard but again you know, I've divorced myself from it entirely. To be approached by somebody saying, "Oh abalone licences are a million dollars, by jeeze I bet you're sorry you sold yours", well I try to divorce myself from that sort of thing entirely because it bears about as much relevance to me as somebody winning Tats for a million dollars. I mean what does it matter, but its something I didn't want to hear about so I kept right away from that side of it. It's strange to relate that you seem to think you had friends within the industry but once you weren't doing it well you weren't part of it so they seem to drop away gradually. I'm not offering any criticism of the people or saying that there's anything bad about it, I'm just saying it seems to be a fact of life that you lose contact with the people because you're no longer involved in it. When you are involved in it you see it every day. At one stage, every diver in the State before it got to the 120 level, when there were probably only 30 of us at the most doing it full time, we all knew each other. Friends, wives, relatives knew each other well but that sort of thing has changed now, of course.

JD Well, right. Thank you very much for this interview, it's been very, very interesting.

PETITH I hope so [laughs]. I don't know that I've covered all the facts or whether it gives the real history do you?

JD Well it's certainly interesting. It gives an understanding of the industry in Tasmania that not everybody has, and certainly I don't. Thank you.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW

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Verbatim transcript of an interview with REG ROBERTS

INTRODUCTION

Reg Roberts has a very wide experience indeed in many aspects of fishing in Tasmania. Born 75 years ago he entered the fishing industry after various other employments. He was instrumental in establishing the Tasmanian Fishermen's Co-Operative and was its managing director for some years. He was also the president and secretary of the Professional Fishermen's Association and at the same time was prominent in the fish processing industry, a measure of the trust he enjoyed in fishing. He also had first hand experience in fish retailing, frozen food distribution as well as cold storage and transportation. All this, in addition to operating fishing boats out of all Tasmanian ports and for all available species.

In this interview Mr Roberts deals with some of the changes he has seen taking place in the industry and with problems such as declining stocks in some fisheries, hazards at sea and changing weather patterns. Reg Roberts is a dedicated fisherman and an astute business man. He has a wide ranging knowledge of the sea and of the Tasmanian fisheries. He makes a valuable contribution to this history of the Australian fishing industry.

The interview was recorded by Jack Darcey for Murdoch University at Mr Roberts' home in Hobart on the 3rd March, 1990. There are two sides of one tape. The interview starts at 022 on the revolution counter.

TAPE 1 SIDE A

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

ROBERTS Reginald Maxwell Paul Roberts. I was born at Sanford in south eastern Tasmania on the 15th May, 1915.

JD And have you lived in Tasmania all your life?

ROBERTS Yes. I've lived in Tasmania all my life.

JD Did you come from a fishing family?

ROBERTS No I didn't come from a fishing family. I came from a farming family really.

JD Well how did you come to go into fishing?

ROBERTS Because water always had a fascination for me even as a toddler. I had the misfortune when I was about three of falling in a pond and being stripped by my

sisters while my clothes dried so as that my mother wouldn't find out. That was my first taste of water.

JD When did you start fishing then?

ROBERTS Well I went through many, or quite a lot of industries before I got to fishing but I always had this fascination to be back on the water all my life. I started in fishing in 1950.

JD So what are some of the other things you'd done before entering fishing?

ROBERTS Well I did a little bit of farming when I was very young. From there I went into the timber industry. From the timber industry I went into heavy transport, contracting for the Hydro Electric Commission; carted a lot of logs and steel and things for the dams that were built up in the central highlands. When that finished was when I got the opportunity to go fishing. Maybe it was a big misfortune for the person concerned because he'd just had a boat built, a chap by the name of Rex Peck which a lot of fishermen would remember. He had the boat in the dock in Hobart, she'd just been launched and they were down there fitting the motor and tuning it. He had the misfortune to be killed on the way back home at Campletown and that was how I came to really go into the fishing in a fairly big way. I had been in some smaller boats before that.

JD Did you actually go in as the skipper or owner or....

ROBERTS Well I started off actually in what we called a cray dinghy, cray dinghy fishing which was single handed. In those days you carried as many pots as you could stack on the boat. There was no licence governing the number of pots. From that I went into a little 23 footer which was again more or less single handed but I did have several fishermen with me: a chap named Roy Higgs and another one, David Fehre who fished with me at odd times in that boat when we were doing certain work, particularly crayfishing because it made it much easier to haul pots and this sort of thing.

From there I went into a boat called the **Shirley Ann** which I earlier said was built for Rex Peck. It was built entirely of pine, the hull was built entirely of huon pine. It was very heavily constructed and it was built by one of the best boat builders in Tasmania, a chap called Neil Drake who you've probably come across in your travels.

JD What size vessel was it?

ROBERTS Ah she was 33 feet with [a] twelve foot beam and the draft, five foot six.

JD What sort of fishery did you use her for?

ROBERTS Well I fished crayfish, scallops, shark, oysters, did a bit of salmon fishing and that's about it.

JD That covers a fairly wide range of fisheries, doesn't it? [laughs]

ROBERTS Yes. I fished in most fisheries that were going at that stage where you could make a bit of money out of it. I worked the boat as a business which probably a lot of fishermen didn't like because they liked to have their two or three months a year off but I felt that it was a business so I took the cream of each fishery at the height of

its season. I went into it at the beginning of the season as it tapered off. I then went onto another fishery.

JD So there was no sort of limited entry to any of these fisheries at the time?

ROBERTS No. All you had to do was have the various licences which entitled you to fish some of the fisheries, your ordinary fishermen's licence covered the lot of them.

JD How long did you continue as a sort of a hands on fisherman?

ROBERTS Um, can't recall exactly but probably six, seven years, something like that. I qualified as a skipper, a radio operator and a diesel engineer. Then was when we formed the co-operative. I felt at the time that the fishermen weren't getting a true price for their fish and I approached the Government to finance a co-operative. I more or less steered that Bill through both Houses of Parliament with the Members of Parliament. I was there available to them the whole time the Bill was being read through every phase, first, second and third stages. Then I went through the Legislative Council which is our upper house as you probably know and I sat in on committees there and they cross questioned me and so on. They financed the co-op. It was called the Eastern Tasmania Fishermen's Co-Operative because it started off in Triabunna in the south east.

JD Did it have branches in other ports?

ROBERTS As it went along we had fishermen all over this island. We finished up with, from memory, somewhere about 200 odd fishermen were members of it.

JD And was it called the Tasmanian Fishermen's Co-Op?

ROBERTS It was never ever known as anything else but the Eastern Tasmania Fishermen's Co-Op.

JD What was your role when it was up and running?

ROBERTS I was managing director.

JD So you came ashore to do that?

ROBERTS I came ashore then.

JD You were for how long then involved in the Co-Op, approximately?

ROBERTS About four years I'd say.

JD Did you hand over to someone after those....

ROBERTS No. I had a huge disagreement with the Board because they wanted to do things which in my opinion were uneconomic and unbusinesslike and I could see it would be the undoing of the Co-Operative. I gave them a forecast that if they carried on as they were it would fold within three years. I resigned on the spot because they insisted on going ahead with the policies they wanted. Within three years the Co-Operative had gone broke.

JD And some other....

ROBERTS And SAFCOL came in and bought the installations then, well, had them almost given to them by the Government.

JD The Government still had an influence in it?

ROBERTS Well the Government was still backing the Co-Operative when it folded.

JD Must have been a sad day for you?

ROBERTS It was but I could see it and I've always been a realist and I don't think it's any good, you know, sort of crying over spilt milk. What's happened's happened and what can you do about it? You can't undo it.

JD You were also very much involved in the professional fishermen's organisations Reg, weren't you?

ROBERTS Yes well when I first went into the fishing I always believed because again going back to when I was in the timber industry, we had a very strong union in the timber industry and I believed that you should belong to any organisation of an industry that you were working in. When I joined the Fishermen's Association it was probably at its lowest ebb. I could see that there was only one way to go and that was to join it and if I could, get it back on its feet with the help of quite a good few other really good people who only wanted direction. They only wanted pointing in the right direction.

JD And you became the secretary first?

ROBERTS I became the president first and I carried on that for a number of years and then the secretary of the Fishermen's Association, a chap named Willis, he had a disagreement with the committee and resigned and he was a fulltime professional accountant and secretary and the Association couldn't afford really to pay them the salary he was getting. I took on the job as secretary and I did it for nothing just for the love of it. They paid the postage and that was all they paid.

JD You continued in that capacity for some years?

ROBERTS Oh about eight years, yes. I had about eight years there. I actually had a unique experience in that because I suppose there wouldn't be anybody else in Australia that has been a fish processor and the secretary of a fishermen's organisation at the same time. I carried those two titles for about three years.

JD So you were the secretary and president of the Professional Fishermen's Association....

ROBERTS I was secretary only at that time.

JD But you were also a fish processor?

ROBERTS I was chairman of the Fish Processors' Association.

JD That's a fairly unusual sort of an arrangement, is it not?

ROBERTS Yes. Well I was quite pleased with it because I felt, well for me to be able to do it, the fishermen must have had a lot of confidence and in my integrity too to know that I would do both jobs and do it fairly. I was made a life member of the Fishermen's Association when I retired as secretary on the 25th September, 1968.

JD Were you processing on your own account or for someone else?

ROBERTS Well at first, well I was processing for the Fishermen's Association and then I was processing with two partners from Melbourne. We had two factories. They were bought out by W. Angliss & Company and they took me over with the installations as their State manager and they spread all over the State.

JD So you were with them for some years?

ROBERTS I was with them for about four years. You went on a contract with Angliss. They are a very good company in many ways. I found them an excellent company to deal with. They knew exactly what they wanted and they told you what they wanted. There was no frills. You did what they wanted or else but you were on a five year contract and at the end of each five years your contract was renewed.

JD Reg you were telling me a little while ago before we started recording that you also had a fish shop?

ROBERTS Yes, that's true. While I was working for W. Angliss & Company there was a well known fish shop in Hobart named Casimates. They'd been here since, oh somewhere about the early 1900s, might have even been the late 1890s and it was still going and they were retiring. They leased the shop out to a few fellows who made a real mess of it and I could see, if I could persuade W. Angliss & Company to take the shop on, they'd have a very lucrative outlet. They didn't want to get mixed up in a retail outlet so I approached the managing director for Australia, Angliss, to have my term terminated early with them (term of employment terminated early) and explained to them why because I felt it was a golden opportunity to go ahead and do the thing on my own. Mr Hall who was the Australasian manager at that time, he was a very nice gentleman. He wrote me a very nice letter back and said he felt that they couldn't hold me back and they would continue to draw on my knowledge if I was willing if they required it and on those conditions they would release me, which they did. So there was a couple of Greek boys who I'd had a lot of dealings with and one in particular was a very, very good chap. They came in with me in the fish shop because I knew nothing whatsoever about running a fish shop and both of them, one fellow in particular, had done nothing else but fish shops ever since he'd been in Tasmania and he came here just after the War so he had good knowledge; [a] good fellow.

I stayed in that with them and one thing leads to another with all these things. I could then see that there was a golden opportunity for distributing the frozen product, the fresh and frozen product to all the hotels, restaurants, shops and so on. So I decided to have a go. I talked to them. They weren't terribly keen on going that way so I said to them, "Right O. Well if you don't want to have a go, if you like I'll buy out your share in the shop and I'll go it alone and you can come and work for me if you like" which they agreed they'd do but I'd only been going about three months and one of the fellows wanted to buy the fish shop so I sold that off to him and just concentrated on the frozen food side. I went through on that frozen foods, like frozen fish and

naturally one thing gathers another and I was in ice-cream, vegetables, you name it, I handled the whole lot.

In fact I was sole distributor for McCains who no doubt you've heard of, the potato people and vegetable people. I did all those. I did Cottees distributing and quite a few of the big companies like that I did. Then in the ice cream side we got into Coles and Woolworths; their own brands we carried it because we had very good cold stores. I built modern cold stores when I started. They were capable of freezing lower than anything else in Tasmania at that time. We could freeze down to minus 40 degrees in four and a half hours so this was why we gathered a lot of these agencies. I carried on that until I retired. The reason the business didn't carry on was mainly because none of the family were interested. My son's a principal of a school and I've got two daughters and their husbands have got jobs and they weren't interested in the frozen foods so I couldn't sell it for the price I wanted so I just wound the business up and shut it down and I sold the premises.

JD So you've seen fishing and other forms of food distribution and so on from pretty well every angle, haven't you?

ROBERTS Yes, yes.

JD Fisherman, processor, retailer.

ROBERTS I've even processed the fish; filleted; cooked crayfish....

JD Done it your own....

ROBERTS Done it myself with my own hands, yes.

JD There wouldn't be too many people that could match that sort of background of experience?

ROBERTS I suppose there wouldn't really. Most people go into a job and they just do one section or the other but again I believe when you go into a job, the fellow that sweeps the factory floor is just as important to you as the fellow that does all the cheque writing and everything else and administration because without a good chap to clean up the factory, well you haven't got a factory anyway. So I believe and this is where Angliss gave me a lot of help while I was with them.... They believed exactly like I did. The company, the parent company in England, used to send people out to train in all phases of every industry that they were involved in and they came out as what they call cadetships.

JD So that by the time they got into a managerial role they know the business from all points of view?

ROBERTS Yes. Their present Director of Fish in London worked under me at the factory at Dover.

JD You'd have seen a lot of changes in all these different aspects of fishing, wouldn't you?

ROBERTS Yes. Seen a lot of changes. I've had a lot of arguments with the Government. I've fought Government tooth and nail on different regulations. When they brought in what we called the sputnik dredge, (I don't know whether you've

heard of it or not) but it's a tooth dredge. I fought that tooth and nail because I told them that it couldn't do anything else but destroy the fishery in the D'Entrecasteaux Channel and sure enough it did. We lost our fishery there and that fishery used to produce about 500 tonnes of flesh weight of fish annually.

JD There's no fishery there in....

ROBERTS No fishery. They've re-seeded it and it's starting to come back I believe now but I don't think we'll ever see the day where it used to naturally reproduce like it did because again you've got a lot of industries in the area and a certain amount of pollution and I don't think you'll get the nice clean, clear water that the fish like to live in.

JD Reg what would be the other problems? You mentioned in passing a moment ago pollution. Is that a major problem in Tasmanian waters?

ROBERTS Not really, not in my opinion. It is in some of the closed waters like the Upper Derwent and Tamar and these areas where all your big industries are pouring rubbish in. Well once you get out round the coast, well you've got the best water in the world really 'cause you've got nothing between us and the South Pole. You've got nothing until you get to South Africa and you've got nothing till you get to South America really, only New Zealand which is not very big and so you've got beautiful clear oceans all around you.

JD Do you think the stock, other than the ones you've mentioned, have gone down in the catch?

ROBERTS Oh undoubtedly. This was where I used to argue with the Government and I didn't argue just on my own knowledge. I used to get knowledge from scientists and leading people that I would talk to and they would give me reproduction figures of what size of fish would start to reproduce and all this sort of thing. This is what I base my arguments on.

JD Did they listen to you, do you think?

ROBERTS They listened but they didn't do anything about it because like most Governments they do what they want to do according to the way the vote is going to go. This is the problem we've got in Australia today.

JD So you feel the stocks are being depleted in....

ROBERTS Oh undoubtedly because you take a crayfish, the minimal size for a female crayfish was four inches, or four and a quarter I think when we first started, and when you're talking on a crayfish, it carries millions of eggs. Now you reduce the size of it, it can't carry as many. You get down in the breeding to the size where they're just starting to be able to reproduce where when you've got a larger size you've got more fish that are producing more spawn. It's just logic as far as I'm concerned. I always felt they should have went the other way, kept a lot of the bigger stock, raised the size of the females in particular and still kept the males at about the four and a quarter inch it was in those days because that was well clear of again the reproduction, when they could produce, they could fertilise the eggs. Well if you don't keep these two things going, you know.

The other thing what a lot of people don't realise is that the spawn of the crayfish when they're first hatched come to the surface of the water and if there's not enough kelp and all this sort of thing, they're prey to all the fish, the bird life and all this sort of thing. So if you haven't got huge quantities of spawn in the cray industry being reproduced, you're gonna get a fall in industry.

JD That seems to be whats happening, do you think?

ROBERTS Yes, that's what's happened. This has happened with most of our fishery. The shark fishery, they reduced the size. We used to have a tremendous shark fishery. They reduced the permissible size down and down and down so that you weren't getting the reproduction. This has happened in most of our fisheries unfortunately. Some of the scientists now I think have been listening too and as you know we're re-seeding a lot of areas and this sort of thing. All I can say is I hope to goodness it's successful.

JD Reg let's go back to when you were actually fishing yourself. You'd have seen lots and lots of changes in methods and boats and gear and areas fished and so on, wouldn't you?

ROBERTS That's very true. My earliest recollections actually before I started fishing professionally are all the fishing for crayfish were done in what we call cray rings. Then the craypot became legalised and that was used but when you went fishing for crays in those days you had to either have local knowledge of the area where there was a hard bottom which the crays lived on or you had a lead weight on a long line which you sounded with and in the bottom of the lead was a hollow and you filled that with fat. You'd let that down and when you pulled it up it'd tell you whether there was rocks or whether there was sand or shell or what, you were in so this was how you found out what sort of bottom you were on.

Then of course the next event was the echo sounder. I had the second one that was fitted to a boat in Tasmania by AWA. That was a Kelvin Hughes , an English sounder and that was a tremendous asset, a tremendous asset. Again I felt that that could come to the stage like in a lot of modern technology they can cause over fishing because you find areas where you didn't know existed, you take those fish from that area and of course where they would have normally been left undisturbed and went on for years producing, you've taken them.

JD So one of the factors in this depletion of stock is the increase in technology [unclear]?

ROBERTS Well that's helped tremendously. No doubt about that. The same when we fished for shark. We didn't have a clue where the Continental Shelf was. Well when I say we didn't have a clue, we steamed for so many hours depending on what area we were in and then we used to do the same thing. We used to have a long line and we'd let that down to a hundred fathoms and if we couldn't find bottom with it we knew we were over the Shelf.

JD 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 the changes in methods of fishing and that sort of thing. What about the areas you fished in Reg?

ROBERTS Well my own port was really Triabunna but I fished out of every port in Tasmania. I fished the entire coastline right round and I did this again with an idea that I've always had, if you do something, do it properly; find out all you can about anything and then you know where to go and when you should go.

JD These waters are notoriously dangerous, aren't they?

ROBERTS Yes they are. You've got to be very careful. This is one of the things that people don't realise, the power of the sea. It can just toss you round like a little cork and you've got no control at all if you don't watch it. You've got to get weather wise, watch your barometer and listen to your weather reports and mainly use your common sense because you can see a lot of this weather coming when you're working. You should always allow yourself time to get out. Lots of area in those days when I was fishing, you could almost step ashore so if you were caught, you'd finish up on the rocks.

The most interesting place I fished I suppose was our west coast because that was notorious for weather. It was really bad. It seems to have changed to me over the years because a lot of boats work it now and work at times when we had no hope of working. We would never have, for instance, left cray gear down over night because you couldn't rely on the weather being alright the next morning and your gear could be gone or tide could have it down. The tide would run so fast that your floats on your lines would be below the surface and you couldn't see them. You'd wait days sometimes to get them and you couldn't always do that on the west coast because if the weather came in bad, you might have a week's weather and by that time all your gear would finish up on the shore or something.

JD So is it better technology; better boats, better gear, better aids that have [unclear]?

ROBERTS I think the main thing is there must have been a huge change in the weather pattern on our west coast because there's no way they could fish it. Even with the huge boats they wouldn't be able to fish it because you couldn't get your gear. I could be standing say 500 yards away from an 80 foot vessel and I'd lose sight of his mast in the swell. No wind, just huge swells coming in.

JD You get these enormous waves come up out of even a calm sea in those parts too I believe?

ROBERTS Yes. Well one night I was coming down from a place called Low Rocky Point on the west coast. It was a pitch black night. There was a very fine mist, sea mist and the sea was dead calm and I had an inside and outside compass and I had an inside wheel and an outside wheel on the wheelhouse. It was such that I was on the outside wheel and I was coming down and I suppose I was half-way between Low Rocky and Port Davey and before I knew anything I was standing in water up to my chest. A wave came behind us and just came aboard with no warning and it was gone and then the sea was flat calm again. It was just one of those things. There must have been an erruption under the sea or something caused it 'cause there was still just this very light mist there and there's no wind to shift anything.

JD And it came from astern?

ROBERTS It came in over the stern of us.

JD It's probably fortunate that you weren't [unclear]

ROBERTS Very fortunate really. It must have come down, straight down our coast but I've struck some very, very bad weather. I've had a half inch chain, I suppose about half a tonne of it, up in the chain locker in the foreward end and I've seen that come down through the boat from bow to stern. A wave would hit you and come straight down [the] flush decks. I've seen that come right down and finish up round the wheel house. Oh you can have some experiences, real experiences.

JD Yes, indeed. Coming to your processing days, you'd have seen changes there too I imagine?

ROBERTS Oh there's been a lot of changes there. I think through the years the main thing that we used to emphasise to everybody was, catch your fish, get them ashore as quickly as you can or have a freezer or ice box aboard and put them immediately they're caught into that. Now that was the major thing because it didn't matter what factory handled your fish, if the fish weren't in good condition when you arrived, you couldn't put the condition back in them. They're only as good as when you received them at the wharf and one of the things that we did speed up was the handling of the fish from the boats. We speeded that up, got the fish into the factories, got them filleted or cooked or whatever it was as quickly as possible. Then of course on the freezing we built bigger freezers the tunnel freezers (what we call tunnels). They were a blast tunnel with winds blowing through them at say something like 40 or 50 miles an hour and they froze the product very, very quickly.

These are the things that have been going on all the years and you found that when you're filleting, once it was a solid block then you started putting a layer pack in (what we called a layer pack). So you laid a poleythene sheet between each layer of fillets so that they become then what was termed a shatter pack. Somebody wanted to get two or three fillets out to cook, he could take them out. This is the sort of thing that went on.

We used planes one time. All our fish used to go to the mainland as deck cargo in insulated boxes. Then we got freezer ships and then we used to fly it direct to the mainland markets.

JD And now it's flown all over the world isn't it?

ROBERTS Now it goes all over the world, yes. I can remember when we had six DC3s land at Hobart airport within about two hours and took full loads away. Angliss went by air to Melbourne and went by refrigerated transport to Sydney.

JD If you had your time again would you go fishing?

ROBERTS Would I ever. I'd go. I'd have a boat now if it wasn't for my wife [laughs]. It'd worry her too much. I love the water. I still love the water and I keep away from boats and all this sort of thing now because immediately I get round the boats I get a real urge to get aboard. It's one of those things that you can't help.

JD How are you filling in your time in retirement Reg?

ROBERTS Well I just wonder how I ever had time to go to work. Right at this time I'm building a golf course. As I told you earlier, I was born at Sandford and I was approached by two people at Sandford because they knew I'd been involved in some of my spare time years ago in building a couple of small golf courses and they asked me if I would be interested in designing a golf course and building it at South Arm. That's what I'm [doing] right at this moment and it'll be unique. It will be the only golf course that I know of, a nine holed golf course that'll have a six par on it. It will be the only golf course that'll have pure pencross seed in it because most golf courses have got areas in Australia of what we call poanna and that's a native grass and it seeds when it's only about half an inch high and they can't get it out. It doesn't occur on the land at South Arm. So we'll be quite unique down there in many ways.

JD I wish you well with it and thank you very much for this interview. It's been great to talk to you.

ROBERTS Yes well I'm pleased I've been able to talk to you. There's lots of things I could tell you about bird life, whales, things that you looked for when you were fishing. You could get an indication if you were after salmon for instance, you could tell by the bird life where the salmon were working 'cause they forced the small fish to the surface. Same with couta and that sort of thing. There's lots of techniques you learn, but I was very fortunate that there's a chap that I got to know very well. He's dead now, God bless him, but I suppose he really gave me more knowledge in my early days of fishing and helped me than anybody.

JD Did you fish with him or....

ROBERTS No, no. He had his own boat and the same as me but he used to talk of a night, we'd lay in the one anchorage and we'd go aboard and we'd talk and he'd say, "Oh well, look I think you ought to try that area tomorrow and see how you go there and if you're not catching as well, use a different type bait" and all this sort of thing and "alter your skewers in your pots to different angles". The skewer is what you pin your bait into the neck of the pot with. We didn't use these boat containers like they use now. They were just a wooden skewer and you skewered it in on an angle in the pot neck.

Oh it was a great life because the few moments you had when you'd finished fishing, the way I fished, you were flat out getting your boat ready for the new season, making new pots and new gear and all this sort of thing, hanging shark lines and nets and all this sort of thing.

JD Course you did a mixture of fishing, didn't you?

ROBERTS Yes, yeah.

JD It wasn't just the one fishery.

ROBERTS A lot of fishermen only fished the one fish. A lot of them just fished crayfish. A lot of them, it was pure[ly] and simply cray boats. A lot of them were just pure couta boats.

JD But you did all of them?

ROBERTS Yes and a lot of them did perhaps a little bit on crays and then they waited till the scallop season and that was all they did. I fished the lot. I wanted to know what it was all about.

JD Reg, anything else you'd like to put on this tape?

ROBERTS [pause] Not that I can think of really. I think we've covered a pretty fair area.

JD Yeah. Well again, thank you.

ROBERTS But if there's anything you [want to] know at any time, if you feel after you've gone through it, which no doubt you will, you think you'd like me to expand on it, you send me a note. I'll put it on tape for you and send it over to you.

JD Thank you and good luck to you.

ROBERTS Thank you.

JD That is the end of this interview with Mr Reg Roberts of Tasmania.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW

Disclaimer

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Verbatim transcript of an interview with PETER ROCKLIFF

INTRODUCTION

This interview with Mr Peter Rockliff of Devonport, Tasmania, is part of Murdoch University's oral history of the Australian Fishing Industry. It was recorded in Mr Rockliff's office in Devonport by Jack Darcey on the 8th March, 1990.

Peter Rockliff has been involved in fishing since leaving school. He and his wife, Una, together with their children and their spouses, have built up a large and highly successful family business which catchs, processes, markets and exports fish and fish products of many sorts. They were pioneers in the lucrative orange roughy fishery and currently operate two deep sea trawlers seeking that species.

Other fisheries they have been involved in over the years are barracouta, flathead, shark, crayfish and scallops. They have been innovative in trawler design and operation and also product marketing and packaging and presentation. In this account Peter Rockliff pays tribute to his family, particularly to his wife, Una. Together they provide an example of what can be achieved in the Australian fisheries by effort, co-operation and sound management.

There is one side of one tape. The interview starts at 022 on the revolution counter.

TAPE 1 SIDE A

JD Peter can I ask you to record your full name and date and place of birth please.

ROCKLIFF Peter George Rockliff. I was born at Latrobe in 1931.

JD Latrobe's here in Tasmania of course?

ROCKLIFF Yes, yes.

JD And were you brought up there?

ROCKLIFF I [was] brought up at Sheffield; went to school at Sheffield. That's inland about eighteen mile from Devonport.

JD Yes and were your family fishermen?

ROCKLIFF Ah, no. My family were farmers although they all liked fishing very much.

JD As a recreation?

ROCKLIFF As a recreation and in the last few years my father did buy a boat and went fishing commercially.

JD Oh did he?

ROCKLIFF Yes.

JD What sort of fish was he fishing for?

ROCKLIFF Back in those times, which would be about 1948/49 it was all couta fishing.

JD Ah right; and you came into fishing when you left school or did you do something else first?

ROCKLIFF No I started fishing when I left school. That was always my aim, was to go fishing or join the Navy but it finished up I went fishing. The first year or two because of the seasonal nature of that sort of fishing, I had to take jobs ashore in the off season.

JD You were with your father, were you?

ROCKLIFF No. I got a small boat of my own.

JD Immediately?

ROCKLIFF Well, no, not immediately but it was my father's boat so I got a loan of that and the first year or two I used that and then I bought a small boat of my own.

JD And this was for couta fishing, was it?

ROCKLIFF For couta fishing.

JD Yeah. Whereabouts did you fish?

ROCKLIFF We started off out of Port Sorell, those times. We sold to, what was then, the Tasmanian Fish Canneries which had a depot in Devonport and then they were trans-shipped to Dunalley and Margate for canning.

JD And how long did you stay couta fishing?

ROCKLIFF Oh we stayed two or three seasons. Then I went to Bridport about 1949 early in the year to catch flathead for the spring spawning for flathead and I moved to Bridport. I went to Bridport to extend the season and caught flathead until after Christmas when the couta showed up again.

JD Were you using one of these couta boats that were sort of a typical couta boat, open boat with a decked in foreward? Is that the boat....

ROCKLIFF That's what we used, yes. A little 25 foot named **Alva** with an eight horsepower motor which was half decked [with a] well in it. We used that for quite a number of years.

JD How old were you when you acquired your first boat?

ROCKLIFF Probably about eighteen; eighteen when I got my first boat.

JD You've been in fishing ever since?

ROCKLIFF Yes.

JD Hands on fishing?

ROCKLIFF Hands on fishing, yes, yes.

JD Could you tell us the sort of shape of your career? After you'd finished with the couta fishing, I suppose the couta sort of went off a bit?

ROCKLIFF Ah yes. Couta did go off. Prices weren't as good, as the cannery started to handle less couta. For the first year or two we caught flathead and couta, probably up to about 1951. Then we started shark fishing, put long lines aboard and fished on my own, on that boat shark fishing. I'd go out of a morning and shoot four or five hundred hooks and pull them by hand and back home that evening, unload and be ready to go again next morning.

JD Did you do alright in shark fishing?

ROCKLIFF Yes we used to do quite well. It was a change and of course you're always enthusiastic when you're young and you want to get on.

JD Still fishing on your own?

ROCKLIFF I was fishing on my own then, yes in a 25 footer. After that.... I got married about that time.

JD And you married the daughter of a fisherman, didn't you?

ROCKLIFF Yes, yes. My father had just a slightly larger boat than I had. We'd get further to sea and I got that off him and my wife came with me and we worked two handed. She used to steer the boat and I'd do all the work. So that year we did very well just sharking. So that gave us probably the best start we'd had up until then because we did save some money there.

JD And then what did you do? Did you go into....

ROCKLIFF After that, we managed to get a slightly larger boat, buy another boat which was a 32 footer named **Rowana**. It wasn't decked in. We decked it in. That had a 16 horsepower Lister which gave us the capacity to go crayfishing then. So after that we went crayfishing. Una didn't come with me. I got a crew and from then on it was crayfishing right through the summer months and we'd go sharking again in probably March, April, May, back crayfishing again the winter. So that gave us an opportunity to fish full-time after that.

JD Were the prices right in those days?

ROCKLIFF Well we thought the price was reasonable in those days but I know we were catching for about one and two pence a pound in those times. It was the early days of crayfishing. They gradually moved up from then.

JD They were big catches though, weren't they?

ROCKLIFF But they were big catches, yes. We were catching.... They weren't big catches because we were fishing right in along the shore where we could see the bottom. It was before echo sounders and sometimes we'd take pot shots out deep and, you know, you'd pull up a pot with fish hanging all over it. So when the first sounders, I think we were probably one of the first ones to have a sounder, (echo sounder) which would have been about 1953. We just couldn't believe it when we saw the bottom on an echo sounder. That really.... from then on it changed the whole crayfishing industry.

JD Yeah and the technology's advanced greatly since, hasn't it?

ROCKLIFF Oh it's unbelievable, the advances in technology today. It's beyond anybody's imagination back in those times.

JD What sort of fishing.... Have you still got a number of boats in the family?

ROCKLIFF No, no we haven't. At the present time we've only got two boats in the family and we've got licences on another one. They sell their fish to us.

JD And are you still crayfishing?

ROCKLIFF No. We were crayfishing.... Well after the first boat we bought, we sold that and bought a, in about 1960, bought a 46 foot crayboat named **Julie Elizabeth** built for crayfishing. We had that for ten years and did very, very well at crayfishing and we built a larger boat again named **Petuna** just for the west coast and fishing in deep water off the west coast crayfishing and also did very well 'cause that ground hadn't ever been worked so it was virgin ground.

JD That was the year when the export of tails to America came in and prices took off?

ROCKLIFF Yes, yes. They were good years and a lot of fish with echo sounders and then radars again came along about that time. So it took all the guess work off the navigation up and down the west coast. Then I think it was about 1974,5 or 6, there were so many boats out there crayfishing I thought there's gotta be something else we can do and we started thinking about trawling, seeing that there's a lot of trawling around the world. It was one of the main methods of fishing so we started planning a trawler about that time. I think that was about the time that Brendon O'Killey came out from Ireland to try and develop other fisheries. He was pretty enthusiastic with what we wanted to do and helped us a lot so we finally got the plans of the trawler and we had it built in Launceston in 1979, it was launched and named **Petuna Endeavour**.

JD That was for deep sea trawling?

ROCKLIFF Yes, yes.

JD What size vessel was it?

ROCKLIFF That's 80 foot or 25 metre.

JD A big ship?

ROCKLIFF Yes it was a big change, not knowing anything about trawling or anything about the grounds or.... We had to design a trawler suitable for down here which, it's very hard to get information, the information you need on trawler designs. Anyway it turned out to be an excellent trawler and it's still operating well.

JD You'd have been in when the orange roughy boom came?

ROCKLIFF Yeah I think we were probably one of the.... We WERE probably the first to ever catch them commercially. We fished from about 1981 or 82 we started catching orange roughy. So we were catching them probably, well we were before anybody else was catching for three or four years.

JD You still have that trawler?

ROCKLIFF Yes, yes.

JD You're still operating it?

ROCKLIFF That's right, yes. It wasn't until early 1986 that we finally found them, we were catching quite good catches of orange roughy but not knowing what we were looking for, it was 1986 we finally found what we were looking for in orange roughy. That was the start of the boom.

JD So you've got one deep sea trawler....

ROCKLIFF Two deep sea trawlers.

JD Two deep sea trawlers?

ROCKLIFF Yes and we had licences which we put on another trawler which we don't own but they now fish for us because [of] the licensing situation.

JD So your fishing operation is entirely trawling now, is it?

ROCKLIFF Yes, yes it is.

JD How did you come to get into processing?

ROCKLIFF Um, well when we first started we were told it was a set up to start off the industry, that we wouldn't have to worry about processing, that there'd be processors arranged to handle all our fish. When we started catching fish they took them for a while. Prices were quite good but of course they couldn't sell them at those sort of price and had to drop the prices which really made it uneconomic for us to sell at those prices also. So we started flying the better fish out to Melbourne where we could get good prices for [them] into Melbourne. The other fish we were dumping at that time; fish like grenadier. We were throwing them away just to catch good fish, ling and dorys and perch. So we started to give them away and get people to know that fish because they'd never heard of it before or seen it before. So the fish shops and people that used to come to the wharf and buy off us, that's the small buyers like fish shops;

mainly fish shops, retail outlets. We used to give them grenadier and they used to give samples away.

So that sort of started it off. Then they started buying a few boxes and it built up from there. Then we moved along the coast to Devonport here from Stanley. We were living at Stanley at that time and Una started advertising when the boat came in off the wharf and it started to go fairly well. We used to get a man down to fillet them and she'd advertise and had everything on the boat.

JD Una, your wife?

ROCKLIFF Yes. So after two months we found the boat was tied up to the wharf, not fishing, so we started to look around for some place where we could put the fish ashore and do all that work, selling and processing on shore. That's where.... We said this would be an ideal spot here so Una went and saw them [to] see if they'd sell it and they said, "Yes, we'll sell it".

JD Was it a processing works?

ROCKLIFF No this was an electrical retail outlet, a wholesale outlet shop place so we gutted it all, took everything out of it. Pulled everything out and put new floors in and lined it and changed the front around and moved in. At that time we were also catching a lot of scallops. Our son was still.... he took the cray boat, was craying and then winter time he'd go scalloping so we had a lot of scallops also coming in at that time. We were processing both trawl fish and scallops in the back of the shop here. It got too big for handling the fish in the back of the shop so then we planned the factory down the back. [In] two or three years that was too small so we've extended that a couple of times since also. Also bought a factory in Hobart and three or four more shops (three more shops).

JD You've done incredibly well, haven't you?

ROCKLIFF I don't know. I don't know. It just happens. It doesn't appear that way to us but it just evolves. It happens that way.

JD You must have made the right decisions at the right time perhaps.

ROCKLIFF Probably at the right time. Probably at that time, yes I think we were just led into it. We could see the opportunities, the way it was going and then I think with the roughy we could see a big change also. So we probably came along at the right time.

JD Peter could I ask you what types of fish do you process and sell?

ROCKLIFF We process nearly any varieties around we catch in Tasmania from garfish.... probably twenty, 30 varieties, squid, cuttlefish. We processed a lot of scallops a few years ago. We're processing grenadier. We're probably the first to ever make fish blocks here in Australia for the fish finger trade. We're processing dorys, grenadier, trevally, flathead, you name it, I think every fish that swims. We do buy fish off other fishermen also.

JD So you process the catch that your own vessels catch and other fishermen's catchs as well?

ROCKLIFF Yes, quite a few other fishermen.

JD Do you do frozen tails for export?

ROCKLIFF No. We've never exported lobster. We only process lobster for our local markets, Australian markets.

JD Do you export any fish?

ROCKLIFF Yes, all our orange roughys. Most of our orange roughy is exported; exported other fish.

JD What's the market for orange roughy?

ROCKLIFF The market's been very good up until this year and it's softened this year, mainly because there's just.... They tell us in America there just hasn't been a demand for seafood in America. It's just not orange roughy but right across the board of all seafoods. It hasn't been selling as well. Of course our dollar isn't [unclear] that well.

JD Your business is largely a family enterprise, isn't it?

ROCKLIFF It is a family enterprise, yes. We've got two son-in-laws and our daughter who's hands on here all the time.

JD Yeah and Una's still involved?

ROCKLIFF And Una's still involved, oh yes.

JD Peter your enterprise is a considerable size now. What are some of the problems that confront you in operating it?

ROCKLIFF I think our biggest worry today is, especially in the last twelve months.... Up until then you could plan, you could see ahead of what was happening in the industry. In the last twelve months since we found the orange roughy in big quantities, big aggregations, there's been such a big investment into our industry, especially in the catching power of the fleet, it's probably four, five times the catching power there was a couple of years ago. With the increased investment to gear up to handle that orange roughy, the quantities we've got to handle and the money that we've put into it and the huge expenses to buy, probably just for boxes alone you're looking at well over $100,000, just containers and containers disappear everywhere. They're very hard to keep track of them, they get broken. Machinery, you'd buy an ice maker, you're looking at probably seventy or eighty thousand dollars. A filleting line, probably three, four hundred thousand for a complete filleting line. It just goes on and on and on. Everything you do in the industry of course it's stainless steel, it's all impervious and usually one off that it becomes very, very expensive.

The other thing we find hard is finding that equipment in Australia. It's got to be.... Because there's not a lot of processing in Australia up to date, we find we've got to go overseas to find the equipment we need, the machinery we need because there's nobody here to draw it, to design it and to build it, up until now. So most of our equipments came in from overseas which is costing us and then there's duty on it [and] it become[s] very expensive. That's our worry today, is not knowing where we're going because of the amount of orange roughy being caught and probably the quotas will be put on. We might be cut right back in our quotas, therefore our factory will

be.... and the people we employ will be idle for probably months of the year. They'll become more seasonal again and I'm talking about our orange roughy. Then we'll probably go on to other fish but there's just not the turnover in other fish. There's not the profits in it. It's gonna be very, very hard for a while until we get markets and get started on that sort of fish because once the orange roughy goes, the whole fleet'll turn to other fish as well because there's no market. It's just gonna be a real glut of fish or that's the way we see it this [unclear].

JD Is there a danger of over fishing, do you think?

ROCKLIFF There's always a danger of over fishing. Doesn't matter what it is, if you put enough effort into it with the technology we've got today and the way we can find fish today and catch them. A few years ago you would never have thought we would be fishing where we are. It's just like the side of mountains.

JD And with the very large investment of money, you really have to make the effort, don't you, to warrant the investment?

ROCKLIFF We've got to make the effort, yes. We've got to just keep going then to warrant the investment, mainly because the investment that's being put in, investors who came in now. Like in the last twelve months there's been a lot of investment go into the industry because the orange roughy have been lucrative, especially in New Zealand. It's sort of stemmed from there that once we found orange roughy probably in big aggregations like they are, well quite a few New Zealanders came across because they'd seen the way it's been in New Zealand; plus a lot of Australian investment.

JD There's a concern in Western Australia that, particularly on the processing side, there's a move of overseas capital and the danger is that that could become overseas controlled in the industry. Is that a worry to you?

ROCKLIFF No it's not really a worry to us. There probably is some overseas money coming in at the present time, but we don't see it as a problem to us; not yet anyway. Probably in the future I think it's gonna be those that are pretty lean and they'll survive because they can't.... I think it's gonna change in another year or two but it's a real boom at the present time but it doesn't always last.

JD Yeah. The importation of frozen fish from overseas, that's pretty well in direct competition with your product, isn't it?

ROCKLIFF Ah yes. We see it as a direct competition in a way. I think probably the overseas fish would have some effect on our sales. I think probably the New Zealand fish have the biggest effect on our sales because of their cost structure over there they can bring it in fairly cheaply. We feel we've got to compete with them anyway on our markets, whatever, sooner or later. If we can't compete well, we've got to compete. That's the way we feel one way or another.

JD The question of pollution seems to be on everybody's minds, particularly for scale fish and I suppose more inshore fish. Is that a worry to you?

ROCKLIFF Yes. Pollution is a worry, perhaps not so much for the deep sea trawler men as the inshore fishing but I think most of our pollution is probably behind us now.

I think they're cleaning up their acts along the shore and I think that part of it probably will only improve from here on.

JD There's a lot of awareness about it now, isn't there?

ROCKLIFF Yeah, that's the way we feel. There's been a terrible lot of pollution in the past and it was put in there. Nobody worried about it but now they're starting to clean it up, make them clean it up. I think that'll continue.

JD Peter, do you have any difficulty in getting suitable people either afloat or ashore?

ROCKLIFF Yes. That's a problem. There's some really good people about but to get a good crew is fairly hard, although with orange roughy and that sort of fishing we find everybody wants to be a crewman because of the pay they're getting and the conditions are improving all the time, their living conditions and standard of living on board the boats. We find no trouble to get crew now on board our vessels.

JD Are they adequately trained for their task?

ROCKLIFF Um, yes. The crews we have are adequately trained but they've all started with us and been trained with us and they're still there so we feel they're adequately trained. They're probably the best crews around.

JD Anything else that you'd like to have on this tape before we finish?

ROCKLIFF No. [One] thing I suppose. I don't think we'd have been where we are today except for Una. Ever since I've been fishing, she's always been there and helped me and it wouldn't matter which port I went into, she'd be there. We moved to Stanley because the fishing was better than Bridport most of the year so we moved down there and we'd go back to Bridport in the winter time. When we built the trawler she.... because it was a new game to us, we didn't understand it that well, she came with me and we went to Eden and spent five or six months there and came back and fished here and moved back up to Eden again through the winter. No, she's been the main driving force behind me.

JD Right. Well thank you very much and congratulations on what you've achieved. Thank you.

That is the end of this interview with Mr Peter Rockliff, fisherman, processor and fish merchant of Devonport, Tasmania.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

END OF INTERVIEW

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