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An oral history of Ningaloo Reef

Transcripts

Dr Paul R. Weaver
Edith Cowan University
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Transcript of Interview

Interviewee: Douglas G. Bathgate

Address: PO Box 120, Exmouth, W.A. 6707

Phone:

Date of birth: 10 June 1934.

Date: 14 March 1998

Place: Exmouth

Side A 32 mins

Side B 27.8 mins

Total: 59.8 mins

Interviewer and Transcriber Dr Paul Weaver

Subject: Ningaloo Reef fishing

Side A: Exmouth pioneer - 3rd longest resident. Acting Dir. Gascoyne Dev. Comm. Early fishing days. Involvement with setting up Marine Park. US base - shells, fishing. New roads facilitated reef access. Mandurah retirees arrive in numbers "Shamateurs" took big catches. Local work as trained zoologist. Colloquial names for parts of reef. Targeted fish - spangled emperor. Characters in the past.

Side B: Chemical use on reef (by others) for octopus. Use of chemicals not yet banned. Exporting of reef resources seen by many as a right. Perceptions of how Green Movement relates to reef. The search for management strategies. Possessiveness of long term campers. Effectiveness of park camping strategies. Mangrove vandalism. Impact of trawling on gulf ecology. WW2 on NW Cape and Ningaloo.



PW This interview is being conducted on the 14th March 1998, with Doug Bathgate of Exmouth. Doug, for the record would you please give your full name and date of birth.

DB Yes - Douglas George Bathgate - date of birth the tenth of June 1934

PW Doug you've been in Exmouth for some time, how long have you been up here?

DB Actually I came here in very late 1964 - very late, that was just Christmas time.

PW What brought you up here?

DB I came up as the first headmaster actually and opened the school here at Exmouth, needless to say there was nothing here when I arrived, and - so I've seen the place from virtually scratch to what it is today.

PW Exmouth had its beginnings not long before that, is that right?

DB Actually the town itself was gazetted in - May 1964 - Of course the surveys and everything started in late 1962, and there were field teams on the ground here from that time onwards.

PW So you're a true pioneer of Exmouth?

DB Oh yearh, I should say so.

PW Are you the oldest resident in town, or are there other people who've been here as long as you?

DB Not quite, there are two residents that beat me. One guy that came in in '63, and another guy that's beaten me by about two months.

PW And who are they?

DB - Robbie Atkinson who actually owns the Lighthouse Caravan Park, and a chap by the name of Jim Figs, who is in fact the oldest resident, and he is living in retirement here.

PW You came as a headmaster, then - you left the education service at some stage, did that take you away from Exmouth, or did you come back (from elsewhere) in the intervening years?

DB No, I resigned from the Education Department, in the end of 1966 after that school year, and before I could leave town, I was offered a job with the United States Navy, so I took up that offer

PW And what were you doing with them?

DB Well I started off - and set up their library, which was both technical and a lending library, and - then later moved into the area of Director of Recreation - what they called Special Services, but it looked after all the sporting facilities, bowling alleys and that type of thing, and not long after that I was then promoted to Military Education Officer, and was given responsibility to look after the American schooling and their education programmes, and finally ended up as the Director of Civilian Personnel on board.

PW Were you with the Americans for the duration of their presence here?

DB Well virtually, yes, I was one of the first civilians employed by the United States Navy, yeah.

PW And they left when?

DB They left in 1992.

PW And is that when your employment terminated with them as well?

DB Yes, I was made redundant, and - I was then able to acquire a job with the Gascoyne Development Commission.

PW And you're now the Director of the Gascoyne Development Commission?

DB Acting director - yes.

PW - That - position with the Gascoyne Development Commission also takes you further afield, you were telling me earlier on you spend a lot of time in Carnarvon, you go around to other regional areas as well?

DB - Yes, our area takes me to Shark Bay - it encompasses the shires of Shark Bay, Carnarvon, Exmouth and Gascoyne Junction, so I go inland as far as Mt Augustus, and - then down to Shark Bay

PW And what sort of things does the Gascoyne Development Commission do?

DB Well our main charter is to try and foster economic and social development within the region, we are basically facilitators, we - spend a lot of our time resourcing projects, trying to get joint funding for them, we identify projects and then, we - we don't necessarily drive the projects, we try to get the communities to do that, a couple of good examples - in Exmouth is the shire, we've been very closely associated with the shire in their endeavours to get an international terminal built in the town, of the new boat harbour, we've had a lot to do with that development, and we are still very closely involved in trying to get the resort development - established behind the boat harbour

PW In the time that you've been here you obviously would have done a bit of fishing, which is what this particular interview is about - you've spent some time on Ningaloo Reef, no doubt. Can you tell me about that, and from your earliest times on Ningaloo?

Side A: 5 mins

DB Yes, I must admit from childhood, I grew up in Fremantle, and the Fremantle Harbour was a favourite spot with fishing, and I have very fond memories of going down to the port, and - fishing there, so I grew up very akin to fishing, and so it was a natural thing to do when I came to Exmouth, I must admit I didn't really bring any specific gear with me and I stated just throwing handlines off the beach, because I didn't have a boat - but very early in the (those) days, I met up with a chap by the name of Jeff Johnson, who was in fact the lighthouse keeper here, a remarkable man who only had one hand, but he not only used cane rods off the beach, but - was able to even make his own, and that was really quite intriguing to watch him do that. Well he taught me everything about nor'west fishing, and the beach fishing, and - I became an ardent beach fisherman - we did have a small dinghy, but we didn't use it very often, and it was always hand lining in those days, off the dinghy. And we'd potter around off Bundegi Reef, eight kilometre off shore, but it wasn't a large enough dinghy to go further, so I class myself as being a beach fisherman, and we roamed the whole length of the Ningaloo Reef, and of course in the early days - the construction site, there was probably around about a thousand people on the construction site, and most of their activities sort of centred on the beaches just around the town and the construction area. Not too many of them ventured further afield down to Ningaloo, down to where Coral Bay is now, of course "Coral Bay" wasn't there in the early days - but we did, we were set up with four-wheel drives and camping, and - one of our favourite pastimes was looking for new fishing spots, and we extended ourselves all the way up and down the reef. Now I must say that it was then that I learned to appreciate the reef and I understood the threat that that reef was going to be under in terms of population pressure. Undoubtedly when the Americans came they were very quick to start shell collecting and those sorts of activities, and there are many horror stories about hundreds of shells collected and then put under, buried, and when they dried out they were packed up and shipped off to the States. And it took us many years before we could get Customs, and regulations in to ban that sort of activity, so I do honestly believe that I was able to observe the human impact on the reef over a period of time, and those concerns led me to discussions with Dr Barry Wilson, who was a university friend of mine, and we talked often about the need to have Ningaloo Marine Park put in place, and we were very very proud to have been associated getting it in place - It was declared in 1987, but - I'm - rather proud that I did have a say in persuading people that, you know, that this should be a thing that was done early in the piece. But getting back to the fishing - beach fishing - was something that enabled me to interact with my family, so it wasn't just me, it was my four children as well. They all had rods and we all went fishing. And so it was something that I believe was exceptionally valuable, not only in appreciating what we were doing, but being able to bring the family up in that environment. - We didn't have Engels (portable refrigerators) and things like that, it was very much cart a bit of ice with you, so I s'pose just by shear force of - the nature, we rarely brought a lot of fish back with us, we sort of fished and ate what we caught and then came home with them. - I must say also that we were very quick to realise that there were large quantities of mullet and whiting in the Gulf area and - the WAPET (Western Australian Petroleum Pty Ltd) had done a lot of seismic exploration through the region, and these seismic lines ultimately became the accesses to Coral Bay, and sorry, well into Coral Bay, but accesses bay of Rest, and places like that as well, and I've got fond recollections of us actually being the sort of first ones down these seismic lines and getting ourselves bogged, and all sorts of interesting things. - So my other part of fishing was certainly net fishing, and I still carry out that activity occasionally, but unlike most - I'm a fanatic for oversized net, and I only virtually take what I want, and - leave the rest - I s'pose actually if I may just talk about the net fishing for a moment - The Bay of rest and the mangrove areas is where the mullet hang out, and - in the early days they were there in vast quantities, there were times when we'd put our net, and it was cord net in those days, not the mono-filament, and it was just incredible you know, we caught fish that we could not handle, but unfortunately - once they meshed up - the cord, they were that damaged that you know, it took them, you had to take them because they - weren't fit enough to let go, and I can recall on a number of occasions where we came back with that many fish, we'd go through the caravan park, which was virtually the town in those days, and - try to give them away, and if the fish weren't scaled and filleted people wouldn't take 'em. The tragedy also was that we really weren't all that geared up to store fish in that time, but - we learnt as time went on and - the net fishing became a very social activity, we would take groups of us, even up to twenty people and - we would go

down to the Bay of Rest and put the net in and - when the fish were caught we would barbecue them and spend a whole day doing it and then bring the excess home, and even - when I was elected for Council, persuaded the Shire Councilors - to come on one of these expeditions, and that became quite a regular thing, once a year from therein - but I chose to think that as we became more sophisticated with what we did, that - we always adopted a pattern as soon as there was enough meshed, we'd open the net and let the rest go, and - a lot of people used to react quite violently to that, so you know if you're wasting all this fish what are you going to do with it, you know, "Don't let them go, don't let them go, we've got to catch 'em." the sort of greed syndrome - but I think after seeing and giving reasons why that I chose to think also that was the sort of educational thing, and - certainly most of my acquaintances (would) only just take what they want, leave the rest to survive for another day.

Side A: 12.8 mins

PW You mentioned some of the horror stories to do with shells, and there has been horror stories to do with other people taking large quantities of fish - what sort of - when did that - intensive activity commence, with people coming from other regions to Ningaloo to start exploiting fish?

DB I think it needs to be defined, the original impact was just purely from the population that lived here, and the Americans, who in all innocence didn't know any better, and I don't want to be too critical of them, but suddenly they saw this wonderful environment, they hadn't seen so many shells and so many fish so it was the big macho (macho) stuff, catch the biggest possible fish - I can tell a story where these CBs - construction type, navy - they used to go out on the pier and have these massive set lines with a winch truck, and - they had a big competition on all the time to see who could winch in and lift these things up forty feet in the air, up on to top of the pier - gropers and things like this, to see who could get the biggest, and it was just plain destruction, because the fish were never used, they just chucked on the dump. - When we first started - game fishing, no one realised really the frequency of sail fish and marlin in the area until one of our local guys, who was working on the shire, a chap by the name of Lance Gregory, Lances - caught one by accident off the beach, and that set off what became the - known as the - was a festival every year, and it was called "Exmo" - and it was centred around sail fishing, and so - sort of "get the biggest" exploitation thing went on. With the Americans they just saw these hundreds of shells and so on, and they just accumulated buckets full of them, they buried them to clean them and then pack them up and ship them out to the states, and this went on for years - and it was, started, you know - reached a peak of concern, and we were finally able to persuade authorities to put a bit of a clamp on this type of thing, tragically also a lot of them forgot about them being buried, or they smelt too much and they left them there so under a lot, or around the houses you can still find pockets of these shells unfortunately - the Americans did take quite a long time to educate in many ways, in that regard - a lot of them of course weren't avid fishermen, they, some of them had boats and things, but they weren't sort of nature oriented like we were, but there was a significant impact there. Then the population changed, because people suddenly realised that this was a winter have, and once the road was sealed in from Minilya, then the caravan parade started coming into town and it was established, this culture of retirees who would come to the area, and set themselves up for fairly long periods of time, up to five, six months sometimes, so they'd have a house in Mandurah, actually - the culture actually originated in Mandurah, it was - 'cause we had a couple of Mandurah fishermen, professionals that came up here, wetliners, and they would come up in the winter time and fish here for M.G Kailis, and then go back down to Mandurah for the summer, and so their word passed on, and so we ended up with this - "golden oldy" type - as the locals facetiously call them, "seagulls" but - they arrived, and their pattern was of course fairly intensive - for most of the year they would fish for their own consumption, but they gradually accumulated and they would pack deep freezers full of stuff and then ship it out and take it back with them, so there was this exploitation where the "shamateurs" role was starting, and there were quite a few - once the - the accesses down at Ningaloo Station, beyond Yardie Creek and down towards Coral Bay were opened up, a lot of shamateurs were coming in with trucks, with - incredible how they towed some of these vehicles, boats into launch them, you know I'm talking about twenty five tonners, you know, and they would come as a team with their ice boxes chock a block full of food and grog, and as they ate that down they'd fish in turn, 'round the clock, and so - one crew'd go out fishing and then they'd come home and the other'd go out, until they filled their boxes, then off down to Perth they'd go. And that became of great concern to us, and I s'pose that sort of activity that we observed very often, was an impetus to push us to lobby hard and bring to the notice of the powers to be that there was a need for some sort of control over the

area, and the reef itself:

PW - When you say we, who else was concerned about this?

DB Well I think a number of us locals, I mean we formed what was called the Vlamingh - Angling Club, and that was - people living in the town, there's Jeff Johnson, myself, and a chap name of Brian Wilks who was a very avid fisherman, and then later, my background, I came into Exmouth from the WA Museum, I was the education officer there, and - I finished my degree in zoology at - university - UWA - and so when I came up here I was doing an enormous amount of field work for the Museum, and for Dr Barry Wilson who was a marine biologist, and they came up and stayed with me and came out to all the places that I had covered - and it's through that sort of momentum that - and the WA Naturalist's Club of which I was a member - we put in quite a bit of pressure. At least to justify the government's move in that direction.

PW - That is very interesting about your work with the naturalists - the WA Naturalists. Did you write papers for them on Ningaloo?

DB - Yearh, but not on the fishing - I used to teach in Shark Bay also, and I published a number - I'm an ornithologist by hobby - and - I did produce a number of papers - on the birds - of here and and Shark Bay - in those days, reluctantly I haven't had time to follow that pursuit in later years but - so that was basically - the interest that I had - I did a fair bit of bird banding for the CSIRO, as well.

PW The, from what you've told me, the - intensified exploitation of fish on the Ningaloo Reef coincides with the development of the road system, initially with your following the WAPET test lines, and then with the sealing of the road, coming through into Exmouth, and then the improvements of the road, the track which runs down from the cape, along the coast, was that track always there, before you arrived, or - was that made later?

Side A: 20.3 mins

DB No, the track was always there, it (has) a very interesting evolution - the mail run for the stations came out of Carnarvon, it used to come all the way up the coast through Quobba, through Warroora, and through Cardabia, following the coast all the way up - that's going way back into the nineteenth century - at a time which I can't identify, I haven't been able to find out when the pattern changed - it was obviously due to some traumatic flooding and so I should imagine had some devastation of the area between Warroora and - not Quobba, the station above that, the name eludes me for a minute, (Cardabia) but anyway - that coastal access was then stopped, and the pastoralists of course have blocked it off, they don't really want that access through there, and so then the station road came up the main road through Minilya, around Lake Macleod, and into Warroora, and then into Cardabia, on which Coral Bay is situated, and then up the coast to Ningaloo, over Yardie Creek, into Yardie homestead, around the top and then down to Exmouth, and then out through Bullara to (indistinct) and to Winning Poll and back down to Carnarvon, so it was a loop, which I understand they took at least a fortnight to do with the mail truck. So that track was always there, and it was a typical follow the pattern track, then along came WAPET and it, they did most of their seismic work throughout 1950, and a little bit in the sixties, and of course they bulldozed straight lines, and it wasn't long, particularly on the coastal strip that the straight line access became the road, and so the west coast access - changed from that funny little weaving road used probably by the pastoralists and once a - fortnight by the mail truck, and nobody else, crossing Yardie Creek was always a major problem, and it had to be done - it depended on whether it (the bar) had been breached, or whether it hadn't, after flooding and so on, the creek would wash out and it was impassible for some time. Actually recently, its been impassible - it was impassible for almost six months, last year, which was very interesting, but anyway - they would always have problems in getting themselves over that bar, and - it wasn't until, in fact when I arrived, we were probably the early users of the seismic lines, or direct line, they were pretty rough in places and you had to be very careful that you didn't take the sump out, things like that with boulders and things sucking up, but they then really offered the access, and - once the access was created, well then people saw, they use it, and perhaps I could mention, we found a wonderful isolated fishing spot - down at the sort of, just a bit north of the whaling station, which we cut the track in - I was meticulous to sort of not quite follow the same one each time 'cause I didn't want to make it obvious where we were, and - I even set up a sort of watering

system where I had a plastic lined 44 (gallon drum) and we'd take water down and leave it there. It was a wonderful camping spot and we used to resent it if we saw anyone else, however now that's the major highway, and I often feel guilty about it, you know, heck you've made that track in - but some one else would have done it if I hadn't. So yes, look I think its very true, to say that access, and the frequency of fishing are very closely related.

PW That particular place that you developed, what was the attraction of that?

DB Well the attraction was - it offered some beautiful little shallow beaches for the children to swim safely - then the reef was very close in to shore - in fact at low tide you could wade out, climb up on the reef and walk up and down on it, and there were lots of beautiful snapper holes, and that was the beach fishing game. we knew that we could always down there and we could always get nice sized snapper, and get what we wanted, and we'd fish for food and eat it and then catch a couple to bring home on the last day, and of course do all sorts of other things as well, but that was the convenience of the spot, it was reasonably sheltered, there was a little bit of a run off, a little bit of a creek - creek bed, not a creek itself - but - it was virtually an ideal spot, and it's proven so now because its one of the most frequented camping sites. I did a bit of a survey down there by plane last year and there were over ninety caravans in that site.

Side A: 25.4 mins

PW And what's that place called now?

DB Well it's called Point Billy, it's named after (Mrs) Billy Lefroy, who they've named those points there, after her. But its probably really still part of Norwegian Bay.

PW Did you have a colloquial name yourself for that place?

DB Yearh, Christmas Creek we used to call it.

PW Christmas Creek?

DB We thought it was because all our Christmasses had come at once, yearh. (laughing)

PW Were there a lot of other colloquial names along the coast that have disappeared?

DB Oh yes, there were - some of them held on, but - things like "T Bone Bay" was a local name.

PW Can you match some of those up with the current names for me?

DB Yes - T Bone Bay's still T Bone Bay - then - we've got Mesa, now Mesa was actually an interesting one because that was named after the drilling company that drilled for oil on that site and drilled out underneath the reef. That was the last drilling - exploration on that site, and that name hung in, that was a local name - it didn't really change, it just got that name attached to it. - We - Stinky Creek, which is really Tantabiddi - Stinky Creek, still some people use that name - then - just trying to think - what we - that would be about the extent of the ones I could remember right off the top.

PW I'm sure others will come to you (agreement) so feel free to add them during the course of the interview. The types of fish that you used to go for initially, you eventually did a little bit of netting for mullet and such, but what about the so called prize fish on the inside of the reef system, in the lagoon areas, what did you used to catch?

DB Well, we targeted snapper, that's the spangled emperor - and I must say that we were probably ignorant of the various species within that category, which is again one of these awareness things that is great to see now. we thought they were all spangled emperor, we call it black snapper - we targeted those but, - so we were always rigged to go for them. It might be interesting to talk about rigs. We designed our own sinkers - and - we made the so they were probably pyramid in shape but they, we made our own moulds and we put sort of

fins on them so that the theory was when you picked them up they tend to lift off the reef so you wouldn't lose too many of them, and of course we used a hook up to a swivel, and then we put our sinker straight behind that on the line, and that's the sort of technique we used. We didn't use gang hooks, we always used just one hook -

PW - The sinker - was actually between the fisher and the hook? Is that correct?

DB That's right, so you had your line down, then your sinker, then your swivel, and then your leader and your hook.

PW Was it free running - so it free ran through the sinker?

DB - The swivel wouldn't go through the sinker.

PW No but the line would? (Agreement) So you could still feel if there was something on there?

DB Oh, yeah - very well. And occasionally later we got to using floats and drifting out. But we targeted the black snapper - some of us got fanatical about taking "blue bone," - that was a real specialist game using special techniques, particularly your baits, and so on, you had to be very patient.

PW What's a blue bone?

DB Blue bone of course is the Venus tusk fish¹, and you used to get some very big ones, but they were always very finicky, they were very difficult to catch. We had one character here who was a Slav, and we called him blue bone, cause that's all he used to catch. (laughing) He was quite clever at doing it, but - other fish that we targeted, trevally quite often, and of course long toms were always a pest - frequented the area, we didn't like those much, and - of course then there'd be the odd, you'd get the odd mackerel that'd come through, but, and of course you always got your odd cod too, in the holes, but we learnt very quickly that the snapper, where the snapper used to congregate, they used to like the broken ground and then we would always throw into a blue patch, or a clear patch in the reef, and invariably you'd catch it. And of course that's the "bombie" theory that we still use with boats. If we go out onto the inside of the reef now, what people do, depending on the tide, they will identify the coral outcrops which sit independently of the main platform reef. There's not a lot of big fish sitting around that platform reef, it's down in behind, or out beyond it, that most of the fish, the big fish congregate, and so what you do is you, depending on your tide, you hang off the bombie and just throw up to it and the snapper come out from the bottom.

PW You mentioned that you didn't like people coming into your special spots. Did you find as you were fishing the reef that you had to consistently move further afield to escape new arrivals?

DB Yeah, I think that's very true, because - the urge to explore further was probably through the need of the fishing pressure around the town site itself, so yeah, we decided hey, you know, this is too crowded here and the chances of catching a fish - I think it's probably true to say that there has been a decline in the available fish - now there's all sorts of anecdotal statements about that, and I wouldn't go as far as to say that you know, there has been a dramatic decline, because there are days when I can still go and catch quite a few - but - your mind, tends to change, but there were very very few times that I can remember with the crude gear that we used to have that we didn't catch something - but now there's often a time

Side A ends: 32 mins

Side B starts:

PW We were talking about the need to go further afield, and - you said that there had been a noticeable difference between now and then? In the past when you were fishing at these places did you - notice that they were starting to become - the fish were becoming less available in those places as well, at those times?

¹ *Choerodon* sp.

- DB Yearh, I think that's true to say, yearh look - what we'd said - yearh, you would say, oh the chances of catching a fish at say Jirabi - Point, or something like that were far less as the pressure crept up.
- PW And that was also then - a signal that it was time to start looking for somewhere else to go?
- DB That's very true, yearh, very true indeed, but not to the point of saying there's no fish there - the availability - I mean there were times when we could just catch a snapper off the town beach, on occasions, not every time.
- PW Which is fisherman's luck anyway.
- DB That's fisherman's luck, that's right, but that sort of chance has become (indistinct) remote. But it's very interesting that - already the fishing activity around our new boat harbour and the breakwaters is becoming quite dynamic, so the breakwaters are attracting a whole lot of fish in and it'll be a new regime altogether.
- PW The other types of animals on the reef, like octopus and crayfish, did you go for those as well?
- DB - Yes, certainly used to fish - the red crayfish does come up here, but it's the northern most extension of it, and we were always sort of pretty happy if we found a red cray, because they by far the best ones to eat, but yearh, we would catch - the *Panulirus vesicular* which is the green cray and sorry, *ornatus* is the green cray, *vesicular* is the painted cray - and we'd catch both of those, opportunistically most of the time, there were occasions when we'd go out. But octopuses, that's a very interesting one - we - go and get an octopus occasionally for bait because it was a good bait for snapper, 'cause it'd stay on the hook, but - in recent years we have had great concern about the octopus being targeted on the platform reefs - the locals don't do it very much, but certainly the visitors do, they wait for the low tides and they're absolutely raping the reefs of occies, and of course they're using chemicals to flush them out of their holes, and there is nothing at the moment that prevents them from doing it - and it has become a major concern - and of course we've tried to change that pattern of behaviour but, it hasn't changed a great deal.
- PW What type of chemicals are they using?
- DB They're using - copper sulphate, ammonia, are the two that I've seen them using, they probably use others as well.
- PW Have you heard of them using Harpic? (caustic toilet cleaner)
- DB - No I haven't, but that's probably one that they would use.
- PW Somebody else mentioned that.
- DB Yearh, Harpic would be one (indistinct) because that's and ammonia based thing anyway -
- PW - Has there been reticence from departments about legislating against that practice?
- DB - To date yes, I think its just one of those ones that have swept up in the momentum of so many things to address - but I can assure you that its got an exceptionally high profile in the Gascoyne management planning process which is going now, and I see it will be an integral part of that management plan. It's going to actually ban the taking of octopus.
- PW To someone outside of the government system, it seems to me that these sort of practices could be - ended with the stroke of a pen, but it doesn't happen that way. What's the obstacles with moving quickly on these types of things?
- DB I s'pose you could sum it up in one word and say political - once one has to legislate - and particularly nowadays where there's a process of public comment and all this type of thing required before you can virtually get to that stage, any suggestion - that you can or restrict something always has some kind of

political overtone or implication, and I must say, and I can give you a very good example of this - this whole idea of, we have possession limits in Ningaloo marine park which is not anywhere else in the state, that was deliberately put in to try and control this excess - what is perceived as excessive movement of fish intensively taking it out and taking it back to the farms and so on. -

Side B: 5.4 mins

PW It's essentially an export operation, of exporting the reefs resources?

DB That's dead right, but the farmers and those people, the inland people see it as a right, they say, you live there and can get a fish whenever you want it we can only afford to come up once a year so we should be able to have a year's supply when we go back. That's their philosophy, and I respect it. Their minister, who happens to be the minister for fisheries also is sensitive to that, and so he has been very reluctant to take on board legislation that would mitigate against that process.

PW When a minister is sensitive to something like that does that essentially translate to votes?

DB It does, yes, definitely.

PW So votes come before conservation issues?

DB I think the poor old, - due to respect to politicians it's - a fine line, they have to be - very careful - if they want to stay in - probably out of fairness to them if they know it's their last year, and in their conscience goes for it, then fine. Now I don't want to denigrate the existing minister because there are positions he has taken.

PW No - just talking generally.

DB Generally, but there are positions recently that he has taken, where he's observed and then understood what the process is and (indistinct) that's something you've got to stop, I don't give a damn about the consequence, but - and I think its not only the politicians, its the environmental agenda, its the green movement, all those lobbies all have a different perspective and they all do influence the process, and - you know I can say the green agenda in Exmouth is to shut of the whole of Ningaloo reef and access of people also, except if you are a privileged person, and I don't know how you define yourself as a privileged person, but that is really their agenda, - they really do just to simply want to. Now - from a fishing point of view our - local strategy is saying yes that we recognise that purely from a fishing point of view and for the future on going fishing for people and our - kin and - people who will follow us, we do have to ensure that the stocks stay at a certain level, and so we are saying and recognise that - we need controls and they are likely to become tighter and tighter, and we are also saying, hey we recognise that you've got to the limit it number of people and were they fish, and we are also saying hey - we've identifying hot spots and we're looking at ways of strategies of limiting the number of - fishermen that go there to try and break down that pressure. So yet the only way we see - I say we, again I mean probably those that are involved in trying to get this things in place and are aware of the need to conserve - that the philosophy really is, look - we have to find ways of giving everyone access but recognising that - that's not going to be possible. We may have to - qualify how you enter that fishery - there may be - there's all sorts of models out in the world, like you buy a license, a very innovative suggestion that has been put through our committee and take some time to hone out is a passport sort of idea where you buy a Gascoyne fishing passport, which entitles you access to certain defined areas, and you'll buy that. - Also of course there is a big room particularly in those remote areas to look at more innovative ways of fishing, barbless hooks, there's all sort of things, catch and release, and I must say that within some of the fishing groups there - they've become a lot more conservation minded - a lot of tag and release in the big game fishing game - business now, where it was grab everything before - and I must take my hat of to most of the people in the Exmouth Game Fishing Club, they've become very sophisticated in the way they are - turning their catches back into the water, and only bringing back what may appear to be a competitive - prize and doing a lot of tagging as well and that's bringing back and logging the stuff, and so there is a lot more information coming out, which is of course is benefiting them, they've realised that they were focussing on the wrong time of the year for the fish - another interesting

innovation is that the boat harbour, a lot of people thought was in the wrong place because it didn't give immediate access to the reef, you had to steam a long way to get to it, but - since the boat harbour is in place, they have explored out into the gulf area and found patches of sail fish and marlin out there as well. So you know that's just another example of how things can change

Side B: 10.4 mins

PW Going back where you were talking about the - old golden oldies or the seagull brigade which comes up here, and as we speak there are probably many hundred of them camped around on the reef system. - Presumably there's a attrition rate of these people as they get to old to come and they, they don't reappear in one year but are they being replaced by a new generation of people like that?

DB Yes, a very good question actually, and - I often toyed with the idea of, it would be interesting to research the background of these people, because I've suspect that there is a decent process going in place where - they identify with a broader family affiliation, if it's not a family affiliation its a area affiliation, "we all come from Wongan Hills", and generations are flowing on, so it's an on going thing - there's changes in the way they set up - I must say these people are well equipped, I mean they come to live, its a home, its a home away from home, and they've had to comply with environmental things so they've got sophisticated shower things and are well set up, but also their gear has got more and more sophisticated. Around the other side there's at lakeside which is one of the campsites within the national park there's a guy which specialises in servicing and repairing everyone's outboard motors for instance.

PW And generators too no doubt?

DB And generators too, so he's in great demand there, of course totally independent of the town, but yearh, there is this - flow on and it's a code. Now when you drive down the coast now, and it's a pity I couldn't have taken you down, it would have been great driving and talking and pointing things out, but you'll see these signs which says "Joe and Mary" - and then there'll be some with coloured knobs and so on and they are all telling the -

PW Their associates?

DB Yearh, where we are, and - the other thing is there's a real possessiveness. They have their sites every year, and if someone else is there, they will do everything in the book to get 'em out, they will make you a most uncomfortable person in the world, they will camp right next to you, they will annoy you until you shift, and then they can move in. So it's a down side to it too.

PW So they are exerting customary rights over these places?

DB Absolutely and they believe because they have been coming here for the last fifteen years, twenty years, and because they have invested so many dollars a year in the place that - you know - we've - well they have contributed to Exmouth - one would question to - what extent, but that's a right

PW They do bring most of their supplies from elsewhere, not from the local traders I should imagine?

DB In the initial stages, yes, that is very correct.

PW And presumably this also extends to matters like fuel and - almost everything, if they can get it cheaper somewhere else they'll probably do it?

DB That's dead right, they will do that, and of course the locals try to cater for them: The garages give them a special discount if they - buy in bulk and all that type of thing, so yearh they get looked after in that sense. The other interesting thing is that they do work in groups because what they do is they have a roster - in each campsite and that rostered person goes to town and buys and gets the supplies for everybody that week, and the next time round another guy does it, so they, they're pretty well organised and that's it, but there's definitely links, friendship links or family links, and there is a replacement thing going on, so I don't think

the activity will dwindle because of an age group or a pattern of attrition.

PW Is this - process - limited in the time that it can continue to operate, or will it continue to go on for ever?

DB No, it will, it will be limited, and it's being limited now, it's being limited by the park management, they can only stay in one place for twenty eight days, and so they have to pick up and move to another, and that's an inconvenience. - I must tell you about this because there is another very interesting way of adapting to people's needs. There was a - fairly significant group of regulars - who really got very upset when the new park rules came in and said no more than twenty eight days in one spot, and they lobbied very heavily and the solution was, and I thought a very brilliant one on CALM's behalf at the time. They said alright, well you're a special group, you've been doing this, we'll offer you a deal. We'll give you the opportunity to become "camp hosts." That means that you take up a plot on that camp site, and we'll let you stay there for the term that you want, that's over the whole winter months, on the agreement that you collect all the rubbish, that you put people in and out of the bays, and make sure they rotate, and you collect their fees. And offer all the other park information to take the pressure of the rangers (indistinct). It's worked like magic, so those real oldies who are really possessive are camp hosts - very conscientious about their job, and it's working.

Side B: 15.9 mins

PW And how many of these camp hosts would be there?

DB Unfortunately there's more people than there are available camp host sites, there is actually only five camp host sites that are big enough for camp hosts. The rest of them are one or two caravan park sites. - Certainly the Cape Range Management Plan - stopped all the indiscriminate access to the coast, it focussed people by putting accesses in camp sites in place and that has changed the fishing pattern, and it's probably limited the beach fishing, but increased the "tinny" (metal boats) again where now people camp there and they all take a boat and then they spread out, but, we've observed that you've - got these patterns of pressure centred around each one of these nodes, and - in between of course fortunately you've got sanctuary zones and things like that, but it's a fairly dynamic and it's an interesting planning process to watch this, and we're making, taking cognisance (sic) of in fact in our management planning that - where the people pressure is and the likelihood is of the fish being fished out in those areas - identifying again the hot spots I suppose is the easiest way of saying it. And we may have to put some regulatory things in place to try and disperse the fishing pressure.

PW Well now you've told me some extremely interesting material here, and - I just like to give you the opportunity to tell me anything else that I perhaps should have asked, because you know sometimes I don't know the right questions to ask, but, it there other things that I should have asked you that you'd like to tell me about?

DB I don't think so, I think you've asked the main ones, I perhaps should comment about mud crab fishing, it's something that (we) didn't address. Down in the Bay of Rest and around the bottom of the gulf - and in a couple of the mangrove patches on the west coast, mangrove crabs are in large numbers - there again the impact of man has - been a bit sad in some places - there are cases of - people actually going in with chain saws and cutting pathways through the mangroves, taking shovels and all sorts of devices to dig the crabs out instead of being patient and catching them on the surface or hooking them out, so there has been a massive decline in the available mud crabs in this area, and those that are really keen sort of now go right over the other side (of the gulf) in boats to catch them, and - it was necessary to close off the mangrove, make it a sanctuary area around the other side to protect that habitat, so yeah, that and - the - I suppose one should also make comment about the professional activity in the place - there has been intensive wetline fishing and the charter boat industry has been fairly heavily developed here. The wetline licences are gradually receding fortunately - but that was an increased pressure and they were Mandurah fishermen coming up and catching very large quantities, and a lot of them just for bait, which upset a lot of people. Now there's no doubt that the trawling activity in the Gulf has changed the nature of the gulf ecology, - it probably hasn't changed it to the detriment of the prawn populations because they are still upholding pretty well, and the crab populations, but there's very much concern amongst the fishing fraternity - about what's

happened to all the other goodies that are there. Now I must say that in my early days I went out on the trawlers on behalf of the Museum and collected sea snakes and specimens from the - nets and preserved them and sent them to the Museum. And what I see coming up now is so totally different, there was all alive and bubbly beautiful sponges, everything fresh, now it's stinking mass, most of it that comes up with the prawns and crabs and there's no where near the same variety of species that there used to be, so, and it's acknowledged within the industry, and the industry is trying desperately to relate to by-catch and they're putting new nets on, they're testing out a new thing this year. So there is sensitivity there, but it's been a long time coming

Side B: 20.6 mins

PW Well Doug, I thank you very much for this opportunity, you've just given me some extraordinary information, and I have had to do very little work, which is terrific, it's going to make the typing a real pleasure (laughter).

DB I hope I haven't waffled on too much?

PW No, not at all, I mean you've - given me wonderful information, so I thank you very much on behalf of the project, and I wish you and long and enduring relationship with this system here, and may your fishing be very good.

DB And every success with your project, I was quite thrilled to see someone showing the initiative to do it, and - hopefully some of that material will be useful to us in our local endeavours to put these management plans in place, I would like the opportunity to keep in touch with you, and keep you up to date with what's happening in that process too - the exchange of information is probably going to help that.

PW Well thank you very much Doug.

Side B: 21.4

Addendum immediately following above interview

PW This is an addition to the - previous interview, and we are going to talk a little bit about - the World War 2 history of the Ningaloo Reef. Doug you've done a little bit of looking into this. Could you tell me about it?

DB Yes, I've been investigating this period of history for some time and in my investigations I've uncovered quite a lot of anecdotal information, some of this in written record about the things that the soldiers did when they were stationed here during World War two - the operation was known as Operation Potshot - it originally started off as an American submarine base but that didn't last at all long, however, - they did build a fighter and bomber strip in the area and there were radar and anti-aircraft facilities established here, and manned primarily by Australians - the activities of these soldiers are very interesting from a fishing point of view because in the diaries and so on, often one reads records of them taking hand grenades and other explosive implements down to the Bay of Rest, and particularly around Wapet Creek, and blowing up large quantities of fish, and bringing them back and having feasts, and - this also occurred out around the lighthouse (Vlamingh Point) where the radar people were stationed and it occurs quite frequently even in the records of - the official military records also, like when they expected VIPs in, Joes Bloggs, (would write) They'd sent a detachment off down to the point and we threw a few charges in the water and, boom - we came back, so - I suspect that because there were probably about at least one thousand five hundred military personnel in and around this area that the poor old reef did get a hammering. Also I noticed in my searches - remnants of shell and so on embedded in some of the reef areas - and then looking back through the records I found that the wreck of the *Mildura* was a strafing target, that the - fighters used frequently and - they also used various parts of Cape Range flying up the canyons and would fire into the limestone walls, and some of the shell is still embedded there, and - there is also quite a bit of evidence around the reef that's often not -

it's not that frequent now, but in the early days I found quite a lot of - various shells and things - military shells on the actual reefs themselves, so I suspect that they certainly supplemented their "bully beef" regularly with fish and probably did so in a fairly devastating manner

PW How far south of the Cape do you think they would have gone?

DB - Certainly evidence that they were right down in the Bay of Rest, as far around as Giralia Station, all the way around the coast, and then down as far as Point Cloates.

PW How many kilometres would that be.

DB - Gosh, you're probably looking at the best part of about two hundred kilometres of coastline.

PW So in those days that would have been at least a several days' expedition to go down there and back?

DB Oh yes, and the actual records show that, yes these - they sent small - detachments with a four-wheel drive - a Jeep or whatever to humpity hump for a day or two to catch the fish and bring them back.

PW Would they have had coast watching facilities down there as well?

DB - Yes - a lot of this stuff is not clearly recorded, but yearh, they had spotting units down the coast, all the way through to Carnarvon, and I believe they were replaced on a frequent basis, but there isn't any logs or any records of those actual movements, its just that in the diaries you find reference, indirect reference to these units and their dispersal and their arrival there.

PW Are these diaries in the Commonwealth Archives?

DB - Yes, these are in the Army and navy war records, in the Defence archives at Brighton.

PW Is there a great amount of material relating to Ningaloo?

DB Not specifically - it's dispersed amongst all sort, all the other files - it's not easily identified, one picks this sort of information up through a whole array of other subject files, which makes it very difficult to break out, but it is available.

PW And these are officers' diaries are they?

DB Officers' diaries, and there are even some written records of some of the enlisted personnel. Where there were traumatic events there's some records of their impressions of what happened.

PW What type of traumatic events took place?

DB There was a major cyclone, and - they called it a tidal wave - but that occurred in 1945, close to the end of the war, and was the end result, it sort of wiped out, - they disbanded the whole project at that time, but - they say it was a tidal wave but really - the - records would indicate that it was definitely a cyclone and it was a tidal surge which broke right through and totally flooded the whole of the Learmonth area. I've found 44 gallon drums washed right back against the scarp, against the range, and the photographs that are on the records indicate enormous quantities of water.

(Brief pause because of interruption)

PW Yes, well, that's another whole subject in itself, and I suppose (laughing) we'll have to leave that for another project Doug. You're going to develop this into some sort of document yourself are you?

DB - Yes, most certainly I am, yes - I might just mention that when I mentioned the coast line and the activity, there was a very large establishment over at Yannery as well, which is right down at the bottom end of the

Gulf, and there was a significant number of military personnel there too, so the whole the bay of, the Exmouth Gulf lower ends, certainly (was) exposed to military activity

PW Well Doug, thank you for sharing that with us, and I really look forward to seeing your finished result, and I wish you the best with that too

DB Thanks very much.

Side B ends: 27.8 mins

Transcript of Interview

Interviewee: Andrew James Cassidy

Address: PO Box 40, Exmouth, 6707

Phone: 08 9949 1496

Date of birth: 21 Aug. 1941. (56)

Date: 13 March 1998

Place: Exmouth

Side A 31.8 mins

Side B 32.1 mins

Total: 63.9 mins

Interviewer & transcriber: Dr Paul R. Weaver

Subjects: Ningaloo Reef fishing

Side A: Fishing origins - diving - crayfish industry. Early days prawning at Exmouth. Decline of pearl industry brought many luggers south. Fishing identities. Capsize at Abrolhos. Snapper fishing at Shark Bay, then Point Maud. Fish trapping. Snapper season. Gluts, self marketing of fish in Perth. Turtle hunting on Ningaloo.

Side B: Turtle hunting. Crayfishing in off season. First to trap fish north of Carnarvon. Old wrecks on Ningaloo. Innovations in fish trap design. Public complaints about unloading fish at Coral Bay. Amateurs decimate fish populations. Inshore fishing at Ningaloo has declined. Amateurs stockpiling fish. personal future directions.



- PW This interview is being conducted on the thirteenth of March 1998 at Exmouth with Andy Cassidy. Andy for the record could you please give your full name and your date of birth?
- AC Andrew James Cassidy - twenty first of the eighth, 1941.
- PW Andy you're - a bit of an identity in Exmouth. You've been fishing up here for a long time; when did you start fishing up here?
- AC Probably in the Exmouth area in - sixty six, we were the first to ever come trapping in this area with the old *Tringa*.
- PW Were you fishing before that?
- AC - Well crayfishing, yes. I had my own crayboat when I was - in 1961.
- PW Where were you crayfishing?
- AC Out of Geraldton.
- PW And was your father a crayfisherman?
- AC No.
- PW How did you start crayfishing?
- AC Well actually he got me the job on it - I was in the diving game first - we worked on the - back in the early days - when I was a lad of fourteen I met the first police diver that there ever was in the WA Police Force, a

bloke called Theo Brown, and - he was directing traffic, and being a kid - working in the post office, there was no street - no - sort of traffic lights in those days, just had guys on points, and he got to know - the - like me sort of roar around town delivering telegrams, and he would sort of hold the traffic up and wave me trough, and so we became quite good friends, and - he was a young guy of about twenty one and he invited me to go out diving with him and - that's how my sort of ocean life sort of started, you know, I gave the Post Office away, and - did a lot of diving with Theo. -

PW What sort of things were you diving for?

AC We - blew up an old submarine, Dutch submarine down at Woodman's Point, that would have been beached there just during the war, that was interesting, we put three cases of gelignite the full length of that and it opened up like a pea, and - that was before the iron ore business ever started, a lot of money in scrap metal in those days.

PW So that sub was blown up for scrap metal was it?

AC Yep for scrap metal, yearh.

PW Was that a contract job from the government?

AC No, no, no, just - a guy called Ron Gray started it- like as I say there was no scrap metal in those days, worth a fortune, so we just blew it up and sort of winched the pieces up with a crane, and towed that to Fremantle where it was loaded onto a ship.

PW Did you have to get government permission to do that job?

AC Oh I was only a kid of fifteen or something, now I don't really know what the legalities of it were.

PW And then you became a crayfisherman?

AC Yearh - well after the diving packed up and Theo sort of went his way, we - my father got me a job - he knew a few fishermen, and he got me a job on a crayboat.

PW And - what was the name of the first crayboat you worked on?

AC The *Eureka*. - The first processing boat to ever work north of Kalbarri, and that was - they were tough days - the crayfish were very good, we only worked a hundred pots in those days, and - we never used to get below twenty bags of crays a day.

PW Who was the skipper of that boat?

AC Fred Kato.

PW And he was the owner as well was he?

AC No, a guy called Fred Waterhouse owned it - Fred was the skipper.

PW And so did you serve - most of your time with those people?

AC Yearh about a year I think I was on the freezer boat. We actually came up here and did some trawling in - Shark Bay and in Exmouth - was looking for prawns before it was ever a fishery.

PW Were they trial trawls were they? (confirmed) And had anybody else done - searching for prawns then?

AC There were two other boats up here doing it. There was a fisheries had a little boat called the *Lancelin*, a bloke called Ces Pearce was the skipper, that was up here, and there was an Albany boat that belonged to the

Hunts called the *John Jim*. And they'd come up here as well, and - but it was very early days, it would have been, God, it would have been, I dunno, late fifties, and - the set up was really hard and primitive.

PW Were there a few people living here then?

AC No, there wasn't a soul.

PW Nobody?

AC No, we just got down to the bottom of the Gulf there and there was just nothing there. The old jetty - was there, but there was not a soul, no building.

PW Did you have refrigerators?

AC Yearh there was a - freezer on the Eureka.

PW And what was the prawning like then?

AC Well it was late in the year, I can remember it was just prior to the - like we did that trip and then it was sort of - we went back and got ready for the white crayfish season, so it would have been late in the year, and it's normal up here, there aren't a lot of prawns towards the end of the season, it would have been around about October, I remember we got terrible weather on the way back, southerlies all the way. -

Side A: 5.1 mins

PW Can you remember how you got wind that there were prawns up here?

AC No, I can't, as I say I was only a kid on board then.

PW - Was the skipper very impressed with the prospects?

AC No - it was very primitive, we didn't have - we even had to pull the net in by hand, like they'd just use the normal anchor winch, they took the capstans off the anchor winch and put two drums on in place of the capstan, and - so they'd just use the anchor winch with wire, the sort of capstans, they ran straight down the side of the boat to a gallows on either side at the back, or down the stern, and - sort of - we was only pulling one net and - so the anchor winch just wound the two otter boards up to the two gallows at the back, and then we actually had to physically pull the net in by hand, and you were getting spiked and God only knows what, and there was sea snakes and the whole bit, and diving into it was pretty hard, until we got down to the "cod end" and then we'd just take a little boom stick - out the back and we'd take a - wrap a rope around the cod end two or three times and then use a block and tackle and bully it up, you know, - and by this time we're all out the back and we're all sort of worn out and out of breath, and the boat's drifted around beam on, and the thing's swinging like a great pendulum and there was just, it was hard. (laughter)

PW So you scurried back - for crayfish, and where did you go back to crayfish after that?

AC - Out of Geraldton with the freezer boat for a while, and then eventually moved down south and did some processing sort of down around Beagles (islands).

PW You didn't go to the Abrolhos at all?

AC Not with the freezer boat, I finished up - eventually I got off the freezer boat and went with - a chap, a fine old guy called Billy Sing, who was, had a fleet of luggers from Darwin. But that was the time that the pearling all packed up, and a huge fleet of luggers - I guess it was the start of the plastic era and - oh, dozens and dozens and dozens of luggers came down from Broome and Darwin, and Bill had two, a boat called the *Darwin* about a seventy five footer, I worked with Billy Sing, and - we fished out of Geraldton then

PW When did you become an independent fisherman, working for yourself?

AC After I finished with Billy Sing, back in - it would have been around about nineteen, gee, (Mrs Cassidy interjects: "would it have been in the fifties still?") - yearh, 'cause I didn't get my ticket until sixty one, that's when we took over - I worked - after I left Billy Sing I worked with two Dutchmen on a boat called the *Aries*. - a forty five footer, they were two very nice guys, Dirk Hartog and Rick Kelper?? -

PW His name was Dirk Hartog? (laughing)

AC He was too.

Mrs Cassidy (indistinct)

PW And the boat was called the *Aries*. Did I see in the street where you're living here in Exmouth, the *Aries* Fishing Company? Is that the same people?

AC No - that's us because we finished up, I worked with them for about a year, and obviously they were pretty happy with me, because when they went on to another boat, they built a bigger boat called the *Atlantic Ocean*, they let me take over the *Aries* and I sort of paid them back, and that's how we started. So I think it pays, you know to, in those days particularly that if you know - do the job, and - I got the rewards - So that's how we started, and as I say they were a couple of real nice guys.

PW Are those gentlemen still alive?

AC Rick Kelper(?) is, he's in Cairns I believe - but Dirk passed away a couple of years ago.

PW Now after you became an independent fisherman working for yourself, did you come up to Exmouth then -

AC No, the *Aries* was a forty five footer, was a "well boat" actually - like a well is just two water tight bulkheads - and a hole is cut in the bottom and the boat just sinks down, the buoyancy keeps the boat floating, there's no pumps, that was a really good setup, because you didn't have any trouble with crayfish dying and so forth -

Side A: 10.1 mins

PW Was that specifically for crayfish - or had it been constructed for snapper fishing?

AC No, just for crayfish. And then about - sixty five I got caught beam on over at the shallows at Rat Island and we got capsized in the breakers and lost that boat. - We were lucky to get out of that, but -

PW That's Rat Island on the Abrolhos? (confirmed) And - were there other boats nearby when that happened?

AC No there wasn't, as I say we were very lucky to get picked up, but we sort of got capsized and - washed inside the reef and - I always had the dinghy tied to the - was a steel boat, but I had - was a wooden wheel house on it and I guess - being tumbled over with this huge, absolutely huge swell, as you can imagine it was a forty five foot steel boat, so - the wheel house broke away and the dinghy floated up, and eventually - we managed to scoop the water out, and - climb in and start paddling for Rat Island, and then we got picked up by a guy called Frank Kelly. - And he knew I normally had three guys on board the boat, like two deckhands and myself, and we only had the two of us (chuckling) so he had eyes like a jewfish when he came alongside, because he could see the ropes and stuff floating, and he knew somebody was missing - But as it turned - the reason was - that's one of the reasons I lost the boat actually because one guy didn't turn up for work and - I had gear on the reef, and we'd just unloaded in Geraldton. I s'pose the young bloke hit the booze and didn't turn up, so I couldn't afford the wait, I had my gear on there, so we took off one man short, and of course I was trying to do the winchman's job and no one on the wheel, and as the swell came in - I couldn't get back to the wheel quick enough, we were caught beam on and over we went, so that's how it goes.

PW You picked yourself up after that and got another boat?

AC Yes we bought - an old seventy five foot navy boat, called a GPV, general purpose vessel - beautiful old boat. I had that for the next twenty six years actually

PW And what was that called?

AC The *Tringa*.

PW The *Tringa*. Now this project's mostly about Ningaloo. When did you start operating on Ningaloo Reef?

AC That year, probably, no I'm not sure. We got the boat in sixty - I got my grade one ticket in sixty six - so it was either sixty six or sixty seven and - we went up and did the Shark Bay snapper, we had a nice freezer in the - *Tringa*. And after the - Shark Bay pinks finished we went up into trapping out of Point Maud - there was nothing there in those days.

PW You were trapping?

AC We were trapping out of Point Cloats, and all along the back of the reef

PW Can you describe - a trap to me, what does a fish trap look like?

AC - The standard trap that we used in those days and it hasn't changed much is circular - three foot high, five foot diameter, with sort of a funnel shaped neck in it, so the fish sort of - come up and they hit the circle I suppose, then they just follow the wire around and then they just come in this funnel shaped neck that sort of goes half way in.

PW Did you put bait in them?

AC Yep. In those days we used cray heads, and - now we got cray - heads, well the crays are such a nuisance because they drip black juice everywhere, and everything's just a hell of a mess, nowadays we use mullets, which is far better.

PW You're still using fish traps are you? And did you catch a lot of fish with the traps?

AC Very good on the Shark Bay pinks because they are schooling snapper, you get schools there that - show up on the sounder there fifteen fathoms high, and once you've actually run along and steamed around the place and found a school of fish - you know it might be fifty yards across, ten fifteen fathoms high - millions - anybody's guess how many tons there are down there - no one will ever know - all you see is this cloud on the sounder, so it's difficult to estimate, and - you could just drop your traps on these schools and - get your daily quota, which was for us was probably about a ton and a half in those days, we had to gut them and scrub them and sort of pack them and so forth - that was probably all we could handle, around about a ton and a half.

Side A: 15.1 mins

PW Did you suspend the down into the schools, and you didn't actually put on the bottom at all?

AC Oh yes, they'd sit on the bottom.

PW And how long would you leave them on the bottom?

AC On the schooling fish only a matter of - you know - in fact there was no restriction in those days - (we had) ten or twelve or fifteen traps - I've cut back to, three, that's all we needed

PW And - would they stay on the bottom for a half an hour or (what?)

AC - No, a matter of ten minutes, say fifteen or something like that. You just pull one trap - empty it, turn around, get into position, allow for the drift, I'd put a marker buoy down so you can, you know, so you can work out the drift and - then just - you could even turn the echo sounder off once you had it all mapped out, and just drop you trap, and it word sort of drift down and - where you wanted it to go.

PW - In those good times, how many fish would you get in a trap, or empty out of a trap when you pull it up?

AC - A good average trap when the fish were on the bite would probably be around thirty, forty. Of course you got bigger catches, but you know, in answer to your question, I think a good trap was around thirty, on average.

PW And these fish were the pink snapper?

AC Yep.

PW And how long were they?

AC It depends. If you were in the shallows you could get them up to sort of ten pound - as you went deeper - the fish got smaller, and out best catches really were out in about forty one fathoms, and that was a huge, huge - school out there along an edge. It was about a half a mile or so long, and it was just an unbelievable sight, there was fish fifteen fathoms high the full length of that edge.

PW Did you often see schools that size?

AC Never as long as this, what we used to call the outside patch but, yearh all the schools generally were, you know like, when you'd - come across a school, they'd be ten fathom high.

PW Are they still like that?

AC Yep. It's getting better actually because it's so restricted, and they've cut, there's only a few fishermen doing it now.

PW And how far offshore are these big schools?

AC Just on the west side of - Bernier and Dorre Islands, west of Camarvon, probably around five miles west of the islands, in that area.

PW Do they move down the reef system?

AC No one knows, the guy to ask who could give you a bit of information would be Jerry Jank?? from Waterman's - good blokes in the research side, they did years of research, and there was always such a - they're interesting guys to talk to because - there was always a lot of - you know - people can make - a comment that sounds convincing, gullible people will listen, because it sounds good. Now there was always this story about traps bashing the bottom and killing the fish and all sorts of stuff, and so, you know we really had a bad name. Finally, they created such a stink that the research put a video (camera) down in the fish trap, and - that stopped them. Some of the guys like Charlie Ferns was one that was always, he was a line fisherman out of Camarvon, and he was - vehemently opposed to trapping. Charlie saw this video, Jerry showed us the video in the galley of the *Tringa* and we all sat back one afternoon in the fishing boat harbour, and you could see how - like the video was poking out the neck, and you would see the fish just milling outside like a - like an aquarium, and then you would see them actually swim up, and not like the look of things, and then sort of paddle over with their flippers, little fins on the side, and back off, then eventually you'd see one come in, it wasn't just, you know, it was really interesting, and also then we found out why some traps catch and some don't. We could never work it out - You'd accuse the crew of chucking them over carelessly, upside down, whatever, could never work out why one caught and one didn't, and there

was the answer. - You'd see the video, like poking up front and there's nothing, no sort of fish, or few fish waiting to get in, or - and then you'd see them all start to get fidgety, and they'd just drift away, then along come an old slimy cod, and he'd prop outside - 'cause he's hanging around the food that's in the trap, but he couldn't get in because he's too fat, and that's why it didn't catch. (laughter).

Side A: 20 mins

PW It was nothing at all to do with the trap?

AC It was the old slimy sitting outside the neck. And quite often you'd see a cod that could fit in, he'd sort of come up carefully, you know, a bit dodgy and, and have a look at things first, and there'd be a few small fish in there, swimming past the video, and the next minute you'd just see the - force his way in through the neck, and then all hell would break loose, the camera rocks, and the trap rocks -

PW And the cod, they eat the snapper too do they?

AC They just swallow them whole. And quite often when you brought the trap, many times, all the time, you'd bring a trap up as it empties on the deck, a cod would give a belch, and out comes a snapper, not a scale off it.

PW So he'd go into the shop as well? (laughter) - You havn't been a snapper fisherman (all the time) Oh, before we go onto that - what times of year did you catch snapper?

AC That was about from about the first of June, through till around the middle of August - I didn't bother getting there until end of the first week in June, because then you got onto good fish. You go there a bit earlier and you scratch around and waste fuel, to get a few fish. Better to get there about the first week in June and then get good catches, and then by the end of July they're starting to thin out, you can scratch around once again, but after that (indistinct). In the old days it was a problem with the fish, there wasn't a great demand for fish, and we used to have to take - we could get rid of a few loads, maybe the Fremantle Fish Supply, used to take a few, but then they flooded the market and we'd have to take the last lot down and sell them off the jetty at either Barrack Street or Claremont, or Nedlands.

PW Did you ever go around to the Raffles Hotel in Applecross?

AC We didn't go to the Raffles 'cause the boat drew too much, I think a couple of guys did, Ed Stock?? and old Ted Riggs with *Eliza*, that didn't draw as much water - but we sold them off Nedlands one year, and off Claremont another year, or a few years in a row.

PW Was there a good reception for those fish?

AC Yes it was, it was great. Also there was sort off, you must remember it was also the end of the season where there was nothing much happening so - we got a bit of extra bob - a few extra dollars and it kept us working for a few extra weeks in the off season

PW Are there restrictions now to prevent you selling fish in that way?

AC - I don't think so - they wouldn't let - the jetties have deteriorated, that's probably the main reason - you can still do it out of Fremantle where the jetties are solid but I think - down at Nedlands and that where Jo Jos Restaurant is where the old baths used to be - I think the jetties are now too flimsy, so that's probably gone forever

PW I hear that the owner of Jo Jos Restaurant is another identity from up this way that has been involved in the Exmouth fishing scene?

AC George has been here for, well actually - George is a hell of a nice bloke - he wasn't a fisherman - all his life - we met George when we were turtle fishing out of Coral Bay, and George sort of loved the life, and

when he left the Coral Bay Hotel he came here and moved into Exmouth, and they've been big in charter work ever since

PW He's living down in Perth now is he?

AC Yes. He should be back though for the whale shark any old day.

PW This leads us on to your turtle fishing activities on Ningaloo. What year did that commence?

AC It was going for quite a few years - in the late sixties, but then the boat that was recently doing it was a boat called the *Nardi Mar*, used to crayfish with us down at North Island, a Dutch family called the Pluggs - ran the boat for Tropical Traders, in fact these photos are of the *Nardi Mar*, but eventually the old *Nardi Mar* got wrecked at the end of the turtle season going south, wrecked at Port Gregory actually, just north of Geraldton, and I was approached by Tropical Traders whether I'd be interested in taking over the turtles in the off season, so we did, and it was just really the highlight of my life, it was the most invigorating, and just interesting, and the best thing I've ever done.

PW Where were you based when you were turtle fishing?

AC We operated out of Carnarvon, there wasn't any marina then, we used to - go - we had a forty mile lease from Coral bay, Point Maud up to just south of Yardie Creek -

PW That lease was from the Fisheries Department?

AC Yes - well actually it was Tropical Trader's lease, I dare say issued by the fisheries, so we just - we were always on a quota - they had a market for around three and a half thousand turtles each year, so that's what we figured, three and a half to four thousand for the three years that we did 'em

Side A: 25.1 mins

PW What year was that?

AC That was in '70, '71 and '72. - Coral Bay had only just recently been opened, and actually it was just a huge white elephant - we'd sort of call in there because we'd be turtle fishing in the area, and as I say - we met George King, there was no tourists in those days. Was just twenty years, or fifteen years before its time

PW Can you remember the first day you went turtle fishing?

AC Certainly can.

PW Tell me about that?

AC - (long thought delay) (laughter) We - were doing everything wrong

PW You got up in the morning and had breakfast (laughter).

AC Well actually - what was his name? Martin Plugg, he was a very nice guy, he was one of the guys who had been doing it for years, and he - came up to Geraldton before we left and showed us how to set the boat up and he agreed to come up and show us how to go about it, because we didn't know how to process 'em or do anything. There was quite an art in processing them and so forth, but - so away we went. Martin worked the harpoon, this is the very first day we are talking about, I was working the outboard. It's all done with signals - the guy - when you spot a turtle, you actually just follow - obviously you can't call out and say over here, turn left, because you've got an outboard roaring in your ears. You hear nothing, just the roar of the outboard, so the harpooner, just points the harpoon, and you head, you follow along that line, and you can tell by the angle of the harpoon - you're catching up to the turtle, and pretty soon it's pointing up at you down and - its just a good team - effort, and then you can see him getting ready to throw, and you sort of

when he's pointing say down on the starboard side - and if its angling out a little bit too far you know its too far, and - obviously it's starting to cut back towards the boat, you swing the boat to the left so that you don't sort of go over the top of it, in other words you can't harpoon it and so forth, so just a good team effort, and when he is in position he lets fly, and sort of - you've got him, well not always; they get off the harpoon sometimes, you've got to chase them and get 'em again, and once - then once you sort of pull him in on the harpoon 'till it's alongside the boat, then the outboard driver, sort of lets the outboard go and he races up and grabs hold of it by the flipper and gets a loop of rope around the flipper - like a lasso, and then you've got him, pull the harpoon out and get him on board, and on to the next one. But - it wasn't sort of wholesale slaughter, the turtles were very fast, if they got into patches of weed, and in the shadow, or the sun went down, behind the cloud, you lost them.

PW Did you have spear them in a particular place?

AC No, we used - I've got a harpoon there I'll show you, it's actually right next to your car, that's standing against the fence. I've still got the original harpoon, it's like a piece of inch and a quarter water pipe with about an eighteen inch high tensile - length of five eighth (inch) rod with a barb on the end and - a flap. We actually improved on the harpoon, they didn't have barbs on the original ones and of course the thing would get off, so I put a flap on them so we didn't lose it, and they didn't would and go away and die, although they were terribly tough animals, you know, for years we were catching turtles with two and three and four harpoon holes in them, where they'd got off in previous years. -

PW The first day that you went, did you have some embarrassing - incidents - (chucking) were you experienced as you thought you were?

AC - It wasn't too bad because Martin had been doing it for years - no I think it went fairly well, I suppose.

PW Then it would be fair to say that you developed your skills pretty quickly?

AC We certainly did. I always deeply regretted it, because that year we took a little Super, we had a little Super Eight movie (camera) on board, we took quite a few movies of the turtles, but sort of, we were mugs at the game, the next season, and the following season we were experts, and we didn't bother taking any movies, and I've deeply regretted that.

Side A: 30 mins

PW But you did take some photographs, and we'll have a look at those a little later on - The turtle shell, was that marketable as well?

AC Everything - what we did - we had to - we had to sort of gut them, and freeze them, and every week we unloaded at the whaling jetty in Carnarvon - and they were all taken down to Robb's Jetty (Abattoirs, South Fremantle) and processed there, nothing was wasted. The breast plate and the backbone were rendered down for the gelatinous stuff for turtle soup, all the leather was used for watch bands and ladies' shoes and handbags, and the steaks went over to Germany, France. Nothing was wasted, they were a really good animal.

PW They had a fat which was described as green, what was the green fat used for?

AC Yeah, green fat - I think that was all just boiled up with the - breast plate and the back plate

PW Did you send the whole turtle down to Robb's Jetty?

AC We did, we didn't process them, we just gutted them.

PW So they went down meat and all inside them did they? (Yep) And how did they get there, were they frozen or chilled?

AC Yearh, they were frozen and chilled, like, you know, the first ones - well we whacked them in our freezer and - they were frozen by the end of the week, the last couple of days catches wouldn't quite be frozen - you know, they were back in Perth - only a couple of days and they were at Robb's and all processed out.

PW Who was processing them at Robb's Jetty?

AC A guy called - Headland.

Side A tape ends: 31.8 mins

Side B tape starts

PW I'll have to ask that question again. Who was processing them at Robb's Jetty?

AC For Tropical Traders, but the guy, that the contractor was Barry Headland.

PW And did he had a team of butchers working on these things?

AC Yearh, we never actually saw them processing them down there, but - he was the contractor.

PW How many would you send down in a single load?

AC About 250.

PW And how frequently would that happen.

AC Every week, every Saturday. We had our own chiller, truck - a Gascoyne Trader's truck would finish his north run, and he would backload our turtles every Saturday on the old whaling jetty.

PW And was two fifty about a maximum load was it?

AC - Was about average, yes - we could get a few more in, but - that 250 was around on average, though we had bigger, better loads on sometimes through bad weather, and rain. Turtling wasn't very successful in overcast, because you couldn't - overcast and rain, if conditions were too bad you couldn't see them. But nice sunny conditions we did a lot better.

PW Now correct me if I'm wrong, but you set out from Carnarvon on a weekly basis, and you would move up the Ningaloo Reef - and catch your turtles and then you would make sure you got back to Carnarvon in time to prepare them. Did you gut them on the boat, on the way did you?

AC Yearh, as they - actually we improved on that as well from what - the Pluggs had. They used to - like you'd - harpoon them during the day and sort of pile them up on the deck - cover them with a tarp' and so forthe, and - then that night, say from about five o'clock - once the sun started to go down, they were too difficult. You couldn't start work before eight o'clock, and you couldn't sort of fish after five because of the sun being too low and shadows, so then we'd get stuck into the processing - the head was removed and we used to just use a meat cleaver, and a gympie hammer to open up the breast plate up the centre, and that was sort of fairly hard and fairly slow - belt this butcher's cleaver through it so I bought and old - I bought a circular saw, a Black and Decker, still got it to this day actually, and - so then I could, we could just rip em up the back plate (sic), up through the centre, instead of chopping through all this gristle and bone

PW That's the breast plate?

AC Yearh, the breast plate, and that was - that made the gutting a lot better, then - See one guy actually removed the heads and - ripped them up the guts with the saw, and put a little rope on the back flippers, and slid 'em across to me, I was the gutter, and - we hooked a block and tackle on 'em and winched 'em up so that, by the back flippers so that the - naturally with gravity all the guts is tending to fall out, so - that's how I actually

gravity was helping us and so all the guts would fall out fairly easily, with the method we used, and then just booted it out, pushed it all out with your foot, out through a hole in the bullwarks, and - there'd be an incredible amount of tiger sharks, used to hang around the boat when we were gutting, in fact one day at Norwegian Bay there was twelve, twelve foot tigers.

PW How long would it take you to gut a single - turtle?

AC - With me gutting - like you know because it's sort of half done for a start, I mean I suppose if you said from (indistinct) like the guy that actually had to run a knife around the outside of the breast plate, and also run it, pick up the saw and roar it down the centre - remove the head off - I guess that would have taken him several minutes, and then it comes across to the gutter, and I wouldn't think it would have taken me much more than a minute to have gutted a turtle.

PW So overall from start to finish, about five minutes per animal?

AC Maximum, yeah, maximum. Then it was ongoing, from the removal of the head, the organs and right across to me then down on the deck, it then go along to - slide, pushed, they were all on their back, they slid easily on their back plate, and that would then go up to the third guy who would just - cross the flippers - over the breast plate, because obviously you know, you can imagine trying to freeze turtles is like trying to freeze a kangaroo, you can't - (the limbs are) stuck out everywhere, so we fold the breast, the flippers together, and just poke a knife through the end of the flippers, we poke a twitch of wire through the flippers, and through the breast plate, a just put a twitch, that held everything closed so you could pack them neatly, and then he would stand them up to draining, neck down, in a big row, like down the boat, but he'd also then just drill a small hole through the edge of the shell down near the tail, we'd put a twitch of wire through that so we could hook 'em on the block and tackle, 'cause they (would later be) frozen and hard to handle, and when we got down to Carnarvon, we just - lower a hook down to the freezer. The blokes down below would just put the hook into the wire, and then we'd whack it on the pot winch, whuzz 'em up, and someone on the jetty would just pull it, that would swing the boom across and drop it on the little train that Nor'west Seafoods had. And to this day, I should have spoken up. I've - actually seen tagged turtles, and they've got some terrible way of putting a tag on the flipper, which to me - it's difficult to put on because it might flap - accidents - 'cause if your working on something as strong as a turtle and they flip, they can deflect your knife, and that did happen to us. I got - stabbed quite severely once.

Side B: 6.4 mins

PW You got stabbed?

AC No, a guy did, as - he poked the turtle with the knife, it just gave a flip, deflected the knife and he rammed it straight in his arm, so that was a nasty one. But - the ideal place for a tag for a turtle is, run along the beach and just put a little battery drill, bore a hole in the end of the shell, there's nothing there, it's just solid bone - just that last inch, and put your thing in, and the turtle would never know it's there. And I don't know why they do it, put it on through the meat and everything of the flipper, it's beyond me.

PW What type of turtles were you catching?

AC Green turtles.

PW There are other turtles?

AC There's the old loggerhead, there is no commercial value - we saw the odd hawksbill, but not many - these were just hundreds and hundreds of - green turtles.

PW You fished for turtles for three years along Ningaloo and then you ceased, why did you cease?

AC - They withdrew the license. Times change, that's when they started talking about a national park, and -

This would involve approximately 20.8 hours for 250 turtles

Tropical Trader's licence was just withdrawn.

PW What year was that?

AC That was in '72

PW Was this inconvenient for you?

AC No, we just kept - it wasn't, I was sorry to see us going, there was no reason why there couldn't be a turtle fishery, and I know it'll never happen again, because they weren't in any danger of extinction - we were also, I must say, we didn't take small ones, our contract was they had to be a hundred and twenty pounds dressed, and they were big turtles those, some as big as this table, so you didn't take a small one. So they weren't in any danger.

PW When was the turtle fishing season?

AC - Well we used to go after - the Abrolhos crays, so there wasn't actually - we used to go sort of June, or say July, July or September, maybe October.

PW And this would run for how long?

AC - It'd run sort of probably for about three or four months, depending how long it took for us to get our quota

PW Was the breeding season of the turtles coinciding with that period?

AC - A few had eggs, not a terrible lot - any turtles that were on the beach we didn't bother, apart from the fact that they were probably there to lay eggs, and it was also, and I must say, we did do it once - said "oh yeah, there's some turtles, come on lets go and get them." Big mistake! Didn't do that again, because - you sort of - dinghy runabout tangled up on the - small two foot surface on the beach, you get, and your outboard's hitting the ground, and the bottom. What do you do with a turtle when it's on the beach? It weighs hundreds of pounds. How do you get it back on the boat? It was just too hard, so we never did that again, for all of those reasons. It was far better to just get them in the water where you harpoon them, bring them alongside, the dinghy leans over, and although they're heavy, with two of yous on one side and your pullin' the turtle in, your dinghy actually tips to the water's edge and the thing just drops in. You're only - lifted it a short distance, you're not lifting it at all, your only sort of half lifting it, and it topples into the boat, whereas if you've got one that you killed on the beach, what do you do with it? You've got this dead weight, weighing hundreds of pounds. (chuckling) No; so (indistinct) do with their breeding and everything, was fine.

Side B: 10.1 Mins

PW Did you do any fishing along Ningaloo reef as well?

AC - Not while we were turtle fishing, not professionally. When the turtles finished we - we used to trap the same area, and we did trap it before. In fact as far as I know were were the first to ever trap north of Carnarvon

PW Did you always trap on the outside of the reef?

AC Oh yeah, never inside. There was a guy - when we were turtle fishing, that - by the name of "Duke" Wellington, very nice guy, we got, we met him there 'cause - like we were anchored, he'd come across for a cup of tea or something while we were unloading our turtles and - he made his living in a twelve foot dinghy - just catching fish inside the reef. And he's come alongside sometimes with that dinghy which would be just loaded, hundreds of kilos. There was just him and his wife and two kids, camped on, they had a little freezer at - on the - point - just below the homestead there at Ningaloo, and that's how he made his living for years, until - everything comes to an end. His kids grew up and they had to go to school, and - but - he

caught a lot fish inside the reef.

PW I've heard his name mentioned before. Where does he live?

AC - I don't know. He wouldn't be hard to track down, he's actually just written a book - a guy told me about it the other day, I could find out.²

PW He's not in Exmouth?

AC No.

PW - Well you've told me some really interesting things about your activities up here. Is there something that I should have asked you, or that you feel should be added?

AC (laughing) I'm always sorry - there was quite a few wrecks, there was the wreck of the *Perth* on the - Ningaloo Reef, and - there is the old boiler still sitting there to this day, but one day at - one day at low tide we actually - there was a bit of wreckage sticking out, and I went across and had a look, there was only a couple of feet of water, and had a look at all this wreckage there, and - I said to Duke, 'cause he had been there longer than me with his fishing. I said, "Duke, what's all that?" was a bit of wreckage out this side, off the point there. He said, "Oh it must - be a piece of the old *Perth* that washed down the reef" and of course we let it go. (laughing) Turned out years later someone was spearfishing out there, and missed the bluebone and his this little coral outcrop, that flaked off and there was a big pile of silver coins sitting there, and it turned out to be an American whaler called the *Rapid*, and I've always been disappointed (laughing) that we (never) found that.³

PW This board of silver coins? What happened to them?

AC - I've seen some coins, that was a bit of a dodgy do - (indistinct) seen the coins, they're beautiful coins

PW And they're circling around in a private collection are they?

AC Oh - some were kept, but - I think the Museum's got the rest or the government stepped in and took 'em over, or whatever, but the guys that found it did finally get, I think thirty thousand dollars reward or something like that, but they lost most of the coins.

PW When did you last fish at Ningaloo?

AC We've actually been - trapping Ningaloo right up until the last few years - only just - because the national Park only goes out about ten miles, we've always been trapping there, but now they've stopped all professional fishing, completely - in the Ningaloo area now.

PW Has that been - presented you with any difficulties?

AC Yes it did, there's no - like - it did because there's no amateur, sort of fishery outside - we couldn't trap under thirty fathoms anyway, and - there's no reason for them to have stopped.

PW That's less than thirty fathoms?

AC Yearh, like you know we had to fish outside thirty fathoms, for trapping, so - they stopped, you know, they've closed professional fishing altogether. But those fish that are outside thirty fathoms now are just going to live and die out there forever, for nothing.

² Numerous enquiries were subsequently made as to the whereabouts of Mr Wellington, without success

³ SS *Perth* ran on to Ningaloo Reef near Point Cloats in 1887. The 366 ton *Rapid* was a American-China trader which was wrecked just south of Point Cloats in 1811. See Henderson, G & K (1988). *Unfinished Voyages 1851-1880*. Nedlands: UWA Press. p.180.

PW I'm not quite clear on what you said there, you could only fish under thirty fathoms?

AC Over, so in other words it was good, the stocks were protected, like, you know, we - we always had to stay to the deep water, you couldn't fish under thirty fathoms, therefore the inshore stocks, there was no professional trapping done on the inshore stocks.

Side B: 15 mins

PW Why couldn't you fish in less than thirty fathoms of water?

AC That was just a restriction that they put on us because, like traps were always, as I said, before they were sort of, you know, a dirty word, proven to be false - as it turns out.

PW But traps are totally banned now are they?

AC No, all professional fishing is on the west coast now - we actually have a trap endorsement to work north of the Cape (indistinct) trap fishery.

PW Have the traps changed in design from the past?

AC Slightly, whereas the original trap was always - round, a guy - changed the design - a bloke from Albany, Grayham - Auguston, Graham - he made them lower, made them out of ARC mesh, and sort of made them like so wouldn't roll around. Like being round they were hard to keep on a boat, as you can understand, they - roll around the place. So he - sort of made the neck - they were more rectangle, more rectangle, with the stem still round like the (kitchen) table but - slightly rectangle, and sort of flat at the entrance, so that they would stand up, and not roll around. And that - and I think that's mainly what they're using today. We have actually, our new traps because - we've got a smaller boat now, my son's have got a smaller boat with our licence on it, we - stuck to the old original size, but as it's a smaller boat - we just made a smaller trap - from the old five foot, we brought it back to four foot, and they've just reduced it and we find they work really well.

PW Do you ever lose traps?

AC Occasionally, but not often.

PW There was - I seem to remember there was some talk about lost traps having the potential to go on catching fish for ever and a day, is that possible, or is that wrong?

AC That's what they say, but, I suppose that they would catch the odd fish, but we have, we've tried all this, they don't catch. - Like for example when we were processing and bait was always such a hassle, - we used to use, you know, we'd put in some of the backbones. That trap won't catch. You know, you catch, okay, one or two fish, but where the other guys are catching thirty, and forty, and fifty. This won't produce because it's just the wrong bait, and - you know, - it'd be negligible. This - ghost fishing always been - as I say, all these stories that used to circulate, and the damage and the fish bashing themselves to pieces, well they don't, because they just behave like in an aquarium. We've seen it on the video. The arguments, as far as damage to the bottom, there is no damage to the bottom. Most of the bottom turns out to be flat limestone, so - just shut all the critics up, and guys like Charlie Ferns, after he saw this, he was the main instigator - raced around and bought traps, he never caught so many fish in his life, and that's a fact

Mrs Cassidy interjects They also get out of the traps.

AC Oh yes, they're not trapped, then they find their way out, see they're not locked in there, there's no one way valve, you just - I can show you the traps, they swim in and they swim out

PW Andy, you are now in a semi-retired situation, have you ceased going to sea for fish?

AC Well - I have only in the last year because we sold our - trawler in last September.

PW What was the name of that?

AC *Kaiama*

PW What was the reason for selling that?

AC Well we had a - development licence issued by the fisheries off for an area in deep water, off west of Coral Bay, outside the National Park, long way outside the National Park - outside a - hundred metres and out to two hundred, and it was a good little area, and absolutely no reason why it couldn't have still kept going, but, there's a - we were always getting complaints, like we were unloading at Coral Bay, and so you'd always get complaints from the tourists if we were unloading, with all these fish coming in. They're catching nothing, different species mind you, but you can't reason with people - and there was always complaints, "What's this trawler doing unloading at Coral Bay - and that sort of thing, plus the catches did drop, and so the fisheries kept cutting our season back, and it became

Side B: 20 mins

PW Why do you think your catches were dropping?

AC - Well they were different fish in the deep water, they were - see you can look at a fish and know where it came from. If it's dark colour you know it came from very shallow water, and for example, nor'west snapper, the spangled emperor, you don't catch them over a hundred metres. A hundred metres they cut out. Red emperor, you won't catch a red emperor over about seventy fathoms, that's the deepest you'd ever find a red emperor - so can look at what the others bring in and you can - you know where those fish came from, and once you start getting around seventy - fathoms and that you start catching job fish, gold band snapper, you don't get them in the shallows. But these were different species where we were, pearl perch, which is the southern (corr.) - northern jewfish looks very much like - we've had guys when we're unloading at Coral Bay, (who would say) "Oh look at all the jewfish, no wonder we're not catching them." Well they don't catch jewfish up here anyway, they're pearl perch, and the difference is they've got a black lining in their stomach, and - I've been unloading a load of pearl perch at Midwest Seafoods in Geraldton, and I've seen the Fisheries guy pull up, and he couldn't just about believe his good luck, or he couldn't believe his eyes, as he pointed at the pearl perch and said, "These jewfish are undersize." and the boss said, "Look don't get excited, these are pearl perch." and, you know, (chuckling) that's a fact, the young blokes just don't know

PW Has this been a problem with them, with the dealing with the authorities that there have been inexperience people coming out and telling you what to do?

AC - I don't know, I mean even with the fisheries, they're all pretty good blokes, Peter Rodgers the director's really nice guy - I've had lots of conversations with him and he said, you'd be surprised at the amount of - he knows that we're sort of doing the right thing, he said, "You'd be surprised the amount of complaints we're still getting about our (AC's) activity up there." so we've had all this pressure from the Coral Bay, what do you call them? Coral Bay - Progress Association, continually writing to the department, they didn't want a trawler there, they tried to get us kicked out of Coral Bay - well they can't, we've just got to unload somewhere - that's where we were working, so we always had this pressure, and I think it told, it told on us - and the Fisheries just sort of kept cutting our season back, and it became uneconomical.

PW Did you have direct confrontation with the public as well at the beach?

AC No, we were very well received by the public, the people were delighted to be able to come and buy a fish - 'cause all the inshore stock's are just about depleted, you've only got to go down here during the tourist season, any where, Coral bay, anywhere, anywhere you like and you'll see probably a hundred boats going in the water, where you'll see fifty out of Tantabidi - be at least so. And so you've got to argue for the sake, say in Exmouth alone one hundred boats going out during the peak of the season. Now if they all only catch two fish, or say three fish, you know, there's three hundred fish coming in a day, and there'll be far more

damage than (by) the professional. The professional does not pick a place to death.

PW Do you think that the inshore fishing along Ningaloo has declined?

AC Oh, definitely, for the reason I just mentioned, and plus, you cannot, you cannot just reason with people. Like, you get these, some of these guys are professionals in the sense that they are so good at their job that they are good fishermen. Now when they go out and get their bag limit in a few minutes, they will toss the smallest fish back, because they've got their quota, but they'll toss the little one over and catch a bigger one.

PW And the little one might be dead anyway?

AC Yearh, gone, but I mean - you can't - do anything with these people, it's just the way it is.

PW Do you think that the degradation of fish stocks on the inshore waters has occurred along the entire length of Ningaloo?

AC Yes. Over the years - there's been guys - I mean there are good bag limits in force now, but they only work, as I said, the unscrupulous person will toss the small one back and sit there and catch a bigger one, they don't care, not all the fishermen, but there's that element that do that, there's no question of that - people only told me that yesterday as well, we were talking about it -

PW How do you know that's (true)?

AC - A person told me that yesterday, who has been out on - boats fishing, and seen the guys - drop them over.

PW Does this happen on some of the commercial charters?

AC No, I wouldn't think so. No that's - the charter boats are pretty good at looking after their - future, but, you know, the guy that's up here for a holiday, he might not come back, next year he might go to Broome or somewhere else.

PW I hear some fishermen also build up a stock pile, they're allowed to build up a stockpile, and then take this back with them, do you think that's a good idea?

Side B: 25 mins

AC Oh, definitely, (they do) when - we first started here with our factory and processing, it was just absolutely nauseating the amount of fish that some people stored, to send back. Now Fisheries have stopped that - I think they're not allowed to accumulate -

PW Fourteen kilos or something like that?

AC Something like that, so what they do now they ship them out, but at least they can't store it. We've had guys down there that, well Shirley - she's got the record probably of all these boxes of fillets, this is in the old days, before they brought in these new tough regulations which are only fair.

PW Do you think people should be allowed to ship any fish back? (long pause without answer) Or just eat what they catch here?

AC (long pause) It's a difficult one, it'd be nice to come for your holidays, suck to the bag limit, keep your catches, that's how it is. I think I'm a little bit soft like that, I like to see, but -

PW Have you been - are you still involved in freezing fish for people to send back?

AC No, not since we sold the trawler, we've actually shut the business down, and - we've still got the - my son's got a thirty eight footer, which is the smallest boat we have ever been involved with, and because of

the summer southerlies, the boats actually too small to head north of the Monte Bellos, and to travel that distance back, so we've actually stopped fishing. And as the weather fines up, the season changes and we get some easterlies and that, now the summer southerlies will be gone in another - by the end of March, then we might look at doing a few trips up north and perhaps starting - opening the factory up again - because there's an absolute shortage of fish in town at the moment, you can't get any. There's a couple of little guys with small boats that - you know, are trying to make a living here, but there aren't the stocks.

PW Your factory is in the same street as where you live, which is Mallee Street isn't it? (confirmed) And when that operates do you have employees?

AC Arh yes - only usually just the one, or a few casual staff just to help to process, so that's been a bit of a loss too to a few people to the fact that we've closed down. It is a great pity, because there's absolutely no reason why we couldn't have kept working on the west coast, in the deep water, and particularly on our trawling area south of Coral Bay, because there is no sense in it, the different species, and as I just said, they're gonna live and die out there for ever, for nothing.

PW And is all because of the withdrawal of your licence to take fish of the Ningaloo Reef system?

AC Oh not so much the reef, no we weren't involved with it, we've never actually fished under thirty fathoms. Our activity was always in deep water.

PW But it's adjacent to the Ningaloo Reef. (agreement) And that decision was based on perceptions of concern for the Ningaloo Reef system, is that right?

AC True, but they didn't have an argument. It was just like Irishmen, you can't reason with some of them. We had a thing on board called a VMS. Now they watch us from Canberra, with the Vessel Monitoring System, and so there was no question of us poaching, or doing anything stupid, because for a start you can see the species of fish are different, and plus that we were watched from Canberra. You can see where the boat is at any given time.

PW All boats have that now do they?

AC It's coming in, I believe that - I believe it's just been introduced, it was introduced at Carnarvon last year for the scallops, and I understand that they've just in the last few months, the trawlers in the Pilbara have it as well.

PW Does that have an application towards conservation of fish stocks, or do you think there may be some other reason why they do that?

AC It's to stop the unscrupulous operator poaching, I can't see it - yes it would, because they have to have it, because there is always someone who will cheat, and that was rife in the Pilbara - they've got some sanctuaries and closed areas.

PW In the old days have you ever poached?

AC No, because we don't fish under - well for a start there was no - sort of stocks under thirty fathoms - We were chasing, sort of different species - so that when they put the closure in of fishing over thirty, it didn't worry us.

PW And your son has taken over your licence?

AC Well, they haven't actually taken it over, I put it on their small boat, but because of the weather, the southerlies and that, the boat's too small for it. It's the first time I've been involved in such a small boat.

PW But you are still a licensed fisherman yourself?

AC Yearh -

PW And do you intend to keep going in that way for some time to come?

AC Oh actually I haven't got any set plans at the moment - I can't myself work a small boat anymore because too long at sea over the years, I've sort of got a crook knee, and I was always, led my life on a seventy five footer, and to get out on a thirty eight footer and drop off a wave; just - I cant really handle it. (chuckling) I hate to say.

PW Did you hurt your knee while you were fishing did you?

AC Yearh -

PW Was that and injury or is it a repetitive strain type injury or was it the result of a trauma?

AC No - I think it's just too many years - going back to the old days, I did not have an automatic pilot until, probably ten years ago, so I stood at the wheel for, you know, all of my life, from 19, from the *Aries* days, right through until the last few years on the *Tringa*, we didn't have an automatic pilot, and so we'd stand there for - twelve hours a day, and it told on us.

PW Well Andy I thank you very much for this interview, you've told me some really interesting information, and I'd just like to wish you the best for all the future.

AC Well thanks Paul. I hope that there's some way that you can use that information.

PW Good mate, thankyou.

Side B tape ends: 32.1 mins

Transcript of Interview

Interviewee: Shirley Anne Cassidy

(Also with some comments by husband Andy Cassidy.)

Address: 845 Maley St. Exmouth. 6707.

Phone: 08 9949 1496

Date of birth: 28 March 1941 (56)

Date: 15 March 1998

Place: Exmouth residence

Side A 32 mins

Side B 15.1 mins

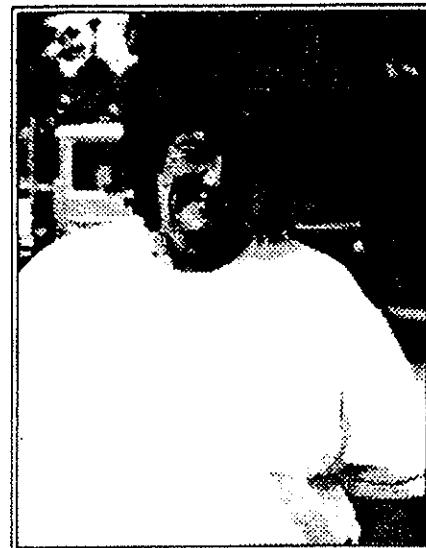
Total: 47.1 mins

Interviewer & transcriber: Dr Paul R. Weaver

Subject: Ningaloo Reef.

Side A: Turtling - a woman's perspective. Turtling attracted sharks. The worries of a fisherman's wife. Family fishing and maritime origins. Turtle hunting. Dangers of turtling. Turtle butchering. Turtle cooking. Culling tiger sharks. Turtle rissole recipe. Fishing at Monte Bellos after atomic tests.

Side B: More on Monte Bellos. Extending the fishing range - testing new fishing grounds.



- PW This interview is being conducted on the 15th March 1998, with Shirly Cassidy of Exmouth. Shirly for the record would you please give your full name and your date of Birth.
- SC Shirly Anne Cassidy, 28th of the third, forty one.
- PW And Shirly you're married to Andy Cassidy whom I interviewed the other day (13 3 1998) - you've played an interesting role in turtle fishing I understand, from the early days, would you tell me a little about that please?
- SC Well I used to go up quite often, probably once a month, drive up to Coral Bay and go out on the boat with Andy, and just do some cooking and get violently seasick, and things like that I'd drive up with the three children that we had then, and we'd spend some time with Andy.
- PW Where did you drive up from?
- SC Geraldton.
- PW That was where your home was was it?
- SC Yes.
- PW And what - are the names of your children?
- SC Danny, is the eldest, and then Linda, and Bradley and the youngest is Matthew
- PW Have - any of those gone into fishing?
- SC Yes, all of them, oh, apart from Lindy She spent a small time, not twelve months on the boat cooking, but the boys all went into fishing.

PW And whereabouts are those boys fishing?

SC They're not now, they've been employed by Mermaid Marine, up on the tugs, out of Karatha. They've all left the fishing.

PW Your initial turtling exploits were at Coral Bay, what year was this?

SC - '70, '71, '72. Yearh.

PW When you first saw the turtling operations what was your feeling towards that?

SC I hated it.

PW Tell me why?

SC 'Cause I felt sorry for the turtles I s'pose. I've never seen anything killed before, and I really didn't like it, but it was - it had to be done, because we needed the money for the off season work, after the crays had finished, and we were quite poor in those days, and - and Andy just had to have something else to do, and he thoroughly enjoyed it, that type of life, it was very exciting and that for them - But I didn't like to see it.

PW Do you know why your family was selected to take on that task?

SC No, the size of the boat could have been a great factor, because we had a big freezer in the - in the *Tringa*. That was the boat we were using, and Andy was such a hard working fellow I think as well.

PW You originally took over from the Plugg family didn't you, and they had some catastrophe which befell their boat.

SC Yes, they lost their boat, and Tropical Traders needed someone else and they chose, or they approached Andy.

PW Was Andy their first choice?

SC - I really don't know.

PW No. And so Andy went away and started turtling and then he - did he call for you to come and assist?

SC I never ever worked on the boat as such - I just used to do the cooking and that while I was there, because I was sort of tied up with three kids, but I used to go out, I drove his outboard for him one day when one of the crew was sick, and I spent most of the day in tears, because it was rough and horrible, and (laugh) - and Andy was getting agitated with me.

PW did you have to help haul the - turtles on board?

SC No, no. No the boys all did that.

PW So on that particular day you were on the outboard motor following directions were you?

SC Yes.

PW And - so Andy had himself, and who else did he have with him?

SC Only me, but that was on the small boat, and we used to chase the turtles

PW Did you make mistakes in following his directions?

SC Yes, yes! I did. (laugh)

PW And did he get upset about that?

SC He got very upset about that because we didn't catch many turtles and things, it was horrible

PW In hindsight it was probably a mistake for him to have got upset, because he might have had you more actively involved?

SC Yes, yes. No I didn't like it.

PW Was it a gory sort of an occupation, hunting turtles?

Side A: 5 mins

SC - I suppose it was, there was lots of blood in the boats and things, to transport them back to the *Tringa*. It used to be a bit dicey, there'd be lots of blood in the water and lots of sharks around.

PW Did this attract the sharks?

SC Yes, yes.

PW Was there an objectionable smell involved as well?

SC No, no. Not with the turtles. They just have a weedy sort of smell, not like fish. You can wash the smell of turtle off. But it's pretty hard to wash fish smell off yourself. But there was no real bad smell with turtles.

PW Is this a downside for fisherman's wife to have him coming home smelling of fish and stuff, or do you get used to it?

SC - Well I was sort of brought up with it, my dad was a fisherman, and I suppose you just get used to it.

PW It's a bit like aftershave is it?

SC Mmm, yes, yes.

PW Fishermen's aftershave. The main role that you had in those turtling days appears to have been as a shore - as a keeper of the shore camp?

SC Yes, yes. It always has been.

PW What sort of things did you have to do in that respect?

SC Oh, well in those days it was fairly difficult because I couldn't communicate with Andy - I just used to have to wait for him to come - come into shore and ring up once a week, or something like that. But previous to that, they didn't even have radios on the boats. So he would tell me the general time when, you know, I should be back by - on next Friday, so I'd go and sit down the wharf and wait to see if he turned up. If he didn't turn up I'd go back the next day and sit there and wait.

PW Was this a worry?

SC Yearh, a great worry, it was terrible.

PW You spent a lot of time worrying about it?

SC Hmm, yearh.

PW For the whole time that he was away would you worry?

SC Yes. It was great when the factories got radio contact - with the boats finally. I remember one time - when Andy lost his first boat, the *Aries*, and someone had sent a message into town, and said that the *Aries* had rolled over, and I said to them, 'Well where's Andy?' and they said, 'Well we don't know.' So that was a bit of a worrying time - but he turned up, so that was lucky.

PW Do you think the men appreciate the worry that their wives go through?

SC I think eventually they do, but it was just sort of a thing. That's what you did, and that's what you had to do.

PW Did you talk to other fishermen's wives during these sort of times?

SC Yes, they all sort of went through the same thing. You just sat at home and waited with the kids.

PW Were other fishermen's wives a strength to you in that respect?

SC - We didn't socialise a great deal. I suppose I knew a few that were in the - in the same boat as me, but we were never great socialisers in going out.

PW Mainly you had to endure it yourself, and work your way through it?

SC Yep. And I had my mum, she was used to that. She was mostly by herself because dad was always off fishing and -.

PW Your father had been a fisherman for a long time had he?

SC Hmm, yes.

PW What was his name?

SC - James Sinclair.

PW Where did he fish?

SC Well he was - he used to be on a tourist boat, the *Batavia Road* from Geraldton to the Abrolhos Islands. It was the first - I think probably the only tourist camp that's ever been on the Abrolhos. And - they used to go over there once a week and do trips, fishing trips and things like that. And then he started working with the - the Ackerstroms, in Geraldton, and they had a big boat called the *Nord Star* and they would come north - I suppose - I really can't remember because I was a kid, but I think they came up and did the Shark Bay pink snapper season. And then he would just come home after about ten days and off they'd go again.

PW Where did your father first start fishing?

Side A: 10 mins

SC Where?

PW Hmm.

SC In Geraldton, out of Geraldton.

PW Was his father a fisherman before him?

SC No, no. He was - oh - what was he. Something on a - one of the State ships, called the *Julia Percy*. I think it was, it used to do the trade between Port Gregory and Fremantle, or something like that. He was a seaman but he wasn't a fisherman.

PW Did your father also fish for crayfish?

SC Yes, yes. In the later years of his life he bought a boat called the *Viking* and he was crayfishing out of Geraldton, but he only had that for three or four years and then he passed away.

PW When did he pass away?

SC Oh heavens.

PW Roughly, approximately.

SC Well he was 57 when he died, and he was born in 1907, so we'll work that out after.

PW He was a young man then.

SC Yes, yes. Yes he was a very helpful fellow, and he went down and helped someone fix their motor, he was a mechanic as well, a diesel mechanic. And he was down there in a terrible gale in June and got this terrible flue and pneumonia and all sorts - and passed away from that. Hmm.

PW If we come back up to the turtling camps, you spent some time ashore at places like Coral Bay?

SC No, no. While I was in Coral Bay I would be on the boat. There was never any camp there.

PW You were living on the boat?

SC Yes I was living on the boat.

PW How long was that boat?

SC Seventy five feet.

PW Plenty of room?

SC Hmm, yes, a lot of room.

PW And you had your children on board as well?

SC Yes.

PW What was it like having young children on a boat like that?

SC Oh great, yes. There was never any problems with them. I s'pose the eldest one - what Dan would have been nine, I s'pose - eight. Eight seven and six.

PW Did you have to keep a constant eye on them?

SC Yes, yes.

PW No one ever fell overboard and had to be fished out?

SC No one fell overboard, no they were very good kids.

Andy C They went ashore a few times like Point Cloates.

SC Yep, yep. We used to go ashore and go on the beach.

PW At Point Cloates you'd go ashore?

SC Yearh.

PW And how long would the longest stay that you'd live on board the boat be?

SC - Probably a week, a week at a time.

PW What was your role on the boat apart from looking after the children?

SC Just doing the cooking while I was there, that was all. Yearh.

PW What type of things did you cook?

SC Oh, bulk food. Roasts and - chops and stews and things like that. Something that you could put on in the morning and then it'd cook slowly all day and it'd be ready when they came back that night with their loads.

PW Were they big eaters?

SC Huge eaters, huge.

PW Did they take lunches with them when they'd go out hunting?

SC No, we used to put a leg of mutton in the oven when they left in the morning, and just put it on slowly. It would cook very slowly and then they'd come back to the boat about two o'clock, and I'd have all the bread sliced up and everything and they'd have hot roast beef or roast lamb sandwiches for lunches.

PW And they'd take off again?

SC Then they'd take off again, and come back a couple of hours - or a few hours later and then it'd be time to start processing the catch.

PW Would they always finish the day in daylight?

SC - Yes, a couple of times you got back after dark, I remember, you'd had a breakdown or somesuch thing.

PW Was that a worry when things like that happened?

SC It was a great worry because of the sharks, and when they had a big load of turtles in the small boats, there wasn't much freeboard, and there'd be water coming in and blood going out, and things - and all the sharks thought it was -.

PW It does sound like there was a certain amount of risk attached to these activities?

SC Oh, a great amount of risk, yearh. Because all of the tiger sharks¹ that we saw there were at least twelve feet long, and they used to sit under the boat while the processing was going on and things - it was fairly worrying.

PW How did the men react to that risk, did they pass it off, or did they ever think about it, do you think, or (what?)

¹ *Galeoceradon*. Can grow to 6.5 metres and weigh 521 kg., according to Allen and Swainston (1988) p 24

Side A: 15 mins

- SC I don't think so because they were all just young fellows, and it was all great excitement to them. I don't know that you were terribly worried. - Oh, yes they harpooned some of them, and of course they were concerned about them, but it was great sport in those days, to harpoon a twelve foot tiger shark.
- PW You'd do a bit of water skiing then would you? (chuckle)
- SC Yes well one time I was out in the dinghy with the kids, and - Andy had harpooned this tiger shark and they were taking it back to the boat to gut it to see what was in it, and - so he lashed this great tiger shark next to the dinghy and our young - our eldest son who was only nine at the time, and he was on the outboard and taking us back. It was a bit of a worry that day.
- PW And what was inside the shark?
- SC Oh, God, heaps of heads and a breast plate from a turtle that they'd killed, oh it must have been the trip before at some place, and it must have followed the boat up. and - no. it was all - I think it was mainly turtle heads and that in it. It wasn't at all in different stages of decomposing
- PW Tiger sharks were major predators of turtles by the sounds of things?
- SC Well it was easy feeding, they'd just sit under the boat and gobble all the heads.
- PW Oh, right, I see, they were eating the heads as you butchered the animals and threw them over, yes, hmm. You never became involved with any of that butchering at all?
- SC No, no.
- PW Where did you go when that was going on?
- SC I used to sit up on the top wheelhouse, on the boat and watch them. But I didn't like it very much.
- PW Was that distaste for those activities right through the whole period of the three years that you were fishing for turtles, or did you gradually get used to it?
- SC - I sort of got used to it - but even now I'm thinking back, I didn't like it at all
- PW I just wanted to ask Andy who is sitting nearby. Andy when you showed me your harpoon the other day, which you'd used for turtling, you'd mentioned a figure of how many turtles you thought that might have taken. Was that seventy thousand turtles?
- Andy C Oh no no no no no. In the - we averaged around between three and a half to four thousand turtles a year, that was - we were actually on a quota through Tropical Traders, that's what the order was - so I'd say that harpoon would probably have - I would probably have caught about - well okay, possibly around eight or nine thousand turtles - on that harpoon.
- PW Yep, well okay, I just wanted to verify that - so that's a lot of turtles. Did you cook any turtle meat?
- SC I didn't, no. I really couldn't stand the look of it, because it had green fat, and I'm not very adventurous with food, and I wouldn't, no
- PW Did the men eat turtle meat?
- SC Yes, yes they did.
- PW Did they cook it on the boat?

SC Yearh, they did cook it on the boat, and then sometimes they used to take it ashore to the pub at Coral Bay for a barbecue.

Andy C Excellent on a barbecue.

PW How - Andy just said it's excellent on a barbecue - how did they cook it on the boat? Where were you when they were cooking it on the boat, you weren't there were you?

SC - Yes I was.

PW But if they wanted to cook in on the boat they had to do it themselves?

SC If they wanted to cook it, yes, they did it themselves, yearh.

PW How did they go about that on the boat, what did they do?

SC Well it was grilled - or I s'pose fried in the frypan, or else you could stew it. The front flippers were for stewing, for the front. The top end of it was for stewing, and the hind quarters were, was the good grilling stuff.

PW Did you ever try it?

SC No.

PW Neveronce?

SC Never once, no.

PW Did they trim off the green fat when they were cooking the meat?

SC Yes they did, but I'd seen it in the raw state and I'd - no.

PW And that was truly enough was it? (chuckle)

SC It was enough. (chuckle)

PW Andy has just sat down with us here. Andy, tell me what did turtle meat - Can you describe turtle meat, what it tasted like?

Andy C - It was just like any other normal meat, it didn't have - it was a different flavour than the beef, but it was just a very nice meat. We also made beautiful rissoles out of it, with the mincer, and - you know, it was just a very good meat, and when we went ashore occasionally at Coral Bay it was - it was a highlight of the few visitors that were there, and in those days Exmouth had only just got fired up and a lot of Americans went down just for a weekend and they'd be there, you know, for the barbecue at the hotel, and it was extremely popular with all the American tourists - it wasn't a strong meat - it wasn't fishy, as Shirley was saying we used to handle and gut it and so on - we only had to get the hose and hose off and that was it, because turtles are weed eaters - and there's no smell, other than sort of like, rotten seaweed

PW Is it a white meat?

AC No it's pink. There's about three different types in it. Up in the shoulders, there's a couple of nice, sort of "veal" looking pieces, and as you get down to the hind quarters are darker, probably more musclely. But - there's about three different colours of meat through it, hmmm.

PW How much weight of meat did you get out of a single turtle?

AC Well all the turtles that we produced had to weigh a hundred and twenty pound dressed, gutted. It gives you an idea of how big they were, they were not little turtles, they were - there was no danger of the turtles being fished out - I suppose - of course they were fished down, but you wouldn't fish them out, because you weren't allowed to take small turtles - And they were just all big turtles.

PW But the meat inside a turtle?

AC I'd only be guessing but I, you know, it, I guess about - fifty percent of it would have been meat. Very solid sort of through the upper part.

PW Quite a lot of meat in that case?

AC A lot of meat, yearh, there was a lot of meat in it -

PW When you took the stuff ashore at Coral Bay, was that a lever for getting - things like beer and stuff like that as well, did you do trades?

AC No we didn't, no we didn't, we were sort of - no we always had - 'cause we were only out of town for a week at a time - we'd be back into Carnarvon once a week on the weekend to meet our truck and unload, and then we'd be away again Sunday morning and sort of working Sunday afternoon, so - it's not as though we were out for weeks and run out of things, we only had to - you know, we'd be in town every week, so we didn't sort of run short of anything.

PW And these barbecues were held at the hotel were they?

AC Yep.

PW Did you actually have to buy your beer?

AC Yes, well we did - I mean George King who was the publican that one of the years there was a very good host and - I mean they all enjoyed the fact that we'd rock up with some turtle meat and the atmosphere was great in those days, it really was. Some interesting things with turtles - like - one of those tigers that we'd harpooned, it was a thirteen footer, and when we sort of brought it back, it was just amazing, we hadn't been - we hadn't been to that - particular anchorage for about ten days, and when we sort of opened it up on the boom and had a look inside its guts, out came all the turtle heads that we'd - he'd been waiting for us, so it was rather quite spooky, you know - you know it's not the sort of thing you want to fall over the side of a night, because I mean, there's all those heads, they'd all decomposed, you know, and he's been obviously sittin' around waiting for us, so it was, you know, a little bit hard to - they're not fools, he knew where the food was. And there was a funny thing as well, that morning we had sailed from Coral Bay to travel up to - Point Cloates, a distance of about twenty seven miles, and we occasionally kept a few small ones, the small turtles, just for - sort of an ornament for our friends of family, like there's one on the wall there now. We only ever had a few, you know, and a breast plate was thrown over the side, outside Point Cloates before we go in there, and that night when we caught this tiger, that breast plate was in there, so we know that that breast plate was thrown away out about three miles from Point Cloates, and yet that night, that tiger shark had that breast plate that we dropped out about three miles - it was just hard to work out what happened - did he follow us from Coral Bay? Or what? I mean that was - can't explain it

PW You made sure that you never fell overboard?

AC No, but we often sunk coming home, that's why we did harpoon a lot of tigers when they were hanging around and you know, because we did often get swamped coming home.

PW That was a safety issue for yourself then, to kill the tiger sharks in case you got into the water

AC Yearh.

PW Could you swim?

AC Oh yes, hmm, yeah.

PW Could the others swim as well?

Side A: 25 mins

AC Yes, yeah. The dinghies were unsinkable, you know, because sometimes when you are harpooning a turtle in shallow water and in the excitement and all the turbulence and God knows what, the dinghy sometimes came down on top of the harpoon, which was - and hit the bottom maybe through a turtle - whatever, and so there was this rigid spike, and the next minute the harpoon'd come raring up through the bottom of the dinghy and you'd had a hole punched in it, things like that, so we used to - there was a lot of leaning over the side and trying to pull the harpoon out from underneath and whack a patch on it, jam a rag in it and all that sort of thing to do emergency repairs to get back, so.

PW These were aluminium dinghies?

AC No this one I had was what they call, the place called "the old Myrtle" that was the one I had, we had a fibreglass one, and my bondwood one. My bondwood one was easier to patch, because you can whack a tack a patch on it -

PW Shirty, did you ever come ashore and collect eggs for cooking, turtle eggs?

SC No, no, no.

PW Did you see turtles laying eggs?

SC Never, I've never seen that.

PW Do you know what time of year that they laid eggs?

SC No, I don't, I don't know that I ever saw a turtle on the beach.

AC No, we were always catching them out the back of the reef, that's where the turtles are. I mean if you see one turtle in on the beach, there'd be fifty outside. They're all feeding off the weed at the back of the reef.

PW Did they come into the lagoon as well?

AC A few, but if we had to rely on making a living catching turtles in close to shore, we would have gone broke. The fact that the quantity's not there, they all - they must come in from wherever they come from, overseas or whatever, and just sort of go over the reef and they feed off the back of the reef just in - inside, right on the edge of the breaker line inside.

PW Do they eat fish as well?

AC No, just weed.

PW What type of weeds, do you know? Kelp and stuff like that?

AC Yes -

PW Is there a lot of kelp on the outside of the reef?

AC No it's not so much - actually it's just on the inside of the reef I should say - they come over the breakers

and we would fish up right to the waves, where they'd sort of broken and roll across the reef, and we'd be sort of in the turbulence of the the back of the reef.

PW On the very inside edge of the reef, yes

AC Yep.

PW Tell me the way that you made turtle rissoles, you mentioned them earlier on. That was a man's role was it, making turtle rissoles?

AC Yearh, we just had an old hand mincer, like all our mums' used to have, and we just minced that up, and just that was it.

PW Did you mix it with anything?

AC Yes, the same as, you know, you know, you'd experiment with a bit of bacon and - all that tossed up in it and, they were superb.

PW A bit of onion?

AC Yep.

PW Potato maybe?

AC No, I don't remember putting potato in, but we'd experiment wit them and they were really nice.

PW Well the is the turtle rissole recipe we want here, so first take your turtle, then you mice that with a bit of onion?

AC Yearh, a bit of onion, a bit of herbs, and a little bit of bacon.

PW What, mixed herbs?

AC Yes, you know, whatever,

PW Salt and pepper?

AC Salt and pepper, the same as what you'd make -

SC Did you put sauce in it?

AC Oh yearh.

PW A bit of tomato sauce sometimes?

AC A little bit of soya.

PW Roll 'em in breadcrumbs?

AC Or flour

PW Or flour, yearh, and you'd flatten 'em out would you, or make 'em in balls?

AC No, No We'd flatten 'em out

PW Flatten 'em out like a sort of a fritter type of thing, then you'd fry it up?

AC Yes. Very, very, very good rissoles, they were superb.

PW And did the kids go for 'em as well?

AC - I sort of can't remember the kids were going for them.

SC Well I think probably because I wouldn't eat them the kids wouldn't.

AC See we used to take turtle meat home as well at the end of the season and we couldn't give it away. Oh a few people, a few old diehards, 'Oh yes I'd love to try that.' But the majority of people said 'Ooh no, fancy eating turtle.' And that was it. But as I said earlier, I mean, it sounds rather bad but - I couldn't imagine killing sheep, cutting their throats, the sheep. People say, 'Well how do you kill a turtle?' Well it's not wholesale slaughter - poor old sheep sittin' there - slice their throat. With the turtle we were working hard for them and it was -.

PW Well Shirly, just to finish off here with you, but is there something else you'd like to tell me about turtle fishing, your memories of that?

SC No, not really.

PW Were you glad when it finished?

SC I was, - but it didn't keep Andy home any longer. He went off and did snapper fishing and things. He was always working twelve months of the year, he would be away fishing.

PW Was that one of the reasons you were glad to see it finish, you thought that perhaps he might be home a bit more when the turtling finished?

SC No, I don't think so, I don't know, it was just our whole life that Andy was away fishing and that.

AC We were struggling all the time so we had to keep fishing, we'd go north - the Monte Bello trips and ate the first radio active oysters and things like that,

SC Yes, yes.

PW You got radio active oysters have (did) you?

AC No, well - Shirly was scared to eat the oysters up there because we used to have a barbecue, you know, in a twenty feet from where they let the bomb off there's a little plaque saying, 'Here in 1956' they let - detonated an atomic bomb where we were sitting down at the barbecue, but there was a lot o interesting things there, pieces of blown up ship and all that all over the island, and eventually we were all getting into these big oysters, and finally Shirly tried some oysters and that was it, she's been hooked ever since. (chuckle)

PW When did you start eating food from the Monte Bellos?

AC - We always ate the oysters when we went ashore up there, and of course the fish would have been okay

PW Can you remember when you first went to the Monte Bellos?

AC Yes, the first - went there in 1956. We were the first boat to ever trap at the Monte Bellos, and the first boat to ever trap north of Carnarvon

PW Had that been sanctioned by the Federal Government when you went and did that, or were you operating on

² The first atomic explosion in the Monte Bellos was Operation Hurricane on 3 October 1952. This was followed by Operation Mosaic "G1" on 16 May 1956 and "G2" on 19 June 1956.

your own?

AC Probably not, I think technically it was closed, but you - it's like everything else, there were no - these laws were probably in force, there was no one to police them. There was no Fisheries patrol boats (tape end)

Side A, tape ends: 32 mins

Side B, tape starts

PW You were saying at the Monte Bellos there was no policing of people coming and going in 1966. Were there signs on the shore?

AC Just warning about - there were, yes, there were signs there, and also written in Indonesian, just warning about the possibility of radioactivity - we - particularly the guys from Onslow, I know some friends and that that they collected heaps and heaps of copper wire off the Montes, and even when we were there, I collected hundreds and hundreds of yards, this is you know, years after the bomb went off, and I collected hundreds of yards of seven strand wire, in fact I took a heap of it home and - (chuckle) I gave it to a technician friend of mine and he wired half the automatic pilots in Geraldton with it. (laugh)

PW So half the fishing fleet of Geraldton was wired with copper wire from the Monte Bellos?

AC Well some was, you know, it's probably an exaggeration, but when I showed it to this guy - we brought it home because we thought it would be good to wire trailers and that with, he said, 'Oh it would be great for the automatic pilots.' So I gave him hundreds of yards of this wire that we'd sort of collected, but I don't know whether it was radio active or what.

SC All of the islands were linked up - with the wire.

PW Oh it was telephone wire was it? Plastic covered or (bare)?

AC I'm not sure, it was just ordinary black wire like this.

PW It had some sort of plastic covering on it?

AC Yearh, yep, oh yes, it wasn't open wire, no it was all covered, and a lot of what (indistinct).

PW Did you collect bare metal off the island?

AC No we didn't, no. It was interesting, there was chunks of ship - there was even a door (which) still swings open, you could see holes blown in it, so they said that the ships just vaporised, but they didn't. Pieces came down everywhere. In fact we were having a barbecue one day on the site - on the shore, there was an actual stern bearing into the rocks, so rock must grow. It seemed, you know, the bearing was sitting on the rock, and I don't know whether the heat fused it in there or what, I wouldn't have a clue, but you couldn't shift the bearing off.

SC It was welded into it.

AC And that was about eighteen inches long, say a foot wide, it was a stern - a stern bearing off the ship somehow or other, and it was fused into the rock, amazing stuff

PW Did you bring any souvenirs home from those days?

AC No

PW You don't have any here now?

AC

No.

PW

Were you aware of radiation in 1966?

AC

Yearh, we were - knew it was sort of radioactive - but I also had known that people had been going across there for years, you know, all fisherman had always been going - there, collecting copper wire and stuff, and it was all grown over, you'd see a big crater there where bomb - one's gone off, and the other explosion was let go on a ship, they had about three or four tests up there, a few on the islands and some of an old Corvette or something - but I think we were fairly blase, we were a lot younger, and - it wasn't sort of - as much said about it as there is today.

PW

Are you aware of any fishermen contracting cancers?

AC

None.

PW

Have you ever had a cancer of any type?

AC

Oh, lot's of skin cancers, like you know, keratosis, and things from the sun. But I haven't had any serious problems.

PW

Whereabouts on your body have those cancers formed?

AC

- Well, lip. I lost that lump of lip you can see missing there - that type of thing, but

PW

Have you had any on other parts of your body?

SC

Face and arms and neck - his chest there.

AC

Yearh, I think they're just mainly from -.

SC

A couple on your back.

AC

... a few scars and so forth, but it was just stuff on the neck.

PW

I see quite a lot of scars on your chest there?

AC

Yearh, that was just some little bits of surgery just - but you know, that was - mainly I thing just in the sun, we didn't - in the early days we did not look after ourselves, we didn't have sunscreen, but now you don't go anywhere without sunscreen. But when we were young it was unheard of.

PW

Do you know the names of other fishermen who might have been going over there in those early days?

AC

Yearh, I think Finn Fossier, he's a retired - one of the last of the Finns. His name actually is Finn, even though he's a Finn, but Finn Fossier lives in - Shark Bay now, Denham. But people that would know a lot about it would be the Onslow guys, old identities there, not friends of mine, I know of the names, like Shankses and that, they used to be - fairly old names in Onslow, they could give you information about the Montes.

Side B: 5 mins

PW

Well I'd be just interested in placing on record here those families that might have been involved in that sort of activity, because it would be of interest to perhaps somebody in the future to follow up on these matters - not that anything can be done now, it's all a long time ago, but there were people actively collecting scrap metal from a very early stage, and this was being done apparently without any official sanctioning

AC

Oh yearh. I mean, I didn't see that myself, I mean, we bought back some copper wire as I just said - plastic

coated stuff, but I know that, I've heard other guys speak over the years that the Onslow, a lot of people from Onslow - apparently collected a heap of stuff - there was one story that - the navy couldn't work out how this land(rover) - an old jeep - was on the island, and what actually happened there, this is the story - but we've seen that jeep, we've got it on the old movies actually, this jeep appeared there. Well apparently people from Onslow went across there to collect wire and so they used the jeep to run around the island, and of course they couldn't get it back on the boat, so the jeep stayed on the land. And actually - we have actually sat in that jeep. (chuckle)

PW That jeep came from the explosion days did it, it was brought over by somebody?

AC Somebody, yeah. Well that's it, it was taken over from Onslow by some Onslow people. There's no question of that, I remember reading about it in the paper, and blow me down a few years later we were at the Monte Bellos and there's the jeep.

PW And that was used for collecting scrap was it?

AC Hmm, yep.

PW Where did the scrap go?

AC Oh well that was nothing to do with us, that was sort of Onslow based, what I'm sort of telling you what we heard, and we saw the jeep, so it did act - obviously happen.

PW Do you think that scrap was transported back to Perth and sold in scrap yards?

AC I'd say so, there'd be little doubt about it - if you - any of the guys would tell you the same, I've heard that story for years. I know that - well I didn't actually see it, but I know that they did, because I was told that they did, and there was the jeep.

PW Well, is there anything else you can tell me about the Monte Bellos at that time? The types of fish, were there - did you ever see fish with deformities?

AC No, no we didn't, of course that was long after the event fifteen years or something. Sixty, it was up around the seventies and so forth.

SC Ten years.

AC It was long after the event, it had all grown over, you could just see the crater, and the heaps of, as I say, debris everywhere, dotted in the lagoons, and so.

PW Did you walk down into the crater?

AC Yes.

PW And you took you family with you as well?

AC No.

SC No, they were never - the kids never ever came to the Montes.

AC It is a very wind swept place, it's not as though there's hills and plenty of bushes, it's just wind swept stuff.

PW Is there a lot of dust on the Monte Bellos from the wind?

AC No, no. It's all just grown over.

PW And did you swim as well?

AC Oh yes, we loved swimming in the lagoons there and it was, you know, looking for crayfish, was a few green crayfish and stuff like that in there, it was a nice spot.

PW Did you sleep on the beaches, or on the island itself?

AC No, we always - no we slept back on the boat,

PW Why was that?

AC Oh well, that was our home, we had a big comfortable boat with showers and everything, that was where we, you know, were.

SC I wanted to sleep on the island one night and then I was reading the book, I s'pose it's about all the ports and things along the coast, I don't even know what book it was, but it said there's lots of rats on the Monte Bello Islands, so that was the end of that, I wouldn't.

AC The Nautical Almanac wasn't it?

SC Yearh.

AC - If you are going to go to Karratha or the Monte Bellos you can buy a marine book from the Port Authority - say Monte Bellos, there's an article on the Monte Bellos, what's there, and a warning of the explosion and all sorts of things, and these rats that are s'posed to live on - there, so it's a very handy book for travellers, anywhere 'round Australia, give you all the information on that particular spot.

PW How many fishing visits do you think you made to the Monte Bellos?

AC How many trips?

PW Yearh, over time.

AC Over time, yearh, well we went there every off season for probably - probably around fifteen years, I s'pose

SC Hmm, easily.

PW Fifteen years is that?

Side B: 10 mins

AC Hmm, just in the off season, after we finished crayfishing, we'd - we did the three years turtle fishing, but either side of the turtles we did Shark Bay pink snapper, and when the pink snapper finished, because we were sort of always struggling, we - and so forth - just making a living we then carried on, trapped up the back of the (indistinct) which was the Ningaloo Reef, before it was national park, and up around the Monte Bellos because it was a good place to be - and then on two different occasions we went to Rowley Shoals, this is - these are early days when there was - no one - you know, we just heard about these places, and no wonder there was no fishing activity, so we did a trip out to Rowley Shoals for a bit of a, you know, a holiday trip and to have a look, and - Shirley came on that trip.

SC That was twenty five years ago

AC (Indistinct) spent a nice few days looking around the Rowley Shoals and - and then right up to the Lacepede and Adele Island, just had a look at the northwest, but it was, as I say, early days, there was no Fisheries or anything in those days (in those places).

Did other fishermen take advantage of the Monte Bellos as well in the same way that you did?

No, very few ever went there in those days because no one had the boats

Apart from the scrap metal collectors?

Hmm, yearh.

Just the guys from Onslow that lived in the area, that were only a hundred miles or eighty miles away see.

What type of metals do you think they were collecting?

Copper wire.

Mostly copper wire?

There was tons of copper wire linking up the islands - there might have been other things, but it was copper wire mainly that they were chasing.

How much do you think you might have brought back?

Oh, we only brought back a few hundred yards of - at the most - of this one particular lot of - like an extension cord, I think it was seven strand.

And where was that found?

It was just running across the, running across the island, and it disappeared into the water. Everything was all linked up.

So that was the island that had the main explosion on it was it?

No, there was dozens of little islands - but they were all just linked up, stuff went everywhere. But of course when we got there it had all been pirated, you know - older fishermen that had been up that way.

So perhaps you were lucky to find what you found?

Oh yearh, we just got it because it was a handy size for wiring a trailer and that sort of thing. (chuckle)

And that was something that someone else had missed?

Hmm, yearh.

Well Shirly and Andy I thank you very much for this supplementary tape recording and you've certainly given me something else to think about with the Monte Bellos - that's opened up a whole new area of fishing activity which I hadn't appreciated, and perhaps nobody else does either. I just would thank you again for your cooperation, it's just been wonderful. Good luck in the future.

Good Paul, thank you very much.

Tape stop at 13.1 mins

Tape restart for further comments on Monte Bellos

AC always is Shanks

PW Shanks?

Cassidy, Shirly 15.3.1998

AC Shanks, so if you could chuck down Shanks - these guys might be - I don't think they'd care much - I mean, this is what happened.

PW Oh of course.

AC See, as I said to you, this is not just hearsay, because the Jeep was there, and I've got it on the old Super 8. I've got old Kerry Drake, remember Kerry sittin' in it, doin' this, everybody laughed (indistinct) I did a bit of a goose on board and he was going to (indistinct) the steering wheel, you know. - I mean, that happened, I read about it in the paper that they - that the navy was puzzled how this jeep got there or something like that, and all this, and then blow me down years later, we're there and there's this old jeep still sittin' there. (chuckle) And it'll still be there.

SC We've got photos of that stern bearing set in the rock.

PW Oh I'd like to see those.

SC Yeah, well our daughter's got all the photos in Geraldton.

AC It was as long as that thing, 'cause it was not a very big destroyer that they blew up. The guy that took me for my grade one ticket, old Commander Grant, he was there for the explosion, and he told me - I can't remember it now, they sailed this old boat out from England, and anchored it there, they let one go in that.³ And those were his words when I said - it's exactly what he said to me, he said, 'Oh they said it was vap - that the ship vaporised.' But it was not, pieces had come down everywhere. And blow me down, you can walk across the island today and there's a door that still opens, with a few holes blown through the section, it was like a section of - of wheel house lobbed down there, and the reason that the door still swings, because (of) brass bushes, see. Can't seize up, and so there this door still opens and we actually walked in there, so, maybe we'll one day die of cancer, but then again my dad died of cancer when he was my age, so and my brother, (nervous laughter) he'd never been to the Monte Bellos and he's died of cancer when he was 48, so you know, who knows.

PW Your brother had never been to the Monte Bellos either?

AC No (indistinct)

PW Allright, well thanks anyway.

SC Would you like a cup of coffee?

PW I'd love a cup of coffee, or a cup of tea, yes please.

Side B, interview ends: 15.1 mins



Husband, Andy Cassidy

³ A fission device was detonated in 1952 on board HMS *Plym* in the lagoon on the western side of Trimouille Island. The 1956 G1 and G2 explosions were on towers, G1 at the northern end of Trimouille Island, and G2 on the north eastern end of Alpha Island. All the explosions were within approximately one and half nautical miles of each other, forming a triangle.

Transcript of Interview

Interviewee: Maxwell Dease

Address: 56a Reynolds Rd, Mt. Pleasant. WA 6153

Phone: 9364 5406

Date of birth: 24 June 1921

Date: 21 April 1998

Place: Mt Pleasant

Tape 1, Side A 28.9 mins

Tape 1, Side B 31.9 mins

Tape 2, Side A 23.8 mins

Total: 84.6 mins

Interviewer & transcriber: Dr Paul R. Weaver

Subjects: Ningaloo.

Tape 1, Side A: Tropical Traders (former Managing Director). Family business background. RAAF aircrewman in Bomber Command WW2. Early days processing crays at Lancelin. Tropical Traders - frozen crayfish exports to USA and France - financial backing of local fishermen - R. Holmes a Court involvement. Promotions - manger of Gtn. branch - no place to bring up young women. Changes in crayfishery management. Trop. Tr. rejected participation in undersize cray market. Whaling at Pt. Cloates in 1950s prior to joining Trops - details of work roles - vessels - people involved.

Tape 1, Side B: Loading ships with whale oil at Maud's Landing, Ningaloo. Fish canning - bye-product more valuable as bait. Prawning pioneers, nearly. Abalone pioneers. Commercial decision making processes. Turtling on Ningaloo - butchering - exporting to Germany - keeping out of public eye. Tropical Traders - company history - Rbt. Holmes a Court takeover - company expansion. *Nardi Mar* history - wreck.

Tape 2, Side A: *Nardi Mar* - more. Financial reckoning of a project's viability. Turtle and shore based whaling at Ningaloo - influenced by wind. Peel inlet cannery. The continuing quest for craybait. Colourful characters along the coast.



- PW This interview is being conducted on the 21st April 1998, with Maxwell Dease of Mount Pleasant. Max for the record would you please give your full name and date of birth.
- MD Maxwell Dease and I was born a long time ago, in - 24th June, 1921
- PW Were you born in Western Australia?
- MD Western Australia.
- PW Max you've been a former Managing Director of Tropical Traders I understand, when did that connection with Tropical Traders occur?
- MD With me and Trops? I joined the company in 1956 '57
- PW Did you start from the ground up?

MD From the bloody bottom up.

PW What was your first job there?

MD Pulling heads off crayfish.

PW Where did that occur?

MD Lancelin, eighty miles north of Perth. I - worked for my family for a number of years, since the war, and - I decided to make a break, and I didn't know what to do and someone said, 'Why don't you take a breather and get away from us and the photography business. Get away, do something different.' and some of my relations used to camp at Lancelin, they knew someone who knew somebody and I went up there, joined about ten blokes contracted to pull heads of crayfish and pack 'em. So I got in a pair of shorts and did that, made some money, laid on the beach, went out fishing, and had a most enjoyable time. Well at the end of that I was about to go into a business myself, and I was - I decided that - I was offered a job, permanent Job with the company and I said I wasn't interested however, they conned me into it, probably over a pint of beer up the Lancelin Pub, I can't remember exactly, but I went down to Fremantle, and Bob Stowe was the receiver of Tropical Traders, so being - and got into trouble. They were known as Tropical Traders Pattersons in those days, and they were on the - exported apples in the main, and they were in the gear business, and also exporting cray tails to America in the main. All to America in those days, with - at the the same time developing a market in France for cooked, whole cooked crays. And from there I - I looked around and they seemed to be an interesting crowd, - Bob Stowe ran the place like a sergeant major, watching every penny, and I s'pose he did a good job. And anyway Tropical Traders as far as I know, would have commenced business in the early 1920s. And they were - involved in - importing exporting business, and on their letterhead I have dated the 21st May 1925, they advertised that they were into importing bananas, coconuts, pineapples, cop - something?

PW Copra.

MD Copper.

PW Copra.

MD Coffee, tea, timber, molasses, oil cakes and rattans. Now if you want to know any more about that, I guess if you contacted a chap called Alan Collins, of Pier Street, East Fremantle. Alan wasn't in a managerial position, but he was in there very, very early, and would know the background, and names like Reg Long, Jim Farrell, a chap called Black. And I believe that, although this is debated at every good pub in Fremantle, who was the to export crayfish, all I can say is Tropical traders was among the very first. Who was the first person I don't know. But I have been told that they exported crays, I guess about 1949. Alan would know all that. He would know the people, and he ended up managing Lancelin processing works, and then leaving that and - went fishing, and made a dollar. More than a dollar. So he'd be interesting to talk to about the early days of the company, and maybe able to direct you further to someone that's still alive that knew the company then. Another name that comes to pass is William Sumpton, he played some sort of part in the whole show, as we named a boat that we had built called the William Sumpton. Another chap that would know about the company in the beginning would be Doug McCorkhill, now Doug, he was in Dureau Road for many years selling things, and he expanded the company, and he sold McCorkhills in Marine Terrace some years ago. Someone would know where he lived. But Doug gave me that letterhead that I'm showing you. I don't know where he lives these days.

Side A: 5 mins

PW You told me that after the war - you went up to Lancelin, that would have been as a young man in your early twenties I presume, had you had any war service?

MD Yearh, I was with the Raf in England, RAAF in England.

PW You were flying?

MD Yearh.

PW And - can you tell me a little about that please?

MD Bombing German cities, in Bomber Command.

PW What sort of aircraft were you flying?

MD Long Lancasters, I wasn't flyin' them, I was a rear gunner.

PW Did you do your training in Australia?

MD Yearh, trained here, and then - finished our training, real training in England.

PW Prior to the war, what were you doing?

MD Oh, I was living a teenager's life - I worked mainly - most - up 'till I joined up, I would have been about twenty, nineteen I think. I worked for Atkins WA Limited, 894 Hay Street Perth. I think everyone's worked for Atkins WA. - (chuckle) I've met them all over the face of Australia, it was a good training ground, I made some good friends there.

PW So you came out of the war and you eventually found your way into Tropical Traders employment at Fremantle, after doing some sporadic work with them at Lancelin. You worked your way up in the company. Was that a difficult task, or did you find that you (had an easy path?)

MD No it wasn't difficult for me, I had a free spirit, and I - did the job that they gave - to me, to the best of my ability, and if I had nothing to do I did my own thing. And I'd been there, I'd built up a - started to learn about fishermen etcetera, - 'round Fremantle, I found out that Tropical Traders had, had quite a fleet of boats working for them, mainly ethnic people, and these people had this disagreement with the company, and that was the nucleus that left Tropical Traders and formed Fremantle Cooperative. - The details of why they left were many and varied, it depended who you talked to. But I met them all, knocked on doors, and they told me mainly why they wouldn't fish for Tropical Traders, so it was a good learning experience.

PW What was that reason, like the main reason?

MD Price, main reason. I would think they think they should have been paid more, possibly could have been, you know, it's a bit hard. More likely to get another dollar out of a coop than working - for a public company. Tropical Traders were on the stock exchange incidentally. - Anyway I raise a few boats down at Safety Bay, we had good catches there and I could have got a few interested at Mandurah, which was very little crayfishing down there in those days, and I did a year doing that, or a season; and then I (indistinct) what then sent me back, or asked me to go, 'cause I wasn't in the mood those days to be told where to go - to Lancelin, to manage Lancelin, which I did. And had a good year up there, and they decided to close it down and take some of the compressors and the refrigeration gear to the Geraldton branch.

PW Can you remember what year that was, approximately?

MD Yearh, that would have been fifties, around '57. Anyway - ultimately - as I say, that closed down, I came back to Fremantle and once again Bob Stowe offered me Geraldton, which was the plum job in the company then. It was the only main branch they had, it was - and they in Geraldton, the operation, they had a shop down in Manne Terrace, just opposite where the dock handling Strappers(?) and Dears(?) now. And when I went up there that was being closed down and they had bought the Globe Brewery in Evans Street, and - there they were processing crayfish, they had an ice works and - that's where I ended up for two and a half years.

PW You were a single man still at that stage?

MD Oh no, no. Far from it, I married a WAF on the Squadron in England and brought her out, hand picked - I

PW What was her name?

MD Her name was Mary Walker, and Mary and I met up, one night I was about to fly, and she was a dental nurse and I had toothache, and I went up there, the dentist wasn't in the place, but she volunteered to poke some medication into the tooth, and so I could go and do my duty in the air. And I then took her to dinner, to say thank you the next night, and I've been buying her dinners now for the last, what fifty four years, so there you are, that's how that happened. However she came out to Australia, put up with the Australians talking about "bloody Poms" - and then I took her to Geraldton, which was a shock to the system - and I drank after work where there was twenty blokes in the circle at the Vic Hotel, things like that. However we had a good time up there, but we had two daughters and I could see at the time, if the company hadn't moved me, I would have moved myself, because it wasn't a place in those days - to bring up two young daughters - fortunately the Managing Director, Gordon Humphries, God bless him, he died in 1968, good bloke - he came up and said to Mary, well you'll be pleased to hear, and I'm going to ask your old man to come down and look after (the) fishing side of things in Fremantle, for the state. And she kissed him I think, which I thought was very forward of her, to kiss my Managing Director, but she did, and so I came back to Perth. Now you did ask me Paul, you were really, we should be talking about Ningaloo, which I know very little about, but I can perhaps just touch on what the company did on the fishing side. - The Geraldton operation which was the main operation was - taking fish from fishermen, either with the boats that we had financially backed - or those that thought we were very nice people to sell the catch to

Side A: 15 mins

PW Can you just tell me, when you financially backed a boat, what did that entail?

MD Huh huh. Well it entailed this; a chap would approach us and say they wanted so many thousand dollars to build a boat, would we back them? And we would probably, if we knew they had a potential, rightly or wrongly, we'd back them, and that is supply the money to have the boat built, put it under a bill of sale, and then under an arrangement, I think we used to charge them one percent of bank rate interest. Looking back on it, it wasn't a very profitable business for us. And we'd have first bite at the cherry, that is we'd take twenty five percent of the catch as it was landed, that's if they didn't sneak around the corner and sell it to someone else. - We had difficulties competing with the Geraldton coop up there, and once again it's hard for a public company to compete with them. Private companies are not so bad, they approach things differently. However, that was the situation back in those days.

PW Were there many boats that you would have backed like that?

MD Oh.

PW Would you be talking about dozens?

MD Oh yes, yes, over the years. Yes.

PW And did they generally comply with the conditions or not.

MD Ninety percent, yes. It was a risky business. They were fully insured and all that, but it was a risky business in those days, the boats were - a lot of them were open boats, not really built for the game - in those days it was - I s'pose - Randall was the one that really started putting boats in the water that were suitable to our coast - coastal waters. He did a good job on that. But yes, we - we were successful in that they were a good crowd, and some of the heirs today are probably millionaires. The type of fishermen in those days, apart from the ethnic people that possibly learnt fishing in their home countries, or their parents did, they were a cross section from, labourers, - you name it, bank managers when they found or saw what they were earning, and they took to boats with very little knowledge of the fishing industry or.

Tape paused for phone call 18.1 mins

MD Now, that was - where - what was I talking about Paul.

PW We were in Geraldton and we'd just finished talking about your offering fishermen (assistance).

MD Oh yes, the fishermen, they didn't have the knowledge, they were self taught, they - as I say, with the exception of the nucleus of professional fishermen that had fished our coast, and as I say they were in the main - Italian, Yugoslav, Nordic, and quite good people to deal with. But there were some scallywags with the balance of them, and as I said, they lacked the knowledge of running a business, but they - the successful ones were very successful, and we all know the amount of money that's been made in the - in the crayfishing industry on this coast, which has been, I think, well managed. And talking to the younger generation that's running the boats now, they are not fighting the Fisheries like they used to. They are the ones that are - the successful ones are the ones that want the industry to progress, and - I think one thing that has been cleaned up is the undersize catching, which would have ruined the industry. - And I think that's now under control.

PW With the undersize crayfish, was Tropical Traders involved in accepting those sort of situations as well?

20 mins A: Well I - No. The answer is no. But I'm not a purate (puritan) I saw that I was losing a lot of production for the company by those people that were accepting or buying undersized crayfish.

PW Max could I just ask if you wouldn't move your hand 'cause the tape will pick up all the noise that you making with your arm there.

MD No - because - and I had difficulties, chaps would say to me, "Well you've got to buy some of our "cackas." (undersize crays). Well I went to the Directors and said, 'If you want to stay in this game, I've got to buy cackas.' In those days, - there was Rob Stowe, after handing the company back to the directors, became a director himself. Noel Humphries was the managing director, Gordon Humphries, I'm sorry, Noel Humphries was the chairman. Gordon Humphries was the managing director, and - Toby James was a director. Carter, ray Carter who was on the fruit side of the business, which was sold somewhere, early sixties, and it became Tropical Traders, not Tropical Traders and Pattersons. They said no, we're not - we don't have to make money in the cacka business. And I must admit much to my disappointment, because I could see that they were ripping it from under me. However, we progressed on, and hung onto the crayfishing - onto the crayfish business, and fishing, and got rid of that, or sold out to Holmes a Court in 1972.

PW Did Holmes a Court ever do anything with the crayfishing? I don't ever remember hearing his name connected with crayfishing in the past - what happened then?

MD Oh, - well let me go back - I'll come to that, otherwise I'll lose track of the whole thing. It's many years ago now, you know. A lot of water under the bridge. Let's go back to the fishing and I'll eventually get you to Ningaloo. Just on the side, my first introduction to Ningaloo Reef was at - I did two seasons whaling at Point Cloates, with the Moores - they were the family that owned the company - that was very interesting.

PW Was that after the war?

MD That was after the war, that was 1950 and fifty one season. I got - as I said, I was working for my family then, and they gave me leave. I wanted to take my family back to England, to show off my grandchildren to my in-laws, and I'd promised them over there, if I could afford it, I'd come back in five years after the war. Well that wasn't easy in those days to get time off to do these trips that we can do now, and that was a twenty four day trip to England by boat; however I knew the Moores, and they were developing this whaling business, or had developed it. And I said, 'Give me a job up there.' Which they did, I knew them quite well, and so I did two seasons whaling, and thereby getting enough money, we were well paid in those days, very primitive looking back on it - to take myself to England and back, then rejoin by family in the business.

PW What actual task did you have at Point Cloates?

MD Ah ha, well I found myself in charge of a gang of ten - doing any job that came up. Mainly - running the -

28 mins

mainly looking after the chasers, their requirements, mooring gears, and also the loading of the *Norwhale*. *Norwhale* was a tank landing craft - that they had bought. They'd plugged up all the - the hatches in it and used it as a tanker to run the whale oil down to Maud's Landing, which was - there was deep water out there and they used to pick up an overseas ship, once every so often, and fill up their tanks with whale oil - down there. And so I was - arranged to load the boat with meat meal also, and that wasn't(?) bagged, and the old *Kaiber* used to call in behind the reef and we'd load the *Kaiber* - do these trips down to Maud's Landing, and then go up to Onslow. Jacky Turner was the skipper, he was a ex ; coastal boat skipper, and Jack was retired and they'd put him on the *Norwhale*, and he was a very interesting bloke to sail with up to Onslow. Fill up with diesel and bring it back and pump it ashore, so I, with my gang, I looked after the loading the *Norwhale* with oil, meat meal, or whale meal I should say, and running the diesel, for fuel ashore when we came back, then cleaning out the tanks on the *Norwhale*. Well I did that the first season and a job became vacant for able bodied seamen on the *Norwhale*, and - they asked me to select someone, so I selected myself, with much argument from the shore manager, Harold, question mark, I can't remember his name, he didn't want me, we wouldn't give it to me. So I had by this time got to know Jacky Turner the skipper quite well, and old Jack said, 'Leave that to me!' So I ended up as a (tone) overpaid -.

PW It's okay, the tape will be running out, so it's going to make a few beeps and then we'll change it over.

MD I ended up an overpaid able bodied seaman, and found it very interesting doing the runs as I had a navigation experience from the airforce days, so had an enjoyable time, made a lot of money out there, but that's when I got to know what a beautiful country Ningaloo was. So that was the first big fish that was ever caught around Ningaloo, was the whales.

PW How were you catching the whales?

MD They has three chasers and they harpooned them.

PW Were these big chasers?

MD Fairmiles, do you remember world war two Fairmiles? Well they had two of those, and another boat that I don't know where they got it from, I can't remember what it was. They had three chasers when I was there, if I remember correctly.

PW Did the whaling station catch fish off the reef for food for the men?

MD No, no. They didn't, there was no one. they were working twelve hour shifts, there was no one up there to catch fish - there was a hell of a journey in there to the sand hills, it still is too I believe to get to Ningaloo - to the old Point Cloates. Incidentally, the story of Point Cloates, is originally the Norwegians opened it up in 1923, and that's when the Moores, R. Moore and Son, went up there and used a lot of there own, old machinery, which had been covered in whale oil when they pulled out, and sand had encrusted it, and it was - like in mothballs¹ - and they - (tone) do you want to change that?

PW I think we'll fast forward, yes. I haven't figured out how to turn this noise off so we'll just stop

Side A ends: 28.9 mins (blank to 32 mins)

Side B starts.

MD So that was my first introduction to Ningaloo, and there was absolutely nothing up there. The air - there was an airfield over on the Gulf side. Exmouth Gulf - then - I forget the name of it now, that we called the "Potshot." - That was about a three hour across on the back of a truck to get to an aircraft, but in the main there was, if we went down, I went down on a couple of occasions, we'd go down by truck through to Carnarvon and down.

¹ For photographs of the whaling station in this period see Stanbury, M. (1985) *Norwegian Bay Whaling Station, an archaeological report*. Perth: Western Australian Museum. (p.44-45)

PW The whaling station brought it's oil down to - Maud's Landing and what was it brought ashore at Maud's Landing was it?

MD No, there's a - at Maud's Landing, it's in the Pilot book, it's a overseas port for a certain depth boats and they can get through the reef, so the Norwegian vessels used to come in, when I'd say vessels plural, they'd probably ship out at twice a season, if I remember correctly, two or three times, no more. And the ship'd come in and drop anchor at Maud's Landing and the *Norwhale* would come down, lay alongside and pump the oil on. But if you want to know more about that side of it - a lady by the name of Mrs Scott, she may have written her name in - did a thesis on that - and that's in the library, so that's worth reading, that, anyway.

PW How many trips down would you make from the whaling station to Maud's Landing to fuel (fill) up a ship. To fill up a ship with oil, would you?

MD About three times a season.

PW What each time a ship came into Maud's Landing, how many trips would you make backwards and forwards to give it a load?

MD One.

PW Just one?

MD Yearh, they - used to put them what they called lower tanks. They always kept - those tankers that moved around, especially the Nordic Line, always kept what they called bottom tanks, and they were special tanks for special oils, and we'd fill those up.

PW What sort of quantities of oil are we talking about?

MD Top quality whale oil.

PW No, quantities.

MD Quantities, I don't know, no idea.

PW Hundreds and hundreds of gallons I s'pose, or thousands?

MD Oh yes, yearh, oh yes. Thousands of gallons.

PW Now your other involvement with Ningaloo Reef is with the turtle fishing, and that occurred later on when you were engaged by Tropical Traders, is that correct?

MD Yes, well coming back to that, by this time I was back from Geraldton, in head office looking after bits and pieces. Just before I move on to that, the closest we got down into your territory where we - I'm sorry, to the territory you just looked at, down the corner, around the corner, towards the Bight, I went down there once with divers and we explored for abalone, the big red lip - green lip, and we worked with the Fisheries Department on that - and I - we found abalone right through, and those records we passed on to - the - Fisheries. We went north as far as - Port Gregory, and then we ended up down here, taking a bit of reef, by this time we'd bought Ocean Canning Company - so we canned some of it. But we didn't go on with it, I couldn't - I s'pose we couldn't see a good buck in it at the time. So we weren't interested. But strange to relate, we did - one interesting thing which relates to the crayfish side, we bought Ocean Canning mainly to have access to the salmon heads for cray bait. So I looked at that, I was - it was a subsidiary which I managed, and we - revitalised the salmon fishermen on the coast from Busselton - south, to Hamelin. And there we opened up a - the previous owner had put a building which the plans for canning down there which he never did, well it wasn't a viable proposition

Side B: 5 mins

PW Who was that?

MD Gardner, a chap called Gardner. And he - we - I used to go down and saw the operation after we bought it, and they were cleaning fish on the beach, it was shocking. You know, they'd catch it during the day, it lay around in the warm beach, and then they'd process at night and the wind and the sand and Christ knows what, and it was slow, and by the time we got the fish it wasn't good fish, so I came up (with) the idea of turning that - those premises into cleaning units and we supplied people with ice, they iced down and brought it straight in, we cleaned at Busselton. There we took the heads and we sent the salmon through Ocean Canning in Belmont and they canned Australian Salmon. And our main reason for buying it was to get our hands on those bloody heads, because they were worth a lot, to the fishermen. And we also canned Perth herring out of the Swan River. Which was a good product, a very bony fish, I don't know if you know it. But when you can it it's lovely. - Now during this time we were exporting crays to France and Gordon Humphries was watching all that side of it at the time, and writing - answering correspondence to Europe and they were wanting Kangaroo and such like.

PW Can we put a year on this, about what year?

MD They were - Busselton opened up - Oh the turtle?

PW No no no, the - like when did Busselton open up?

MD '61, give and take.

PW Okay, alright.

MD Well then the turtles would have opened up, a bit after that, oh I don't know, '62, let's say.

PW So about then you had an enquiry about a - whole range of specialised foods?

MD Yearh, so the turtles, they wanted turtles, and - we knew there was plenty of turtles up top, and eventually talked to the government, and they gave us a -

PW Was that specifically your own knowledge of having been to the whaling station, having seen the turtles?

MD No, I don't recall seeing them up at Point Cloates, quite frankly. - No, I don't know how we found that knowledge. We were poking around all the time on the coast and keeping in contact with Fisheries Inspectors and working very close to Canberra Fisheries, they were very helpful over there too, and we were exploring. Gordon and myself were very keen, keener than our directors on the fishing side. Interesting to say, that they went up, that is a handful of them, I didn't go up this time. They put a try net down in Shark Bay, and they found there was prawns there. We always knew there was prawns, even from that time I told you with the *Trial* that went through there, the good ship *Trial*. So from that we explored it and we thought, well there's prawns also further north, and we decided - and there was a lot of talk going on, nothing happening, and we had a suitable ship, and we applied and got the first prawning licence in Western Australia, and I thought, 'We're made, we're going. None of us know anything about prawning, let's get on a plane, go around the world if necessary and find a handful of people that know the game, bring them over, and let's start.' Well that was Gordon's and my thinking, we enthused about this, but the directors said, 'Nay'. And looking back on it, why should they. They were all men that were getting on in life, they all had plenty of money, why did they want to get an involvement, and they know that the first few years there's no money in anything like that. So, that was the finish (of) that, and with that licence - Gordon said to me, 'Who are you going to give the licence to?' And I said, 'Jeez, don't give it to anyone because if we give it to one particular fisherman, we're in trouble. They'll never go in our shop and buy gear again, and if they're Italians that get it, the whole Italian community wont -, or the whole British or Australian wont come into us.' So he picked up the phone and spoke to, I forget the minister at the time, 'Mr Minister, I'd like to thank you for the licence you gave me, I hereby hand it back to you.' And that's how we didn't go into the prawning business, much to my regret. If I'd been - if I was wiser and older, I would have grabbed the licence myself, with Gordon, and been in it; but however, that's water under the bridge. Now, we decided to go turtling, and

Side B: 10 mins

Side B: 15 mins

we inquired about this, and I forget where we - I don't know how we did it, but we ultimately found out the right chap to go, and his name was Captain Plugg, P-I-u-g, or double G. and he was a Dutchman that came out with about fifteen other Dutch families, if not more, all in one boat, brought a little boat out with them on deck, and camped down at Naval Base, and the old man used to go out there, old Plugg, catching crab and such like, and to feed his family. Well we got to - we found - I don't know how we found him, but anyway he appeared, and we found that he had a deep sea ticket, fishing ticket, and he'd had so many years experience in the North Sea, so he was a seaman, which a lot of our chaps at the time were not. They had the local knowledge, but they weren't seamen. So we gave him this - this boat that we'd had, the *Nardi Mar*, which we'd had - processing crayfish for some time, up at Green Head - and it was too difficult. The boat was a lovely old boat, the *Sai Fong*, - which we renamed *Nardi Mar*, and we fitted that out, Frank Coffey, the company engineer fitted that out, and put freezers in, or altered them from the crayfish requirement, to - holding rooms, to send her up, with scooter boats, to harpoon turtles. Now no one knew anything about this, but old Plugg took his three sons, Dick, Martin, and Cornelius. And he had a couple of other boys aboard, their names I can't remember. And they pioneered it really, and they practices the harpooning and so forth, and they were very capable people, and the ship was run, like a ship should be. Dreadful, no grog, nothing, everything was work and get on with it and when I say jump, you jump; and it was very successful. And they worked this area from just south of Bill's Bay, which is now known as Coral Bay, north up to near Yardie Creek. And they'd enter behind the reef at Maud's Landing, the one I spoke of, and then travel north for a few miles, it was a lot of "niggerhead" (coral knobs) country up through there, a beautiful place - and then anchor there and work their two scooter boats, bring the turtles on deck, cut them, head them, put them in the holding rooms - the freezer. And then I would - hear - have radio contact naturally, and he would say he was coming to unload. Well unloading was difficult, if you brought it into Geraldton it - people were starting to think - it was pretty dreadful when they saw these turtles coming out on a sling, onto a truck. - And I put it in there once, I never did it again, and then we unloaded it at Lefroy Station. Edgar Lefroy - which is near the old Ningaloo Lighthouse, and I put the boat in there, and we had a lot of trouble. Gascoyne Traders got their truck in there, on near to the beach, and then we used the scooter boats to bring the product from the *Nardi Mar* which was laying offshore about two miles I s'pose. But we had fly problems, blowflies by the thousands, and they'd come in like a crowd of fighters, and hit these turtles. (indistinct expletive) And I - they didn't know what to do. I knew what to do, we'd hose 'em down when we'd get them to the thing, and they - you know, the maggot doesn't, as you know, it doesn't hurt. It's a horrible thing to see, and we even showed the Health blokes at Geraldton what we were doing. So what we did after that, I had - very good contacts with Norwest Whaling, who then had gone down and bought the Government Whaling Station at Camarvon, and then that - they didn't whale, they didn't catch whales, I think they only did a season. They then went prawning from there, so I went there, and I knew them well and said, 'Listen I want to use your bloody jetty to bring the turtles in, so the - people can't see 'em.' And they, they said, 'No trouble.' They were very helpful, and I remember that the boss up there at the time was Noeland MacDaniel, of the MacDaniel family from Broome, the - pearlers, and he was a scallywag also. He went on, he passed away. So we then unloaded there, and we'd bring them in to Geraldton. I'd borrowed a couple of slaughtermen from Robb's Jetty. Cliff Bennet was the manager down there at WA Meat Exports at Robb's, and - he loaned me these two blokes, or three actually, and we set up a line, and we had the description of the cuts from Germany, how the Germans wanted them cut, breast plate, back plate, flippers - and two or three other cuts which I forget, and we then packed them out and put them in our - we had very good freezers there and snap froze 'em ready for export. - I skinned - skinned a flipper one day, on the boat I was up at in Ningaloo Reef, and I suddenly realised there was a large piece of skin, so I salted some of these down and came through - and went down and saw Shelkuns, the tanners. And they grabbed them and experimented with them and says, 'Right, we'll buy them.' So we did alright out of that, it was just a thing we hadn't thought of - well we fished on successfully, the old man - Plugg, used to - he used to refer to paddocks of fish, they come grazing like sheep, the turtle - and he'd fish a paddock and move the boat say ten miles up and fish that, then come back here, and - he reckons, from the records he kept over the years we had it running, that it wasn't effecting the catch rate. Now that wasn't at all scientific, but it's how the old man did it. He was a - was worried about hitting the stock, as those old fishermen were - the companies weren't but the fishermen themselves were, from what I've (indistinct). So that was the story, and they did a marvellous job, now what happened then was that the *Nardi Mar* was coming down to Geraldton for some reason or other, I s'pose it was the end of the season, and the weather was bad, and the old bloke put into Port Gregory, and on the Pilot Book it was shown that you anchor at the north end of the reef, just before you get behind it, so he dropped anchor there and put a night watch on for two hours.

20 mins

considered it safe, and the storm came in and washed him up on the beach, and that was the end of that. Broke up, finished. So that's where Andy Cassidy came in, he had the good ship *Linda* which I think he was buying, this mightn't be right, but I think he was purchasing it from Jim Davies, that had Golden Gleam processing works. And - nice people, Andy and Shirley, how are they going by the way, good?

PW They're going well, yes.

MD Are they, yeah, they are good people. Where are they, Leeming?

PW They're in Exmouth.

MD Is he fishing?

PW - He's reconsidering his options now, but I'll tell you about that later.

MD Okay, right, we'd better get on with this story Paul hadn't we, otherwise we'll get mixed up. I was going to tell you a story about him, shall I?

PW By all means.

MD Well I was due to go to see him up on the reef, and didn't take much urging for me to go up there. I could think of a dozen excuses to get out of the bloody office, and I'd always grab my managing director and say, 'Would you like a drink.' and he'd say, 'Well you know, what's the time, yeah we'll go at four o'clock, we'll go and have a grog.' and I eventually would say to him, look I've got to get up there, this is serious business, and he'd call me all sorts of names and give me my blessing and away I'd go. And I had to put a presence in, but I enjoyed it, that's what I'm trying to say. He said to me this time, 'Look, Ray Moore, the company secretary, he's been working his inside out, and directors wanted this and that, he needs a break, why don't you take him up with you.' And I said, 'Oh he'd love it wouldn't he' and he was, he wasn't a hands on person, and I thought he'll get a bloody shock when he gets aboard that turtle boat, with turtle guts everywhere and the chaps look like they - they were clean I s'pose, but they looked terrible, like rebels. So away we went. I sent a signal through, saying that I was coming - with the company secretary - with his permission of course, seeing Andy was the skipper, I thought I'd better be polite. And he welcomed us - well when I got to Coral Bay; Coral Bay had commenced by this time, it was no longer called Bill's Bay, it was Coral Bay, and I - and - when the scooter boat had come to pick us up, the couple of crew had got out - they'd got white shirts on, clean. (I thought) 'Jesus, what's wrong with these blokes?' So when we got - got out to the boat and they grabbed my bag and took me up and put me in Andy's cabin near the - a very nice cabin. And I looked in there, and that had been cleaned. It was spotless, and they took Ray and put him down with the crew down below, and I said to Andy, 'I can't take your - cabin.' And he said, 'Oh it's alright.' And I eventually said over a beer, 'What's going on with this boat, it's clean, I'm living in the skipper's cabin.' They said, 'Well Christ, when you said you were bringing you secretary up.' I said, 'I didn't say my secretary.' And so by this time the - anyone working Fremantle radio knew that I was taking a bird up to the turtle boat. (laughter) Which I didn't do. I was blamed for it, but that's one thing I've missed out in life. Anyway that went on until we - now I'll come to where you asked me about Holmes a Court. Holmes a Court came in in 1972 and he put a proposition to our directors that couldn't be refused. And so, there I was with a young chap called Rob Holmes a Court, and I didn't know he was going to be a billionaire and one day try and take BHP, I just thought what would this chap know, he's a lawyer. Well I learnt, and he said to me, 'What are we going to do with the fishing business?' We'd lost forty thousand that year on sales to America, and forty thousand then for our company was a lot of money, and I think, not being a director then, I think it frightened our directors and they took this option - it was a wise one because we weren't a true fishing company by this time, we were too narrow, we didn't have enough product, and we were buying stuff, and paying out when you didn't know how much you were going to get it for in the American market, and that doesn't make good sense to me, used to frighten God out of me, but however that was up to the directors, so Rob said, 'What were you going to do with the fisheries?' Well I said, 'I don't know what to do with it.' I said, 'We would have to put money in, become fishermen, and have a few trawlers working.' And he said, 'Oh I don't know about that,' he said, 'who would buy it?' And I said, 'Theo Kailis.' So it was sold to Theo, and that's - just as it was being sold, either before or just after, the

Side B: 25 mins

government withdrew our - or wouldn't renew our licence to fish turtle, so that's all - that was out, gone. So Theo took over Ocean Canning, the canning factory, improved on that, moved it from - that was out at Belmont - moved it over to his premises in Osborne Park, and it's gone from strength to strength, right up 'till today in - processing food, as you know. Now Rob then said, 'Well what are we going to do now?' And I don't know what I said, I was very cagey, I didn't know this young man, and he said well, and by this time, Stan Emery had been the boss of Taylors, of Tropical Traders after Gordon Humphries had died, and Stan was on some sick leave. Well he never returned for some reason - he decided to get out, and so I was left and Rob said, 'Do you want the job?' And I said, 'Arh, yes, I'll take that.' And that's when he said, 'well who's the next biggest in marine gear in Australia?' And I said, 'J.N. Taylor of Adelaide.' He said, 'Well let's see them.' So we saw them, and what happened there, he - he took them over, and then sold us, Tropical Traders to J.N. Taylor. It was the best move, and then that spread us right 'round Australia. We built on that. And (indistinct) nucleus were left, and Tropical Traders really built on, we cut Adelaide right back, they had stock and goodness knows what and we trimmed it up, and we followed the fishing industry, and we were the agents for Furuno gear, which as you would know is electronics. It was a lovely thing to have, it was beautiful, and so they've prospered right up 'till now. Holmes a Court was taken over as you know, - when the balloon went up, but the family Heysbury kept - J.N. Taylor - and it's only recently they sold that, or three years ago, sold that to Holdstead, a South African, who they - it was Jan Holmes a Court and family knew well, and that's still being run - from the chap that took my job, and very very successful. And the name Tropical Traders is still there, because we were also ships' agent and we never ever changed that, we left that as a trading name because the shipping people knew the name Tropical Traders, particularly the Japs, we handled their - tuna boats, so that's where the company went.

PW If we go back to Ningaloo, if we can just put up with that beeping for a little while - but when you first started bringing the turtles ashore and you had trouble with flies, were the turtles frozen at that stage, or were they unfrozen? Were you freezing them on board the *Nardi Mar*?

MD No no, we tried to but it was too hard, we treated it like, had it running at the same temperature as you'd run beef, and that, DPI (Dept. Primary Industry) were quite happy with that.

PW So they were chilled in effect?

MD Yearh, some of it was frozen, we didn't talk much about that. But the product was good because we weren't silly, we never ever put any crook product (indistinct) otherwise you know, you'd had it. (be in serious trouble.)

PW And you did some slaughtering or abattoir on the turtles at Robb's Jetty as well, is that correct?

MD - I forget what happened there - very little.

PW Did you? Where were the most turtles butchered?

MD Geraldton.

PW Geraldton. And were they then sent to Perth as processed product, or were they exported from Geraldton

Side B: 30 mins

MD They shipped out of Fremantle I think - Fremantle.

PW After they were butchered in Geraldton they would have been frozen would they?

MD Oh yes, because we had the snap freezing setup for the crayfish there.

PW And did you package them as a product or was it just sent in large sort of bundles to Germany?

MD No. It was packed in cara - carapace, that's the back and the front plates - there was flippers, and there was

red meat.

PW Did you have your own labels for turtle meat?

MD Oh we would have, yeah.

PW And they - were you preparing the material for direct sale in retail outlets or was that -?

MD No, into a soup factory.

PW Oh, I see.

MD Yeah, they used to send us a carton of soup occasionally, it was good stuff

PW From Germany?

MD Hmm.

PW And was most of the turtle being turned into soup?

MD Everything went into soup, whole lot.

PW Did you send the turtle meat as meat, or were you mincing it?

MD As meat, yeah.

PW Well, you've told me some terrific things about this, oh there was one thing, the *Nardi Mar*, I remember in a phone conversation you mentioned the *Nardi Mar* had come from Singapore, is that correct?

MD - It was built in Sydney, now I'll stand corrected on all of this because it's a long time ago, it was built in Sydney for a monied person as I refer to, I don't know who it was, and she had a mast in her, or two, and anyway for some reason or other he sold it and it went to Singapore. (tape end)

Tape 1, Side B ends: 31.9 mins

Tape 2, Side A starts

PW This tape is Tape 2 of an interview with Maxwell Dease of Mount Pleasant, being recorded on the 21st of April 1998, Max for the record please could you please give your full name and date of birth.

MD Maxwell Dease, 76, 24th sixth, 1921.

PW thanks Max, now you were telling me a little earlier on about - the *Nardi Mar*, and the background of that, it had been built in Australia and then it found its way up into the tropical regions somewhere, could you just enlighten me about the *Nardi Mar*, it sounds like a pretty good story?

MD Yeah, *Nardi Mar* was built in Sydney I believe, and as I was saying, eventually it got to Singapore, it worked out of Singapore doing something, it was suggest what they were doing was quite illegal, however I don't know that as a fact. It was renamed the Sai Fong, I guess you spell it S-A-I F-O-N-G, it was then brought down to western Australia, I don't know who bought it and brought it down, but anyway our company ended up owning it, Tropical Traders. I should say

PW How long was the *Nardi Mar*?

MD As a guess, seventy eight feet

PW Was it built of wood?

MD Yearh, round - she was - a round bilge, with two bilge keels on it, used to roll dreadfully - we put a new motor in her, as time went on, a Gairdner, a beautiful motor - and she was a stout boat. She was laughed at as times went on by the other boys because she was a slow mover - but Plugg did well with it, he even went crayfishing with it, and did it well. Now may I remind you, if you want to get more details of the catching of the turtle, get in touch with one of the Pluggs, now, as I (was saying) there was one that worked on the tug boats, don't know his name; then there was Dick, he was the next in line, then Martin, the centre one. Now Martin would have an all round idea because he eventually went crayfishing. He worked one of our boats I think the *Moby Queen*, but then he built his own boat, and as far as I know he may still be fishing, now he would know all that, what his father did, what probably what his father said. Now if he thought Dick knew more, - and they were up there for three months at a time.

PW When was the turtling season?

MD Well the same as the whaling, when the winds abate - July - to when we get out in October, otherwise like you'd be blown out. - So let's say June to October

PW Can you remember what sort of quantities of turtles your company was getting?

MD I knew you'd ask me that. I think he used to - unload about two hundred a trip - we'd do over a week to fill her up, depended on weather too. Quantities in a season, I don't know, two, four, eight hundred.

PW And how profitable was that venture?

MD It was profitable, I can't think of the percentage in it - it was good.

PW How did you calculate the price that you would send it or sell it to the Germans for, what sort of factors did you bring into your pricing?

MD Well we were - in our own way, we could give our bean counters a lot of information, you'd sit down with a bloke with pencil and you'd say, 'Now this is what will take place, and this is what I estimate this would cost.' So you get pretty accurate on your costings on a - whatever you were doing. You knew how much it cost you to run a ship, you knew the likelihood of what repairs you'd have to put against it for that ship - through experience, now your accountants should build up a history themselves - now as the boats improved, once you got in the fibre glass, all this became pretty straight forward - and so you knew your costs of dragging the stuff down by truck, you knew your freezer costs through experience in your freezer rooms. You had figures to put in, and you knew what your selling price had to be, you knew your shipping costs, so that wasn't difficult, because of the knowledge you had.

Tape 2
Side A: 5 mins

PW Can you remember how much the Germans would have paid?

MD No.

PW How did they pay, by pound weight, or was it by (something else)?

MD Oh it would be by weight, yes for sure. I'd say that, yes it was, of course it was

PW And would they pay in advance, or would they pay after their product was landed in Germany?

MD We would ship free on board (FOB) and that would be the normal thing - an exchange of bills of exchange, and once they receive the product - they wouldn't be released over there 'till we got our money, so they have to take you on faith, we never had any claims. We had one claim on cooked crayfish, once, and they went bad, they'd been - the blood - they hadn't been - oh they were cooked when they were dead. Now you can cook dead crayfish, everyone does, I don't. But if you do, the blood turns black, depending how much is around the tail, where it joins the body, the carapace, and they claimed back on that and we said sell it down

the line, you'll get rid of it all right.

PW Can you remember the name of the company in Germany that you were selling to

MD No, I've got no one to ask that one now. The secretary lady then, Shirley, she's dreadfully ill, so I couldn't ask her. No I can't just remember it.

PW Hmm. Well Max, thank you very much for this interview, you've told me some extremely interesting information, and I'd just give you the opportunity, if there's anything I should have asked you that you would have liked to include. Sometimes I don't know the right questions, is there anything that you'd like to add?

MD No, not really, we - it was a very - it's a very interesting life I had on the coast, I've had that. I didn't make a lot of money, but I enjoyed it. There was always something new, and no one, no one breathed down the back of my neck. They say, 'What about doing this.' Even when I got with Rob Holmes a Court, he would - he was a very nice chap to work for, he may suggest things over a cup of coffee to you - and my old boss, Gordon Humphries, he - he left it all to me, he'd get some ideas and away we'd go, we put a place in at Cervantes, we were the first people to put a plant in there, and to give you an example, I don't know if you've been in the Cervantes. Well it used to take me from, I don't know what you call it now, after you left Badgingarra, you used to come out through Moora, and you got within sixteen miles of the coast. It used to take me an hour to get a Falcon (car) through there, and we built that from scratch, put a jetty up, and the jetty, part of it's still there I'm proud to say, we built it ourselves. We put shell joinders(?) in it. Alf Bragg who was a builder, and was keen to get up there, he built it, we put the jetty out. I took a gang of chaps up there. It was an off season, I said to the cheifo, I've got nothing to do for a month, I'll go. So I went up with Braggie and two or three of the chaps, and he insisted, and we punched the piles in with - you know, water jetted them in, and put the jetty up, which was good, and it enticed a lot, we had a good crown fishing for us there, they could see we put the effort in - and that was an interesting experience, so I've had a good life. I s'pose the last ten years when I was flying a desk wasn't as good as when I was out - going around talking to blokes. Industry blokes were - they were good - it's changed now because there's not many of them alive, let alone - see there's chaps - that fishermen that were usually a bit older than me, you know ten years older. There wasn't that many young chaps, they were deckies - and you know, if I went back to Geraldton (in the past) I'd be waving to people, I notice now I don't know anyone. As you said you went into my old company and it was only the boss that knew me, and that's how life goes, you know.

PW Well Max thank you very much, and I would wish you well for the future, and thanks a lot.

MD Okay Paul.

Tape stop 10.8 mins

PW Now we're just going to have a little post script here Max, you just mentioned after the tape was off about your going up to catch Spanish mackerel when you went up to see the *Nardi Mar* at Ningaloo, just run through that again for me would you please.

MD Arh, well, a day's hard work at Ningaloo - was to have a late breakfast and the boys by this time would be out catching turtle, they'd bring them in and they finish that side of the operation by say, I don't know, eleven o'clock at in the morning and if the wind wasn't blowing, and boy it blows up there, but however, I'd grab one of the scooter boats and a rod and reel, and go out on the inside of the reef, which is probably just about a mile off from where the boat *Nardi Mar* was anchored, and spin for Spanish mackerel, and I'd always catch one, two or three, and beautiful fun, lovely weather, and in - and then we'd smoke them. Now this - they had a forty four gallon drum up the front of the ship, up forward - and they had the jarrah timber from fruit boxes, and so they'd hand a couple of bits of fish in there and the following early morning after the fish had settled, set I should say - and it would be gently be smoked until lunch time, by lunch time it would be like a creamy substance round the edge of the outlet, it had a lovely tang - it was the most beautiful fish I've ever tasted - and if we wanted a snapper, that was a matter of throwing the line overboard and catching a snapper. It was unbelievable the fish we could catch there. Most interesting at night if you've

got a spotlight over the side of the boat, the number of different fish that surfaced, including many water snakes would come up to the surface, and the big fish that you'd see occasionally cruising around were groper - unbelievable size, like small bullocks, however, it was a fisherman's paradise. I'm sure that those days will never return - people, too many people, won't allow it to

PW Did you make many visits to Ningaloo?

MD Yes, I would make quite a few, at the beginning I was up there quite frequently, and either picked a ship up at - Lefroy's, Hector Lefroy's station, I think was called Ningaloo, just down from the old lighthouse. Or I'd go into Bill's Bay, which is now known as Coral Bay, there was nothing at Bill's. A matter of fact I had ideas of putting a flying fox in there - to unload the *Nardi Mar*, we wouldn't have got the *Nardi Mar* right in but at least we could have got the smaller boats in, unloaded the flying fox straight onto the freezer trucks which came in from Gascoyne Traders, Carnarvon. However, that didn't eventuate and as I said we ultimately unloaded down at - in the main at Carnarvon. What I was going to mention Paul, going back in the crayfishing days, and salmon fishing, at one stage, mid-1960s, I - my managing director suggested that we took more fish out of the Mandurah estuary for the canning factory. Also "boil in the bag" fish was becoming popular and we'd done experiments with pilchard, and these fish - we'd fillet them and put a little dab of butter inside the bag, we had this machine that sucked the air out and the idea was to put them in a pot (of water) and you cooked them. And they came out - extremely nice - I put them up to the Perth Hospital, and they were very very keen on using pilchard, they had all the nutrients in it that they wanted, and so they - it was suggested to me we put in a cleaning shed down at Mandurah. Well we did this, and that place is still there, just beyond the new cut, on the south side of the cut. I think it's some sort of community hall now, and we took there - mullet, and pilchard. We used the mullet, mainly for - the heads for crayfish bait. We experimented in the canning of mullet, but it wasn't a proposition, we couldn't get the quantities we wanted - and it was necessary to can them in a flat can, which couldn't be produced in Australia at the time unless we ordered by the millions, which we couldn't do. It's interesting to note - oh before I get off that, when putting up the factory, we had as water problems, we had to put in large holding tanks for rain water - it was passed by Health, but I then wanted to pump out the offal into the estuary with a sludge pump, because we didn't know what to do with it, we'd have to have carted it away and buried it; but I thought then that it would be very good to put in the estuary. Well I went up and saw the town clerk and the mayor, and said this is what we want to do, and they were horrified at the thought of it. And I tried to explain to them that it'd bring many people to Mandurah to catch the crabs that'd come round (for) the effluent. - However, I was losing the argument hands down until I said, 'Do you know I'll be employing up to twenty five people on the casual rates here?' And the mayor looked at the clerk, and the mayor then looked at me and said, Well I can't see any harm in that offal going in the estuary' (chuckle) That's what happened. (laughing)

Tape 2
Side A: 15 mins

PW And did you pump the offal out did you?

MD Yes, and the fish came from everywhere, the crabs came in, and away it went. I don't know what harm it did to the estuary, but - I can't take the credit for this to cause that "cut" being put in

PW When did that operation take place?

MD Mid '60s, mid-sixties.

PW Now when the tape stopped you told me another wonderful story about a fisherman in Shark Bay, you'd gone up there to organise buying bait at one stage - can you tell me that story again?

MD Yes Paul I will, but before I do, in case I forget, we - another story of fishermen - fisherfolk, was that we were taking fish out - down the coast at Cliff Head, going south towards Snag Island - and Green Head, and half way down there, there was a family of people, mother, two daughters, and a number of children. Not too sure who the father was, however they were a happy lot there, and they stayed there all the winter, and I would suspect that they didn't - they caught crayfish unlawful - and would have flogged them round to the farmers in the off season, God bless them. Well someone down at Robb's Jetty suggested they had a lot of 'pigs' heads, and thought I may like them for bait. They had many many bags but they had been condemned.

so I thought they may make good cray bait, I don't know. But I knew this little - this chap and his family was operating during the winter months so I got the station wagon out and I ventured down and met him with these bags, and I gave them to him, and he gave me a home made brew, I recall that, one of the worst brews that I've tasted, and also some delightful mutton birds, and I picked at those - little fillets of meat, and I had them. And after I'd finished and drank his rotten brew, he said, 'Did you like the mutton birds.' I said, 'Yes.' He said, 'Well they're not mutton birds, they're seagulls.' And so I have eaten seagulls, and I must add, they were delightful. Well salted down and they were very nice indeed. However, he got the bags of pigs' heads, and at the opening of the season in a couple of months time I went down that way to see other fishermen and also called in on my friend that et the seagulls, and said, 'How were those pigs' heads that I left with you?' He said, 'They were no bloody good for bait, but by God they were good eating.' (chuckle) Now you asked me to retell you the story of my trip into Shark Bay many years ago to buy mullet. This would have been the early sixties, and Shark Bay was a beautiful place, with nobody there. A few people there - and as you may recall. That was an old pearling centre. And consequently there was a mixture of people there with a cross - a little bit of Japanese, maybe Aboriginal, and the white people, and - they were delightful people, colourful. So I went into town, saw Wellington the publican and asked for his - the name of the best fisherman. He said, 'Mr Fry.' Well I duly called on Mr Fry one sunny morning and the kids, it always stands in my mind, the kids were off to school, and they were - had been polished as far as I am concerned, they were delightful, clean and bright and smiling faces, away they went. Mr Fry invited me in and introduced his wife and we had a cup of tea, and he told me he knew I was into buy fish and the price had gone up tuppence, and I - I don't know what my comments were - I would have smiled probably. We negotiated and it was agreed I'd bought his full season catch of mullet. And on leaving I said, 'Well now when do you want your freezer unloaded. You'll have to let me know by radio and I'll send in a freezer truck.' And he turned and said to me, 'Well it won't be for a while.' I said, 'Well the mullet are running, you better start catching them.' - He advised me that he wouldn't be catching because he had plenty of money.' I thought I'd misheard him and I said, 'What?' He said, 'Well why would I go fishing if I've got money?' And I - it was hard to answer that and I went back to the publican, and who laughed and said, 'I know he has, I'm his banker, I act as banker for a number of small net fishermen up here.' And he said, 'No while he's got money he won't fish.' So I went back and saw him and I said, 'But the mullet will run, what were you going to do then?' He said, 'I'll catch whiting,' but he said, 'it would be very silly of me to go fishing if I've got money.' Well after sitting for three days in the sunshine outside the pub thinking of ways of getting mullet, I was convinced that I'd up camp and come and live there myself. Well Paul I think that's about it.

PW Good, yes. Okay Max, well thanks again for that post script, and they're good stories, thank you.

Tape 2, Side A, interview ends: 23.8 mins

Transcript of Interview

Interviewee: Harold Harmond Dodd

Address: Flat 23, Stock Hughs St. Exmouth. W.A. 6707

Phone: 08 9949 1758

Date of birth: 6 October 1933 (64)

Interview date: 14 March 1998

Place: Residence at Exmouth

Side A: 32 mins

Side B: 14.2 mins

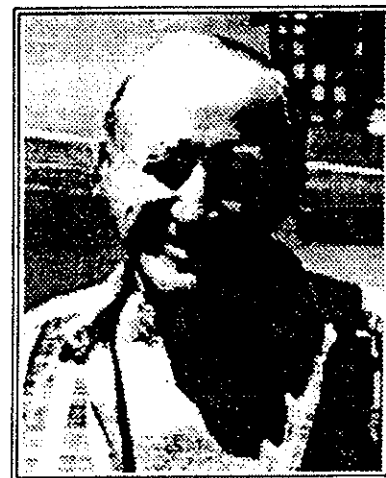
Total: 46.2 mins

Interviewer & transcriber: Dr Paul R. Weaver

Subjects: Ningaloo reef fishing (professional).

Side A: Lived 25 years in region. Originally shark fisherman on south coast. Dangers of small boats influenced search for new fishing horizons. Early days at Exmouth. Commuting back and forth from Perth. Fishing and firewood selling. Venturing over the Cape Range to the reef. First boat he used at Ning. was a wooden clinker dinghy from Swan River. Early objections from station owners. fishing at night. Being followed by amateurs. Seine netting for bait. Hooking for target species. Fish and Chips negate dependence on Perth market. Decline of fish numbers. Sharks have become more numerous. Disagreement with fencing off. Increasing pressures on fish. Moving further afield as people numbers increased. Catches became uneconomic. Buyback of licence. Diversification into fish and chips. Partnership with wife essential. Spangled emperor most popular.

Side B: Personal social readjustments. Injuries etc from fishing. Transport unreliability in old days. Management generally okay, but should not include mangroves. Amateur net sizes still too small - take too many juveniles. Long-term stayers bring no economic benefits - asserted ownership over fish resources.



- PW This interview is being conducted on the 14th March 1998, with Harold Dodd of Exmouth. Harold for the record will you please give your full name and your date of birth.
- HD Harold Harmond Dodd, 6th October 1933.
- PW How old are you now Harold?
- HD Seventy four.
- PW Seventy four?
- HD Oh sorry (laughter) - sixty four
- PW Okay - Harold, how long have you lived in Exmouth?
- HD - Actually settled and lived here, I'd say about, twenty four, twenty five years
- PW What year did you arrive?

HD - 1974 I think it was.

PW What brought you here?

HD Oh well I previously fished the area by bringing mobile freezers up here.

PW Were you a professional fisherman?

HD At that point, yep. And - we fished the Ningaloo Reef for snapper, and whiting.

PW Were you a licensed professional fisherman, or an unlicensed fisherman?

HD - Licensed at that stage, yep.

PW And had you fished anywhere else before that?

HD - Yearh, I fished right around the coastline actually.

PW When did you start fishing?

HD - Initially we went to Esperance, or further east than Esperance, Duke of New Orleans Bay, and Israelite Bay

PW Was that a family operation?

HD - No I had a partner then.

PW Who was your partner?

HD A chap by the name of Rendell, Brent Rendell.

PW What were you fishing for out there?

HD - Shark.

PW And you fished off the shore did you? And - in a boat?

HD Around the bays, yep, sometimes out at sea which was pretty dangerous.

PW And when would that have been Harold?

HD Oh, gee, that would have been (his age) 26 then, 25, something like that..

PW Yearh? You would have been about 26? In your mid-twenties were you?

HD Yearh.

PW Where did you learn to fish?

HD (laughter) It was a natural thing to me, you know, hooking up and down the coast, outside of Perth

PW Where did you spend your childhood?

HD - In West Perth, Leederville.

PW Did you commercially fish out of Fremantle?

HD No. Not out of Fremantle, no.

PW What was it that made you go down to Esperance to fish?

HD Well we were lookin' for shark - quantities, you know, and at that stage there were a lot of shark down there

HD Well, part of this project is that I am interested how people had their origins in fishing you see, and I'm wondering how you began in fishing - was that the first job you'd ever had?

HD Oh no, no, I'd served an apprenticeship, as a fitter and turner.

PW As a fitter and turner, and that didn't work out for you so you went fishing did you?

HD Well I was fish mad at that stage - we'd be up at 4 o'clock (indistinct) Quinn's Rock hand lining, you know, it was in the blood, yearh.

PW So when did you become a licensed fisherman?

HD - Gee, I couldn't tell you exactly the date.

PW Was that well before you went to Esperance?

HD Yearh, I was around 24, 25 at that point.

PW Was it hard to become a licensed fisherman?

HD No, no, you just applied at Fremantle office - no problems at all.

PW So you got your license and you took off for Esperance to try your luck out?

HD Yearh, yearh, right around the coast really, you know, we dabbled in everything

PW And did you catch other fish besides shark?

HD - Oh yes, a variety of fish, we used nets.

PW What did you catch?

HD Shark - oh God, I couldn't give you details now.

PW Did you fish in any of the estuaries?

HD - No, I never fished estuaries.

PW It was always ocean fishing?

HD Ocean fishing, yearh, I did - did have - I could fish, net the upper reaches of the Swan when I lived there, I had a permit to do that.

PW Where was the best place you fished down that way?

HD Down that way, well everything was prolific in them days, there was a lot of shark around. The only thing that stops the Esperance fishing was the unpredictable weather

PW And, you moved then from Esperance at some stage?

HD Well we used to travel to Esperance, with the freezer

PW So you weren't permanently based there?

HD No, not permanently based, no.

PW So you'd go on expeditions and - were you permanently based in Perth were you and then you'd go out to these places?

HD Yep, to the bays around the south coast, yes. - yep.

PW And how long would those expeditions last?

HD Oh, around about a fortnight was maximum.

PW And then you would bring your catch back to Perth?

HD Back to the markets in Perth, yearh.

PW And you'd actually bring it back yourself rather than put it on the train or anything like that?

HD Yearh, yearh, yep, yep.

PW Did you make a good living from that?

Side A: 5 mins

HD It was always a battle, we were always struggling, yearh.

PW After you'd fished on the south coast, did you go and fish somewhere else?

HD Yearh, I fished shark at Leeman, or Snag Island in them days, yep, I had a camp there, two miles out of Leeman.

HD Did you fish there for very long?

HD Oh, about three years I would say, on and off.

PW And was that a good operation for you?

HD Once again the weather beat us down there in small boats, you know.

PW How big were your boats?

HD Fourteen foot.

PW They were dinghies really?

HD Yearh, dinghies, yearh, all pulled by hand, the shark nets, but you could get into a bit of trouble once again, you know, so - that's when we decided to move up to Exmouth

PW How did you hear about Exmouth?

HD Well this mate I was fishing with, he talked me into doing a trip to Durahilly with him, and that's how I got started.

PW Where's Duralia Bay?

HD That's right down the bottom of the Gulf, through Bullara Station, and the coastline there

PW And what did you go for there?

HD Mainly whiting, bream - shark wasn't a proposition from up here -

PW Was the fishing good in those days?

HD Oh, it was very good, yearh, yearh.

PW How did you process your catch?

HD Oh, they were sold whole to the markets, they went in the freezer and straight down to Kailis.

PW So you sold to Kailis, but where were Kailis then?

HD They were in West Perth.

PW So you sent direct to West Perth?

HD Direct to the markets in West Perth.

PW By road freight was it?

HD No, we'd the same system when we started, we'd fill the freezer and go back to Perth.

PW You'd drive it yourself all that distance?

HD Yep, yep, and when we'd get home we'd have a cup of tea. (chuckling).

PW It was an unsealed road then wasn't it?

HD Yearh, when you drove out of Northampton, just straight onto the gravel, two inch corrugations.

PW That must have been an enormous undertaking to come this distance?

HD It was, yearh, yep. Slow trip.

PW How many kilometres were involved, or miles?

HD Oh well your looking at seven or eight hundred miles, a thousand kilometres. I don't know - how it converts, but -

PW Was it profitable for you to do this?

HD - Not really - no, no - I never ever made any money out of that, but we knew the potential was here so that's why I moved into the place permanently.

PW You would take a trip - from Perth to Exmouth to catch whiting, and you would get -

HD No whiting and - spangled emperor.

PW And get a freezer full and then you'd take them back - These would be (take) a two week trip?

HD Yearh, two to three weeks.

PW Two to three week trip, and was that the days of pounds shillings and pence?

HD That was, yearh.

PW How many pounds would you make for a trip, roughly, what would you expect to make for a trip?

HD Oh gee, you'd have to look at - four of five hundred pounds, that was about all we got, but I haven't worked it out, you know, it's only off the top of me head.

PW Hmm, but roundabout that sort of figure. Was that quite a lot of money then?

HD That was a lot of money in them days.

PW So despite all the effort there was still - some (advantage?)

HD Oh no because you got, you might spend a month home, you know, before you do another trip, maybe two months.

PW Oh right, well, that was the other advantage of it that it allowed you to spend a greater time at home doing nothing, or other things?

HD Yearh, it was not a continual thing.

PW Did you have other jobs as well, besides fishing at that time?

HD - At that particular time, yearh, I was cartun' firewood, selling it by the ute loads, you know, around Perth.

PW And did you go out in the bush and cut your own wood?

HD Yep, yep. So the two businesses worked in fairly well, you know.

PW Then you decided (presumably) that you'd had enough of driving and you would stay in Exmouth permanently - did you initially set up a camp, or did you build a house?

HD No, I built a small shed around in the light industrial area.

PW Did you have to buy the land?

HD - Yep, yep, we bought the land.

PW Was land cheap in those days?

HD Three hundred and fifty dollars a block.

PW That sounds pretty reasonable?

HD Pretty reasonable, yep. (chuckling)

PW You could earn that in a week's fishing, just about?

HD Oh, yearh, yearh, oh well depending, you know, I'm not saying we did.

PW But potentially, you could?

HD Yearh, yearh, but our market was very bad in them days.

Side A: 10 mins

PW Yes, it was still a long way to market. (agreement) And you still had to drive your fish to market did you even then?

HD Well I had such trouble getting a market, you know, a frozen fish market, that would - well getting the fish was okay, getting out of town, shipped to Perth was a different thing.

PW It was a real hardship?

HD Yearh.

PW Alright, well let's talk about Ningaloo, because that's the main purpose of this series of interviews - when did you first go around to work on the Ningaloo Reef system?

HD Oh that was in the very early days when we first came up here, we actually went over the range initially

PW You didn't go around via the Cape which is the way that people do today?

HD No, we went over to have a look, from Duralia, we went over the Range, had a look, and we thought the next trip we'd go over there on the snapper.

PW Was there a sort of a cart track or something going over was there?

HD Oh, you can still get over there, yearh, very rough.

PW Do many people use those tracks?

HD - I wouldn't say so, there's a couple of - tour guides go over them.

PW Tell me about the fishing in those days on Ningaloo?

HD - On Ningaloo it was very good, yearh, the fish were tame, if you like to put it that way - you could drive up to a lump and they'd come up to the prop, you know. -

PW There were lots of fish?

HD Oh there were a lot of fish, yearh. - Why there were so many, I think they were a tame fish, compared to what they are now.

PW - Were you aware of any other professional fishermen operating on the reef at that time?

HD - (long hesitant pause).

PW There was another man was there?

HD There was someone else fishing further south than us Yearh.

PW Did you ever meet them?

HD - Over the years, yearh, later on I did, yearh - We didn't strike 'em on the coast

PW In that case it was a fairly lonely sort of a place fishing, was it?

HD Oh yearh.

PW Did you mind the loneliness?

HD No, it sort of comes naturally. (chuckling).

PW What type of fish did you used to catch off the reef?

HD Well in the main, spangled emperor, yearh. That's what - we fished for.

PW That activity, was that taking place on the inside, in the lagoon?

HD Yep, yep, inside the lagoon.

PW Did, you ever go on the outside of the reef?

HD Oh, I fished outside, yearh.

PW What sort of boats were you using?

HD Oh, in them days they were only twelve footers, fourteen footers.

PW What were they made of?

HD Aluminium, Oh initially when we first came up we had an old Swan River, wood netting dinghy.

PW A clinker?

HD A clinker boat, yearh.

PW That would have been fairly heavy to drag over some of the sand dunes?

HD It was (chuckling) yearh.

PW And that made you a strong man?

HD Yearh.

PW And did you do any netting on the Ningaloo Reef area?

HD Oh yearh, for whiting, we had our whiting spots.

PW Was there a lot of whiting in those days?

HD Yearh, a lot of whiting.

PW Where did you fish for whiting?

HD Well probably our key target was - Mangrove Bay.

PW And the other fish, the spangled emperor, where did you catch them?

HD Yearh, we'd set up a base camp down there and just work the immediate reef around us

PW Where did you have your base camp?

- Ned's Camp.

Ned's Camp? Was that someone that was there before you, called Ned - ?

I don't know how it got its name to be truthful

Had anyone been there before you got there?

Oh, I would say so, yearh. A chap by the name of Broad had the station, he didn't like people going down there so there wouldn't have been a lot of people down.

Did he mind professional fishermen going down?

- No he actually tried to get rid of us, initially. He brought the cops from Onslow over and tried to say we had no health facilities there, you know.

And what did the police do?

Well they said, "Well don't come back." but - we still come back (chuckling) it made no difference, they didn't do anything, didn't take any action -.

Have there been other confrontations with people on that area?

- Well not (since they) turned it into a national park, yearh. After that there were confrontations yearh. (sic)

The National Park - when did that occur?

Side A: 15 mins

Oh gee - I couldn't tell you exactly what year it was

When that happened was that a serious blow to your fishing activities?

Not initially it wasn't. But then it became a manne national park, course this was only a few years ago, and yearh, that effected us.

So when it became a national park, you were still able to continue your fishing activities?

Oh yes, yearh, yep, yep.

And when that occurred, is that when you started to have more confrontations with people?

Yearh, well with a couple of particular rangers, yearh, they didn't want us to camp on the beach, or anything like that. So eventually we went further south, to - the bombing range, and built a camp down there. But that meant travelling from Exmouth to the camp every week, three or four days a week.

That was outside their jurisdiction I suppose?

Yearh, it was, yearh, yearh.

Are those rangers still around?

Oh no, they've long gone

Long gone. And what was their idea of chasing you off the national park?

HD Well, like you'd wake up to them in the morning, they were charging a fee, they'd want to charge you for camping there and - which we never ever - we never paid for anything when we went down there. Just a matter of principal, you know.

PW Were these - meetings sort of contentious. Did people raise their voices, and things like that?

HD Oh, I can remember a couple of time, voices were raised, yearh.

PW On both sides?

HD - Initially on both sides, (chuckling)

PW How about tourists and amateur fishermen. Have you ever had confrontations with them?

HD Not really - tourists, when they started to move into our camp at the bombing range, we went down there one year - one week, and it was like a tent city, you know. But what they'd do is follow us around when we were going fishing at night. A stream of boats would go out, behind us. (laughing)

PW What was the idea of that?

HD Well to find out where to go fishing I suppose. I don't know. They used to follow us anyway.

PW Does that mean that the fish were becoming depleted, that they were having trouble catching fish?

HD No, I think they tried fishing through the daytime hours, and that was, there was something wrong, they weren't getting fish, they'd say. The thought well we'll follow this bloke. Course we go out about half past four, five o'clock, and locate our spot, and that's where we'd stay until eleven o'clock at night.

PW And you'd be hooking would you?

HD Just hand lining, yearh.

PW Did you catch a lot more fish at night time, than in the day time?

HD - Oh yes, yes, yearh.

PW Did you let - tidal matters influence you activities at all?

HD Well no - we fished though all different tides - we had our set routine, you know, off we'd go at half past four, five o'clock, find the fish.

PW And you'd do that every day?

HD Yep

PW Did you catch other things like crayfish, squid?

HD No we never worried about that.

PW What did you use for bait?

HD Oh well net fish, anything out of the nets, they'll take any bait.

PW That was your primary source of bait was it? - To net the fish in the daytime?

HD Yearh, if we got a school of whiting, or something like that, we'd net it, yearh.

What did you use? You'd use a seine would you, or a haul net?

Oh no, you'd seine 'em, you'd seine 'em, - you run a haul net around them

Did you use a boat to run that net, or -?

In most cases you'd walk 'em.

You'd just walk it out?

Off a net board, yearh.

So not a very long net?

Oh, no, it doesn't have to be long.

How long would your haul net be?

Well the haul net was about twenty five yards, no more.

And in that sort of a situation, how many fish would you usually take?

Well I s'pose our average, working on the west coast, you could look at about 200 kilo, a haul, that's - about the size of the schools, yep, on average.

Have you noticed any changes to the - to the reef system over time?

Side A: 20 mins

Yearh - it has deteriorated, fishwise.

Can you tell me how?

I think it's activity in the areas. As I say, the snapper were tame once, but now you'd have to drift up to a lump and gently put the pick (anchor) over and, everything's got to be quiet.

What sort of quantities of snapper were you catching in a single day, or a single night?

Single night, well it varied. It'd be one to two baskets, I have caught 450 kilo in one night.

How many fish would fit into a basket?

You're looking at about eighty pound of fish.

How many fish would that make, ten, twelve?

They'd average about - four kilos I suppose. They were all big snapper, you're getting around at night

Is a four kilo snapper a big one?

That's a good average sized fish, yearh. I have caught them up to 15 pound, you know

Did you ever catch pink snapper?

No, no, never. Never seen one

PW

Have those sort of fish declined in numbers over time?

HD

The spangled emperor - well no, I don't think they've declined, I think they just operate in - deeper water. They don't school up like they used to. I used to see schools of them swimming through inside the reef, but I haven't seen that for years.

PW

How about sharks?

HD

Never a lot of trouble with sharks, but I believe they're having trouble with them now around there. But - I never struck any problem with sharks.

PW

Were there sharks around when you were fishing?

HD

- Well they probably weren't there, otherwise you'd pick 'em up on the lines, you know, it's only recently that they're starting to take the snapper, as you're pulling them in.

PW

What sort of sharks are causing problems now?

HD

Oh, they're mainly black tip, bronzies.

PW

Are they large sharks?

HD

Oh, they'd get to four foot, four and a half.

PW

And do they attack the fish as you're pulling them in, is that's what's happening?

HD

Yearh, that is a problem, now apparently. I haven't fished for about three years around there, but they reckon the shark are really bad.

PW

Have you noticed any changes to the actual environment, to the reef itself, or even the beach environment where people go. Has that deteriorated?

HD

- Well if you can call hammering in green poles everywhere, yeah.

PW

Could you be more explicit?

HD

Oh, they're building fences everywhere, you know, they're blocking off the sand areas. People can't go to them, and yet the kangaroos are rollin' all over them, you know, they come and sleep there at night, and they've got it fenced off for humans.

PW

Do you think it is a good idea to fence it off to humans.

HD

Well, like when you got a hundred kangaroos treading over the place (chuckling) I can't see the sense in it, you know.

PW

There's a lot more people now use that reef than in the past, when you were fishing did you notice ... this was occurring, that there were greater numbers of people starting to turn up every year?

HD

Oh yearh, over later years, yearh.

PW

And as a result of that did this tend to make you move to other areas which were further out?

HD

Well, yearh, we found ourselves going further all the time, from the popular areas.

PW

Was this because the fish were becoming harder to catch in those more popular areas?

HD Yearh, well I just think they're an intelligent, fish; the noise, the activity, they get out somewhere else, yearh. And if you find an isolated spot, yearh, you might find them

PW Was the - main reason that you were moving to go to places further out, because you were looking for fish, or to escape the crowds of people that were starting to turn up?

HD Well a bit of both, yearh.

PW Did you realise that things couldn't last for you?

Side A: 25 mins

HD Oh yearh, I eventually had to give it away, yearh, it was just too many - too many nights we were missing out. It had deteriorated to that point, yearh.

PW What it became uneconomical for you to operate?

HD Yearh, yep.

PW And then you ceased fishing on the Ningaloo Reef did you, purely because it became uneconomical?

HD Yearh, we sort of gave that away - yearh, exactly. We'd only end up with half a basket, or something like that, or half a dozen fish.

PW When did you stop fishing there?

HD It must be - time flies doesn't it? Probably about five years ago

PW About five years ago. It's 1998 now, so probably about 1993, something like that?

HD Yearh, that'd be right.

PW But you kept your fishing license?

HD Yep, yep.

PW And you still have it do you, you're still a licensed fisherman?

HD Oh no, no, I handed the license in.

PW When was that?

HD That was, gee it's only about 18 months, two years ago. We got paid out for it

PW Oh, it was a buyback scheme was it?

HD Yep, yep.

PW Did you get much back for your license?

HD Oh yearh, I thought a fair price, do you want me to tell you?

PW Yearh, I'd like to know

HD It was forty two and a half thousand.

PW And did you have to pay tax on that?

HD No.

PW It was tax free. Well that was a comfortable little retirement present. (laughter)

HD It certainly was.

PW Were there many other fishermen up here that - were part of that buyback scheme?

HD Yeah, there are a few of them, but I don't think anyone's realised their money yet.

PW They're still waiting for it?

HD Oh, oh, well they probably don't want to hand their license back at this point.

PW Is there a time limit that they have to make a decision?

HD - I couldn't tell you that.

PW You haven't heard?

HD No.

PW Did you have to think very hard about participating in the buy back scheme?

HD No, not really - the bank started to give away, and things like that. I couldn't operate a hundred percent.

PW How did they calculate how much your license was worth?

HD Well they set a criteria by paying someone else out - we're up in that area. And - I think that's how they set the criteria for us.

PW Did they base it also upon your record of fishing, how much fish you'd caught in the past, or anything like that?

HD I wouldn't say so, no.

PW They just came up with a figure - did you think that was a generous figure, or would you have -?

HD Well they would have had to get up around that figure - if we sold it privately, or were able to, you know, we would have ended up with the same amount of money. So it was pretty well worked out.

PW That occurred not long after you left Ningaloo, for fishing - did you do some other fishing after you stopped fishing on Ningaloo?

HD Yep, yep. I shifted around to the Gulf, we built a camp down at Bay of Rest - and we remained there for a while.

PW And how was that?

HD Well that was good - I didn't have the requirement for the fish I had in earlier years when we had the fish and chip shop. So I was able to concentrate on mullet, whiting and tindistinct.

PW Tell me about your fish and chip shop, where was that?

HD That was in Polieth Street, and that is how we got over marketing fish in there all days, we couldn't, you know, no costs in transport or anything like that, so we decided to start a fish and chip shop.

PW And was that a great success?

HD It did very well over the period we had it, yearh

HD What was the fish and chip shop called?

HD Doddies.

PW Doddies?

HD Fish and chips. (chuckling)

PW And when did you start that up?

HD Oh dear, I'll have to wrack my brains now. It would have to be about '80 (1980) something like that.

PW Right, well how many years do you think you ran it? About twenty years or so.

HD - No, we've been out of it now for about probably six years or so -

PW Did you sell the business?

HD Maybe ten or twelve years we had it.

PW Did you sell it?

HD It was sold, eventually, yearh.

PW Is it still going?

HD - Yep, still running.

PW And it's still in the same place? Is that the the one that they call Betsies?

HD No, no, it's closer to town than that, its in Polias Street. What do they call it now?

PW But it's still in the same location, and that was the first fish and chip shop in Exmouth was it?

HD Yep, oh there was one in earlier years, when the base first started, but that only lasted a short time. When we come up there was nothing at Exmouth. There was one caravan I think, selling hamburgers.

PW Did the Americans like fish and chips?

HD Oh they loved them, yearh, yep.

PW Were they your main customers?

HD Oh no, no. It was split down the middle. You know.

PW And the type of fish you sold in the fish and chip shop, what were they?

HD Well, spangled emperor number one, and then you got your whiting, we had cod. As big a variety as

possible.

PW And it was all local fish that you caught yourself?

HD Yearh, they wouldn't buy mullet, wouldn't buy shark. It was all, you know, top quality fish.

PW What sort of hours did you have to operate that place?

HD Well, it was pretty well a full time thing, the wife ran it of course - she had a couple of helpers on the busy nights - it used to be open from well say from four to nine at night, but you've got your preparation hours and everything else.

PW So you would catch the fish, and you wife would - you would prepare them, process them, you'd cut them to size and shape would you?

HD Yep, yep and go through the cooking yearh.

PW And your wife would cook them and handle all that?

HD Yearh. Yep.

PW Was that the salvation of your fishing activities?

HD I'd say so, yearh. There was many people come up trying to hand line fish - bigger boats than we operated out of, but - there'd be five or six I s'pose, that actually went broke and had to get out.

PW Did other people try to open up fish and chip shops too?

HD Oh, they all dabbled in it, yearh.

Side A ends: 32 mins

Side B starts

PW You were telling me about the fish and chip shops and you said that initially there was no competition, and then it went up to a fish and chip about seven or eight fish and chip shops around the town?

HD Yes - Oh not entirely fish and chip shops, but you had the pub selling it, you had different restaurants.

PW And these all impacted on your sales did they?

HD Yearh, we still retained a pretty high level of sales, yearh. Well the business was still profitable even when we had maximum competition.

PW Tell me, with your activities, did you have any customary or religious activity associated with your fishing? Were there particular days that you wouldn't go fishing, or anything like that?

HD No, no, not really.

PW You'd go any time?

HD Anytime, when the fish were there.

PW - You never, when you were in other areas ever became involved in Blessings of the Fleet ceremonies, or anything like that

HD No, no.

PW Were there seasonal considerations related you fishing activities? Did you do certain things at some times of the year, and not others?

HD Oh, no, no, was - we had a schedule and we worked through whatever season there was, yearh.

PW Could you catch your target fish all year 'round?

HD - Yearh, you could with the emperor, yep, sometimes better than others of course

PW When was it better than others?

HD Well, it's probably the heat that stops you, like it's more your fault than the fishes' - Strong winds would stop us, and hundred degree temperatures, I'd give it a miss, you know.

PW Did you know when the emperor spawn?

HD - No I couldn't tell you exactly.

PW Had you ever seen that coral spawning which takes place in March, when you were fishing?

HD Yearh, we've seen it, yearh.

PW Were you aware of that all the time, that it took place?

HD - Yearh, it's always been with us - like you get the thick streams of this stuff running through, you notice it.

PW Did you used to notice that in years gone past, like in the very early days?

HD Oh yearh, its always been with us, I'm sure of that.

PW Did you know what it was?

HD Well, (chuckling) no not so much as saying it was - what do they call it - the spawn of the reef?

PW Yearh.

HD No - I wouldn't have even thought about it properly in them days.

PW You didn't actually know what it was, you saw this stuff?

HD Yearh, it could have come from anywhere, yearh.

PW Did that effect the fish?

HD Not to my knowledge, no.

PW Didn't change their flavour, or anything like that?

HD No.

PW And how about the big whale sharks, did you see those going a long way back, or have you only become aware of them fairly recently?

HD Only recently, since they've been pointing them out. Yearh.

PW Were you surprised to discover that there were such big things out there?

HD Outside there, yearh, yearh.

PW Would you have gone out there if you'd realised they were out there?

HD Oh that doesn't worry us, no we used to fish all waters.

PW Did you - did your boats ever get attacked by sharks?

HD - I got attacked once by a hammerhead. I was laying a net and he swam under the net to the dinghy, and was bumping it.

PW That was here?

HD This was here, yearh at (indistinct) We were laying a net and he sort of run up and down the net, but everytime he'd come to the boat, he'd come right in and hammer it, yearh, wouldn't say hammer it (laughing). But hit it with the oar and it'd turn away and go off.

PW Now we hear a lot about conservauon. In the past was your attitude to try and catch as many fish as you could, and - that was the primary aim?

HD That was the primary aim, to get as many fish as we could, yearh.

PW Have your attitudes changed subsequently, over time?

HD Oh now I've retired, yearh definitely, definitely changed. I've always had a strong feeling for the spangled emperor, you know, a very intelligent fish, a very gentle type of fish.

PW Do you think; do fish think?

HP (chuckle) I think they act on impulse sort of, you know, I - don't think they actually calculate a situation, but they know when they're scared, or -

PW Have you - had social relationships with other fishing families up here? Your wife for example does she come from a fishing family?

HD No, no.

PW Where did you meet your wife?

HD - Well through activities, just socialising at the yacht club.

PW Up here at Exmouth?

HD Yep.

HD And - she's not related to any fishing families?

HD No.

PW Did she used to go out and help you catch fish?

HD - Yes that happened on occasions, as company, yearh, she never actually, fished. She was with us quite a

bit.

PW Did she help prepare the fish, like gutting and cleaning and things like that?

HD You'll scrub this? (Laughing)

PW Yearh, yearh. (Laughing)

HD Which wife were you talking about?

PW Oh, you've got a couple of wives? Okay, we'll just pause.

Side B: Tape pause 5.5 mins

PW Well what you were saying is that you now have a second wife and that your first wife was working in the Fish and Chip shop, and she became disgruntled with the situation and she eventually left and went back to Perth, an so that the lady whom you're with now, is not the same woman who was with you initially?

HD That's correct, that's right.

PW Allright, well we'll leave it at that. Now - I've got a heading here, "the influence of fishing literature on your decisions?" Did you ever read any literature about fishing over your time, did you - find out about what was going on?

HD No, I was never one for reading, or anything like that.

PW Do you read much now?

HD No, I'm the same way. (laughing)

PW You can read can you?

HD Oh yes, yes, yes, but I'm not a reader.

PW What would you say was your most important return from fishing, the lifestyle or the economic return? That's if you don't consider the handout from the government on your license, but you didn't know you were going to get that.

HD No, that's right. No, I think it was more of a lifestyle, because no matter what would have happened, I would have continued, fishing, you know.

PW Have you had any health problems from your fishing, or had any health benefits?

HD Er, no.

PW You mentioned you had a sore back?

HD Oh yes, I had back trouble there, yearh.

PW And was that from the heavy lifting -

HD It was mainly heavy lifting, pulling shark nets for years, which I did - by hand -

PW Have you had things like hernias and stuff as well

HD No, no, it's all been in the back and neck. Yearh.

PW And what about sun cancers, skin cancers?

HD - I've had a few taken off, but not many.

PW Whereabouts?

HD Oh, on the arms mainly.

PW On the arms, your arms were always - you worked with short sleeved shirts I suppose, did you?

HD - Always running around without a shirt, I had one cancer on the back they took off

PW And was that recent? These cancers?

HD Oh no, that's going back ten years or twelve.

PW So you've had cancers for quite a long time?

HD Oh yes, yearh.

PW Did you always wear a hat?

HD Always wore a hat, yearh.

PW Have there been - technological changes over time that have improved your chances over fishing?

HD No, no, I wouldn't say so. It's still basically one hook and a bait on it.

PW What about four wheel drive vehicles, did you always have them up here?

HD Oh, always, always had an old Landrover or something.

PW Landrovers in the early days?

HD And then we changed over to Toyotas, yearh.

PW Which do you think were better, Toyotas or Landrovers?

HD Oh, Toyotas definitely, they were more consistent. A Landrover would break an axle on you any time, you know.

PW Did you have a lot of broken axles over the years?

HD - I think I've had two broken axles

PW And that's enough. (chuckling)

HD Yearh, and that's all you want. (laughing) Yearh, in heavy work they'll snap an axle for sure

PW Well now you've told me some interesting material here. Is there something I should have asked you which you might like to tell me, or add to these matters?

HD - No I can't really.

PW What do you think is happening for the management plans now? Do you think they're a good thing, the

way that the park's being managed now? Are they necessary?

HD Yes, I think so. I don't agree with some of their sanctuary areas, like they've got 'em mud flats where there's no water, or it goes out - I don't think that's (should be) a sanctuary area. Maybe for the mangrove trees it might be.

PW What other things do you think that they might not be doing properly?

Side B: 10 mins

HD Everything else seems to be under control, their net sizes are not good - they've got a two inch, I think it is, haul net, one that you can haul. Well you can get a lot of juvenile fish in that, well when I say juvenile, baby fish.

PW Do you think the mesh size is too small?

HD For hauling, yearh. They've either got to be a net that you can empty the fish out of and let them go, or they've got to go to a larger net size.

PW Tell me about the retirees which come up here and live for long periods of time along the Ningaloo Reef. I think the locals call them, is there a name they've got for them? What do they call them?

HD (chuckling) Oh, there's been a lot of names for them, amateur-professionals

PW "Seagulls"? Is that a term they call them?

HD Seagulls, yearh. (laughing)

PW Are there any other words like that they apply to them?

HD Probably seagulls would be the most popular, I can't think of any others.

PW Why would they be called seagulls?

HD Well (laughter)

PW Go on, you can tell me because no one is listening? (joking)

HD You haven't got that on? (laughing)

PW No. (joking)

HD Well, they're scroungers, you know, they come up here on a minimum budget, and want everything for nothing. That's the opinion I've been given, yep

PW They come and practically settle?

HD They do, yearh, they spend up to six months, some of them up here. But a lot of them tend to bring all their own gear, you know, they don't spend a lot of money in town. - Well not all of them, but some of them

PW What you're saying is there's not a great advantage to the local community from people coming up and sitting there for six months?

HD No, no. (in the affirmative)

PW

Do they bring all the food with them from somewhere else?

HD

Well they used to in the olden days, they'd bring all their gear and all their beer, but you couldn't blame them for that, 'cause beer was a lot more expensive in them days

PW

How have you related to them as a professional fisherman? Have they interfered with your activities?

HD

Well in later years, around the Gulf here when we were netting whiting - they seemed to think that they owned the beach, you know, they get very upset if you run a net around, you know, along side them or something.

PW

How do you react when they criticise you?

HD

Oh, if there's a school there we just take it.

PW

And how about around on the Ningaloo Reef? Have you had run-ins with those sort of people around there?

HD

No, not really, not around there. It's only the tourists that line up on the beach.

PW

Is that situation getting worse around on Ningaloo, with people permanently camping like that?

HD

Oh, I don't think so, no they've got it under control now. They've got proper camping areas and they just won't let 'em camp in the bush -

PW

So that appears to be an improvement?

HD

Oh yearh, in that regard.

PW

The situation was getting out of control was it?

HD

Oh, it would have done. Yearh, yep. This way they got a special area to go to, and toilets.

PW

And is the fish - improving on the reef do you think, or have they continued to decline?

HD

Well they're going to continue to decline I think, as long as there's activity in the area, if that increases the fish will decrease. That's my opinion of it.

PW

Well Harold, I thank you very much for this opportunity to interview you, and you've told me useful information. It'll go into the - pool, and so I'd just like to wish you all the best in your retirement, and hope that you succeed in catching the fish that you want into the future.

HD

Yearh, thanks very much Paul.

PW

Thanks Harold.

Side B interview ends: 14.2 mins.



Harold with a big cod caught on Ningaloo Reef in the "olden days" It ended up as fish and chips

Transcript of Interview

Interviewee: Lesley Peter Garbellini

Address: 1 Sargent St. Exmouth. 6707. PO Box 103

Phone: 08 9949 2755

Date of birth: 28 January 1965 (33)

Date: 13/3/1998

Place: Exmouth Fisheries Office

Side A 23.3 mins

Total: 23.3 mins

Interviewer & transcriber: Dr Paul R. Weaver.

Subject: Ningaloo Reef fishing

Side A: Regular fisher with family as a youth in SW.

Occasional visits to Ningaloo. Moved from Rottnest ferries to Fisheries. Management role of Fisheries officer in relation to Ningaloo. High percentage of public generally receptive to conservation strategies. More intensive fishers have now transferred activities further north than Ningaloo. 17 kilo limit of fillets still equates to very large quantity of fish, esp. in large party. Many recreational complaints that 1997 was worst year for fish in memory. Bad weather may be reason for poor catches. Spawning time of nor'west snapper - theory. Occasional recreational fishing.



- PW This interview is being conducted on the 13th March 1998, with Les Garbellini of Exmouth. Les for the record could you please give your full name and your date of birth.
- LG Yearh, my full name is Lesley Peter Garbellini - date of birth, January 28th 1965.
- PW Les, you are a Fisheries officer in Exmouth; what's your title?
- LG I'm Senior Fisheries Officer in charge of the Exmouth fisheries.
- PW And how long have you been here?
- LG I've been here just on eighteen months now.
- PW How long have you been a Fisheries officer?
- LG Oh, going on - this'll be my eleventh year, yep.
- PW How old are you now?
- LG - 33.
- PW So you've come quite a long these years - did you start as a cadet, or (indisinct)?
- LG - Started off as a trainee Fisheries Officer, we we do a year training, and then we get put into the districts. We go from there; yearh, lucky enough I was in the right places
- PW Is this your first senior appointment?

LG - Yes, my first district, I was in Broome where I was appointed as the senior fisheries officer - in the foreign fishing section up there. I was there for - I was in that appointment for about twelve months before coming here.

PW And how many Fisheries officers are here at Exmouth?

LG There's two Fisheries officers including myself, and a Linda, who's our receptionist

PW Now this project's about the history of fishing at - Ningaloo Reef - when you came to Exmouth, was that the first time you'd been to Ningaloo?

LG No, I've - growing up, I think I probably came here, say three or four occasions with the family, when I was a young feller; I'm still young now obviously.

PW Yes, I wish - I was your age too. Can't be unfortunately. Now your family were amateur fishermen were they?

LG That's right, yearh.

PW And did they come up here fairly regularly, or did they go on fishing trips fairly regularly?

LG - Yearh, I mean we lived in the country originally, down in Rocky Gully, down near Mount Barker, and I always remember as a young feller we used to go fishing every weekend just about, camping and fishing. That used to be down on the beaches in the southwest, fishing for salmon and herring and that sort of stuff. Then when we did move to Perth, when I was, oh about ten years old - we I guess continued that tradition in that we still enjoyed fishing, so we went fishing regularly, but not camping as much. I'd say when I was fourteen or fifteen, we made a few trips to Exmouth and to Coral Bay. And I think that was following my dad, (he) actually did a trip up through here in Exmouth with some mates of his, and they went out in a boat, and did that sort of thing, and then from there on we came I guess every two to three years we came to Exmouth.

PW When your dad came up with his mates, did he used to bring fish back from up this way?

LG He did, but not a lot of fish - it was, he only came up once with his mates and I think at that time he brought back a few mackerel and some prawns from Kailis, and that was it, I mean, I know that a lot of fishermen do come up and keep a lot of fish, but no, he was never in to that sort of thing

PW How did you decide to enter the Fisheries Department, did you fall into that job, or had you always wanted to be a Fisheries officer?

LG No, I fell into the job I guess - I had marine qualifications, I used to work for the Rottnest ferries, and I had my engineers tickets and coxwain's tickets and that sort of stuff, so - and then after the *America's Cup*, the job opportunity came up with Fisheries and (I) applied for it and (I was) lucky enough to get it, so

PW What you saw it advertised did you?

LG I saw it advertised in the paper and applied for it with everyone else, and lucky enough to get it, so

PW And obviously you are going to make a career of this, it's going through quite well

LG At this stage, yearh, I hope to - I mean there's, there are a lot of changes in the Fisheries Department at the moment - but you know, I'm still enjoying the job, and while the family's young and we are moving around, and yearh, I'm happy, yearh.

Side A: 5 mins

- PW Now let's talk about Ningaloo Reef - over the - time since you've been associated with it professionally. What's your role in relation to the reef system?
- LG It's primarily to manage the fish resources - within the marine park, and that is - how would I put it? - Yearh I'd say, primarily to manage the fish resources and - to enforce the legislation of the Fisheries Act.
- PW Do you travel very much in the park?
- LG - Yes, we travel - well our district encompasses an area from Onslow - down through to Warra (Warroora) Station. So in other words, I probably cover all of the Ningaloo Marine Park from here.
- PW That area that you've described is vast, and there's how many Fisheries officers to cover that? Three, three of you?
- LG There's two of us actually.
- PW Two of you?
- LG Two of us, yearh.
- PW And so are you on the road most of the time?
- LG We are actually, especially - not so much during the December, January, February period, but from here on in, from April, the start of the school holidays, yearh, we're pretty well out and about all the time, and that's on the road - we do extended trips down through the park where we might camp out two or three nights, and that's a necessity really to - to be able to get in and see everybody and ensure everybody - from - my main role is to educate the fishers at to what the requirements are in the marine park, and I find, what I've found so far is that a good ninety five to ninety eight percent of people are pretty receptive to the rules and regulations that we have in the marine park.
- PW You must have heard in the past of many excesses amongst fishermen in the way they've approached the resources of the park, have you heard of those things?
- LG Yearh I have, I've heard in the old days where we used to have our fishers come up with freezers and generators and that sort of stuff. - I think once the possession limits were introduced here, the seventeen kilo fillets as in limits, I think that may have - I guess dissuaded people to come to this region. I don't think it stopped them, I think maybe - it may have pushed them into other areas further north - but obviously those things will be reviewed in time. I do see, I still do see a lot of freezers obviously, when I do my inspections in the park. But seventeen kilos of fish per person is still a lot of fish, and you can imagine six, six people in a fishing party, you'd need two or three freezers to hold that amount of fish.
- PW It seems - some people have mentioned to me that fishermen are - the old brigade that took huge catches have moved further north as well, and perhaps it is something that needs further attention?
- LG I think it'll be addressed in our - at the moment we've got a regional management strategy that's going ahead, this year or come first of April, Fisheries Research are doing a creel survey, a catch and effort survey, and they'll be interviewing recreational anglers as they return to boat ramps. And also at this time there is a review of the bag limits and, well basically of all the fishing rules for the Gascoyne region. Gascoyne region's the first off the rank, so - there's a consultative committee at the moment who meet every couple of months to put together a management plan for the whole area.
- PW A lot of people that I've spoken to have given the impression that fishing has declined on the Ningaloo Reef system over time, and that this was occurring as early as the mid nineteen seventies. Is that your impression as well, have you gained that impression from talking to people?
- LG It - I guess, I mean I've only been here eighteen months, last year I think it was a fairly poor year in regards

to - in weather wise, the weather wasn't too good - and that may have been a reason why there weren't as many fish around, I know that I had a lot of complaints last year that this was the worst year they'd seen, there wasn't a lot of fish. But I put it more down to people not being able to get out as much, because of the weather and that sort of stuff. I think it's inevitable that once we have the increase in tourism and population and that sort of stuff, there is going to be some depletion of fish stocks on the inshore reefs anyway, and that's why we're here to manage it.

Side A: 10.6 mins

Tape pause for Les to attend to counter enquiry.

- PW Some of the people that have come up here have been coming for a very long time, have you met some of those people?
- LG Yearh, quite a few of them - especially down on the stations themselves, I got to know a few of the people - they tow their caravans into these places and they set up camp for anywhere between for and six months, so virtually the whole winter period they are up here.
- PW It seems a very long time for someone to come and settle down, doesn't it?
- LG Yearh, and talking to them, they've done it for years, and they come back to their same spot - and like, you know, they've done it for ten, fifteen, twenty years some of them. I have heard, so.
- PW Do you find that some of them feel that they have customary rights over a place with that type of experience?
- LG I think, I think there may have been those sort of attitudes there, before the marine park was gazetted. I think there may have been some problems there, but I think now it's pretty well accepted - that they've accepted I guess the necessity in implementing these restrictions, further restrictions on fishing and that sort of stuff. I think - a lot of concerns are with the number of people that now visit these places, especially like for instance, Ningaloo. I have heard from people that it's actually advertised now in the camping books as a place where you can for free camping, which concerns a lot of them, because obviously that will bring in a lot more people, a lot more campers. And I did find last year, last season, that there were a lot of new tracks being pushed through, in particular Ningaloo Station.
- PW They're - cutting into the hinterland are they?
- LG No, they're cutting in through the sand dunes and that sort of stuff, which CALM are monitoring fairly, well they are monitoring fairly rigidly actually, they put up a lot of flights during the season to see what is actually happening in there, seeing what the population - where the population concentrations are, well - the fishing and camping - densities and that sort of stuff - but yearh, it was just one comment that I had this year in particular.
- PW These people that are coming and staying for those long periods of time are generally older people?
- LG They are.
- PW Retired people?
- LG Retired people who, most of them may only have just a dinghy and go fishing when the weather's good. Do a lot of squidding and fishing for the spangled emperor in the shallows on the inside of the reef in particular.
- PW Are these people as (they age) - obviously some of them are becoming unable to continue that activity and they probably don't return, but are they being replaced by a new generation of retirees?

- LG It's really hard to, it's really hard to answer it. I know that with a lot of these people they do have their family come up and visit them during the school holidays and that sort of stuff, whether their children when they get older come up through here, I don't know. I mean, I think they probably will if - you know, once they do retire and their kids are off their hands.
- PW It would seem that there's possibly a need for a study along those lines to try and determine what's actually happening with people and their movements?
- LG Hmm. I would say though, there is always going to be an increase in camping and that sort of thing, it's just we've - it's with the leisure activities now that people get into, and a lot of people have four wheel drives and have camper trailers, and have access to all these areas now, and that's what we're finding now, so it's just inevitable that there will be an increase, and there'll be an increase -
- PW And there is talk about the road down along that section of coast being bitumised, even further than it is now?
- LG Yeah, I did hear something along those lines.
- PW Which may well exacerbate any problems mightn't it?
- LG May do, but it may have the same effect I guess of what Cape Range has done, you know where they can control access a lot more stringently, I mean that is CALM. I know that CALM are wanting to be able to manage the whole coastal strip all the way down from Cape Range, down to the boundary of the marine park. I suppose you would have heard that have you? No.

Side A: 18.9 mins

- PW If they are not controlling that now, who is controlling it?
- LG Well CALM control, I think it's a hundred metres above high water mark, and then from there it's the stations' responsibilities, I mean, you've got Cape Range National Park, it stops, and then you've got Commonwealth Land, which is the bombing range - and then, obviously the Commonwealth look after that area, then you've got the Ningaloo Station, and that obviously is run by Billy and Jane Lefroy, and then you have the Cardabia Station in the Coral Bay area, and then Warroora Station, so - if it's outside of that (it's) CALM jurisdiction and then obviously the stations, they look after it.
- PW There's been a catastrophic fire and subsequent erosion problem on Ningaloo Station, and I've heard that there is occasionally problems with dust blowing across onto the reef system, are you aware of any effect upon the fish populations as a result of that?
- LG I think it's too early to tell. - I mean, to be honest, I wasn't even aware that that was a problem with the dust blowing over the reef and on the water and that sort of thing. I guess time will tell, I mean, it's just too early. There's not the people fishing through those areas now to gauge any (effect)
- PW The season's not yet commenced has it?
- LG No, it will commence - generally it's the first holidays - the first - so that will be around about the fifteenth of April, and that's when the season kicks off, so that's around Easter -
- PW And how long will it run for?
- LG It will run through until the school holidays in October, so it's almost - six months, six or seven months
- PW Now next week we are going to have the annual coral spawning, have you seen that occur before?
- LG - In the water?

PW

Yearh.

LG

- No, I mean you can only see that at night, diving, and no I haven't, I haven't been able to do that yet.

PW

Does anything happen to the fish population that you are aware of - well I know that there's been extinctions of fish in some places as a result of that, but does this in anyway, aside from those extinctions of fish, is there any other impact on recreational fishing associated with that spawning? Are there greater numbers of fish caught, or lesser numbers -

LG

Again, I wouldn't be able to give you an answer on that - I haven't been here long enough to gauge that, and to be honest, I didn't notice it last year, whether there was an increase or not, but I was fairly new to the region too. I guess that will come about - we'll get some results from this survey that we're doing now, and we may be able this time next year be able to give you an answer on that.

PW

Well maybe ten or twenty years, before an answer comes, but I was just wondering if there was some sort of reaction from the recreational fishing community to that event, that perhaps - forced a decline of fishers, or maybe more fishers came to coincide their activities with that, or whatever, either one way or the other, but it was really just a thought that had occurred to me. - Do you personally fish on the reef?

LG

- Yearh, yearh. I do from time to time, not as much as I'd like. I'd like to do a lot more obviously, but - yearh, I do fish from time to time. I mainly fish on the inside of the reef in the dinghy, or just from the rocks, or from the beach.

PW

What type of fish do you try and catch?

LG

Mainly spangled emperor, yearh.

PW

That seems to be the magic - attraction for most people?

LG

Yearh -

PW

What's special about the spangled emperor?

LG

- They're a good fighting fish, you can catch 'em in the shallows from the beach, which is a good attraction I guess. You don't need - a boat, you don't need any real fancy gear - and when they are running you can just about catch 'em anywhere on, you know, as long as you are in the right area - on the right sort of ground or habitat.

Side A: 20.8 mins

PW

Is there a particular time that they run?

LG

- Summertime appears to be the best time - I have heard that throughout the winter months when the water is cooler, that they don't come inshore as much, they are out in the deeper water - and I have also heard and noted that during I think October, November, 'round there, when the snapper move in fairly close to shore. Whether they are spawning or not at that time I don't know, I haven't heard of any research, but I know some locals during that time have said that they've pulled out some big fish with a lot of roe, so it must be that they are spawning at that time of year.

PW

But you are unaware that there's been any specific research on that particular species?

LG

Yearh, no, I'm unaware, yearh.

PW

Hmm. Are there any other types of fish you like to catch?

LG - I mean, it's really, it's wherever I am, so whatever opportunity I have at the time. If I'm in the deeper water then, you know, I always like to go for a Rankin cod, or a red emperor, don't have much success, but and you know, mackerel from time to time

PW Do you take your family with you?

LG I do on the beaches when I fish for snapper, but I don't, not on the boat - I normally just normally take a friend or a mate, or something like that.

PW How often would you go fishing, once a week? Once a month?

LG - Probably a couple of times a month, I guess. I'd go specifically out to catch a fish, yes.

PW Do you ever go game fishing?

LG No, it's something that I haven't done. Not in this region anyway.

PW Well, I won't hold you much longer, but is there anything that you'd like to add that I haven't asked, that might be particularly relevant?

LG - I can't think of anything, no.

PW In that case I thank you very much for this opportunity, and I'll come back and speak to you in twenty years time, and then we'll see what you've got to say then. (laughs)

LG Yearh, allright.

PW Thanks very much Les.

LG Okay, I appreciate the opportunity Paul.

Side A, interview ends: 23.3 mins.

Transcript of Interview

Interviewee: Douglas James Hunt

Address: 25 Wahoo Court, Coral Bay, W.A. 6701.

Phone: 08 9942 5955

Date of birth: 10 April 1942 (55)

Interview date: 12 March 1998

Place: Coral Bay

Side A: 20.1 mins

Total: 20.1 mins

Interviewer & transcriber: Dr Paul R. Weaver

Subjects: Ningaloo Reef commercial operations. Side A: Crayfishing in Bass Strait. Crayfishing in west Tasmania. Attracted to WA by prospect of purchasing Carnarvon whalechaser. Rottnest ferry operation. Rottnest glass bottom boat. Prawning in Gulf of Carpentaria. Coral Bay development in 1960s. Noticeable deterioration of fish stocks. Current management plans an improvement on past, but a need for "fine tuning."



- PW This tape is being recorded on the 12th of March 1998, at Coral Bay with Doug Hunt. Doug for the record could you give your full name and your date of birth.
- DH Douglas James Hunt - tenth of the fourth 1942.
- PW Doug, you operate a commercial sight-seeing venture at Coral Bay, could you tell me about that?
- DH Yearh, its Coral Bay Adventures, it - consists of a Coral viewing boat, a semi-submersible coral viewing boat, and another boat that we use for whales sharks, interactive cruises with whale sharks, manta rays - and whale watching, and - scenic reef cruises.
- PW How long have you been operating at Coral Bay?
- DH - Well this is our fourth year, in the fourth year, but - we've had a house up here for about thirteen years, holiday house.
- PW And - your background is that you are a former professional fisherman?
- DH - Yes.
- PW Where did you commence fishing?
- DH In Victoria in - that was in 1958 in Victoria, we were crayfishing, my brother and I were crayfishing there, then we went to Tasmania.
- PW Whereabouts in Victoria were you fishing?
- DH - Point Lonsdale out of Queenscliff, Port Philip Heads
- PW Point Lonsdale?
- DH Yearh, Point Lonsdale's where we lived

DH .And what was your brother's name?

DH Norman, Norman

PW Is he still fishing there?

DH No, he's down in Tassie at the moment - Tassie - of course he's older than me, he's sixty, sixty three.

PW You both moved to Tasmania from Point Lonsdale?

DH Yearh, we lived down there for six years on the west coast.

PW Why did you move to Tasmania?

DH - There were more crayfish down there, that was early days in the fishing on the west coast of Tasmania, in the crayfishing -

Pause for outside noise.

PW So at Point Lonsdale you were crayfishing were you?

DH Yes, working out of Point Lonsdale, or out of Queenscliff, but working King Island - and around the Victorian coast.

PW And did that that fishery decline?

DH Oh yes, yearh, and it was - the Victorian coastline was fairly well fished, and also King Island, but the west coast of Tassie, because of the atrocious weather, that - the experience down there was (that it) was fairly well untouched when we went down there in about fifty eight. (1958).

PW So, you moved to Tasmania because opportunities were better? It was a new ground?

DH Yep, Yearh, - it was a lot more - and the crayfish were very good down there, the price wasn't very good, but the quantities were good.

PW And where in Tasmania were you catching crayfish?

DH Well all down the west coast there, we were based in MacQuarie Harbour, at a town called Strahan, and we used to work out of MacQuary Harbour, out of Hell's Gates, up to the northwest corner to Cape Gnm. and down to - down to Port Davey.

PW When did you cease fishing in Tasmania?

DH - 1964, we moved over to Western Australia - we got out of the fishing.

PW Was there a reason that you ceased fishing?

DH Yearh, well we wanted to move into the tourist industry - we initially came over to Western Australia to buy an ex-whale chaser actually from, that Moores had up at Carnarvon - in the whaling industry. And we were going to take that back to the Whitsundays and start up a tourist industry in the Whitsundays - we subsequently didn't go ahead with purchasing one of those boats, but we looked at another boat that was running on the Rottnest run, and ended up we bought the Rottnest Island Ferry Service, in sixty four, so, we moved over to Western Australia, and we're still here.

PW And were you operating the Rottnest Island Ferry Service (personally)?

DH Yearh we operated that from 1964 to about 1975, I think it was.

PW What were the boats that you had on that run?

DH - *Islander 5* and *Islander 6*, and we started up the *Sea Viewer*, the coral - the under the water, the glass bottomed boat at Rottnest, started that up - that was about - twenty four years ago.

PW That was the first glass bottomed boat in Western Australia if I'm not wrong?

DH Yes, that's right, yearh, yearh, about a forty foot thing with four three foot by three foot panels in it.

PW And did you design that?

DH No, no, it was built for the oil industry that thing, it was built for survey work around Barrow Island, it was called the *Barrow Shoal* - it wasn't suited to the application, they steamed it up from Fremantle - it used to go very very quickly, and they steamed it up from Fremantle, and it got to Barrow Island and sank, and they put it on a truck and took it back to Fremantle, and sold it. But it was a very good coral viewing boat - glass bottomed boat, but that wasn't suited to high speed, - but it was a quite popular thing

PW I think that's still operating, is it?

DH No, they've got a big one, big semi-submersible, like, you know, we've got here now. Yearh, but it operated for quite a few years, I don't know where it is now.

Side A: 5 mins

PW What was the family that owned that ferry service prior to your (arrival.)

DH - It well it was a group - it was McGanns, Wilderspains - oh gee - Charlie Manton. There were three, four - partners in it, that had the *Islander*, the *Rottnest Islander*.

PW And when you bought that service did you have partners as well?

DH No, just the brother and I.

PW Just your brother and yourself?

DH Yearh, a couple of crayfishermen from Tasmania.

PW So - its the same brother you went to Tasmania with?

DH Yearh, yearh, and we bought that and operated, and then we bought an additional vessel, the *Islander 6*, which we subsequently in 1968 - took up in the off season, took up prawning in the Gulf of Carpentaria. That was when the big banana prawn sort of bonanza started up there, there was a big gold rush, and Ross Fisheries in Western Australia - had a presence up there and they suggested to us that it might be worth our while, with the boat doing nothing all through the winter season, that we take it up north and make it earn some money, so that's how we got into prawning.

PW And you left off in the Rottnest Island business when the prawning opportunity came up?

DH Well no, the boat - we used to run the boat from Christmas - New Year's Day to Easter, then we'd take all the seats off, put all the prawning gear on and steam to the Gulf of Carpentaria, then prawn for the nine months, then bring it back to Perth - back to Fremantle and take the seats off (on) towards Christmas and put it back on the ferry run. So the boat was working all the year around. It was a long drive though

PW Were there other people doing that sort of thing?

DH No - most of them - there were a lot of - in the Gulf there were a lot of different boats - a lot - from different fishing applications throughout Australia, but - as I say with the gold rush, you know, it was everybody that had a boat was up there, but - and there were, you know, quite a lot of prawns, once again the prices weren't very good, but - a lot of volume.

PW Eventually you ceased working the Rottnest Island Ferry business? When did that occur?

DH That was about '75. We sold out of it, we sold - the *Rottnest Islander* to the Kitcher's who had the Boat Torque, or what they are now, Boat Torque - My brother at that stage, that the schooner we had crayfishing in Tasmania - at that time going through our (indistinct) the ferries, we fitted that out as a yacht, a sixty three foot steel schooner, called the *Pattenela*, - my brother took off on a trip around the world with his family on that, the idea being that we would, had to take it in turns, he'd do six months, and I'd do six months, but then - the wife and I got tied up in building big trawlers, big freezer trawlers, eighty five footers, new boats - we subsequently just stayed home and built that up over a period of the next few years, while he sailed around the world - but that was all at the northern prawn fishery, which ran from Broom round to Thursday Island, so it was quite a large fishery.

PW Were there any other - incidents prior to your arriving in Coral Bay to do with fishing?

DH - No well we were - sort of basically - involved in fishing from the time we got out of ferries up until - we came up here - we had an unfortunate sort of situation arose in the prawning and we ended up - the down side was we sort of lost the boats, lost the whole thing there, lost everything, so, we came up here - our operating this business up here -

PW So you've had to restart all over again?

DH Yearh, we financed the last couple of trawlers with - a company, a finance company that - we shouldn't have looked at, and they at that stage had a lot of internal problems, there management had gone out and done a lot of - deals with developers, and they got into a lot of trouble, and we had a downturn in the prawning industry and we - put a case to them, we got the lawyers?? in, put a case to the financiers that we needed to sell two or three boats - we had five acres of land up at Booragoon, we had to sell that - to just reduce our overheads down, and the lawyers?? had it worked out that we could do it - the finance company looked at that for about twenty four hours, and then appointed the (indistinct) a receiver, so they just came in, and of course when that "For sale" sign goes up, you know, it's not worth anything. - So, yearh, so all the assets from - we had twelve million dollars worth of assets and we got about - we owed the finance company four million, and at the end of the day we got about twenty thousand dollars out of it.

PW Was that personally devastating thing for you and your family?

DH You might say that Paul, yearh - Yes - I was very lucky. The family have been very supportive and - it sorted out who your friends were, but we've been very lucky - it's made the family stronger if anything - now we have a son and a daughter up here with us, you know, and they're looking forward to, you know, a new life, but - yearh it is a devastating thing, you sort of sit down and really look at things carefully, you think - sort of you've worked all your life towards that and - it can be a pretty cruel world - Still we've got another opportunity now.

Side A: 10.4 mins

PW And are you finding it a - success here?

DH Yes, well we're in the process at the moment of getting funding together to try and take over the business, like at the moment we're just working for them, for the company, but - we in the process, as I say, to try and get funding together to take it over, in which case it will be the start of a new era - and it's a good little place, it's a beautiful destination, so I can see nothing but good for it.

- PW Well I went on your tour this morning and I was very impressed, and I was very impressed by you young children, although they are not really children, they're young adults now. Do you have hopes that they'll eventually take over your business?
- DH Well, I'd like to think that they would, because they're both water based, the poor creatures, they know no other life unfortunately but they - they're both very much at home in the water and - interacting with people, which is a perfect application for them here, they relate well with people, so I would like to think that they - like they're working towards certification for their various skills here, and - but it should be good for them.
- PW No tell me about your fishing experience here at Ningaloo, you've obviously fished around Coral Bay area. Have you fished elsewhere on the reef?
- DH No mainly - we had - one of our trawlers one year, the fisheries were doing a - were granting exploratory licences for scampi - in the areas which that weren't currently being fished, that was from North West Cape to Cape Leeuwin, and we applied for, and got one of the exploratory licences of (for) one of our bigger trawlers, in the off season we worked that on the shelf between Nor' west cape and Leeuwin - it cost and absolute fortune, and we seemed to achieve the fact that there were no commercial quantities of scampi. Well we didn't find any between here and Leeuwin, but yearh, we've fished out, we've trawled out about 250, 300 metres of water out west of here, all very strange fish out there, and sort of a lot of - not many scampi, but a lot of fish, that, you know, big eyed fish that you don't see in here - but no mainly our inshore fishing experience - we first came to Coral Bay in 1967, the chap that subsequently got the pub going, developed the pub, wanted us to come up there for our expertise in ferries, and a friend of ours, Jerry Crystal, who'd just built Aquarama, (boating marina facility on Swan River at East Fremantle) to build a marina. We came up and looked at it but in 1967 it was a long way from Perth, and - we felt that it wasn't quite ready, that time wasn't quite right and go and put something in here. But we loved the place, we sort of fell in love with it then, and we've sort of been coming back ever since then. At that stage they were still shooting turtles - they had the *Nardi Mar* up here, you know, sort of turtle killing, so -
- PW The *Nardi Mar* was it?
- DH Yearh - the *Nardi Mar* yearh, and there was another one that was up here, but *Nardi Mar* was Tropical Trader's boat.
- PW And they were fishing in this immediate area?
- DH Yearh, they went everywhere, yearh, yearh, no marine park, they sort of just blowing turtles out of the water (laughter).
- PW And did you catch fish yourself in those days?
- DH Oh yearh, we used to - as a matter of fact the people that were getting the hotel going, they had a boat up here, and to keep the pot boiling, they had a couple of young blokes, from Queensland they were actually that ran the 35 footer, it was a Randall, a plywood Randall they had running here, and they used to go out and catch mackerel commercially, sort of troll up and down the reef for mackerel, go out and catch red emperor. In those days you could go up to oyster bridge, and take a bag up there at night time and get a bag of crays that were wandering the top of the reef there.
- PW Oyster Bridge is North of here?
- DH Just north of here, about eight kilometers, yearh, but I haven't them there lately, in the top of the reef (chuckling) but yearh, that was very very early days, there was nobody there. In the bay here there was only the - station shack, that was the only thing that was the only thing that was in Coral Bay.
- PW Do you think there has been a noticeable change in the fish populations in this area?

DH Oh yes, yes. Coming up to more recent history - since we've had the house up here, twelve, you know, sort of fourteen years we've been (regularly) coming up here, we used to go out and we'd get our bag limit in a half an hour, you'd find a patch of fish and you'd get your red emperor, your spangled emperor and your cod, baldchin. You'd get that in a half an hour, now, I've noticed over the years its taken people longer and longer to get - those catch, so they get their bag limit and quite often they don't achieve it. So yearh there is a definite decline. Red emperor have been overfished, I feel the bag limit is too high. I mean, they're a prize fish in my mind, but it upsets me if see a charter boat come back in with ten people with seven red emperor each on it, 'cause they're a slow growing fish, and they're too good to have that quantity caught I think, but, yearh, I think there's been a decline, it - the stocks aren't limitless, like the weather limits the fishing out here, certainly there's a lot of days you can't go fishing, but the effort over the years is increased; and we've getting more effort this year, I think - two or three commercial boats coming into the bay, which - it's a bit sad, but - progress I s'pose.

Side A: 15.7 mins

PW With the glass bottom boat, this gives you a very good idea of the distribution of fish - do you think that there should be more work done on understanding what's happening with the distribution of fish through the reef?

DH Yes, it would be - a great idea if - there were facilities available for that to take place, because there has never been any - I s'pose it can be said of a lot of the fisheries in Western Australia, they're the poor cousins to the crayfish and the prawns - but there's not a lot, well they haven't got the money to do a lot of research into it, but - Coral Bay has been mainly a recreational fishery - we've had you know, one fishing boat, or two fishing boats to be charter fishing boats a bit - their commercial catch hasn't been of any consequence, but now we've got one commercial boat based here, and there's another, I believe two, coming up, so, there not - you've got to look at, you've got to evaluate the stocks before you say, "Okay, well no more boats at Coral Bay, if you want to work there you've got to come from Carnarvon or Exmouth, but you can't home port in Coral Bay." I'd like to think this area would be kept as a recreational fishing area, I know I've jumped the fence there now, because I'm on the recreational fishing side instead of the commercial fishing but, it's such a unique place, I'd hate to see it being fished out for the sake of, you know, fish catch.

PW Well you mentioned the example of a charter boat coming in with ten fishers on board, each having seven spangled - red emperor, or seven large fish, that amounts to about seventy large fish, and (that's) almost in commercial quantities isn't it? It seems to me that that sort of pressure can't be sustained for very long?

DH No, they're going further and further afield, - whereas, as I say, a few years ago, we used to go out six miles, five miles, six miles off the coast and we'd get our bag limit without any problem at all, we'd get it, as I say, in one or two drifts. Now they're going out twenty miles to get - similar catches, so it is being depleted. I would like to see the bag limits reduced, on those specific fish, the red emperor. The spangled emperor, there's a lot of them around, they're fairly common, but the red emperor, - its - just a fish that's getting harder to catch.

PW I understand that people are able to accumulate fish by placing them in commercial freezing facilities here at Coral Bay, so that over a period of their stay they can build up a stockpile of fish.

DH Fourteen kilos I think it is, and so many whole fish, which is quite generous, but it's better, it's a lot better than it was Paul, because in days of old, you'd see a dual axle trailer come into town with a big fibre glass freezer on it, and then the mates would come in with two or three boats, and then there'd be another trailer with ten 44's (gallon drums) and they'd spend there whole fortnight here killing fish. They would not be happy unless they went home with one ton of fillet. Well that's - they've gone, so that's, we've reduced that down.

PW When did that period cease?

DH - Oh gee, that's about seven or eight years ago I s'pose, yearh when it was made into a marine park, and they brought those certain fish bag limits in.

PW Do you think those people have gone somewhere else now?

DH - Yeah, they're going up to Onslow, yep, fishing up around the Merium Passage, all 'round there, wherever there's not that bag limit.

PW So they're doing the same thing there? (agreement) And they're "skamateurs"?

DH Well you have to wonder - at sort of taking that quantity of fish, they've either got big families, or they love fish, or it's going somewhere else, but - yep, they're going further afield, but it has stopped that element here. We've still got people that do it, but, they've sort of been clamped down on, so it's - yeah the situation is a lot better, but I think it could be fine tuned a little bit more, and I've got to go to work.

PW You've got to go?

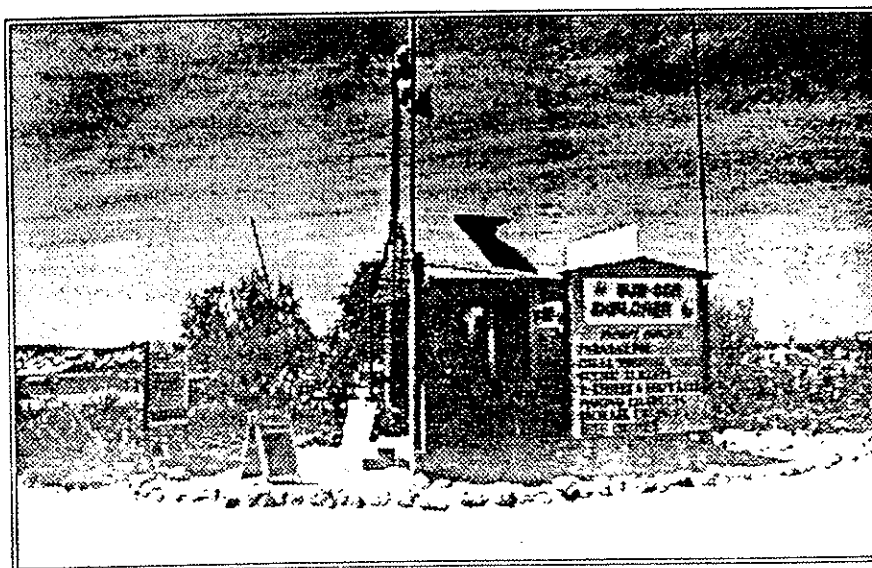
DH Did you want to continue on this (later).

PW Well, we'll see how we go. I thank you very much for this opportunity to talk to you, and wish you well with your business, and hope it is a great success. If we can get together again, a little later on, we will, but otherwise -

DH Thanks Paul, thankyou, okay, I hope I've been of some use to you.

Side B ends: 20.1 mins

Footnote: The interview was originally arranged at short notice. Regretfully the interview ended due to a scheduled boat cruise. I was unable to undertake another interview with Doug because of other commitments at Exmouth. In light of his current business activity of operating spectator craft at Ningaloo, he will undoubtedly be able to provide much other useful information in the future.



Doug's office at Coral Bay - 1998

Transcript of Interview

Interviewee: Susan Osborne

Address: 1 Mirfield St. Roleystone. 6111

Phone: 9496 0034

Date of birth: 1 March 1956 (42)

Interview date: 5 August 1998

Place: Palmyra

Side A 29.7 mins

Side B 11.9 mins

Total: 41.6 mins

Interviewer & transcriber: Paul R. Weaver

Subject: Ningaloo

Side A: Personal background - zoology, marine biology - UK, to Gt. Barrier Reef, to Canberra, to Ningaloo. First manager of Ningaloo Marine Park in 1988. Public complaints about new management strategies - long stayers from the south. Shell collecting on intertidal reefs - not only Americans. Awareness of octopus pressure. Fish species sought by public - snapper, bluebone, mackerel. *Drupella* problem is complex, not yet understood. 4WD tracks and goats caused environmental degradation. Coral bleaching now occurring. Turtle problems - human interference - aridity of region. Scientific studies relating to the reef. Sue is not an angler. Sharks - maybe biguns in the lagoon sometimes. Turtles - little known about life cycle.

Side B: Learning about public relations. Development of social contacts in region. Living close to nature. Americans broad outlook refreshing. Future park usage - need to preserve wilderness aspect of some areas - management plan due for review. Ongoing reef research hampered by quest for funding.



- PW This interview is being conducted on the eighth (fifth) of August 1998 with (Dr) Sue Osborne. Sue for the record would you please give your full name and your date of birth.
- SO - Susan Osborne, first third fifty six.
- PW Sue, you've had quite a long association with Ningaloo Reef in the past - could you tell me about that please?
- SO Oh well I went up there in 1988 and we were up there - 'till the beginning of '95, so yeah, quite an extensive period I suppose. We went up there as - the marine park manager, the first marine park manager for Ningaloo Marine Park, and - initially we stayed, we were living out in the national park at Milyering, and then just right at the end we moved into - to Exmouth.
- PW Were you the first managers of that park?
- SO Yes, yes that's right
- PW And that had been just gazetted prior to your arrival had it?
- SO Yes, just - in fact they were going through the processes of planning - they were still - wasn't a final management plan when I was there, so I was involved with encouraging visitors to put in submissions to the draft management plan, and I mean I did that by - trying to summarise the main points of the draft

management plan and put it into a more digestible format for - people to just comment on what they did, like what they didn't like, and specifically why, to see, you know, what compromises could be attained without - undermining the conservation management perspectives.

PW What's your background? About your (work)?

SO Marine biologist, yes I did my degree in England, and that was just straight zoology, and that was at Exeter, and then came out to Brisbane and worked on the Great Barrier Reef for my post graduate work; and then worked for - I was lucky because I got a job with - Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, with their first section of their Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, so I always seemed to be in ant the beginning. (chuckle) And so, yearh, I worked in Capricornia, which was the first section of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, in the operations area there, and that was for several years, and then went to Canberra and worked for Australian - what was then, Australian Parks and Wildlife Service, and that was sort of more educationally based, so not much the marine management, so we had (indistinct) Kakadu in lieu, but on the education side, and then we got this job over here in WA and went up to Ningaloo as - on the day to day management side, but also with a component of, you know, strong educational emphasis, because that - was also the time when the Milyering Visitors' Centre first opened too, so initially they were looking for someone with those dual - those dual sort of - experiences of the marine management, and also - community education.

PW Was that in control of CALM then?

SO Yes, yes it was, though the - visitors' centre was a Bicentennial project, so - there was - significant Commonwealth - money put into the establishment of that building. In fact the whole Milyering complex, yearh.

PW Had you heard of Ningaloo Reef from elsewhere in Australia before you got here?

SO No, not at all. (chuckle) In fact I can remember going for my interview in Sydney, I had an interview in Sydney, my first interview, and - there was someone else being interviewed in Sydney as well who I also knew from Queensland, and we - I can remember having a little joke with this guy, 'Who on earth would go to a place like that?' You know, in a house in the middle of nowhere with no air conditioning in that climate, we had this big laugh about it.

PW What were your impressions when you got to Ningaloo?

SO - Well it was - before, before they formally offered me the job - I said I wanted to come and look at it, and so I actually paid my way to Perth, and they paid my way from Perth which was good, and in fact - when I got up to Exmouth, they did show me around, so there was Geoffrey Mercer, so I don't know if you've caught up with these people, there was Geoffrey Mercer who was the - at that stage, he was the regional manager from Geraldton, and I actually knew him 'cause he used to get work in Queensland, it's a small world, and the district manager at the time was Stephen Fritz - yes, so he was one of the early district managers, so I don't know if you've caught up with Stephen as well, and - yearh, they showed me around a bit of the coast, and we also went out to the Muiron Islands, we stayed overnight on the Muiron Islands, so i saw a bit of the area.

Side A: 5 mins

PW Were you excited by what you saw?

SO I thought it was wonderful, yearh. But it was a bit intimidating too you know, that very arid - it was hostile environment, because I hadn't - I hadn't had experiences in those environments before, and I mean, I'd been out on - I had wilderness experiences on the Great Barrier Reef, in places which probably aren't so isolated these days, but you know, I mean, north of - Cooktown and so on used to be extremely isolated ten, fifteen years ago - and you know, I'd wandered around - in the terrestrial environment in Queensland as well, in the rain forests in some of the other national parks, but the real arid country - there's a wildness about the Northwest Cape, which I don't think I had experienced before, humm

PW When you arrived there, were there many people using the reef?

SO - Yes there were quite a few. I think that, I mean, as an overall impression in terms of change of usage, there were a lot of people who, when I first got up there, people who came up every year - stay for extended periods of time, people who - seemed quite innovative - and usually retired - and they came up for the - winter time, to get away from the bad climate down south - yearh I think that was the sort of main usage at the time.

PW At that time were those type of people spread right along the full length of the reef?

SO Hmm, yes, oh definitely, I mean - certainly the station country there seemed to be as many people camping down in the station country as in the national park, and there was quite a bit of talk when I first got up there about, you know, that was about the time when the - CALM was limiting the number of nights, the maximum number of nights in a twelve - month period, but anyone could stay within a national park. I mean that's an equity issue, and that's what they decided, that people could have a maximum of twenty eight days I think a year, and you know, there were a lot of complaints about that from the long-term stayers who you know, had a traditional usage pattern, which - they had enjoyed, but because the usage was increasing it did actually exclude other users, and so those people were tending to move away from the national park, or just coming up for a little bit of time and then going down to the station country.

PW Were they doing things that were harmful to the environment?

SO Well I think that everything that man does tends to be harmful to the environment, (laugh) it's all a matter of degrees isn't it? Yearh.

PW But things that were obvious to yourself?

SO Oh yearh, I mean - I can remember someone coming into the Milyerng Visitors' Centre one day and - I don't quite know how you would describe it, bragging or, you know, 'Oh they'd had to go through all this bother of throwing away the fish in there freezer from last year so hat it could be empties to come up this year.' And it just seemed such a wicked waste, hmm, so there were - there's been I think, an attitudinal change associated with change in users that come up there, and I mean it's a gradual process. No doubt it's slightly different now than it was in 1995 when I left.

PW Remind me again when you first arrived there?

SO 1998.

PW 1998?

SO Yes.

PW So it's reasonable then to assume that a lot of those elderly retirees in 1998 - 1988, now no longer go up there?

SO Yes, I would imagine that's the case

PW They'd probably be replaced by some form of attrition?

SO Yes, whether that's a usage pattern that's totally died out, I mean there would have been other people who'd retired and perhaps taken on that behaviour pattern - it is, after all it's a very desirable thing to do, so there may be, you know, just as many people doing that as there used to be, it's just that the other group of people, like you know the younger people - the traditional tourists and the family groups, that proportion of people has increased, but I'm not sure that the total number of the retirees has, you know, the absolute number has decreased, it may not have done, it's just that the proportions have changed.

PW In those days did you hear any anecdotes of fish stocks declining?

Side A: 10.1 mins

SO Yes, people used to often say - and it's funny, because - I s'pose because of my job, I tried to persuade people, or I tried to - encourage people to consider their impacts on the environment, and you know, if they would complain about reduced bag limits and you know, I mean, the Fisheries Department did some - very forward thinking really, you know, in bringing in regulations in terms of possession limits, I mean they - did all sorts of things which aren't done elsewhere on the coast, and all sorts of complaints at the time, and in trying to - get people to understand that these were necessary - restrictions - I've forgotten the question (laugh)

PW Well, yes, I had asked about declining resources, were people telling you anecdotes?

SO Oh yes, that's right, so people used to say, they used to complain, almost in the same sentence - They would complain about restrictions, and also say, 'We used to catch, you know, these many fish here without any effort at all.' Do you know what I mean? And for some reason, some people just could never link the two things, it was just beyond them

PW Were other things besides fish under threat?

SO It's difficult to know, - certainly there was a lot of shell collecting, and I heard a lot of tales of vast numbers of shells being removed from the reef, particularly the intertidal reefs up around the Northwest Cape, and I mean, people said that the Americans used to take vast quantities and ship them overseas, but you know, locals will always blame someone else won't they. It was probably the locals selling it to the Americans (laughing) and so, I think also probably quite a bit came up in the trawls - and it was treated as a bye-catch in a way - I don't know, I don't know, this is anecdotal, and - I'm sure shells were collected all the way along

PW Have you heard about the catching of octopus?

SO Yes

PW How did people go about doing that? Have for example you heard about chemical usage?

SO Yeah, yes, certainly. I - yeah I used to hear of a few complaints - about people using chemicals, because I mean I never actually saw anybody doing that, but I know that the Fisheries Department were - aware of the complaints as well, it's a matter of catching people, you know; and education

PW Do you go back there regularly now?

SO I've never been back.

PW Why is that?

SO Hmm, it wasn't necessarily a happy time for me, hmm.

PW What sort of fish did people tend to favour for catching?

SO Oh the snapper, the nor'west snapper, which is you know, it's just not one species, but *Lethrinids* (*Lethrinus spp.*) was definitely a favoured fish - trout, coral trout,¹ but they're not plentiful at all on the western side of Ningaloo Reef, so people used to enjoy them when they could find them, but they weren't allowed to spear them after the new regulations came in. And then mackerel - those would have been I think the favourites, bluebone,² there was still some of those around

¹ *Plectropomus maculatus*, grows to about to 70 cm long and 6 kg according to Alan and Swainston (1988) p 58

² *Cheerodon spp.* (tuskfish)

PW They're a species that seem to have declined?

SO Well in fact, one of the theories or rumours associated with the *drupella* - you know, population increases, was that very large numbers of predators had been taken from the area and - yearh it was - people pointed to the blue bone, but very difficult to prove, and I mean, you know, that's just considering predation on adult *drupella*, I mean you know probably what makes a difference in terms of a population explosion, is mortality of juvenile - at the juvenile stage, so look I mean, nobody understands *drupella*.

PW Did anyone ever comment that they thought there was environmental changes taking place along the reef? Climate, and things like that, in their own memories?

Side A: 15 mins

SO Climate changes?

PW Well, had they had any perceptions of environmental change taking place, one thing - climate for example? I mean, people say that it's getting - colder, and then other people say it's getting warmer?

SO Certainly - no, I don't remember, I mean people probably said that to me, but I mean for me to really remember something it would have had to be lots of people saying the same thing, and probably several people said completely the opposite thing, so it's all sort of gone from my memory, yearh

PW If we look back at the -

SO I'll tell you what there were changes in though in terms of environmental degradation and that's a lot of four wheel drive tracks, but that had become a big problem on the sand dune areas - become destabilised, and of course on that lovely spinifex country you'd really only need one set of tracks, and the area was damaged sufficiently that another vehicle driving past them would see them, and it's quite inviting when you see a set of tracks going up and over the hill and you think, 'Oh I wonder what's over there?' and so off you go, (chuckle) and of course it just exacerbates the problem.

PW And what was the result of that?

SO Well, I mean, quite a lot of degradation of those dune areas.

PW Were you getting blowouts in the dunes?

SO Yes, some blowouts, and also a lot of the tracks themselves were becoming impassable because you know, they'd become so soft, but I mean, since I've left, there's been that big fire up there, and I haven't seen it, but the whole of the north south track has been completely impassable. I don't know if - I think you can get through now, but, I mean - so presumably what I saw when I was up there is just small fry in comparison to what's (happened.)

PW Well I have seen it and it's catastrophic, and I have heard that there's also - serious problems with dust and soil blowing onto the reef now, have you heard of those -?

SO No, I haven't, but I know there's been some recent coral bleaching, not on Ningaloo - not on the west side of Ningaloo, but on the other side, on the inside there was some significant coral bleaching there. Of course there was the goat problem too, and I mean you always think of goats being sort of terrestrial, but they used to come down below high tide mark and nibble away at things on the strand line, and goats were a horrible problem.

PW The strand line, which is that?

SO Where the - you know, where the weed gets - the high tide mark, yes, and so where there was debris, and I suppose I'm thinking particularly now along the section of coast that's dugong sanctuary, which is in

Ningaloo Station, and - we used to do regular patrols along there, and there was one particular lookout spot where we used to go on patrol, and there was just always lots of goats all over this, you know, stranded seaweed an stuff, yearh.

PW Did people ever hunt dugongs?

SO - No while I was there, no, not while I was there.

PW How about turtles?

SO Not while I was there, but - yearh I mean there was a significant industry until the seventies, and - yearh, I mean, that'd died out by the time I got there.

PW Have you heard of amateurs taking turtles?

SO There was one incident when I was up there where I think someone was taking eggs. Also - there were probably a few turtles taken while I was up there, but I don't think anything significant in terms of numbers, while I was up there. I think the biggest risk for the turtle rookery is the amount of tourism, and people just disturbing the females night after night after night. And it seems from researchers they can handle being disturbed on one or two, you know, nights, and as long as they are not disturbed on the third night sort of thing, they can lay their eggs successfully, but if it goes on too many nights in succession then they'll just jettison their eggs out at sea and so on.

PW Do the turtles come back night after night do they?

SO If they can't lay the first night, and I suppose the thing that - near Northwest Cape, is that the sand is often very dry, I mean I used to be involved in turtles in Queensland too, and because the climate was slightly different, the sand was usually easier for the turtles to dig in. It was often damper, but of course at Ningaloo the sand was often really wet - really dry, sorry, and of course it made it so difficult for them to build that last section, you know, the egg chamber, where they go directly down and then the little bulging bit at the bottom, and - you know, they'd often sort try and did one and then move on a little bit and try and dig another one and so on, and so they'd sometimes try and dig three or four in a night, and if they didn't feel it was adequate, they'd go back to the sea again, come back the next night.

PW I've seen in a CALM - a 1994 CALM report that there is not very much scientific material written on the flora and fauna of Ningaloo Reef, what's the situation like now?

Side A: 20 mins

SO There was - yearh - so there was certainly a museum survey, that would have been one of the first ones, is that what you are referring to.

PW I'd have to check the reference there, but it was in 1994.³

SO Yearh, see I don't think that was ever formally written up in terms of reports, there were bits and pieces of the museum work that was done. I mean, I was involved with the *drupella* surveys and that was - we got some very good biological data in terms of the status of the coral communities, so we looked at *drupella*, you know, size frequency and densities, both live and dead, but in terms of the coral, we looked at - percentage covers - diversities, and also size frequencies again, so I mean, that's some very good data - since then there's actually been an extensive monitoring programme established this year which our branch has done

PW What about the knowledge of the - biology of fish on the reef, is there very much known about - spawning times and how much spawn a northwest snapper would deposit, for example?

³ A Representative Marine Reserve System for Western Australia. (1994) Perth: The Department of Conservation and Land Management. pt.V, p 21.

- SO - The most work - the local work on snapper I think has been undertaken by Mike Moran of Fisheries W.A. and he has put out a report. But most of his work locally was done on the tagging. I don't know whether you've read that one, where he - yes I was actually involved in that tagging program, so they look basically at the movements and found that the majority stayed you know, quite close, but some moved very large distances, so - and of course the proportion that moved in, you know, certain distance changed with time, from the tagging period. So yes, there's some information on movement which Mike Moran's report would detail, but in terms of - spawning, yes I'm pretty sure that you'd find the Fisheries (have done it) because they have to manage that fishery to maximise the catch within a certain size frequency, or.
- PW But there are many species on a reef system, and - I wonder if the knowledge is only for a few main target species, or if it's really, you know, quite broad?
- SO No no, it wouldn't be very broad at all.
- PW Is there - has there been work done on the shark population, for example, not the whale sharks, but the predatory sharks?
- SO Yearh, look I'm not aware of a report on the predatory sharks of Ningaloo, that doesn't mean to say that there isn't one. I know a guy came through, and was very interested in the rays there while I was up there, I'm just trying to think, that may actually have been part of the CSIRO publication on whales and sharks. Do you know there's a whole one of Australian whales and sharks, a really good publication, so it may just have been part of the work for that document.
- PW There doesn't seem to be a continuum in these types of research though does there? They appear to seize upon a point of time when the researcher is there and then that researcher departs for something else somewhere else, and then there is no continuation of that work.
- SO Well as I say, there is now a monitoring programme that has been established at Ningaloo, and that's being done in partnership with the Australian Institute of Marine Science. Also the *drupella* monitoring that I did, that's all experimental work that can be repeated directly in terms of monitoring work, so all those data are available for comparison. So there is some, but I agree with you, and I mean that's just the way, that's just the nature of the way science operates I suppose. (chuckle)
- PW Sue, when you were there did you catch fish yourself?
- SO No, (laughing) my husband used to go fishing, he used to enjoy just wandering down to - he had a little rock just right next to Milyering, that he used to stand on and just cast from the shore.
- PW Did you try to catch fish?
- SO I probably held the rod while he was doing something else occasionally. No I really had very little interest in it.
- PW Did you not have your heart in it?
- SO No I don't enjoy fishing, no. No if I'm going to sit still, I'd rather, you know, draw in the sand, or look at the shells, or.
- PW Like Tim Winton? (laugh)
- SO Yes, that's right, yes that's right, yearh. Oh I think when we were doing the tagging of fish I might have tried to help catch them then, but they probably regretted taking me out to the boat because I'm so hopeless (laughing)

⁴ ABC TV on the previous evening carried a documentary about the W.A. author's relationship with the ocean.

PW Did you do any diving?

SO Oh yeah I did, I did a bit of diving.

PW SCUBA diving?

PW And was that part of your work?

SO Hmm.

PW Did you enjoy that?

Side A: 25 mins

SO Yes I like looking under the water, I love looking under the water, and snorkelling, I mean that's a lovely pastime too, just bobbing around.

PW Did you have any nasty scares?

SO - You see things, yeah, I mean, one of the surveys we did - I think that there was only one person on the whole trip of the whole team - team of us, who didn't see a shark that they didn't like - I can remember one particular incident when I was manta towing - I was being manta towed, and that was out on the reef at - Dugong, it's an absolutely magnificent reef there, it's most unusual because it's - it's a different shape to the rest of the reef which is, you know, the reef crest is quite, is continuous, whereas at Dugong it's like it's eroding so you have sort of big channels and undercuts, and in fact there's one place where - there's an island. I don't think it's been gazetted by anyone, (laugh) could probably go out there and put a flag on it. It's like a big tabletop that's been undercut and it's toppled over, so at the top of it now, it's always out of the water, it's a bit of a landmark, because it's miles, you know, it's kilometres out to sea

PW Does it have a name?

SO No, no, no.

PW Not a colloquial name?

SO No, no, it's extraordinary, but I can remember being manta towed and there was this - tawny nurse,¹ I think it was a tawny nurse - that wouldn't leave me alone, I mean I was happy to stay with it for quite a while, but, yeah, it got me a bit nervous, so I got out after a while, and it was quite curious

PW Did you see any tiger sharks?²

SO - Not while I was in the water, no but they - I'll tell you what I did find there, and I must go to the museum, or talk to (tone) there we go, chuckle) talk to someone - John Stevens at CSIRO, and I was diving once and I found a tooth, a shark's tooth, and it's easily that long, it was, I don't know, what's that, two inches or something, and it's, if you look in a book it looks directly like a great white shark tooth, so it's either a great white or it's and oceanic white tip, it might be an oceanic white tip,³ but I need an expert. But I mean, I found it in the lagoon, I could more or less pinpoint on a map where I found it, where

PW And you don't think it could be a tiger shark do you?

SO No, no - It's not a tiger, it's perfectly triangular - so yes, just from looking at pictures in books, I'd say it's either one of those species, so it's probably of some significance that I found it really

¹ *Nebrus ferrugineus*. Grows to 320 cm, 10.5 kg., according to Alan and Swainston *ibid.* p. 3

² *Galeocerdo cuvier*. Grows to 650 cm, 521 kg. *ibid.* p. 24

³ *Carcharhinus longimanus*. Grows to 396 cm, 56.2 kg. *ibid.* p. 22

PW Did you ever meet anyone who said that there's not as many sharks as there used to be?

SO Oh, people will always say things like that, but you know, if you listen to people who have been up there very recently, they'll say it's teeming with sharks this year, and I mean, in the office in Fremantle (we hear) people are saying that all round the coast this year for instance, so for whatever reason there seems to be fluctuations. Yearh, people used to say, 'there are more of this, this year than before.' or 'There are fewer of these this year.'

PW The reason I ask is because when the turtle catching was going on there, there was a conscious effort to lower the numbers of turtles - numbers of sharks, because they were a direct threat to turtle fishermen.

SO Oh well since them I mean, there's been some, I mean there's been a fin fishery, I mean, you know, shark fin fishery up there, and all sorts of things, you know, I know, that pressure - the turtle, shark catching pressure would have finished in the seventies, but I mean there's been pressures on the sharks, you know, significant pressures since then.

PW Do you think that the turtle fishery suffered a decline because of those commercial activities? Were turtle numbers lowered significantly?

SO No, we were - no, I'd say not. The - in terms of the industry, I'd say not. The - the turtle industry probably failed because it became unacceptable, so that was probably a social pressure I'd imagine - but in terms of the impact that it had on the resource, the natural resource, because we know so little about the life cycle of turtles, I'm not sure that we can really answer that. You know, it may be that if there was a significant decline in turtle populations during the seventies, we may not have reached the stage where that will be evident.

PW I'm going to turn this tape over.

Side A. ends: 29.7 mins

Side B starts

PW Yes, so, some of the questions that I've been asking people probably won't apply to you Sue, because of your short term there, but I was asking people about spiritual relationships with the aquatic environment, and, have you ever felt that you have had one?

SO It sounds terrible, having been a Ningaloo "Marine Park manager," but I think that, I mean that I certainly had a spiritual relationship with the area, but I related better to the terrestrial environment, than I did perhaps to the marine environment. That's because it was more inaccessible, and I mean while I was up there, for nearly the whole time that I was up there, I didn't have an assistant, so it was really hard for me to get out on the water, very hard, because we didn't have our own boat or anything like that you know, in terms of the family, and then of course when I did finally have an assistant, I got pregnant (laugh) so I didn't feel terribly happy about bouncing around in boats too much. But it was just always so easy to go off walking in the hills there, and the range is wonderful, absolutely - loved it.

PW Perhaps we should clarify for the the tape, was it due to the assistant that you got pregnant or what?

SO (Laugh) No, my husband actually. Oh dear.

PW - With your early work out on the reef - in the marine park there, did you find that there was a general hostility towards yourself from visitors, long term visitors, did they regard you as the enemy?

SO Yes, I have to tell you, my first experience up there was really quite something. We arrived in this house, because you know when we first moved in there, there was no power, there was no water, and the toilet didn't work, you know, I mean I could tell you a whole saga about that place. Anyway - and there was no landscaping outside, because it was a brand new house you see, and while it was pretty obvious where people

were supposed to drive and weren't supposed to drive, and this is a private house remember, this isn't the Visitors' Centre. Someone came boring up this driveway and came right up to the house and almost parked on the verandah, and got out and was in this rage about building the Milyering Visitors' Centre, and - you know, the housing there, and I mean, you know, - certainly entitled to his opinion, and I can see that probably before, it was, and if you'd had a relationship with the area, you would have found it quite offensive, but the way of dealing with it in terms of you know, attacking me, was - and that was my very first experience with a member of the public -.

PW Where had this person come from?

SO Oh I don't know, I mean he came up in a very posh car, four wheel drive - from Perth somewhere and so on, but this was his patch.

PW So he'd been coming up there as a visitor each year and suddenly discovered (you)?

SO He wasn't a retired gentleman, no this was a - much younger man, I not even sure he didn't have children, he really made a bit of a display, but yearh, I can remember that was very - pretty unpleasant of him. But most people were really great, you know.

PW And that was the first member of the public that you'd met?

SO Oh, yes.

PW Baptism by fire.

SO (chuckling) Dear oh dear, but sometimes people would come up to the house at home, you know, after hours and knock on the door, and I'd answer the door, and they'd say, 'Oh is your husband in?' (laugh) So I'd say, 'Yes.' and I'd go and get him.

PW Did your husband have a working role there or was he (doing something else?)

SO Oh he did do a little bit of work for CALM, he worked down at the Visitors' Centre, he did some cleaning at the Visitors' Centre, he also did some work in terms of a bit of operating as a maintenance officer in the park occasionally, but no, he had his own business as an illustrator, so he did a bit of illustration work and art work up there, I mean, he's since had a solo exhibition of his work from the area.

PW What's his name?

SO Ian Dickinson.

PW And he's an illustrator of natural history subjects is he?

SO Yes, yes, well yearh he'll illustrate anything, but I guess while you're up there, you get so close to your surroundings, I mean that was an opportunity to actually live in that house, you were so close to your surroundings, I mean, it has to impact you, and I think if you're inclined to draw things, you know, the images that you see, and the colours there are so wonderful too, they really do impact on you, and I think the other thing, that people who don't live that close to the natural environment, even in a small town you're probably less aware of this, but when you're living out in the bush, as we were, you're very aware not only of how beautiful the natural environment is, but also of its cruelty, so these two - things - hand in hand, you see a lot of the cruelty of nature when you are right close to it, hmm.

Side B: 5 mins

PW Did you have any social relationships with visitors, fishing people that came there, or did you tend to be isolated in that respect? Did you have friends coming up?

SO Well we had some friends come up from Perth; we got to know the Lefroys a bit down at Ningaloo. We got to know quite a few people I suppose in Exmouth itself, and we kept in contact with a lot of those people.

particularly the people that used to come out and volunteer at the Milyering Visitors' Centre, we know several of those people who have subsequently moved down to Perth, and so we keep in contact, which is really nice, and so nearly everyone who I knew in Exmouth has subsequently moved away, so we knew the Taylors, he was the doctor and of course you know he's had a lot to do with whale sharks and - was very involved in the marine environment, so we've kept in contact with the Taylors and everyone as well. And the Americans, they were great people, they'd - they really wanted to enjoy their time, make the most of the time while they were in Exmouth, I really enjoyed Exmouth when they were there, and it became a bit more of a narrow minded sort of country town when they left. I probably shouldn't say that should I. But no, they brought a viewpoint into the town which broadened - the perspective.

PW Sue - there's a lot things that I could ask you, but is there something in particular that you feel should be included on this tape, about your experience there, things that I might not ask you? What have you thought about that you would like to put on here for postenty?

SO Yes, I don't know really, I mean I think I was just unbelievably lucky, myself and my husband, we were just unbelievably lucky to have had an opportunity to get that close to nature in an area which is so wonderful, and I mean, I only hope that - I mean, I'm sure that the area can handle more people than it does currently, with good management, but there is a limit if its to keep its atmosphere and its wildness, which is what's special about it, there has to be a limit on the number of people, and you know, as a community we really have to decide on how to set that limit, and so that, you know, the local community can benefit to a maximum extent, and you know, it all has to be equitable, but there is a limit. If we value what is there, there is a limit to its use.

PW So then what it sounds like you are saying is that there could come a point in time where not everybody that wants to go to Ningaloo will be able to go there?

SO Certainly not in all the places, yes. If we want to maintain the whole spectrum of values to that area, some of those values are - relate to the wildness, and to maintain that, at least some of the area, and it's probably not appropriate for all of it, but a chunk of that area will have to be managed in a way that does limit the usage so that the people who go - who can get there, and that would have to be equitably arranged, will be the people who are fortunate enough to get that experience, can take the true value of it away with them.

PW Could this be total exclusion of people from particular areas, or just accessible to people with a backpack, or something like that, and have to leave their car some distance away and walk in?

SO Yeah, I mean, you know, you can't have everybody going everywhere, because it devalues the experience, and so I mean, I think it's up to the community to think very clearly what they do value about an area, and you know, manage for those values, and if there are different kinds of values, the area is large enough to accommodate a wide spectrum of values, and - but you can't go on degrading them, they have to be kept and - managed accordingly.

PW Now Sue, you still work with CALM, do you have a role still with the management of Ningaloo?

SO Oh, peripherally. - so at the moment I'm dealing with community education in the main conservation branch - and so yes, I have - keep in contact to some extent. When the area is - the management plan is reviewed, and of course there's the proposed extension to the southern end of Ningaloo Marine Park. When that is all redone, and it's just about due to be redone, then I'll be involved in the community liaison associated with that planning process, hmm. And also *drupella*, if we redo a *drupella* survey I might get involved in that to some extent.

PW What's your anecdotal knowledge of the state of the *drupella* situation now, is it getting worse?

SO I haven't got a clue, because it's you know, years really - '95 is the last one - we're really due to do a survey this year, and we had hoped to be able to raise money to do one, but we haven't been successful with the grant application we put in. We are going to try and obtain money from elsewhere to undertake at least a portion of the survey that was undertaken before, but the findings from previous surveys indicated that -

some areas, the numbers were increasing, some areas the numbers were decreasing, so there's not an overall trend over the reef. What we haven't really got enough data for at this stage in terms of the number of sequential surveys, is to really determine whether it's a cyclic event in terms of, you know, increase in populations, decline in coral, and then decline in *drupella* and an increase in coral and so on. I mean, we don't know whether that's the case still.

PW Well Sue, I thank you very much for this interview, and I can't think of any more questions just at this moment, I probably will be lying in bed tonight, and if you can't think of any more.

SO No I can't at the moment (laughing) but like you I'll probably think of things later, 'Oh darn, I should have mentioned that.' But never mind.

PW Well we can always do it in the next edition, but thank you very much, and your contribution will be valued.

SO Thanks Paul.

Side B, interview ends: 11.9 mins

Transcript of Interview

Interviewee: Allan Richard Ross

Address: 20 Schmidt Way, Exmouth. 6707

Phone: 08 9949 1371

Date of birth: (52)

Date of interview: 13/3 1998

Place: Residence, Exmouth

Side A 32.1 mins

Side B 12.3 mins

Total 45.4 mins

Interviewer & transcriber: Dr Paul R. Weaver.

Subject: Ningaloo

Side A: Deckhand in Carnarvon in younger days - excess catches of snapper. Fish more prolific in Exmouth region in past. Holiday trips from south since early '70s - with freezer Octopus from Ningaloo reefs for bait - occy now declined. Chemical usage by others on reef - octopus hunting. Shell collectors - impact. American service personnel - fishing. Cowry shell decline. Wrasse decline. Dugongs and turtles still prolific. Turtle seasons - predators. Drupella - opinions. Parasitic worms in fish. Fish preferences - eating - cooking. Fishing Advisory Committee - personal role.

Side B: Spangled emperor - size limit previously under breeding size - small juveniles inhabit Exmouth Gulf. Modern catching technology largely immaterial. Taking of undersize fish still rife - less big fish than small fish. Fisheries Inspectors - need for more in such a big region, or provision of greater powers to shire rangers.



PW This interview is being recorded on the 13th March 1998 at Exmouth with Allan Ross. Allan for the record could you please give your full name and your date of birth.

AR Allan Richard Ross - 21st October '46.

PW Allan we're here to talk about fishing, but could you tell me how long you've lived in Exmouth?

AR We've been in Exmouth ten years full time, but we've been coming here - we've been coming here since about - 1972 I think it was we started coming here, early seventies anyway

PW Did you originally come up here as a tourist?

AR Yeah, we came up here for holidays and long service and

PW And as part of that you fished on Ningaloo Reef?

AR I've fished here, since as I say, 1972, '70, '72

PW Have you fished on Ningaloo Reef since that time?

AR - Oh around the whole Cape, with line, net.

PW Has it always been as an amateur?

AR Yep Yes, in this area. I've fished professionally in Carnarvon for a little while

PW So you are a former professional fisherman?

AR Well no, I worked on a professional boat, that's all.

PW Where was that?

AR In Carnarvon.

PW And what were you fishing for then?

AR Snapper, pink snapper.

PW Who did you work with when you were a fisherman in Carnarvon?

AR I worked with Clive Cooper.

PW And what was the name of his boat?

AR *Nerrilee Two.*

PW Were you a young man then?

AR Yearh.

PW How old would you have been when you started?

AR Oh, I didn't do a great deal of time with them. - I would have been - probably twenty years ago.

PW So you would have been a teenager, almost?

AR Yearh, I was in my mid-twenties.

PW Mid - twenties, yearh?

AR Maybe fifteen years ago, something like that, a fair while back anyway.

PW Did you enjoy professional fishing?

AR Well I like pulling fish up, yearh, so, I didn't like the quantities that we were pulling up, but you know

PW What was there not enough or too many?

AR No, no - I didn't like to see that amount of fish being pulled out and sent away, but it - had to be done, it was - you know, we weren't the only ones doing it

PW What was the method you were using, hooking?

AR Line (indistinct) line - They were all caught by hand in those days

PW Did that boat come up along the Ningaloo system?

AR It came up as far as Farquar, which is just south of Coral Bay, and fished out to sea, up to sixty, sixty mile out to sea.

PW So it wasn't really close to the reef system at all?

AR Oh, some of it was, yearh. We used to do close in around the islands off Carnarvon, then you'd head out a bit further, and you know, all around the place.

PW Then you came to Exmouth recreationally fishing, did you do that initially once a year?

AR Yearh, oh yearh, we used to come up for six weeks, or three months sometimes for long service

PW Was there a particular time of year that you used to come up?

AR - We used to try and get up here after June, in the year.

PW What was the advantage of that?

AR Well that was when my holidays (were), and the best - time - the best season before it got too hot - you get up here after October and it starts to get very warm, so from may to October is the time we tried to get away, August, September.

PW Your visitations would last up to six weeks, were they all male events, or did you let women come?

AR No, my wife used to come, we used to come up with a caravan, stay at the caravan park.

PW And did you catch fish to take away, to take back with you?

AR Yearh, we used to take fish back. We used to take fish back - to keep us going until we came up again next time. And that would be bream, or anything we could get hold of, you know.

PW It sounds from that, that you could almost get a year's supply of fish?

AR Yearh, we used to probably run out, oh I don't know, three or four months before we were due to come back up again, and we'd be down to the last of it, you know, and then we'd have to buy some in Perth 'Cause we eat a lot of fish.

PW How did you keep your fish then?

AR Just froze them.

PW And did you bring a freezer of some sort?

AR Yearh, we normally had Tucker Box freezer and we used to fill that.

PW Was that a large freezer?

AR Tucker Box? I s'pose about a metre high.

PW Is that a domestic type of freezer, like a chest freezer?

AR Yearh, yearh, just a little chest freezer, yearh.

Side A: 5 mins

AR And we used to bring that up with food and stuff in it, and as you used that you'd replace it with fish. Plus what fish we ate here too, you know, we used to eat fish a lot here.

PW How much fish would that freezer have held? Hundred kilograms perhaps?

AR Oh, maybe - I don't know, I've never really thought about it. Possibly, maybe a little bit more.

PW Well do you have an idea of what the cubic capacity of it might have been?

AR Probably about a hundred and fifty kilos I would say, I'd be pretty close with that I'd say.

PW Was that a common thing for people to do, to bring up a freezer?

AR Oh some blokes - used to bring up a lot bigger freezers than that.

PW Did they?

AR They'd bring up, you know, maybe two or three of those. I didn't - I didn't see the reason to take back any more than I could use, so we only - we never gave to very many people, but we - had quite a lot people come around to our place for fish, when we got back, you know. But we used to eat a lot of fish.

PW Where did you fish along the Ningaloo Reef?

AR We fished all the way along, everywhere. You know back in the early days there was no national park out there, so we used to just go and fish anywhere we liked, you know.

PW Did you have a favourite place?

AR No, not really, we fished all 'round - in those - back in the early days you could catch snapper on the gulf side, you know, you'd fish there for a time, you've got to fish to tides up here as you know - we'd have a big line out, set for snapper, or big - something big; then we'd fish for whiting and bream and anything else with small lines. And we used to get one or two snapper a day, big, good, eight, nine pound, ten pound snapper.

PW This is along the Ningaloo (reef)?

AR No, on the Gulf side, and then other times we'd go out to the other side, of course you'd catch your big snapper out there too, just off the beaches in those days. It's a little bit harder now though.

PW Why do you think it's become harder?

AR More pressure.

PW More people?

AR Yeah, more pressure, more people takin' fish, and a hell of a lot of people take fish now. And they don't take a hundred and fifty kilos for six, for four or five months, you know. Well they do, they take a lot more than that, for five or six months at a time, you know, so, you know, our population increases by a hundred percent, we go up - it was about three and a half thousand, now we are up to about seven thousand people so, you get all those people putting lines in the water, they're pulling out a lot of fish.

PW And those people, - do they tend to bring their supplies with them from Perth?

AR A lot of the older ones that come up here, there is a lot of old people that come up here for the winter months.

PW Up to five months at a time?

AR Yearh.

PW Would it be fair to say that ...

Tape pause 8.3 mins. (Interviewee answering front door to lawnmower man)

PW So those people who come up here for five months at a time probably contribute very little to the economy of Exmouth, would that be fair to say?

AR Well they buy their papers, and they might buy bread, and - they don't buy very much meat, or anything like that. They buy the necessity of groceries, you know, that they can't carry, but - yearh, you know, they take a lot of fish out.

PW They take more than they give?

AR Yearh, yearh.

PW Do these tend to be old people?

AR A big percentage of them are, and they're decreasing as time goes on, because they're getting older, you know. They're - some of the people used to come up, now don't come up any more, that I used to - used to come up when I was coming up in my van, and they were older people then, and now, well they're not coming any more, or they're dwindling off, and you see that they don't turn up.

PW And do they tend not to be getting replaced by a new generation of people like that?

AR Yearh, there is a small amount, yearh. But, you know, costs and everything nowadays are a big thing. Fuel's expensive up here, diesel's nearly a dollar a litre up here, so that turns people off, you know. Things change in the caravan parks, where people don't - can't bring dogs into the caravan parks, so - that's going to change some - people's thinking on the place.

PW You mentioned that there's been a noticeable decline of - fish in some areas because of the pressure, has this forced people to go further afield as this has happened?

Side A: 10 mins

AR Well they reckon they're going to Onslow and further afield, but, you know, I don't know if they are or not, or whether they're not coming or not.

PW I particularly mean at Ningaloo, for example - we now have quite a good road going down to Yardie Creek, but I don't think it was very good, maybe ten or fifteen years ago? But this possibly tended to keep people more up this end, but then as the fishing changed up this end, has this meant that people have tended to move further southwards?

AR Well, true fishermen don't really care about roads, they'll go over sand hills and you know - I know an old couple that have been coming up here for years and years and they walk something like four or five miles just to get to their fishing spot, in the national park, and walk over sand hills, and that's four or five - four miles there, and four mile back, carrying their fish.

PW Have the fish that you sought - what have been your favourite types of fish to catch? (whipper snapper in background)

AR Oh, I like the spangled emperor, nor' west snapper - same thing

PW What's been the attraction of those particular fish?

AR Oh they're just a beautiful eating fish. I also like whiting and I like bream, I like eating both those, you know.

PW Has the spangled emperor been a difficult fish to catch?

AR No, no, not really, they have their traits that you've got to do, you know, to catch 'em, if you want to catch 'em, but, especially on a boat, they have their way of biting and if you hit them too hard, too quick, they'll just move on and you got to wait until the next school comes through.

PW Can you describe that in more detail to me?

AR Well they, they'll grab a line, and then they'll run with a little bit, they'll stop, they'll spit it out, they might do that three or four times before they actually grab it and take off with it, and when they grab it for the third or fourth time, they really are hooked then.

PW What sort of bait have you used for catching fish like that?

AR Oh I use mullet, oocy - any of the fish bait, but I do like oocy, it hangs on a bit harder.

PW Do you catch that locally?

AR We used to, it's getting more and more difficult now, the pressure of fishing is - you don't - used to go out and get your five or six occies, and they were good size ones. Now you can walk the reef and you'll only see small ones.

PW Has this happened to other species as well?

AR Oh, of fish you mean?

PW Of fish, or molluscs like octopus, or shellfish?

AR Oh, there still seems to be plenty of squid around, you catch squid from time to time - there's quite a lot of squid coming into the new marina down there in the night time, I see them when I'm doing patrols - (Night watchman)

PW Squid tend to be pelagic fish I think, don't they, they come in from somewhere else?

AR Yeah, but the occies have certainly decreased very, very dramatically, and that's due to some tourists - using stuff to get - the occies out of the holes in the rock - which I don't agree with - They use Harpic they use - other chemicals to get 'em out of the holes.

PW Harpic's a brand of toilet cleaner isn't it?

AR Yeah, that's right.

PW A caustic?

AR They put it in the hole - and (noise outside)

PW We've got a friendly whipper snipper out there

AR Yeah, he'll be there for another couple of minutes

PW It's okay, we can still hear ourselves on the tape

AR Yearh, - and they pour this into the hole and of course it uses up all oxygen and the - thing comes out and they grab it, but they're not doing the reef any good, they're not doing - well you won't get occies go back in that hole for a long long time, you know

PW Because it contaminates the hole?

AR Yearh.

PW And it probably effects other organisms as well?

AR Yearh, it goes right across the reef.

PW Hmm.

AR Shells are another thing, you used to see lots and lots of milk spot cowries on the reef, and in the same area the occies are, like milk spot, serpent head cowries, money cowries, you don't see them any more

PW I think we might just wait for a minute while that machine's buzzing out there and we'll start again in a second or two.

Pause 14.7 mins

PW Okay well we're back on air now and - we were talking about shells, and you'd noticed that there'd been a decline in shell numbers, like cowries¹ and such. There's been quite a lot of shell collecting on the Ningaloo Reef going on over the years, have you seen much of that yourself?

Side A: 15.1 mins

AR We did a little bit when we first used to come up here, but if we picked over a rock, turned over a rock, and there was five shells there, we'd only take one, where other people would take the five. And another thing that used to make me angry, I used to say to people, 'When you turn a rock over, have a look at it, turn it back.' But they never turned it back, and it would kill all the growth and everything underneath it. But that's people. People I don't know, they just, big majority of people, there's more and more becoming more sensitive to the needs of the reef, and -

PW Shell collecting took place in particular areas?

AR All around, there were shells all around.

PW The full length? Hmm.

AR Even on the Gulf side you used to find cowries on the - at low tide under, on the rocks and stuff, but you don't see them there any more.

PW Do cowries take a long time to grow?

AR I'm not sure, I would say so.

PW And what other sorts of shells besides cowries would you get down along the Ningaloo Reef?

AR Well, out in the deeper water you get the big egg cowries, you know, the big white ones, oh you get all sorts of shells out in the deep.

PW And have collectors been going for them as well?

¹ *Cypraea spp.*

AR . Well I s'pose so, I don't really know, but I would say so

PW Someone mentioned to me that shell collecting was a favourite activity of people who came, Americans who came to work on the base here. Have you heard that before?

AR Well yearh, they used to take shells, you know, they don't, there's nothing like that on their own reefs over there, there's too many people there, they've cleaned them up.

PW So would you say it was a pretty regular activity for service personnel to become involved with?

AR Oh, probably some of them, not all of them, some of them are probably more fanatical conservationists than other, you know, Australians

PW Did they used to get involved in the fishing?

AR They were - a lot of them were mad fishermen, yearh, they actually bought (a) boat, the boat's still here, *Solar Eclipse*, it - because we've still got a contingent of Americans here, and they're American air force They've got the boat left over from the base.

PW And that was specifically provided for Americans to fish with?

AR Yearh, yearh, it was a sports boat, because they used to go out on the navy, big navy work boats too, they'd go out fishing, out deep sea fishing, - big boats, big open boats.

PW Did they used to go down on the Ningaloo Reef?

AR Oh, well out off the reef they used to go, you know, on the outside of the reef.

PW On the ocean side?

AR Yearh, not right in on the reef

PW Other animals like dugongs and things live on that reef system sometimes - have you seen many dugongs?

AR Yearh, plenty of dugongs, both sides, out on the reef and in the Gulf. There's no shortage of them

PW And turtles?

AR Oh, turtles are here by the thousands, thousands and thousands of them.

PW They lay their eggs on the beaches up this way?

AR Yearh, they come up and lay their eggs, and.

PW Where do they lay their eggs?

AR All along the beach, oh everywhere along the cape.

PW Along the entire Ningaloo system?

AR Yep, yearh.

PW Right down past Corai Bay do you think?

AR I would say so, yearh.

PW And what time of year do they come through?

AR They start around about November and go through 'till about March I think it is, coming up. And then they start hatching, all that - seventy days after they lay them, they start coming up, the small ones. Quite often if you go out, yearh, probably about now if you went out there of a night time now you'd probably even come across some of them coming up out of the ground about the size of fifty cent pieces, swimming up through the sand and then heading for the water.

PW So they could be hatching about now in March?

AR Yearh, some would be hatching now. The ones that laid back in - in November have already hatched and gone, you know, the ones - there's eggs probably still there not hatched yet.

PW Does that have an effect of the arrival of fish, large fish?

AR Well I s'pose it would be, because there's not many of them survive, the little turtles, they've got a pretty hazardous sort of run from where they come out of the sand, to the beach, because there's ghost crabs waiting for them, they grab them and eat them - not so much in the night time, it's the ghost crabs in the night time, but if they happen to come out in the daylight you've got birds, you've got fish waiting for them, they can be any sorts of fish, you know - foxes, foxes are another thing that get them.

Side A: 20 mins

PW With your fishing, is it better now than it was in the past, or has it gone - become worse, or do you think it's much the same?

AR The fishing itself?

PW The fishing itself.

AR Oh it's a lot worse now, you don't catch anywhere near the quantity of fish. Mind you some of the fish - a lot of the fish are a lot bigger now and I think that's come in because of the controls.

PW Have any types of fish disappeared?

AR You don't see as many of the wrass that you used to see in the shallow waters of the Ningaloo Reef. You know when I used to come up here we used to see a lot of the Maori wrass² and stuff like that - you don't see them very often now, and they were in close around the reefs - I haven't seen any Maori wrass for a long time.

PW Have they been a fish that people have caught?

AR Yearh, they're a good eating fish, yearh, they're a top table fish.

PW Do they grow very large?

AR Some of them quite large, yearh.

PW How large would they be?

AR Oh, well there's a giant wrass and he grows, oh, up to a metre long, but the others are - something's happened and all I can put it down (to) is you just don't catch 'em like you used to, you know. We used to catch a lot of the small wrass, we'd let 'em go again, providing they weren't hooked that bad, and - but now you don't catch any, I haven't caught a wrass out on inside the reef for years and years, you know, they're

² *Chelinius spp.* Two species carry the Maori tag at Ningaloo - *C. unifasciatus* and *C. trilobatus* Lacépède

just not there any more

PW There's been problems with certain molluscs, one called drupella - have you seen the areas where that has damaged coral?

AR Yeah, I have, but really don't know whether that's got out of hand because of the fish that's been taken that used to eat them or something, I don't know. But you know, it's not a man-made thing, I don't think. It's a natural thing, it's not something that man's manufactured and put on the reef, or it's escaped out of a, out of a aquarium or something, it's a man-made thing so.

PW Can you remember seeing those types of shells when you first came here?

AR They've always been around as far as I'm concerned, maybe they were there and nobody ever knew that that they were doing the same sort of thing, eating the coral and stuff. There wasn't the - I'm sure there wasn't the - research done back in those days, but all of a sudden people have found that they are eating the reef, you know, I don't know, I guess that they could have been there for the last hundred years and nobody's even known, you know

PW Is there anything which eats them?

AR I don't know, maybe there has been, maybe some of these wrass that I'm talking about, the big giant wrass, you never see them nowadays, and they were the sort of fish that would munch on - coral and stuff like that, so maybe - they ate 'em, who knows, obviously something that somebody's taken out of the system, of course I do believe that everything that has a control, something used to eat them. If it's not there anymore they can just do what they like now.

PW When you've caught fish in the past have you examined their stomach contents?

AR Sometimes we do, yeah, yeah. Yeah, we - like most of your snapper, they have anything pretty well they can pick up, you know, from shellfish to - we brought some cod a couple of weeks back and - over around the other side of the Muirons, and they had - whole fish, they looked like little flat head and stuff in them, right out deep, you know, the other side of the Muirons, so its - we had a look in their gut and they seemed to have a lot of fish, probably eight inches long.

PW Do you know anything about the other - anatomy of fish, their - would you know for example if you found a diseased organ inside a fish, or what that would look like?

AR Only from time to time you get some of the little red throats that are really infested (infested) with worms. Most of the fish, the deep water fish have got worms, intestinal worms, some of the cod - a lot of the cod have got worms, some of them are quite large, big black worms, but you get a small, you get the little red throat emperors, quite often you cut the fillet off the side and the whole through - not all of them, but just one or two, you'll get infested (infested) with worms, - you could eat it I s'pose, but I wouldn't eat it

PW Have you seen this going back to the early days when you first started fishing?

AR I never took a great - no I think I would have picked it up if I had seen it, but I hadn't sort of noticed it before, yeah.

Side A: 25 mins

PW Do other people mention these things?

AR Oh, yeah, people say, you know, like trevally have a lot of worms, some - queen fish have worms in them quite regularly. But the cod have a lot of worms, they're a big, big black worm, you know. You can sort of pick them out of the flesh, you know, they're not too bad

PW They live in the flesh?

AR Some of them, yeah.

PW And have you ever seen fish with problems with their eyes?

AR No I haven't actually.

PW Do you catch mullet?

AR At times we put the net out for mullet, yeah.

PW Where do you catch them?

AR Oh, on the Gulf side

PW Never on the Ningaloo side?

AR Very rarely, there's only a couple of places you could put your net in on the Ningaloo side, especially in the national park, so I prefer to go on the Gulf side, put the nets in there

PW Over time have you found that your attitudes have changed towards fishing and conservation matters?

AR Oh I don't think so, I've always sort of thought that you've got to look after your fish, right from the start when I've been fishing. There was - you know, I've never taken excess fish, ever

PW Have you ever found that you've had to move to new places because fish have thinned out?

AR Oh, I used to fish in Perth, and you certainly don't catch a great deal of fish down there, if that's

PW But that wasn't the reason that you came up here was it?

AR No.

PW But fishing in these areas - like along the Ningaloo system, have you been fishing at one place and then decided that - prospects had declined so that you would have to move on somewhere else to perhaps get better chances.

AR No, I don't think so, because along the Ningaloo system, fish move, they move in large quantities, in large schools, they move up and down, they're moving all the time, so you know, you'll get fish one area, and you'll go back tomorrow and they are not there. Well that's just because they're moving up and down the reef system all the time, you know. I don't think there's - I haven't seen of any areas that's polluted or anything that - badly polluted that they don't come there for - come there any more

PW Just to change the subject slightly, some people have religious beliefs related to fishing, have you got any religious belief that includes you fishing?

AR No, no.

PW Some people won't go fishing on a Friday, has that not worried you?

AR Nope.

PW Do any people up here allow - have you ever been aware of people up here allowing religion to influence their fishing activities?

AR I've never been aware of any, nope.

PW Would you describe Exmouth as being a non-religious sort of a town? Is there a church in Exmouth?

AR Oh yeah, there's a Roman Catholic church, there's a chapel on the base, which is interdenominational church, so (indistinct).

PW Do people attend those services?

AR Oh yes, yeah, they attend the service reasonably regularly, a lot of 'em. A lot of people don't.

PW Do you?

AR I attend church probably two or three times a year, that's about all

PW Have you had any health matters relating to your fishing activities? Do you see fishing as important to your maintenance of your health?

AR Oh, it keeps you reasonably fit I suppose, you know, you're out walking through the water pulling your net or something like that, you know, you're getting exercise.

PW As far as the diet is concerned do you eat fish regularly?

AR We eat fish four or five times a week, when we've got it.

PW What type of fish do you prefer to eat?

AR I like your bigger fish, like cod, trevally - not too much trevally, I like to smoke trevally, and I like snapper, red emperor, all the choice fish, my wife won't eat anything other than choice fish of course. Whiting, she won't eat - she's not mad about eating - mackerel or anything like that, you know. I'll eat it but it's, you know.

PW How do you usually cook your fish?

AR Well we used to fry a lot of it, but we've changed our way now, we still have it fried, but it's different, it's not in batter and you know, it's - fried in flour and - I don't particularly like baked fish, we like to have ours fried.

PW Do you use olive oil?

AR Olive oil, yeah.

PW Do you read fishing literature?

AR Oh yeah, I'm on the Advisory Committee up here, Fishing Advisory Committee. So I read a fair bit from them, plus I buy fishing magazines, and.

PW Do you buy them regularly?

AR Oh, reasonably regularly.

PW And your role in the Advisory Council, could you tell me a little about that?

AR We - we meet every couple of months, two or three months - we have a committee made up from all walks of life in the town, like you have a rep from the professionals, we have a rep from the diving people, from the game fishing club, so all different sections make up the committee, and then me, I'm a rep from the

community, as a recreational fisherman. It's a Recreational Fishing Advisory Committee

PW And was that an elected situation? How did you become involved?

AR Well they asked for people that are interested and you nominate

PW Put your name down and that was sufficient?

AR Yearh.

PW Do you get input from the public since you've been in that position?

AR Oh the committee does yearh, if they have a problem they'll write to - we organise all the signs through the Fisheries Department, and - that sort of stuff, you know. I should have been out today with the Fisheries bloke actually, so you've got me out of some work digging holes, puttin' up Fisheries signs, with the Fisheries Inspector.

PW What have those signs said?

AR They're the new signs on the spangled emperor, showing all information about the spangled emperor

PW Is that considered to be a species under threat?

AR No, not really, but it's a very popular species, there's two or three of the emperor species that are very similar - the spangled emperor - is a (very popular fish.)

Side A, tape ends: 32.1 mins

Side B, tape starts

PW You were telling me about the signage for the spangled emperor, and that's a very popular eating fish, it's one of the favourite fish of recreational anglers?

AR Yearh, it is, it, you can catch 'em in very close, you can catch 'em over the other side on the inside of the reef, people use small boats to go out inside the reef, and you can also catch 'em out deep in the, you know, the same sort of fish. You can catch ten, twelve pounders in the shallows in two foot of water over the other side, inside the reef.

PW Do you know anything about their breeding activity?

AR No a great deal, no. Only that they've only, just recently - extended the size - of the snapper, 'cause they found that they weren't breeding until a certain size, and of course the legal size was under that size, so - but there seems to be a lot more bigger fish around now, there's probably not as many fish around, but

PW Do you ever see small spangled emperor, and when I say small I mean real juveniles?

AR Yearh, yearh.

PW An inch long or so?

AR Yearh, we see them quite regularly. You see them - you catch them, when you're fishing on the inside of the Gulf here, you're fishing for whiting and bream and stuff and quite often you'll catch the small spangles

PW Over time, since you first started fishing up here, has your technology changed?

AR Oh, only with lines getting a little bit better quality, and reels I suppose a bit better quality, that's about

all.

PW What about hooks and things, have you changed?

AR I still use the same old hooks that I used, you know, I haven't changed (to) all these modern newfangled hooks, I don't particularly like them.

PW Do you think that has lessened the chance for fish with this type of technology arriving?

AR Oh I don't know, I don't really - I think if the fish is hungry he's going to take any sort of hook, providing you've got bait on it. You know that's - when the big spanglies are biting they don't care what sort of hook's in there, they just bite, and they just bite, and bite hard.

PW Have you always had a boat since you've been fishing up here?

AR No, not always, no. I've got a small dinghy out there now.

PW That's a fibre glass dinghy is it?

AR No it's ally.

PW And aluminium dinghy, and have you used that for fishing on the Ningaloo Reef?

AR No, not a great deal. I go out with a mate of mine, he'd got a seventeen foot boat, and I go out with him quite regular. Plus we go out on a - we get a group of us together sometimes, we go out on a charter boat, fourteen of us on a day, and you go out on a charter boat, you can take a carton of beer, and you can drink beer all day and catch fish and not even have to clean 'em, you know, because the charter boats clean 'em and everything for you.

PW Is that usually a male only arrangement?

AR No, no, we all take our wives.

PW And you told me earlier on that you're about to buy a new boat?

AR Well it's not a new one, it's one that's in town here

PW Yes. And how big is that boat?

AR It's about twenty three foot.

PW And where are you going to use that?

AR Everywhere, everywhere. Go to the other side (of the Gulf) chasing mud crabs, over to the islands, out Tantabiddi, anywhere we want to go.

PW That'll enable you to go to quite remote places then?

AR Yearh, it's got big fuel tanks, and yearh. My mate and I, we'll always go out. Mostly we'll go out together in two or three boats.

PW Is it dangerous fishing along the Ningaloo system?

AR No, not really. - You just got to - you never - you can't beat the sea - you can never beat the sea, so you know you just got to remember that its - its the boss, and if you try and beat it, it'll win every time

PW And now that you've settled in Exmouth, I guess that you're going to stay here probably for the rest of your life?

AR Who knows .

PW - Do you keep a stockpile of fish at home to carry you through?

AR Not a great deal, no. I think I've got about two, two feeds in the freezer now, that's about all I've got.

PW You usually carry some fish though?

AR Yearh, we always have a little bit of fish there

PW Well Allan, I thank you very much for this opportunity to have interviewed you. You've told me quite a lot of interesting things. Is there anything that you would like the opportunity to add that I haven't asked you?

Side B: 5 mins

AR No, I don't think so, it's - I just hope that - you know, the government doesn't go silly with licences and all this sort of stuff in the future, because it's one of the few things that's - free, and available to be able to go and catch a fish, you know, and I just hope that stays, providing they put in enough safeguards to make the fish still - available, and I - I really don't want to get political, but I'd like to see the government get a lot more fishing inspectors, because you've got two inspectors here, and they cover a very very wide range. Of course I'm also the Shire Ranger - so I see, I'm doing patrols in the season, I see undersize fish being caught all over the place, there's no inspectors, they're all out, trying to do what they can.

PW Do you have any authority to intervene in that situation?

AR Nope, nope, nope.

PW And the undersized fish that are being taken, is this on a large scale?

AR I do see them, yearh. In the season, yearh, I see a lot of people taking a lot of fish.

PW What types of fish are they taking?

AR Small spangled emperor, undersized spangled emperor. Undersized bream, undersized blue bone

PW Why do you think that they are doing that?

AR Well it's not ignorance, they know, a lot of people know. Most people know, but they will claim it's ignorance, that they didn't know

PW Is there a scarcity of larger fish.

AR Well it's easy to catch smaller fish, there's a lot more smaller fish caught from the shore than there is big fish, but people do catch big fish from the shore. They don't catch as many, they catch a lot more smaller ones. I guess it's - they don't - it's easier to catch small fish. They catch more of them, so you know, - you don't get as much out of a small fish, so they - but they still eat 'em, so I see people every day, throughout the season with small snapper.

PW Do you ever advise people that they're taking undersize fish?

AR Yearh, yearh

PW And how do they react?

AR A big percentage of them say, 'Well are you Fisheries? If you're not Fisheries it's none of your business.' I'd like to see eventually where they actually give rangers some sort of power to assist the Fisheries, if they come across them.

PW There has been some sort of a programme where people wear yellow shirts and such?

AR That's a volunteer Fishery - what do they call it - they're volunteers, yearh. Yearh, no, no I'm talking about people that - like people in authority anyway, like shire rangers or something like that, that they've done it in some shures, where they actually have the powers of a Fisheries officer. I'd like to see that happen a lot more.

PW You're a man of many roles up here, you're also a Justice of the Peace, do you occasionally sit on fisheries Cases?

AR Yep, yep (indistinct) yearh.

PW And has that been occurring for quite a long time?

AR What?

PW Your role in a legal capacity?

AR I've been doing it for two and a half years. I - yearh, I sit on Fisheries things, yearh. I sit with the magistrate also.

PW And offenders that come forward on charges, are they usually people from outside of the region?

AR Well the last big case we had here in Exmouth was - a copper from Fremantle actually. And his mate, and his son. They actually were using illegal firearms to take fish, "smokies."²

PW Oh, I've read of that case, that's been resolved hasn't it?

AR Yearh, well, yearh, it has.

PW And they were people from outside, from Mandurah, hmm.

AR But he had previous - he'd been in strife with Fisheries previously, for undersize crays (indistinct.)

PW Is that - are there a lot of people that are not becoming caught for things like that, do you think?

AR Well the Fisheries can only do so much, there's only a couple of them, and they - when you look at their area, they've got to go from here to Onslow, and probably half way down to Coral Bay - or to Coral Bay. That's a very big area for them to cover.

PW They have to do it by vehicle do they?

AR Vehicle, they have got boats, but yearh, mostly by vehicle, the shore based ones, yearh. So, it's just - much, it's - we need a lot more.

Side B: 10 mins

PW They are spread too dunly?

² A smoky is a fish spear or rod with a live bullet or shotgun shell mounted in the head. It is set in place when struck against a solid object such as a shark or large fish. Death is usually instantaneous, unlike with conventional spearing.

AR Yearh, we need a lot more inspectors, and until we get a lot more inspectors, fishing - the fish are going to keep declining. Because while you - you know, I go down, admittedly I'm known here, but I go down, nobody comes and checks my fish - Now they should be going along - or have somebody that has the authority that's doing a patrol along the beaches, because you'd see twenty or thirty people, you know, anything up to twenty people in one batch, in maybe five kilometres fishing.

PW Would it be fair to say that there is no official idea of the quantity of fish which are being taken by recreational fishermen?

AR They'd probably be able to estimate it, but I don't think it'd be - I don't think it'd be that accurate.

PW Politically - it would seem that there's not the recognition of the quantity of fish that must be taken?

AR No, I think it'd be very very hard, you've only - somebody has only got to ask somebody how much fish they've caught - you know, there are limits on fish, even with - with bread and butter fish, which is like whiting and bream and stuff like that, there's still a limit on those.

PW [I think I saw something like seventy, you're allowed to take seventy bread and butter fish of some types?]

AR - Yes, some of them -

PW Which seems a lot of fish?

AR Yearh, well that's right.

PW More than one person could possibly eat?

AR That's right, and some of them take very small whiting, you know. What the hell are they going to do with small whiting? You know, six or seven, six inches long.

PW Well Allan, I thank you very much for the opportunity to interview you, and - I would like to wish you all the best for your fishing activities in the future, and may you catch what you are after with that new boat.

AR Yearh, thanks very much, good

Side B, interview ends: 12.3 mins

Transcript of Interview

Interviewee: Desmond James Ryan

Address: 14 Davidson St. Exmouth. WA. 6707
 Phone: 08 99491086
 Date of birth: 23 October 1946
 Interview date: 13/3/1998
 Place: Exmouth residence
 Side A 32 mins
 Side B 12.4 mins
 Total: 44.4 mins
Interviewer and transcriber: Dr Paul R. Weaver

Subject: Ningaloo Reef - Exmouth region.
Side A: Arr. mid-'70s. Tourists very few. Tracks from inland used to access coast. Dinghy access important. Former crayfish deckhand at Junien. Noticeable decline of fish at Ningaloo. Fish decline anecdotes by mid-'70s. Coincided with US base. Long term civilian employment of interviewee on US base. Octopus - chemical usage (by others) for capture. Past abuse of marine ecosystem by public. US recreation. Shell collectors. US rec. equipment filters to Australians. Seasonal availability of large fish. Snapper aggregate in lagoons for spawning about February. Game fishing. Billfish interact with fringing reef at night - sometimes the lagoon in daylight. Dusk best for billfish.
Side B: Billfish tagging - no tagged Exmouth fish ever recovered. One percent recovery of tagged billfish worldwide. Specialist fishing publications repetitious - generally offer little new of significance. Belief amongst game fishers - bananas on a boat bring bad fishing luck. Past excessive catch practices of amateurs. Uncertain optimism that matters have improved. Machismo and fishing parties. Ningaloo fishers in past were significant litterers - much improved now



- PW This interview is being conducted at Exmouth on the 13th of March 1998 with Des Ryan, Des for the record would you please give your full name and your date of birth.
- DR Desmond James Ryan, twenty third of the tenth, forty-six.
- PW Des you've been living in Exmouth for some time now, how long have you been here?
- DR Approximately twenty-three years
- PW What brought you here?
- DR Recreational holiday, initially, having been to the place before we were rather amazed with its remoteness and pristine qualities and - chose to search out employment in the town and - fell in love with the place and here we are.
- PW Was it fishing that brought you here?
- DR Partially. Partially fishing, exploration, just to see the coastline

- PW In those days it wasn't a sealed road was it?
- DR It was dirt from Minilya turnoff in
- PW Was it a fairly daunting prospect to come out here?
- DR It was a rugged little track, because in many sections of the road it was only one way traffic, there was no room to pass, on a coming traffic so you had to pull off to the - the graded wall of the road, which towards the end had been graded that many times after wet seasons, it started to look like a tunnel
- PW At twenty-one years, what year does that take it back to?
- DR We came here mid '75, in fact I remember fairly vividly being out in the lighthouse caravan park with tears in an old army tent, which was our first shelter in those days in Exmouth, and listening to the fall of Saigon on the ABC.
- PW The - Ningaloo Reef which is our main interest, was that being fished in that time?
- DR It certainly was, it was - for the towns people - of course the townspeople was a very diverse population in those days, being made up of American military personnel, Australian civilians and Australian Navy personnel, and some remnants of Air Force, so you had a very diverse population that enjoyed all the fruits of the ocean, being the fishing, the snorkelling, the sunbathing, shell gathering; every aspect that makes Exmouth what it is.
- PW When you first fished Ningaloo Reef, where did you go?
- DR We, in the early days, chose to investigate as many tracks, and there were many tracks - from the coast road, south from Yardie Creek, to I suppose Warroora Station would be the same, you know, Amherst Point type area, the southern most point. So I guess it was a process of going down tracks and saying, well that's a very nice place, and that would be worthwhile camping, or discarding or disregarding other ones because they were too rocky, or too rough, or for whatever reason, they just didn't have what you were looking for. And so naturally we picked, I s'pose, half a dozen more spots over the years that we've been returning to - of course they've changed many times over the years with the increase in tourism pressure - In those days in the '75s and '76s tourism in Exmouth was virtually zero, in fact of a - if an unusual car came in, not a town car, that'd be the buzz of the town, "Whozat? Who's driving that car, that's a new one in town" "Till of course where we are today where we are hosts to thousands and thousands of tourists
- PW What are the names of some of those places you first fished?
- DR I guess many of those names have vanished - well Crayfish Reef I still believe is called Crayfish Reef - on the near coast, closer to Exmouth, this side of Yardie Creek, the Oyster Stacks, Turtle Bay, Turquoise Bay - Snapper Rocks, there were quite a few - in so far as that Ningaloo stretch of coastline - I don't recall a lot of the individual names of the sites, apart from of course Norwegian Bay, Bruboodjoo, Winderabandi, those kind of areas yeah.
- PW Did you have a favourite place?
- DR Favourite insofar as that we used to tow a dinghy down there quite often, so you were looking for a spot that you could launch a dinghy, also we got a lot of enjoyment from the rock fishing, so I try to combine a nice beach that was good for a swim and proximity to a rock fish, and also launchability of a boat, which made, I think it's called the Nine Mile just north of Cardabia Homestead, a very good spot to operate, and that's the spot in fact that Duke Wellington used to operate out of many years ago.
- PW When did you first arrive up there - to work permanently?

Side A: 5 mins

- DR - We came early in '74, mid '75, went back south for a month, packed up our gear and went straight back. said, "This'll do us."
- PW Where were you living before?
- DR - Mandurah.
- PW And what did you do when you first came here?
- DR - I worked for one of the local electricians, and a removal firm until such time as permanent employment came up on US Nat Coms HEH, I was employed by the US Navy for eighteen years
- PW What did you do with them?
- DR - I worked in a metal trades shop as a T.A.
- PW That's a Trade Assistant?
- DR That's correct, yeah.
- PW And what are you doing now?
- DR I run a very small one man operation pest control unit.
- PW This allows you a lot of time to go fishing I suppose?
- DR A fair degree of flexibility, I like to think that I'm in the twilight of my years, and prefer to take it just that trifle bit easier.
- PW In the twilight of your years, (chuckle) I would think that you might have another forty or so years ahead of you yet, looking at you.
- DR Well if you hear today's predictions of the big asteroid that's heading our way in thirty years, I think it might be about shut down time.
- PW Is that so, - well - the types of fish that you caught in the past, could you tell me about those please?
- DR When we first came to Exmouth, Cathy - being my wife, and myself were not skilled fishermen in the least, in fact it was a sport that we hadn't indulged in really at all, apart from a little bit of cray fishing 'round the Jurien bay area- so it was a whole new ball game to us, we had everything to learn. The species that are prominent in the area, methods of fishing etcetera, etcetera, so little by little, reading, asking, experimenting, we worked out how to go about it and found of course there was an abundance and I guess the main species that were targeted, and they still are, are the emperors, being the spangled emperors and nor-west snappers as they're largely grouped together - But living out at the lighthouse point you also had - oh very diverse off the beach, being - sand whiting, bream, threadfin salmon, dart - a myriad of sharks, the trevallies - we often ballooned offshore when the easterlies were blowing, for the likes of mackerel etcetera, but with no great success. They certainly were there, I think our methodology possibly got the better of us there
- PW Have you always fished as an amateur?
- DR Yes - I have, I spent - a couple of weeks at Jurien Bay on a crayboat, but - I wouldn't rate it as breaking my amateur status
- PW was that when you were a teenager was it?

DR Absolutely.

PW What was the name of the boat you worked on?

DR God knows, Johnny Braithwaite's boat

PW Who was the owner?

DR John Braithwaite.

PW John Braithwaite.

DR Hmm, from Jurien, yeah it was his, a brand new boat, his first boat, a little thirty footer. And John went on to make millions out of the game, did very well.

PW Have you noticed a decline in fish since you first came here?

DR Most definitely, there is no doubt about that at all - even in '75 the town had been going virtually ten years for construction etcetera, and the stories that we were being told in '75 were that ten years beforehand the fishing was even better than it was then; so what people were suggesting no doubt is that there'd been a significant decline in fish captures just in that period. - Stories of the construction type people catching snapper from Town Beach using a piece of white rag on a hook, the fish were that thick - some of the massive catches that were brought back from the islands etcetera however, in '75 it was exceedingly easy to catch quality fish from the beaches, from the reefs, the full extent of the Cape - out at the lighthouse type area where you have a very rocky foreshore, it was - very possible to walk along the beach at night with a torch and pick up crayfish off the reef, something you can't do today.

PW Have you personally done that?

DR We have, yes. And the same thing applies to octopus gathering on the shallow reefs at low water. They were alive with octopus - fishing pressures have taken a massive toll on that style of bait collecting. It was primarily for bait, and possibly some rather dubious methods of collecting occy were employed. Condy's crystals, and soap detergents injected into their lairs to flush them out, which of course does damage to the rest of the reef. Of course you must remember too that people - this was a whole new ball game for a lot of people (who) had never been in such a remote location, they were totally unfamiliar with the marine world and its requirements to be able to regenerate and recover - many people would fossick about the shallow reefs at low water turning rocks over, exposing all the little critters that live thereunder, winkles and all the little bits and pieces, and wouldn't turn them back again after they'd had a look, and of course they're exposed to the sun and whatever and suffered thereby. But - I'd like to think that today, we've become a little bit more educated in the ways of it all and some of the practices, those practices have been stamped out, and hopefully we've got a much better understanding of the whole affair.

Side A: 10 mins

PW So those practices still occasionally occur?

DR I'm sure they do, I'm sure they do.

PW How do you think that knowledge of these practices is passed on? Is it by people on the beach telling each other about it or whatever? How have you heard about people catching octopus like that, or have you seen them doing it?

DR Seen it in practice - .

PW Have you tried it yourself?

DR No I have not, I've not found a need to employ those methods - I think - it's just been a general educational

thing, I mean the same thing really applies to roadside litter, where many years ago we thought nothing about throwing a bottle out the (car) window. You wouldn't dream of it today. That's just that we've been educated.

PW Yes I'd agree with that - I don't think I remember seeing any rubbish at all coming along that main road.

DR It's been minimalised, yearh, very much so. Of course there are the unthinking, but there always are going to be.

PW The extent of people in the past going down that reef, was the whole length of the reef being exploited by the mid-1970s?

DR Yes I would say the majority of it was, because the predominant vehicle that people owned in this town and more often than not it was their second vehicle, being a cheapie, was a four wheel drive of some variety. In those days of course the old Landrovers that were gathered form maybe a station relic or something like that, but this town has always had a massive percentage of four wheel drives, and very obviously to access the more remote beach locations. So it would be fair to say that, yes that coast line has always been utilised to a degree.

PW Would that be the most important reason why people had four wheel drives in Exmouth, for fishing?

DR For beach access, yes. For whatever beach activity that they were involved in.

PW And where was the main point of access to the beaches, from the north by the lighthouse, would they travel down south, or somewhere else?

DR In every direction the Gulf shores were - the western Gulf shores of Exmouth Gulf were utilised that whole period down to the Bay of Rest, Bay of Gales type area - traditionally the prime netting spots have been virtually I s'pose from Town Beach to sort of WAPET Creek type area - with a large American contingent that - many of them chose to take this lifestyle with both hands. They would go on their time off, weekends, whatever. Their recreational facility on base provided them with camper style equipment, whereby they had the wherewithal to head on down and camp, and all of these beaches were being accessed.

PW Do you think there's been any American activities or methods introduced to fishing activities around here?

DR In the early days, and it wasn't frowned upon at the time, because it seemed to be the accepted and the norm. There was excessive gathering of shells from the Cape, and a lot of those shells were being packaged, not just by Americans, Australians were doing it as well, packaged up and shipped elsewhere, sold, traded, people had this belief there was money in shells, and they were being collected, killed and collected at an absolutely alarming rate. - I have witnessed being an agent for a pack up firm - I can easily recall ten huge boxes, ten cubic foot boxes, and it would be nothing for a household to have five or six of these completely loaded with shells for export back to the States, as part of their shipment. And that was true of a lot of Australians as well, they were gathering them as I say at alarming rates.

Side A: 15.3 mins

PW Were the Americans taking them back when they departed, or were they being collected and sent throughout their period here?

DR In the majority (of cases) I would suggest that while they were resident in Exmouth they were part of a shell collection that they had in the house, or they had been salted away for transshipment on their relocation in the forces.

PW And these were being flown out by the big MAC flights that came into Exmouth?

DR The big MAC flights, yep, yep.

- PW Was there a high turnover of Americans?
- DR Their tenure was normally two years, and I think from memory there was a contingent of about a thousand to twelve hundred odd Americans in the town, being a makeup of four barracks full of single personnel and oh a hundred & fifty odd houses of married personnel and family
- PW And most of those would go and become involved with the reef system at some time or other I suppose?
- DR It's hard to judge a percentage, you know, there was a faction amongst the Americans that found this climate far too harsh for their liking. They'd come from the big cities and they chose not to take part in the lifestyle we have in Exmouth, but certainly the ones that did get involved in the fishing and diving etcetera, were right in amongst it and they had the best of - the best equipment available at the time in the way of SCUBA gear etcetera and fishing gear, and they certainly did enjoy the place.
- PW Did that equipment, like the SCUBA gear tend to filter out to the Australian community?
- DR It definitely did, yes, yes. There was lots of bartering and trade and things went on -
- PW Would it be fair to say that was an important - aspect of introducing SCUBA diving to the Australian community up this way?
- DR To a degree, some of the Americans that came here of course had a history of SCUBA diving in their previous deployment, and they brought that interest with them, and possibly nurtured it amongst their friends, and in the early days I remember they had what was called the Barracuda Club, it was a diving club here, fairly - close knit group of divers that used to regularly dive on the pier and a whole lot of spots around the cape.
- PW Has that become defunct? - Yearh, you've got the old radio going there so -(two way radio)

Tape pause to turn down radio

- DR Can you tell me about your seasonal considerations with fishing here? Have you fished at certain times of the year and not others?
- DR We have a programme ourselves where we time with the seasons, well obviously the weather governs it, the prevailing winds govern it - we regard summer as the bill-fishing season, we target the marlin and sailfish, as a tag and release situation - those outings have to be tempered with the strength of the southwesterly, the prevailing sea breeze, so its an effort to pick the days that the sea breeze holds out, and (indistinct) marlin around us during the summer months - coupled with a bit of inside the lagoon - bottom fishing for food purposes for the spangled emperor type fish. Winter time is more a gulf fishery - even though you have very often a very strong south, south easterly, and later in the day things tend to drop out a little, and you access more of the islands etcetera, - from the middle, bottom of the gulf, whalebone, north to the Muirons and Peak, Long Island, those sort of areas - all weather governed, but the billfish here, or the bigger billfish are here predominantly over the summer months. Everyone keeps a good eye on the snapper spawn, come mid-February - the winter Spaniards around the other side - Winter fishing for the pelagics other than the bill fish on the Tantabiddi side on the west coast side, is at it's peak during winter because you get those days where the easterly drops out and its very very calm around there, so the cobia, the wahoo, the Spanish mackerel, the dolphin fish and tuna are targeted during those periods - the islands around the gulf are targeted for the inshore throwing around of small trinkets, lures for the queenies, the little speedsters - the darts and trevalies and small mackerel, very close in shore and coupled with a bit of snorkelling, - the snorkelling being for the purpose of shooting fish, which I don't get involved with, but - purely the pleasure of being in the water and seeing - the beauty that is around some of these reefs

Side A: 20.6 mins

PW You mentioned the snapper spawning, when again did that occur?

DR It normally occurs around about the middle of February

PW And what happens to the spawn? The young hatchlings, do they live here?

DR The lifestyle of the snapper I couldn't throw a lot of light on. The adults come in very very close to shore inside the lagoon, inside the reef, where they seem to spend some three, possibly four weeks in very very large numbers, and they are large adult fish at that period inside the reef.

PW Have you ever seen very small snapper?

DR Yes

PW When I say small I mean fingernail size?

DR I believe that we have encountered very small fish as part of the intestine of the larger fish we have caught. To lay my mind on exactly - it was a very recent - however - no it escapes me right at this second.

PW With other fish that come here, do you know when they spawn?

DR No, not - I really don't have a big handle on the spawning activities of the fish, no.

PW Do you think anything's known about the spawning of billfish for example?

DR Unfortunately it's a world wide problem that so little is known about the billfish, because of the difficulty in actually obtaining that information - it employed sonar type attachments, but you've got to stay with them. I think it's about four hundred metres a fish.

PW Have you ever seen a small billfish?

DR Yes.

PW I mean like those (finger) size?

DR Not, no not that small.

PW Two inches?

DR No around about nine kilos is the smallest one we've ever captured, or seen. Nine kilos being a very small one from what I can glean from the information available, it would be about three months old.

PW Do they come into the close proximity of the reef?

DR That one was off the Muiron Islands within a hundred and fifty, two hundred yards of the shore however, marlin have been hooked down around Cooper's Shoal, which is some five or six nautical miles from the beach, adjacent to the light aircraft strip.

PW Do they ever come on the inside of the reef?

DR People have seen them free jumping from the shore, sails, particularly free jumping inside the reef, it is fairly rare to have that occurrence, it is, it's definitely not the norm - both marlin and sailfish have been hooked from the US Navy pier

PW Which is just on the east side of the peninsular?

DR Yes, at the northern tip on just the east side

PW A few kilometres from the lighthouse?

DR It's approximately a course heading of about eighty degrees.

PW The types of technology that you are using now, are they very different from those in the past when you first started?

DR Not vastly different, refined I think would be - and then of course the refinements fail and you go back to the old faithfuls - methods of rigging, the methods of dressing up trolling baits etcetera have evolved, but it's more marketing. I think the lures catch more bloody anglers than the do fish - and we try all these truly wonderful things and we think we're having great success until it all fails in a heap and we go back to the traditional, or the more traditional.

PW I noticed in your garage you have a very large collection of rods and reels, are they all yours?

DR Yeah.

PW And have you acquired those over the years as trials or why do you have so many?

DR We fish the tournaments in Exmouth, in fact my wife and myself were instrumental in creating a couple of the tournaments. I'm a past president of the Exmouth Game Fishing Club, and we run three tournaments a year that require different tackle. When I say different, pertaining to the line classes, we fish from one kilo through to open class, which is 60 kilo, and each one of these tournaments is a different design to target different species to provide a different style of angling to the participants.

Side A: 25 mins

PW How many rods and reels would you have?

DR I believe there's about twenty-eight, something like that out there, yeah

PW And some of those go back to your earliest days of fishing?

DR Yes, some of them do, but then some of them have been updated over the years too as the technology changes - when you get the two speed reels and things like that,

PW Have they made a lot of difference to your success?

DR I believe they put the edge in your favour, yes.

PW And what type of boat do you have?

DR - We run two boats, we've got a twenty four foot Star, that we use for the wider blue water, and we have a little fifteen foot centre console that we use for l's'pose bait collecting, garfishing, that sort of thing - a fun boat basically, inside the lagoon type boat.

PW The lagoon is the shoreward side of the reef system?

DR Exactly.

PW And so that term can apply to anywhere along the entire reef?

DR The Ningaloo Reef, yep

PW How frequently would you go into that lagoon?

DR I don't like to let too many weekends slip by, 'cause of the social pressures of Exmouth.

PW And where do you launch?

DR There are several locations that we beach launch - more often than not we launch from Tantabiddi and travel afield from there, or Town Beach, Bundegi are the other two jumping off points, depending on which particular area you want to fish, and your prevailing wind.

PW When you launch at Tantabiddi then how far would you extend out from that point?

DR Okay, last Sunday we had one of the most beautiful days one can imagine, our big boat was out of action, we wanted to go and see if we could take a sail or two, so we took the small boat down to what's called South Passage, which is approximately seven nautical miles south of Tantabiddi Passage - or Tantabiddi boat ramp. Went out through South Passage and fished up to thirty fathoms, worked that reef area from thirty fathoms into about twelve fathoms, zig zagging up and down the reef. We raised a couple of sails, we had one trash a bait, but didn't fail to hook up. A couple of small mackerels, dolphin fish, quite a pleasant day, but it's rare to get weather that good that you would safely go out there in a fifteen footer - we have done a trip, this last year that, two of us, a boat similar to mine, a little fifteen footer, we launched at Tantabiddi and went down inside the reef all the way to Coral Bay, we took three days to do that and camped mid-way being Winderabandi, about forty nautical miles down. Camped there overnight and just generally enjoyed the reef, in fact I don't think we even had a feed of fish. It was more a snorkel here, a look there, just enjoying it.

PW When you are going after the larger game fish you catch your baitfish inside the lagoon do you, and then you cross the reef to go outside?

DR Yes, we don't do a lot of live baiting. Most of our fishing technique is with what's called high speed glass - plastic lures trolled at high speed for the billfish, specifically designed for the billfish - and trolling dead baits - and these baits we gather from fishing for garfish in the gulf type regions, there's several locations that regularly produce quality garfish - put an oil slick on the water and a bit of bread, that sort of thing - which we package and store (the garfish). Mullet through the beach seine netting type situation - with the more exotic baits being the gulf mulies and small mackerel, small, like the Queensland spider type mackerel - can be got from the trawlers, which all this sort of thing which we package carefully, wrap in plastic etcetera and store in the freezer and (are) drawn upon as required.

PW Are these fish the normal food fish for those large game fish?

DR Very much so, yearh. Our studied have shown that the belly contents of fish that we have killed concur with the styles of bait that we are using.

PW That suggests that perhaps these larger game fish might come closer inshore at some time? Perhaps night time?

DR When you say inshore, I'm assuming you mean to

PW Oh, in close proximity to the reef.

DR To the outside of the reef, most definitely - we have billfish, both marlin and sailfin - I would suggest - if you are as shallow as six fathoms, which is within seventy metres of the fringing reef.

PW And do they feed usually at night, or evenings, or in the early mornings?

DR A combination - it is suggested that billfish only spend some ten percent of their day on the surface. When I say billfish, actually this relates to marlin - The rest of their life is spent at around about forty fathoms - so

they would have us believe. However, the prime times are of course daylight. It appears that there seems to be a major feed, very much regardless of tidal state. It is an enhancement having high water in the middle of the day, but it seems they come on the feed again at about one o'clock - and again at dusk is a prime feed, and these facts are born out tournament after tournament, where you might have say up to thirty boats fishing a tournament, and you are listening on the radio and it's just quiet, no ones seeing a damn thing, it's just not happening, we're just driving around wasting fuel, then you'd hear a boat, "I'm hooked up." and another, and another, and the action comes on, and it is a definite flurry of an hour, an hour and a half maybe of non-stop action and then it shuts down. - We love that late afternoon, that sort of four thirty, - through dark, the late dusk - consistently has billfish up in an active (mode).

PW Do you ever catch them in the dark?

DR I have never fished for (them) in the dark.

PW Do other people?

DR No one in Exmouth that I know - fishes for billies in the dark - we had a couple of attempts I believe going wide. When I say wide we're talking about four to six hundred fathoms, looking for broadbill swordfish, but relatively - (tape ends).

Side A tape ends: 32 mins

Side B tape starts

PW You were just saying that no one really likes fishing in the dark, and there is not much of that going on here. What I'd like to ask to is about the tagging programme. The Game Fishing Associations have to my belief been at the forefront of tagging programmes up in this direction. - Has that been a long going project?

DR We have been tagging fish I guess at Exmouth - I'll rephrase that. Tagging game fish - billfish at Exmouth for. I s'pose the best part of ten years, - personally I'm opposed to the tagging of the smaller pelagic species, I believe they stress too much. A - they've got to be handled to a degree that would stress them in the first place, and I believe the application of the tag would stress them further, and I seriously doubt that they would survive the process. - I totally agree with the tagging of the billfish, certainly as opposed to the killing thereof. I have not killed a billfish myself, for one thing it would have to be an extra special fish before I did. - Unfortunately the results aren't on the board, in fact I believe worldwide it's only about one percent of tagged fish worldwide, tagged billfish worldwide, have been recovered. The results were fairly spectacular, they bore out a lot of theories of the long haul migratory habits of these fish but for the numbers of billfish that have been tagged in Exmouth; eg over a tournament, which could be twenty. Billy's tagged - and we're talking about a relatively small area of fishery too, I suppose from Sandy Bay in the south, to the Muiron Islands in the north, with the concentration of boats fishing it would be fair to assume that one of those tagged fish would be recovered. This has not been the case, I know of no instance of a billfish being recaptured with a tag in it. There are several answers for that I s'pose. My theory is that the nylon tag that we've been using traditionally, possibly ulcerates in the skin and is rejected by the fish, - if on the other hand the fish was dying through this stress process of the tagging, they would become apparent on the surface floating, this has not been the case - and with the number of boats fishing at tournament, and their proximity to one another, and you could be in sight of six, eight, ten boats at any given time, this would be happening. You would be finding dead billfish floating on the surface, and it does not happen. - The answer to the lack of tag is a difficult one, the Billfish Foundation of America is promoting a stainless steel tag, which are possibly more permanent gesture of tagging than the simple nylon arrow, but it's possibly a little early in the day for Australia to be able to bring back any evidence of their movements from that

PW Do they recover billfish tags in America?

DR Once again, I think the percentage is one percent worldwide - possibly more have been recovered in America and Hawaii, although too little tagging is done in Hawaii, they're a table species in Hawaii - I s'pose the answer for America is the fact that the pressure of the fisheries there, there are so many boats, the boat hours

in America are just staggering, and yet I s'pose six days a week at Exmouth, there's not one boat out looking for a billfish, so the pressures are just totally different.

PW Would you spend more time fishing for billfish, or more time - fishing in the lagoon for smaller fish?

DR - My preference is to billfish - it is to me the most exciting form of the game fishing. Of course there is a lot of time put for very little result - we temper our fishing, we like to take part in quite a few diverse aspects of the fishery, be it the inshore snapper fishing, or catching "gars" from the rocks of whatever.

PW Do you read fishing literature?

DR I - I don't subscribe to any publications - if it's available, if it's on somebody's coffee table I'll have a look at it, but - it's like all specialist type magazines, after you've read a couple of publications they're all (the) same, it's the same information rehashed, with little actual information coming out of it, and massive revelations sort of thing. From time to time I'll buy the *Marlin Magazine* that comes out of America. That's quite an interesting publication.

Side B: 5.3 mins

PW Have you ever appeared in any of those magazines?

DR Yes we have, yeah. We had a journalist, Shane Mensforth come over from South Australia, he writes, I think it was for fishing world, an Australian publication, and fished, from memory I think it was the first billfish tournament we held at Exmouth, and he fished that tournament with us, and then did a bit of an article on us, on our boat and the tournament, and we tagged two marlin in that tournament.

PW have you ever had any religious factors relating to fishing activities - has there this ever influenced you? I ask about it because there are people that - professional fishermen become involved with blessing of the fleet, and some people won't go fishing on a Friday.

DR No, none whatsoever.

PW You've never had any (indistinct) like that?

DR Keep the bananas off the boat, that's about it.

PW No bananas on the boat?

DR No bananas.

PW Why bananas?

DR You go overboard if you have bananas?

PW Why, you slip on them do you?

DR No, it's just produces no fish

PW Could you expand on that?

DR It's a myth amongst game fishermen that bananas on a boat are bad luck, and it is widely held and believed: a the point that - pre-tournament antics would possibly be a crew member from an opposing team slipping some bananas down your gunwale or something like that, and it is widely accepted as being (chuckle)

PW Well there you go, is there anything else like that?

DR That's the only one that I'm aware of.

PW Well you've told me many interesting things, is there something that I should have perhaps asked you that I have overlooked, that you might like to expand upon?

DR My observations purely, is my involvement with (the) Recreational Fishing Advisory Council, and being a keen recreational fisherman myself, is that at long last, possibly to late, I mean that every thing comes too late, we are now finally getting a handle on the management of both the recreational and the professional fishery - I think for example, M.G. Kailis is - are now proving they're a very responsible participant in the Exmouth fishery - their practices have been changed, and - allowances have been made. They've refined their fishing techniques. They've been regarded as the bad guys for many years, be it true or be it false, but everyone likes to blame poor old Michael, and - that they are certainly always willing to share their knowledge and techniques, and theories. - The recreational fisherman himself is starting to abide by a form of decency insofar as capture limits etcetera, the days of plundering fortunately are starting to - they are certainly on the demise. The freezer brigade is falling away, fortunately it's being made too hard for them. So hopefully we are on the road to recovery, we'll certainly put the brakes on if we are not on the road to recovery. So there is a - certainly a chance that future generations will have something to come here and fish for. It could well have been saved, but it appears that all of the agencies involved are heading certainly in the right direction, it might be slowly, but that's the way the wheels turn. But I believe that certainly the group that I mix with, the people that I'm involved with - we've all evolved personally to the point of understanding that there is a limit to the resource, and that some of the practices were just totally obscene and fortunately those days have gone, so hopefully the future holds well.

PW What practices were obscene?

DR Large parties of fishermen coming up here and becoming so intense that they worked on a roster system to catch fish in excess, to package, freeze and return south, more fish than one could ever possibly expect to eat in a year, or certainly in the freezer life of the fish anyway. The name of the game was numbers, (for example they'd say) "I went to Shark Bay and caught two hundred snapper." "I went to Exmouth and caught sixty mackerel." and this sort of thing. Fortunately some of that mentality appears to be disappearing, well hopefully it's disappearing. Don't get me wrong, they were quite - it was quite - see (to be) and - acceptable way of thinking back in those days of course, where (now) we have hopefully evolved to that point where it is no longer acceptable, and we believe now, that one should only take what you require for you immediate consumption.

Side B: 10.4 mins

PW Do those days of excessive catches tend to be fairly exclusively male operations?

DR I would say definitely yes.

PW So there was a macho element to it?

DR Yeah I guess it was more often than not, and certainly from my observations of Shark Bay and the Ningaloo area it was half a dozen mates (would) get together and load the truck with as many cartons as you possible can and then trade them in for fish once you get there. I s'pose that's the blindest way of putting it

PW Cartons of beer? And did they leave a lot of litter as a result of that too?

DR Absolutely - Absolutely - litter in every form.

PW Did they damage the terrestrial environment?

DR Yes they did, in so far as - for argument's sake the gas barbecues weren't as prevalent as they are now, so people required firewood for cooking and heating in the cooler months, and naturally a lot of the coastal shrubbery was denuded for firewood - It was common practice rather than to cart out your rubbish, to a

suitable location, that holes were dug and the rubbish was buried in holes, as was human waste. - And of course time and wind sweeps these coverings of sand away and the rubbish is exposed. Fortunately those practices are changing, and I would say litter wise the beaches have possibly not been in a better state for some twenty years, thirty years.

PW Well Des I thank you very much for the opportunity to interview you, it's been extremely interesting, and I'd like to wish you all the best for the future, and hope that your fishing here remains successful.

DR Thankyou very much, we are working towards that aim.

PW Thankyou.

Side B: Interview ends. 12.4 mins



Des Ryan with a prize fish

Transcript of Interview

Interviewee: Douglas Charles Schmidt

Address: C - Peoples' Caravan park, Coral Bay, via Carnarvon.
WA. 6701.

Phone: 08 99425988

Date of birth: 15 July 1943 (55)

Date of interview: 12/3/1998

Place: Progress Association's room, Coral Bay

Side A 32 mins

Side B 18.6 mins

Total 50.6 mins

Interviewer & transcriber: Dr Paul R. Weaver

Subject: Ningaloo - recreational

Side A: Permanent resident of Coral Bay for 10 years. Charmed by pristine quality of beaches, waters, isolation. Tackle always adequate to ensure fish capture. Number of visitors increasing substantially in past decade. Good fish still to be had within walking distance of Coral Bay. Visitors lose a lot of tackle on reefs. Some fish species have noticeably lessened - spangled emperor, "Charlie Court" cod. Claims by others of how prolific fish were in past could be exaggerated. Reef dynamics - sand covering. Fish feeding - increases numbers. Sharks - types - most in summer. Personal discovery of conservation ethic.

Side B: Personal fishing range. Most popular species with public. Freezing of fillets for public at supermarket. Commercial entrepreneurs continually seeking new, more distant grounds for large fish. Feels Coral Bay fishery still has plenty of fishing opportunities, but requires appropriate strategies. Religion at Coral Bay. Personal preferences with cooking fish.



- PW This interview is being recorded on the 11th March 1998 at Coral Bay with Doug Schmidt. Doug for the record could you please give your full name and your date of birth.
- DS - I'm Douglas Charles Schmidt, and date of birth, 15th of July 1943.
- PW Doug, you've been living in Coral Bay for some time, how long have you been here?
- DS On a permanent basis Paul, I've been here for ten years, and this is the tenth year - came up on the first of January 1988 to stay here as a permanent resident.
- PW And you're working here?
- DS And been working here from that time, yes.
- PW What do you do at Coral Bay?
- DS At the present time I'm working for the Coral Bay Supermarket and Outdoor Centre - prior to that my first original job up here - I came up as manager of the Coral Bay shopping village in the Peoples' Caravan Park
- PW You've seen a lot of changes take place?

DS And quite a few changes from a very basic, very rustic - original buildings, to what it is now, with a lot more lawn, a lot more trees, and gradually building up from where we had twenty seven people working here, to now where it's a little over a hundred people.

PW Doug, when was the first time you came to Coral Bay?

DS I'm not exactly certain of the year, but it would be in the mid seventies - I read a small article in the daily newspaper in Perth, I thought well that looks like quite a nice little place, I think I'll nip up there for a holiday, and from that first time, I've been returning every year on holidays, until 1998 when I came up on a permanent basis.

PW Have you always come up by yourself on those holidays?

DS Always, yes.

PW And have you been a fisherman?

DS I've been a recreational fisherman all that time - fishing has been one of my hobbies ever since I was a child, and I've always been very interested in whether it be boat fishing or beach fishing, I seem to think that beach fishing is a little bit - my favourite, more so than boat fishing.

PW Where did you fish as a child?

DS The majority of the fishing was done at the North Mole at Fremantle, the North Wharf, and the Swan River around the Nedlands jetty area.

PW Did you used to fish with your father?

DS With dad, and my brothers, not so much the sisters and mum, but my brothers and dad and I, we'd always be going down on a fairly regular basis, nearly every weekend.

PW What were your impressions when you came to Coral Bay, the first impressions of the place?

DS Well first impressions, I really liked it because I had a feeling that I would like it from the article in the paper, and then when I got up here and found out that it was so remote - the beaches that you could walk on and fish were absolutely empty of people. You could be totally by yourself when fishing - the water was different for a start, it was - well I called it tropical water, and because of the coral reef - so different to Perth, and the fish, the species, totally different from anything that I'd had before and been connected with.

PW Can you remember the types of fish that you used to catch when you first came here?

DS Well the main fish up here, which everybody I think fishing from the beach would be aiming for, is still the spangled emperor, and that's still the major fish for people to catch, although there are tons of other types of fish, but catching a nice spangled emperor from the beach, especially where there's rocks and reef, it's a pretty mean effort, because they are a very good fighting fish, especially off the beach.

PW Was the sporing element important to you in your fishing?

DS It was reasonably important, although I must admit I've always been a fish person for the plate, I didn't want to lose the fish, so I'd never really get down into really light tackle - always fished with tackle which I thought would be capable handling just about anything that I could possibly run into under those conditions.

Side A: 5.2 mins

PW So your tackle's usually been fairly heavy?

DS I'd say medium tackle, I wouldn't say heavy tackle, there are occasions when I've thrown out a big heavy hand line - more so because there've been sharks around, you might want to catch a small one, but standard beach fishing tackle, ten foot rod, or an eight foot rod, normal Baitcaster reel and average line breaking strain would be anything from 15 to 20 pound breaking strain.

DS Now I just can't remember if we pinned down actually what year you probably first came up here. Was that in the 1970s was it?

DS In the mind-1970s, so it would be approximately, say 1976 we could say would be the first year.

PW How many other fishermen would you have seen in that first few visits, like on a visit like that?

DS - Beach fisher people, not a tremendous amount. The majority of people coming into Coral Bay would be bringing in boats - dinghies, anything say from 10 foot to 14 foot, and then larger boats which were capable of going out into the ocean, that'd be anything say from and 18 foot boat though to a 25 foot boat. The beach fisher people, they would be a minority, more their secondary object up here.

PW The road coming in in the mid-seventies, was that a good road, or was it a difficult road?

DS Well it was classed as the second worst road in Australia at one stage, and when asking other people what was the first - major road that they went on which they would describe as the worst in Australia, was the Gibb River Road, and then the Coral Bay turnoff road was the next.

PW So it must have been quite hard to get something like a twenty five foot boat into Coral Bay on a trailer in those times?

DS It was pretty difficult, there was a lot of damage done to trailers, boat trailers and also to caravans, and also to vehicles themselves - corrugation was quite severe, and also just general pot-holes.

PW And was the road to Exmouth sealed at that time as well?

DS The road to Exmouth through, was sealed, yes.

PW Where did the fisher people mostly come from in that time, from Exmouth, or from elsewhere?

DS No funnily enough there wasn't a tremendous amount of people from Exmouth or Carnarvon coming into Coral Bay - there was a lot through the season, through the winter season, who'd be coming up from Perth and the south west of the country, or the state. There would be a lot of people coming in from the iron ore towns, Goldsworthy, Karratha, Dampier, Newman, Paraburdoo, - towns like that, they would come in here to Coral Bay; and the other group of people that would always come into Coral Bay would be the surrounding station people, or the people that had properties, they would come into Coral Bay. They would mainly come in during the Christmas new year period, occasionally throughout the year - and the other people naturally during their working holidays and the major holidays of the year.

PW Obviously the interest in Coral Bay has increased since you have been here - but when did you start to notice increasing numbers of people?

DS Well from being up here on a permanent basis in 1988 - that was when I started seeing that Coral Bay was starting to become recognised throughout the state as a holiday place - so for quite a few years then, up to say, 1991, '92, Coral Bay was a very good holiday destination from a lot of people during the winter months - say from the beginning of Easter, through to the end of June, sorry, end of September - after 1991, '92, because of the word that had started getting out that Coral Bay was a really, really top place on account of the reef that's here, the Ningaloo Reef, - the bus companies and the tour operators started coming in, the backpacker situation was starting to be catered for by the people at the hotel and also the Bay View Caravan Park, where accommodation for backpackers was set up. I think ever since that time they've basically been

le A: 10 mins

filled with people travelling by bus or vehicle, staying in backpacker situations - and naturally the general public of WA getting to know more about Coral Bay, so we'd be getting more visitors coming up, to the extent that where the majority - or the major period of the time would be the month of July, and Coral Bay would be totally packed out, every camp site would be taken up and every piece of accommodation would be fully booked out.

PW Has there been an estimation of how many people are here at those particular times?

DS A rough estimate given by people over the years would be that - the most that could possibly fit into Coral Bay would be two and a half to three thousand people, at any one given time, that's basically all that Coral bay would be able to cater for.

PW And that includes residents as well?

DS And that includes the people that are here as well.

PW And that happens pretty regularly these days?

DS Oh yes, as I say, the busy period, the winter period - starting as from the Easter holidays and going right through to September, - over the Easter weekend, the first term school holidays, the July school holidays and the third term school holidays, you would have two thousand people, two thousand five hundred people, quite comfortably here.

PW And do you think a lot of those people would attempt to catch fish?

DS There'd be quite a few would, - and a lot do catch fish and a lot don't catch fish.

PW The store where you work sells fishing tackle?

DS Yes.

PW Do you sell a lot of fishing tackle?

DS We sell a lot, yep.

PW What type, what sort of fishing tackle do you mostly sell?

DS The main amount of tackle is what I term, terminal tackle, that's on the end of the line. Hooks, sinkers, swivels, all that type of gear.

PW That's already made up is it?

DS Oh no, you can buy that in single packs, and that's the majority of it. We do sell fishing rods, we do sell fishing reels and we sell a lot of fishing line, but the majority of the goods that we do sell are what as I say, as terminal tackle, that's on the end of the line where the fish are going to be. So the hooks and the sinkers and the swivels etcetera, and the lures.

PW And is there a high loss of that sort of equipment amongst people that fish? Do they buy that because they're losing tackle?

DS They buy it because they are losing tackle due to the conditions up here, due to their lack of knowledge - people are forever throwing their gear out onto the reef instead of throwing it onto the sand, so naturally all they are going to do is catch a lump of rock, and the rock's always going to win

PW Do you go regularly fish now, yourself?

DS Oh yes, I go on a fairly regular basis, I like to get out at least once a week, weather permitting, which is quite often really - I have become a bit of a fine weather fisherman. I don't really like getting out when the wind's howling a gale, but on a nice evening, or a nice night, or during the days off

PW Do you fish in the immediate proximity to Coral Bay or do you go further afield?

DS No. It'd have to be classed as the immediate proximity, from where my caravan is in the caravan park, I can walk fifteen minutes to spots where I like to fish, I could walk a half an hour to other spots, or I could walk for an hour to other spots and fish. It's really not too far away and if you do catch a couple of fish it's not too difficult to carry them home.

Side A: 15 mins

PW You don't use a four wheel drive to get to more remote places?

DS No, I have gone out with other people that do have four wheel drive vehicles, and gone out to other places to fish, I'd still say it's within the immediate vicinity of Coral Bay because it's all well within five kilometres to eight kilometres.

PW Do you have a car?

DS I don't have a car myself, no.

PW And you are a single man?

DS Single man.

PW So you must be approaching to be one of Coral bay's first millionaires? (chuckle)

DS I'd like to think so, but no, that's not quite right, if someone hasn't got a car to spend money on I think they'll always find something else like a hotel or a restaurant.

PW The changes to you fishing over the years - have you noticed changes taking place in your fishing activities, for availability of fish, and where you've gone to fish?

DS Well yes, there's definitely been changes, - being in the public eye, working behind the counter, and also being a drinker, drinking at the hotel, you tend to be able to see the majority of people, and talk to the majority of people that come into Coral Bay, listening to them talk, especially those that - have been coming up here for a very long time, when I say a long time I mean, oh over the last fifteen to twenty years, and I think it's the case, of no matter where you go, the story is always it's never like it used to be, it was always better in the good old days. But I can remember the first trip coming up here on a holiday, and it took me three days to catch a decent fish from the beach, so if they were the good old days, and it took three days to catch a decent fish, I think something was wrong. Whether it was my technique, or, I don't think so though. But there are days when you do catch fish and there are days when you don't catch fish, and my way of looking at it is you pick and choose what you go for, you cannot just say I want to catch this type of fish and go down and catch it, you can start off with wanting to catch a good fish, and then you've got to find out where that fish is, and then go for it. People have been coming up for years, they've all had various little secret spots or areas where they like to go fishing and they say they could come up here now and not catch fish like they used to in the good old days, but they can still catch the same type of fish, possibly not in the same numbers that they did back then, and because they were catching them in the numbers back then that maybe the reason why they can't do it now.

PW So definitely now, some species are in lesser numbers now than they were in the past?

DS There would be some yes, I don't really know how you could single one particular - two particular species out - I suppose the fish that you would have to mention would be the spangled emperor, and also I would

imagine, the rock cod, like what's colloquially known as "Charlie Court" which is really just a rock cod.¹ Where at one time you'd be able to come up here, go down to like Five Fingers, or areas like that south of Five Fingers, or even just to Monk's head, and you'd be able to catch spangled emperor, Charlie Courts, you still can, but I think nowadays you do have to follow all of the correct procedures for fishing as in, fishing early in the morning, fishing early in the evening, or late at night, and fishing on a rising tide - I don't think that you could just go down to these places at any given time, throw a line in and catch a fish, I think you have to put a lot more thought and work into it.

PW People say that they could do that in the past - would you agree with that?

DS I think they'd be exaggerating quite a bit really, they would have good days and they would have bad days - they would always talk about the good days more so than the bad days.

PW Have you noticed any changes to the overall marine environment in this area? Like changes to the Coral Reefs?

Side A: 20 mins

DS I've noticed quite a bit, really, and it's not so much through peoples' impact, it'd be more on nature's impact over the period of times you'll get - where parts of the reef are covered with beach sand, and during parts of the year that gets uncovered and coral grows, shell life comes back. There are areas where boating has had an effect, especially right where the - boat launching section is, which is only natural, and must be - accepted, over a period of boats coming here for twenty five years, in numbers that they are now, they have to have an effect.

PW What sort of effect have they had?

DS Well I don't think it's a tremendous effect, I think it's an effect of - some coral which has been very close inshore which has been covered by sand - and some has died, but still very close to shore there is still beautiful coral. Different types, you've still got your staghorn still have your plate corals - lavender corals, cabbage corals - they are all still there, and at various times of the year they are a little bit more prominent than other times. Anybody coming into Coral Bay can still walk down to the main part of the beach, swim thirty metres out and be in extremely nice coral, and as far as the fish in the area, they tend to be getting more and more, the reef fish themselves which are naturally not caught - and the larger fish which are targeted by fishermen, they are still here, and you can go out at any time of the year and see these fish in numbers, and I think any damage that has been done has been minimal, when you take into account or consideration the numbers of people that have been here in the past twenty five years.

PW You mentioned that you thought some fish were increasing in numbers in these areas, what do you put that down to?

DS Where the fish are increasing would be say, right in the very part of the bay where you have the tour operators operating from - they do have fish feeding on a daily basis during the season there - where they've encouraged the spangled emperor to come in close so that the general tourist could walk down into knee deep water and see these fish being fed - that's attracted them into the bay, they've become quite used to that, in fact they will even follow the tour boats around. Over the years that practice has been going on - various types of foods have been used. It started off with just using ordinary bread, now they use a - specified fish meal type food, which is a special preparation, which is supposed to be a lot better for the fish than natural breads or normal human foods, and wherever this sort of activity takes place, naturally all your other smaller fish, all the little reef fish and that, also come in and join in the feast of free feeding. I think over the years they've become totally used to that, their numbers have increased from where there would have been a half a dozen or a dozen large fish, lots of small fish, now there are lots and lots of big fish as well as lots and lots of small fish.

PW The feeding of the fish is with a special food, you mentioned that. Has that been specified by someone like

¹ A fish with a large mouth, named for a former state premier.

the Fisheries Department, or the Conservation and Land Management, or has it been developed by the operators themselves?

DS I think it was - I would have to put it down as Conservation and Land Management were the ones that instigated the special food for feeding the fish - through there, how could I say - their experience of what has been happening on the Barrier Reef in Queensland - studying the fish feeding over there by the general public, which naturally everybody uses is just bread, and they thought, well you know, it can't be right, you know, feeding on such a scale - a food which is not a natural food for them. I think they've looked into it and they've come along to the operators here and said, you know, 'We believe that it's bad for them using the bread as such, and it would be better if you used specially constituted pellets which would be more in liking to their natural food, so I think that's where all that came from

Side A: 25 mins

PW So it's now some sort of pellet type food?

DS It's like a pellet type food which they can throw in.

PW And - those feeding activities, do they extend only in the Coral Bay area, or do they go further along the coast?

DS No it's basically just where the tour operators are - got their boats working - all within the general vicinity of Coral Bay itself.

PW How far out do the tour operators go with their excursions?

DS Oh when you - when we say tour operators here you could put it into two sections, you'd have the coral viewing tours, that's incorporating glass bottomed boats or boats with viewing panels to be able to go out to see the coral and the fish, their operations would not to take them more than - well all within the lagoon area, possibly - up to one kilometre from the beach itself. Usually much closer than that because of the coral, they don't have to travel further than that. Snorkelling operators, or doing snorkelling trips, they would travel a little bit further to get away from - the general mass of people, and they actually don't do fish feeding, but - they would go to areas where they know that there are fish, and where the coral is quite nice - where they can get into slightly deeper water for the people to enjoy themselves a lot more, then just what they could naturally do from the shore itself.

PW You mentioned sharks earlier on - did they used to be a problem for fishing here?

DS Well sharks are a problem anywhere where you're fishing if they decide to turn up. They've got a big open ocean out there, and yes there are sharks out there, and sometimes during the course of the year, there'll be a period when sharks are plentiful, and they really can upset your day's fishing where to the point you'd have to up anchor and leave that position and try and find another position.

PW What time of the year are they most plentiful?

DS - I would say around about this time of the year (March) and also in the past months.

Pause for someone at door

PW Okay, I'm sorry, the end of the year that you said the sharks were most plentiful?

DS When coming into summertime - I'm not too certain whether they come in closer to breed, I've never studied that, but usually around February they do become quite active out there in the ocean and they seem to be around a lot more than during the colder months, but they are there for twelve months of the year.

PW What sort of species do you see here?

DS Starting at the top of the tree, you would see tiger sharks - there are a few hammerheads, I've never yet to see a hammerhead shark, I've seen plenty of tiger sharks. A lot of whalers, bronze whalers and black tipped whalers, and then you get a few more of the exotic type ones if you are out in a nice boat tonking along there, quite often you can - well not quite often, but occasionally you'll run across a thresher shark or a leopard shark, just lazing on the surface, and it's really great to see them.

PW Do some of the whaler sharks come in close to shore?

DS Yeah, they will come in close to shore, we're very lucky here that - sharks being sharks they don't like to get in amongst coral a lot, except for the little reef sharks, - but your major type of sharks, the black tipped whalers or your little bronze whalers and that, they like open water, and people coming up here to Coral Bay can still go out snorkelling on top of the coral and that sort of thing in the daytime and not have any problems at all, they'd be extremely lucky if they did manage to see a shark, whereas if you get out into the open ocean, a little bit further out where there is no coral, it is open water, naturally you will see the larger type of shark.

PW Have you ever heard of sharks taking an interest in people?

DS I would think taking an interest in people would be just showing a little bit of curiosity, if they see something in the water.

PW Have there been any attacks?

DS Not to my knowledge here, we've had - people that have been spearfishing in areas that have come across sharks, or sharks have come across them - people out boating, snorkelling, they've come across sharks, but naturally it's their environment so they are allowed to be there, and I don't think that they pose any problems whatsoever if people just use their common sense.

PW Have you seen and changes in your own values towards fishing since you first started coming here, for example a greater awareness of ecological considerations?

DS Oh definitely, I think coming up through my era, it was always a case if you go fishing, you go fishing to catch fish. There were bag limits that were put down and I think the majority of people have stuck to bag limits, or daily bag limits. - There have been a lot of people that don't take any notice of that sort of thing and would catch as much as they could possibly catch, but for myself personally - I must admit that it's been good to go out there in earlier times and catch your daily bag limit. Now I think it's a better idea just to go out and catch a couple of fish, and for the pan, specialise in the type of fishing that you are trying to do, instead of just catch, catch, catch. And make it more of a - well becoming more conservation minded, releasing fish, putting more fish back in after catching them, sticking strictly to the daily bag limits, and the possession limits that are now in force, but the changes over the years have been reasonably steady for the better, as I say, people coming along, and myself included in this, catching as much as possible, now realising that you can't do that all the time.

Side A. tape ends: 32 mins

Side B. tape starts

PW Have there been pockets of resistance to changes - reduction of catch limits?

DS I think you'd always find, as you term, pockets of resistance, but I think - those sort of people, they - would not change for anybody. They think that they've got a God given right to do whatever they like where ever they like, when ever they like. Thankfully it's such a small minority of people that I don't think they would have any impact on it as now.

PW Are there still people like that?

DS You'd find one or two.

PW - And would they be resident here or would they just be visitors, or what?

DS No, they'd be people that would be visiting. I think that every resident here in Coral Bay is fairly conservation minded, they understand that - the people are coming to Coral Bay to catch a fish, to see the coral, to enjoy what the ocean has got here, and they understand that they want to keep it here for as long as possible, so they are very conservation minded.

PW Ningaloo Reef's quite a long - structure, have you been to other parts of Ningaloo Reef, apart from the immediate area of Coral Bay?

DS Well the Ningaloo Reef is 260 kilometres in length - taking from - Exmouth, all the way down to Point Amherst - I would say that - the majority of my time has been spent here in Coral Bay itself - directly around the immediate environs of Coral Bay, going out to sea from Coral Bay, maybe up to ten miles distance, going south of Coral Bay, I would say no more than - another ten miles, and going north to Coral Bay, (indistinct) a little bit further, getting up to say - oh fifteen - did I say miles?

PW Miles.

DS Right, fifteen miles, I still can't get away from them.

PW That's okay - so your radius of operations is really between ten and fifteen miles from Coral Bay? (16 - 24km)

DS From Coral Bay itself, yeah.

PW And when you go out, say fifteen miles, is there a noticeable difference in the availability of fish at that distance, compared to here?

DS Compared to beach fishing or compared to boat fishing in (indistinct)

DS Well of the type of fishing that you do - would you have expected to have better fishing fifteen miles north of here?

DS You would expect to, because - the lack of people, the less amount of people travelling out to there over a given time - but you change your style of fishing to fishing for different types of fish - closer in shore, you'd still be going for spangled emperor - that would be the major fish that you would go for - Baldchin groper,² which to my mind is the best eating one. And you'd also do some surface fishing for the pelagics such as wahoo, Spanish mackerel, etcetera. Going out further into the deeper water, travelling say from a depth of thirty metres - going out to that fifteen miles, or between ten and fifteen miles out to sea, you'd be looking at depths of seventy to eighty metres. The types of fish there vary slightly, whereas the top fish out there would be the red emperor,³ that everybody would like to catch, but there's also the spangled emperor¹ and the other types of emperor there available, and the baldchin, but there's one or two species that you wouldn't get in close, that you do get out there further

PW The spangled emperor, you've said that's the most popular fish, is that a large fish?

DS It's quite a large fish - the largest one that I've seen would weigh in at six kilos, that's quite a very big fish, that would be as big as what you would possibly ever get one. Average - good average size that people would talk about - say and they caught a good fish, would be - four kilos.

² *Choerodon rubescens* (max. weight about 7 kg)

³ *Lutjanus sebae* (max. weight about 16 kg)

⁴ *Lethrinus nebulosus* (max. weight about 6.5 kg)

PW And what are the qualities that make that fish so desirable?

Side B: 5 mins

DS That's a very good eating fish, and the other thing about it is, if you do catch one, it freezes very well also, so that when you do thaw it out to recook later on, it has got its flavour, it does retain its flavour and its keeping qualities, there are some fish which you sort of eat immediately because they're very nice when they're fresh, but they won't have any flavour to them, they sort of become quite bland after freezing, and then thawing out, but the spangled emperor, and the red emperor and any type of emperor is really - they do freeze very well, hold their flavour, so that if you catch them while you're on holiday, it's taken back home, you can still eat them down there and thoroughly enjoy the taste

PW Do a lot of people take fish back home?

DS Quite a few, yes - I think everybody coming in here to actually fish at Coral Bay, have the idea in mind that they'll fish here in Coral bay, have some fish meals while they're here, and also take some fish back home.

PW Do you think that's a good idea?

DS I think so at the present time, as long as they restrict themselves to the possession limit which is in force here at the present time - the possession limit to my mind is - quite good, its - caters for the fisher person who has a little bit of luck going on his side. I don't think one could turn around and say, 'Well I'll only catch X amount of fish and that's it, just for a feed.' and if they can come here to Coral Bay and catch a bigger fish, eat some of it, be able to take some back home, its a good thing. I don't think anybody - I wouldn't like to see anybody abusing the situation as would be people would remember in years gone past, people coming up here, filling absolutely filling freezers and taking them back down, to keep them in fish supply for over a twelve month period. I don't think that's happening that much, I don't think the abuse of the system is happening any more. Maybe in a very small percentage of people are doing it, but as I say, they are getting less and less every year.

PW Do any businesses offer fish freezing facilities for people who come here?

DS They do yes, there are fish freezing facilities here, people can - catch their fish, package it, bring it in and have it frozen and held in a freezer for until they depart to go home. Then they can pack it into their Esky and take off.

PW Which businesses provide that service?

DS The supermarket does that - I'm not to certain if I could mention anybody else, because I don't really know if they definitely do or not, but the supermarket does do - freezing for people.

PW And do you charge for that?

DS There is a charge, yes.

PW What's the charge for freezing fish?

DS We charge two dollars per night for freezing - that's say for an average package of - say roughly a half a milk crate size, not necessarily fish, it could also be their own stocks - fresh meat and that sort of thing that they bring up here. Or anything else that they would like to freeze - a lot of people like block ice - Block ice is not available in Coral bay, some people like to put in their plastic bottles of water, and have them frozen

PW With the fish, - what do you have a container that people can put their fish into - Is that how it works?

DS When holding fish with people, by law - what they do is they have their fish filleted, that is individually wrapped and their names are put on that, and if they haven't got a carton themselves to be able to put that

fish into, we'll just supply like something similar to a milk crate or a cardboard carton, just to pack that fish into so it doesn't get mixed up with other people's fish. If they have a complete whole fish, that's always wrapped in plastic and naturally they have to be gilled and gutted before we can do that for them, and we can hold that in the freezer for them.

PW And you wrap the fish in plastic for them do you?

DS No they do that themselves. They do that themselves. And can they keep adding to their cache of fish day by day as they go along, is that what happens?

B: 10 mins

They can, up to a certain point - possession limit here in - Coral Bay is for X amount of kilos of processed fish, like fillets, and X amount of fish complete, like a -. Now possession limit is at any given time, so you cannot just keep catching fish and adding to whatever you have in your possession. So - we would only keep X amount of fish for people, and let them know that if they're going over and above that, that they are breaking the law.

PW And I suppose, can your store also be liable if you're keeping more than the legal quantity of fish for people (indistinct)?

DS Through the law, yes we could be liable for that - what the people do - as I say, they do have to package their fish, they have to have their name on it, kept in a carton. If an inspector comes in he can have a look in the freezer and say, 'Right, there's a box that's got fish fillets in, who does that belong to?' He'll check that out, he'll see that it's processed fish or a whole fish, it's got the person's name on it, we have a book underneath the counter. There's the book with that chaps name on, what's in there, X amount of fillets of fish, X amount of whole fish, the type that they are, the date that they were put into the freezer and the approximate time when he's going to be leaving.

PW And how long have you offered this service?

DS Oh, ever since the supermarket was operational, and also ever since the - laws regarding that came in.

PW Is it an important part of the supermarket's business?

DS It's not an important part of the - unless you call it - terms - service to the general public, an important part, it's part and parcel of service to the general public, to be able to do that, to hold the fish for people that have come here for a holiday period, and want to retain fish to be able to take back with them.

PW And do a lot of people take advantage of that service?

DS I wouldn't say a lot of people, there are quite a few people - and I would like to see it happening as well too - that's why you can also have a little bit of say in the actual control of how things are operating around the place - we can - group of chaps will come up, or family groups will come up, they will catch fish, they'll go out on a fishing charter, they'll catch more than what they need are while they're on holiday - they can have it frozen down, and take away for them, and I think it's a service which needs to be kept going.

PW Doug, you've told me lots of interesting things, is there anything I haven't asked you that you'd like to particularly mention, or discuss in relation to the history of fishing here?

DS Well I'm as I say a recreational fisherman, I do love catching fish from the beach, but it's not only going down and catching big amounts of fish, or big fish. I do enjoy going down with a little flick rod and light line catching garfish, and I do enjoy catching nice whiting, and I do enjoy going down and flicking out a lure occasionally and just - more for the sports side of it, all of that's still totally available up here at Coral Bay - anybody can come up here and catch a fish, but they do have to work for it, and they have to fish properly - would be the same as down in Fremantle, you can't just go down to Fremantle and catch a fish, you have to know what you're doing. But the diversity of fishing up here is very very good, and I think a lot of people

tend to forget that. They always think, 'Oh go to Coral Bay and I might catch a spangled emperor, or catch a red emperor.' or catch this or catch that or catch a big something - and they tend to lose track of the fact that there are beautiful small fish here, the whiting, garfish, and the smaller type of fish for eating, trevally, golden trevally - and that's what I like to see people catching, but there is so much here for fishing, it could cater for everybody - the charter operators taking out fishing people on fishing trips, on daily fishing trips. they do a very good job, and they are now spreading out quite a lot further, going to areas where they haven't fished before, finding new grounds, and you can basically say they are farming the area, so that they are not just clearing it out all in one hit, or in one area.

PW They're finding new grounds, are they - is that an ongoing thing. looking for - new grounds?

DS It's always an ongoing thing if these people have got - their future in front of them, they put money into boats, they want to be able to take people out and for the people to be able to catch a fish to come back and have a feed of fish, so they're continually looking around, they've found X amounts of spots already where they can go and be assured, or almost guaranteed of catching a fish, so they're always looking for new avenues as well, where they can go to - further south, further west, further north.

Side B: 15.2 mins

PW One of the questions I ask fishermen - about is their spiritual association with the fisheries - in some places we have Blessing of the Fleets, amongst professional fishermen, I don't think there's any church facilities here in Coral Bay is there?

DS Not a church facility, there are church services which happen here - a Catholic priest comes down on occasions - and also there is an Anglican priest will come to Coral Bay as well for - certain functions such as feasts or holiday periods, Christmas time, Easter time, that - you know, to celebrate the religious feast days

PW Do any of those services relate directly to fishing activities?

DS Not really, not unless it's on a personal basis, somebody going along to these churches saying, 'Please God help me catch a better fish the next time.' but - no, no really, no relationship between the two

PW Do - are you aware of any of the commercial operators, operating tours and things like that, do they have their boats blessed, or that sort of thing?

DS Not to my knowledge has anybody ever let me know that they've done that, no, so I would have to say that there's nothing on a public scale such as what they have at the Fremantle, the Blessing of the Fleet, Jurien Bay, the Blessing of the Fleet there, where the commercial crayfishing and fishing boats are getting out there in quite large numbers, and they've turned that into a - not totally religious day, but they've turned it into a set occasion throughout the year, I think Coral Bay would be far too small for something like that to happen.

PW Have you - had any perceptions of improved health from your fishing activities, or have you had any problems from fishing activities?

DS Oh I haven't had any problems from fishing activities. I've nicked my finger with the fishing knife occasionally, and I've stuck myself with a hook. I think my health has improved by being a beach fisherman and getting out into the open air and doing the miles of walking that I do do, and it's definitely helping me - The actual eating of the fish, I thoroughly enjoy that and as the people are saying now, well fish are very good for you, and if you eat one fish meal a week, you've reduced your chances of heart attack by fifty percent, that's the latest in the paper that I read.

PW How often do you eat fish a week?

DS Oh it would be once or twice, on average. Some weeks where I might have three or four fish meals

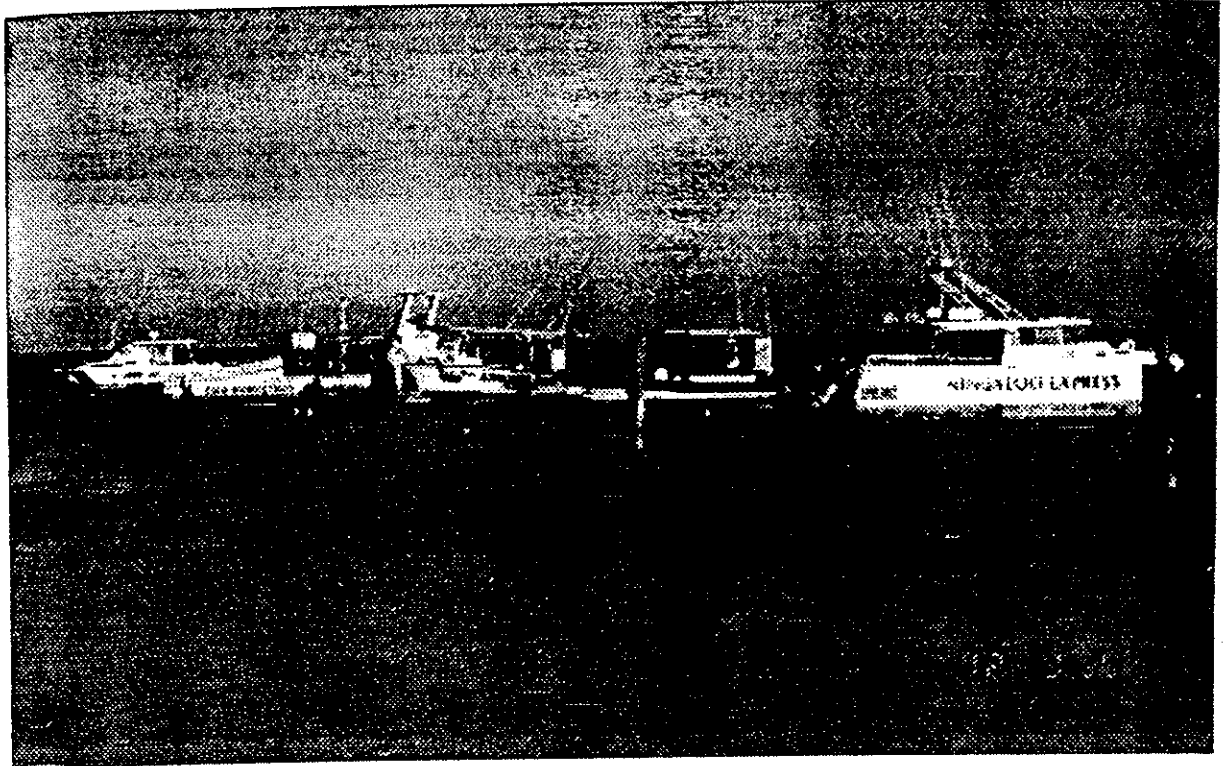
PW And how do you usually cook 'em?

DS My own cooking, I personally like just pan fried, or grilled, and I don't like too much fancy work.

PW Well Doug I thank you very much for this interview, and I would like to wish you all the best for the future

DS Thankyou Paul, thanks very much.

Side B, interview ends: 18.6 mins.



The commercial fleet at Coral Bay - 1998

Transcript of Interview

Interviewee: John Geoffrey Taylor

Address: 6 Park Way, Busselton, W.A. 6200.

Phone: 08 975 42772

Date of birth: 25 September 1950 (47)

Date: 12 February 1998

Place: Busselton

Side A 32.1 mins

Side B 31.9 mins

Total: 64 mins

Interviewer and transcriber: Dr Paul R. Weaver

Subject: Ningaloo

Side A: First visit to reef with WA Museum in 1980. GP at Exmouth from 1982. Decline in fish numbers at favoured locations apparent from about 1983. Ningaloo Station was early base for intensive recreational fishing. Mobile freezers for transport of fish to Perth. Large rapid hauls of NW snapper in 1983. Frozen mulies from elsewhere being imported for bait. Crayfish decimation. Spearfishing for "prize" fish.

Gamefishing - waste. Whale shark studies - beginnings. Gamefishing - shift towards conservation in late 1980s, coinciding with recession. Whale sharks - individuals observed (150). Conservation efforts - opposition to oil drilling on reef.

Side B: Discovery of coral destruction involving *Drupella* snail. Significant reduction in whale shark numbers coincides with *Drupella* plague - reasons - predators. No fish known to eat mature *Drupella*. Some areas of coral able to survive *Drupella* infestation. Theory - overfishing of predators of coral grazing fish has allowed the reef grazers' numbers to rise disproportionately. Coral spawning feeds zooplankton - zooplankton feed whale sharks. Zooplankton research needed. Northward flowing current outside reef. Multi-species fish aggregations. Japanese see Ningaloo as one of best dive sites in world. Anthropomorphism and the human experience of fish contact.



FW This interview is being conducted on the 12th of February 1998 with Geoff Taylor of Busselton. Geoff, for the purpose of the record could you please give your full name and date of birth?

JT John Geoffrey Taylor, twenty-five, nine, fifty

FW And how old are you Geoff?

JT - Forty seven

FW Geoff, you've had a long association with the Ningaloo Reef area as an amateur fisherman primarily, haven't you?

JT Yes, and as a diver, probably more principally as a diver and underwater photographer, but I did some fishing up there as well

PW When did you first start in that region?

GT Well I first went to Ningaloo with the Museum, on an expedition to Ningaloo Station, at Point Cloates, we were excavating the wreck of the *Rapid* and - I just loved the region so much that - when there was a job came up in Exmouth in 1982, I moved up there with my wife and our new born baby, so it was April of '82, we first went there.

PW You're actually a physician?

GT General practitioner, physician, yes.

PW And - was 1982 the first year that you went to Ningaloo Reef region?

GT Oh, 1980 was the Museum expedition, and then we went back two years later.

PW Can you tell me what it was like in 1980?

GT What in terms of fishing?

PW Hmm.

GT No, because we were only diving.

PW But you would have made observations about fish populations just generally?

GT - Well we were mainly diving on the wreck, and we did go out and do a little bit of spear fishing, and - actually the Paxman family were there, The Paxman family were going out almost on a daily basis and spearfishing outside the reef, and coming back with huge Spanish mackerel, I did do out one day with them and - it was too rough to go outside the reef, and we went into an area where there was some "bombies" and I was the only person who caught a fish, I shot a big blue bone, so-

PW What sort of fish?

GT A big blue bone, baldchin groper.

PW Oh right.

GT But - no we mainly were just snorkelling and exploring on that holiday, we weren't really doing any fishing I really didn't start fishing up there until - I went up to Exmouth and I befriended a couple of people who were quite keen fishermen. One was George Teesdale, who's now - well the ex-headmaster of Margaret River. He was headmaster at Exmouth at that time, and George was a keen fisherman, quite often I went out fishing with George. And - George was there the first two years that we were in Exmouth, and then they left, and - I don't know whether it was just that the - I always caught plenty of fish with George, but after that the fishing definitely dropped off, (chuckling) even though we'd go back to the same spots and try the same areas, it never seemed the same again after those first two or three years up there

PW In the early 1980s were there very many people who used to visit the Ningaloo region?

GT There was still a lot of tourists coming up in the winter months, they'd spend a lot of their time down the west coast fishing rather than living in all the camps down - Ned's Camp, Mesa, T Bone Bay, all the way down the coast.

PW So was the whole - the whole extremity of the reef system being visited by people at that time?

GT Oh yes, yeah, but not to the same numbers as it is now, but - of course there were no controls on the

amount of fish that they took out at that time. In fact there is a group of fishermen that have been fishing at Ningaloo Station that you would be interested to interview I am sure, one of them, I think it's David Hartley, if it's not David it's his brother. That's right, I am pretty sure it's David, who was a radiographer at Royal Perth (Hospital) and he used to go up there with a crew, and they were there at Ningaloo in 1980 when we first went up there with the Museum, and they were fishing at Ningaloo every year for about two weeks, they had the shearing sheds booked for that time, every two weeks - for two weeks every year, and I caught up with him again when we first went back in about '82, '83, we went down there one evening and caught up with him and had a beer, and 'cause we got to know them quite well, 'cause we were there living in the shearing sheds at the same time as them when we were there with the museum.

PW The - region has an extremely good reputation amongst fishermen. Is this because the fish are so prolific, or because they are so big, or whatever, can you tell me why?

Side A: 5.1 mins

GT Well I think both, because, I mean compared with the sort of fish that you catch down here at Busselton - especially in those days you could go out reliably and catch a very good feed of good sized snapper, and without too much problem at all, and especially in the early days

PW I've heard that people also took large freezers and stocked them up. Was that happening in those days?

GT Yes, that group I was referring to had a big freezer on a trailer that they were filling up to take back to Perth, and that's been going on at Ningaloo Station for many years, and further north, but particularly at Ningaloo itself. People would come in and have their freezers, stock them up and - take them back to Perth.

PW Was there ever any concern amongst people that this might have been something that wasn't the right thing to do?

GT - I think right from the start, - we were concerned about it - but - there didn't seem to be much concern from the fishermen.

PW How many fishermen to you think might have been doing that in the early 1980s?

GT Oh it's very hard to put a number on it -.

PW Well would we be talking about hundreds?

GT Oh, probably, yeas, I mean during the course of a winter season, there would be several hundred fishermen I would think, coming up in groups of, sometimes with two boats. That group that I knew of, there were probably eight fishermen, and one big freezer, that I'm aware of. I knew of another group - I've met other groups over the years when I was sailing up and down the coast, and I'd put in to Ningaloo. I was out there looking for whale sharks and - there'd be groups all through that Ningaloo area. Nearly every one of them would have a big freezer.

PW Was it essential to have a boat to catch the sort of fish they were getting?

GT Almost all of them would have had, or did have boats - but of course you can catch fish quite well from the shore as well, but most of them were fishing from boats.

PW And they would be mostly fishing for the larger species, like your snappers and - trevally and things like that?

GT Sure, yep.

PW Which do you think was the most popular species that they were going for?

GT Well the northwest, the spangled emperor, the northwest snapper as it's known.

PW And these grow very big, do they?

GT Well - I'm never very good at estimating the weight of a fish, but yes, certainly they grow up to thirty or forty centimetres.

PW Are they still a common fish up there?

GT Yes, they are still relatively common, but I think - the fishing success is nowadays is nothing like it was in those earlier days - I - I'm the sort of fisherman that I get bored if I'm not catching fish, and - in those early days, I can remember one trip where we actually went down to Ningaloo to the area I'm talking about, what's known as the six - I think we used to call it the sixteen mile, or was it the ten mile, the ten mile. Sixteen k's north of - Ningaloo homestead, Ningaloo shearing sheds I should say, and - that was a common area for people to camp, and we camped there one weekend, I went out with a friend George Morresy, a Telecom guy who was a very keen fisherman, and - in one hour we had thirty good sized snapper in the boat, and the three of us fishing, we each caught ten fish, we put quite a number back that were small, and - after one hour we thought, this is, there was no point in fishing any more, we've got more than an adequate feed, plenty to take home, so we stopped fishing and we came home.

PW What were using for bait to catch fish like that?

GT I think we were fishing mainly with mulies, triple ganged hook with mulies.

PW And did you take the mulies from Perth?

GT Oh we'd take a block of mulies down from Exmouth, yeah.

PW What would you buy them at Exmouth?

GT Hmm.

PW And then this was when you were living at Exmouth after 1982?

GT - Yes it was, it was probably that very first year there.

PW And how often would you go onto the reef system after you started living at - Exmouth?

GT Down to Ningaloo?

PW Hmm.

GT Not too infrequently, maybe two or three times a year. Sometimes we'd go down to get crayfish, that's another story. (chuckle)

PW Tell me about the crayfish?

GT Oh there was a particular bit of reef down at Ningaloo Station, down at what's known as the Four Mile, which in the early days was full of crayfish. There were two places to go around Ningaloo Station, one was to go round towards Norwegian Bay - there was quite a lot of reef in there, and the other was at what's known as the Four Mile. Now the Four Mile was fantastic, and in those early days, we only ever fished by hand, we never used hooks, we never used gidgees, we used to take them by hand, and there were so many crays under these narrow ledges in shallow water, anything up to about ten foot or depth of water, right in to close in shore. The reef, quite often there was quite a swell breaking over the whole area and (could) make it pretty hard work, but we would catch plenty of crays without any problem, just by hand, and if you'd go under a

ledge there'd be ten crays there, you'd get one of them and the rest'd all disappear under the ledge and that, so you weren't really having a great impact on the population there. The trouble was that over a period of ten years while I was there, more and more people got to know about it, and more and more people decided (to be) going down and occasionally down there and people'd be using hooks to hook them out. They'd be able to go along a ledge and get the crays that were out of reach of anybody fishing by hand. They'd hook out cray after cray, and there was a huge depletion of the crayfish in that area.

Side A: 11.3 mins

PW Did this annoy you to see this happening?

GT Yes, yes. I was very sad. I felt somewhat responsible 'cause the trouble was, everybody'd keep it a secret, and they'd only tell one person, but if everybody only tells one person, and they told one person, and somebody else tells one person the word eventually gets around, and it became very common knowledge in Exmouth that - about this reef. I think when I first went there there were very few people knew about it,

PW Have you ever confronted people about taking excessive catches?

GT Oh, on occasions, and particularly taking undersize crays. I've said (laugh) well - I have, and on one occasion there was group of us and these people had taken a huge number of undersize crays, and I came back with my bag of really nice sized crays and I looked at them and said, "Well alright, you guys can have that lot, and split them up and do what you like with them, but I'm not having a bar of it." and I said, "I'll just hang on to these." You know I didn't approve of that at all.

PW Did they get angry?

GT No, they just shrugged their shoulders and thought, "Oh that's Geoff Taylor," (laugh). I had plenty of crays I mean, the thing about going down there was that you were going down, you maybe only went down once a year to go crayfishing, so you'd take quite a few, but - that was a once a year trip.

PW Have you had behind you activities, have you had an ethos of conservation controlling what you've done? Even though you've taken large catches?

GT I always had a problem with - I mean, the other thing I used to do - the other fishing experiences I did over the years was at times - going out with friends spearfishing. Some of my friends were very keen spearfishermen and at times I was a hopeless spearfisherman, because at times I used to - sort of - I didn't always have great enthusiasm for it, I mean I did and I didn't. I want to be - you know, I needed a few fish for the freezer, but - and I'd generally - it ended up in the end I would only really shoot a coral trout, we were mainly looking for coral trout and big blue bone. And I wouldn't shoot a fish unless it was really big. I mean it was sort of trying to get a prize fish, and anything smaller I wouldn't touch at all.

PW And what was the aim of getting a "prize" fish, for photographs - ?

GT Oh look, well no, no. This is spearfishing, I mean this was -

PW Trophy?

GT - No, just that - if you are going to get a fish you may as well get a good sized one - (indistinct) - no point in messing around and the small ones can hopefully grow and be bigger ones.

PW Did you tend to record those activities with photographs, if you caught a particularly large fish?

GT Oh occasionally, yeah, I mean I think there's a photograph on the wall around the corner there of me holding a -

PW We'll have a look at it a little later on.

GT (chuckle) Which my wife has put in a lot, you know in a composite photograph, lots of other pictures. In the early days if one got a big fish one might have taken a photo, but -

PW And do you still catch fish?

GT I occasionally go fishing. I actually - my son is always trying to get me to take him fishing, and I'm too busy most of the time. But we did go fishing a couple of weeks ago out at - Eagle Bay.

PW That's near Busselton?

GT And my partner - yes, out towards Cape Naturaliste, and we went and caught some little yellow tailed whiting, right on the beach. It's a particular technique that my partner, Dr Rod Jarvis enjoys doing, using leg worms and it requires remarkable skill. And he kept telling me that I hadn't a hope of catching one with the particular rod I was using, that it was not flexible enough. It was an "Ugly Stuck" (trade name) but it's a fairly tough old, fairly strong one. My two children each caught more fish than I did, but at least I got the biggest one in the end, but it took me two hours I think before I finally landed one (laugh)

Side A: 15.4 mins

PW Geoff, you've acquired some fame over your association with whale sharks and Ningaloo Reef, and you've also written a very fine book on the subject; I think also you've made a couple of films, and you've been the subject of documentary films by Japanese film makers as well on Dugongs, is that correct?

GT Yes, that's right, yeah.

PW When did your association with whale sharks begin?

GT Well, it all started because of my interest in underwater photography, and - back in 1980 on the expedition with the Museum to Ningaloo Station, somebody saw a whale shark outside the reef, at Ningaloo and had a - it was Jeff Kimpton, the museum diver, went for ride on the back of this big whale shark, and that sort of captured my imagination, to know that there were whale sharks out there, because I think I'd fairly recently been reading Cousteau's book on sharks, and he mentioned how over many years of cruising the ocean, he'd only ever seen two whale sharks, and he described in his book how rare they were and their experience at seeing these two huge whale sharks. And I was - it was one of the things that made me keen to get back up to Exmouth and Ningaloo - just before I went to Ningaloo I purchased a little cine camera, a Eumig Multica, which one was able to take underwater without a housing, just like the Nikonis camera, it was purpose built to go underwater and shoot Super eight millimetre film. And so right from the start, I was keen to try and get outside the reef and find more of these whale sharks, because I knew very little film had ever been taken of them in the wild. And on the very first trip outside the reef at Ningaloo we saw two whale sharks. They were quite small. My wife wouldn't let me jump in the water. We had a new born two week old daughter Julia on the boat with us, and - in fact most people at Exmouth would not of dreamt of jumping in the water outside the reef in those days, and thought that I was crazy when I started going out looking for whale shark and getting in the water and diving with them. It was actually nearly a whole year 'till it was March the following year. Despite many sorties going game fishing, we would always take our trolling gear and go out and troll up and down, and hope that we'd see whale sharks, and it took nearly a year before we saw any more. And really (indistinct) almost immediately because of seeing those two in 1982, because of the one that was seen in 1980, which was about May the first, and then we then started seeing them in mid-March through 'till April in 1983. And it became quite clear right from the very start that there was a definite season when the whale sharks were appearing, and so I started keeping a diary of my sightings of whale sharks, and really it all started from there. But in those early days, most people's experience of the reef on the west coast was game fishing and fishing, and they would commonly see quite big sharks, they would when trolling there would maybe get hammerheads coming up - occasionally with the game fishing competitions, they'd occasionally catch big mako sharks, and of course there were plenty of bronze whalers, grey - reef whalers *Amblyrinus*(?) and - so most people wouldn't dream of going outside the reef and going diving, but at that time there was a very keen SCUBA diver, Peter Moore in Exmouth, who dived a lot in

New Guinea, and he was quite used to diving in reef waters like that where there were plenty of sharks, and Peter and I became friends, and we used to go out there and go SCUBA diving - so - but in fact it was quite hard to even to get the proprietor of the local dive shop to go and dive out there - Most people really associated those waters with big big sharks.

PW And - did you also - you mentioned that you went game fishing along the outer Ningaloo Reef. Was this the full extent of the reef that you went game fishing?

GT Oh, - on any particular day, no I mean, one would usually probably just go - down as far as the gap at Ned's Camp and back again.

Side A: 20 mins

PW And what sort of did you catch when you were game fishing?

GT - A variety, Spanish mackerel, barracuda and occasionally trevally. Depending on the lure, particular lures you were running - sailfish as well occasionally, and we've caught - I've been in - but you'd have to be trolling especially for sailfish - I've hooked up a few sailfish, we've had one - landed one on the back of the boat there. I did catch a sailfish in a game fishing competition at Muiron Islands - in a GAMEX competition in that first - probably about 1983, could even have been that first year up there in '82.

PW These must have been the very early days of game fishing up in that region?

GT No, I'll think you'll find that the GAMEX competition up there and the game fishing club up there have been active up there for quite some - its been going on quite a long time. - Already, in those days, there were quite a lot of - there were even boats coming up from Perth. Big (indistinct) forty foot game fishing boats, coming up for the competition there.

PW They'd bring them up on trailers and things would they?

GT The smaller ones, but the big ones would actually come all the way from Perth by sea.

PW Forty foot would have to come up by sea?

GT Yearh, there were one of two that came up, but then of course when we went into the recession, which (was) sort of around about, what, eighty - seven, eighty-nine (1989) - from memory - all of a sudden there was no - you know, peoples' financial state had changed and no one could afford to do that sort of thing, and the boats tended to get smaller and smaller. And people tended to be going more and more for fishing with light game fishing gear - and - and tag and release became common, much more common.

PW Tag and release started to become much more common towards the end of the 1980's?

GT Yes, yes.

PW What was the idea behind that? Was it recognition that the numbers of the fish were becoming threatened?

GT Well I think recognition that it was extremely wasteful to catch a big sailfish and - take it, weigh it in and because the meat wasn't good to eat, to chuck it away on the dump

PW Is that what happened to them?

GT A lot of them, yes. Yearh, unless they were - you'd really looked after the specimen, in which case somebody might want to take it away and make a mould of it and mount it, and the rest of it.

PW And it would still get thrown on the dump?

GT It'd still end up on the dump. Occasionally people smoked them, but I think there were worries about the levels of heavy metals in some of these big fish

PW Do you still go game fishing up there?

GT - Not, not really, no I mean, with the last few years my only visits to Exmouth have been on big charter boats going up there, as a guest of the - charter boat operators to - talk to people about whale sharks, and that's allowed me to continue to try and get photos and measurements of the whale sharks. I've been trying to build up a library of photos of all the individual animals that are there, and we've got measurements on about a hundred and fifty - sorry, we've got photos of about a hundred and fifty different animals - measurement on probably about a hundred of them.

PW Could it be fair to say that you are the authority on whale sharks?

GT Well there's one or two other people that are getting more and more experience of them, but probably I'm one of them. (modest chuckle) put it that way

PW And how would you rate amongst the world's whale shark experts?

GT Well I haven't got a background in marine biology - much more in human biology yes, and general biology, but - the other experts in the world - haven't really concentrated on the whale shark. I mean Eugene Clark is probably the preeminent expert on sharks of all species in the world, and - there's a guy called Compagno in South Africa. Again its - I mean, they are involved in marine biology full time in their lives.

PW It's a fairly small field of experts then?

GT Hmm. (yes)

PW And have you found because you're not directly qualified as a marine biologist there's been resistance to your observations and knowledge from some quarters?

GT Yes, yes for sure, and it has as other people have tried to get involved. It's made it much more difficult to try and get money, grant money to continue with studies - it became impossible - it also was probably not helped by - I became chairman of a conservation committee at Exmouth and campaigned very hard in the early days of, I s'pose really nineteen ninety to ninety-three - eighty-nine to ninety-three we campaigned very actively to try and stop the oil industry from being allowed to drill at Ningaloo Marine Park, and - so I think that - I became labelled as a radical greenie and - that's made it somewhat more difficult to get grant money and - I think to some extent (someone) also tried to discredit me, so that my stance about Ningaloo Reef was less credible.

Side A: 25.4 mins

PW And is this ongoing?

GT No, I don't think so. I've published a paper about my observations with the aerial surveys - since then I've finally got published. I published a book which has been very well received by most people, and of course I'm much less involved now in the conservation issues, now that I've retired to Busselton - its - but of course I'm no longer trying to - I haven't tried to get and grant money (indisinct) (chuckle)

PW The oil mining spectre, oil drilling spectre hasn't actually gone away has it, there's still quite a lot of pressure?

GT Hmm. I don't think it ever will. (go away)

PW Have they done test drills on the reef yet?

GT Well I believe they may be drilling at this very moment - from the shore, they will have to drill out from the shore and drill out underneath the reef, and my biggest concern is not really the exploration phase with things with the oil industry, but the problems that'd arise when they find oil and then want to create offshore oil tanker terminals and have oil tankers coming into the region loading oil

PW So it's the developing infrastructure that becomes the primary problem?

GT And really the oil industry itself, disowns itself from the shipping, and of course the ships of the oil industry have been labelled as "ships of shame" throughout the world, its aging tanker fleet very under - under serviced and many of these ships are barely fit to be on the ocean, and for them to be entering an area of such important environmental value - and an area that is frequently effected by tropical cyclones, in fact there's a tropical cyclone coming down the coast at this moment as we speak. I think that it's just a recipe for disaster.

PW What could happen?

GT Well it almost has happened already, I mean I could tell you of instances such as in 1991 when a ship called the *Neptune Atome* nearly went to ground at Early Island. - A classic example was a tropical depression coming down the coast, not yet labelled a cyclone, meteorological bureau keeping a watch on it, deciding whether to call it a cyclone or not. Oil tanker comes into a fairly confined area between several islands - off Early Island north of Onslow, which is only really about forty miles from the edge of the marine park, and de-ballists in order to take on oil, once it's de-ballisted it of course is not really in a fit state to go to sea again, and all of a sudden this tanker is hit by seventy to eighty knot winds, which had not been forecast at that time, looking at the (weather) bureau faxes that had been coming through, the forecast was for thirty or forty knot winds, and they were hit by seventy to eighty knot winds. It's not clear from reports as to whether the oil line from the tanks on the island actually ruptured, or whether - it was just the joint to the tanker that split, but there was significant spill of oil into the ocean - but not sufficient to cause any major damage. But the ship itself - actually dragged its anchors, there was a story that the anchors had actually dragged through a pipeline, but again that has never been confirmed, it's just pure rumour - and the ship made an extremely difficult voyage out in the area, and then had to find its way back up into the shelter of the islands up near Dampier - so that's the sort of scenario that can easily be repeated and at the moment there's the *Griffin Venture* is sitting out there, if it's not back in Fremantle for a refit. I saw it there only about six months ago. But the *Griffin Venture* is a huge oil tanker which is used as a floating storage tank, sits up there about forty miles north of the Muiron Islands. They've occasionally had their problems, I believe one day they nearly had a fire on board, but - the - one wonders really what they do with a ship that big when there's a cyclone coming down the coast? If it were to drag its anchors and be - come down onto the Muiron Islands the Leeuwin Current would inevitably bring any oil slicks from such a disaster down the whole coast, down the whole length of the Ningaloo Reef. It would be a disaster of major proportions.

PW So potentially it has the - it has the potential to destroy the entire reef?

GT Well to destroy a large part of it, and we've got to remember that Ningaloo Reef itself has already been devastated by the snail, the marine snail *Drapella cornus* has damaged acres and acres of corals at Ningaloo, it really isn't the pristine reef that it was when I first went up there in 1983, in fact there are very few people that seem to have an appreciation of what the reef itself was like in those early days, and if you - in fact there was really only one occasion when I made an effort in those early days in about 1983, I went fishing with George Teesdale, and we anchored just south of the Ned's gap - a gap in the reef, an George stayed there, fished in the channel there, and I snorkelled in over the coral on the inside of the reef where it's very shallow, finding that the channels to get through, and with my cine camera - and took some film of - the reef at that time, now if you snorkel - and ant that time it was just a magnificent coral garden, as was the whole of that back reef, I mean we have no reason to suspect that that was any different from any of the rest of the reef. Of course by 1987, in 1987 - trying to think of his name, Cliff White's'd from C A I M brought a cine photographer Jeff - (tape ends)

Side A tape ends: 32.1 mins

Side B tape starts

- PW (indistinct) So you were telling me how you were asked to accompany a CALM officer with a cine camera?
- GT Yes, - we went out one afternoon, it was my afternoon off and raced around to Tantabiddi and we went out in a boat, and they wanted to get some nice photographs of coral. And we stopped at a couple of areas, at - and everyone was very disappointed, and I said, "Well look, if you really want to see the coral gardens in their magnificence, one needs to really get out to the back reef there and just snorkel in over the back reef." and I said, "Well I know an area - which I filmed a few years ago, let's go down there." And we went down to this honestly identical area as we'd been in 1983, and snorkelled in over the back reef. The tide was high enough that we could get in, because it's the sort of area where at low tide the coral heads will stick out of the water, and all the staghorns will be sticking out of the water, you can't even get over the reef in those areas at low tide. And we snorkelled in over there and were - I was absolutely devastated by the - the destruction, and the sight that was there, all that was left was skeletons of corals and most of the corals such as staghorns had just collapsed into a coral rubble on the bottom, and - there was so little live coral to see, the fish life that had been there had all gone, and we started looking at other areas and found that this was - the scene all the way along the reef, and for me it was a devastating day, I couldn't believe what I was seeing. In fact I felt extremely depressed about it because it was just about at that time that - well back in 1986 that the penny had dropped that probably what was bringing the whale sharks in to Ningaloo was the annual coral spawning. That's the time that they turn up following the spawning of the corals, and not only the corals that are spawning, but the whole reef system, there's all sorts of creatures undoubtedly that are spawning at that time of year, and to see the devastation - in 1987, and see how acres and acres of coral had disappeared, and along with that all the - fish that rely on that habitat, and other marine creatures that rely on that coral habitat to survive. I could see immediately that this was going to have a devastating effect, not only on the reef itself, but other creatures such as the whale sharks, and that was the case. But people have been very reluctant to accept the data that I've presented, that seems to show that. But our success at finding whale sharks from that time onwards, dropped off dramatically. In fact we'd already found that year, I think it was about October, we'd already found in 1987 it hadn't been a successful a year as '86, which was a fairly good year, and - and progressively through '88, '89 and '90 we found it harder and harder to find any whale sharks at all, despite a huge increase in our search effort to find them, and for instance in 1990, I haven't got the figures here, but I spent about four weeks, with a break every two or three days - sorry, three or four days I should say, having a day off, almost every day out on the water searching for the whale sharks, and I think in the whole season we only saw three or four whale sharks, as compared with seeing - fifty whale sharks in a couple of weeks of a similar amount of effort back in 1986.

PW At the time you started making your scientific observations of life on the Ningaloo Reef system, and - I can only think of it as scientific, you were certainly (giving it) very close scrutiny, - were there any other people taking such a close interest in the marine fauna at that time?

GT - No, essentially. - There was occasionally research scientists were coming up from Perth to spend a few days and it was at about 1987 that when the *Drupella* was discovered that there was particularly some scientists coming up to - investigate the *Drupella* plague.

PW Do you know who identified the *Drupella* as the source of this devastation? Did you realise it was a snail when you first saw it?

Side B: 5 mins

GT No. - But I think it was the CALM - Cliff Winfield had already heard about it, I think he knew that there was supposed to be a problem with this marine snail, and in fact we found the snail that day, I mean we were able to locate it, and - I think he knew what the scars looked like on the coral, so it was already known about that there was a problem there among some of the CALM researchers at about that time, but it was the first time that I had heard about it and I was absolutely staggered by the devastation, and of course the reason is that - it - the area that was so badly effected was the shallow water corals on the back reef, which of course normally nobody ever dives over, it's so shallow that it's not the sort of area that anybody goes fishing

spearfishing, whatever. Outside the reef there was very little impact at all, but you tend to get very different species of coral growing in those areas that are exposed to the surf and swells, and - it's only when you get to the deeper water that a lot of the corals can survive, and in deeper waters you get different species than you do in the shallow lagoon. So there are certain areas such as at Tantabiddi, where you've got quite good stands of lagoon coral, and further down the coast, there used to be a beautiful stand of coral in the middle of Turquoise Bay, then of course Coral Bay is the classic example of a huge area of lagoon coral, and the corals that grow - you see you've got the areas where there's lagoon corals, then you've got the back reef corals, then you've got the corals outside the reef. It seemed - this whole problem seemed to start at the northern end of the reef - and it really has shown - in my experience, and I haven't been up there now for eighteen months, but every year when I go back I do try to find some time to go in and have a snorkel over the back reef and see what it's like, and I haven't yet seen any good evidence of any substantial recovery. Here we are nearly ten years, well it's ten years now down the track from when it was discovered in '87. For instance, - if you look in Turquoise Bay, there used to be about an acre of beautiful - corals, mostly *Acropora* plate corals, there's one or two - varieties of "bombies" out there, in the middle of Turquoise Bay, the last time I went there there was virtually nothing, I think I saw one little favoured coral about six inches across sitting on the bottom.

PW And without these corals, of course there's no fish?

GT No, absolutely, and on the back reef itself - its - still very poor indeed, the coral cover might be three to five percent on the back reef, and the problem is that anybody going in there now would look at it and say - they would have no idea really what should be there, because all the coral skeletons have collapsed, just into a rubble, and they have no idea that maybe for a hundred to a hundred and fifty metres from where the swells are breaking in towards, in towards the shore, there should be an absolute mass of *Acropora* corals, and they are just not there, they've gone.

PW Was the - this snail, where did it actually come from?

GT Well its supposed to be there in the fossil records, so people believe that it has always been at Ningaloo - I personally have my own ideas about the *Drupella* snail, I think it's been - there's no doubt that it did reach plague proportions, but the interesting thing is that if you went down to the southern end of the reef, although there were huge numbers of *Drupella*, the corals were managing to survive, - and in areas - for instance around - we did a study that Sue Osborne in CALM organised, just south of Coral Bay - going into an area twenty-five metres by twenty-five metres, and taking out every single *Drupella* snail we could find - there was another area next door where we did the same, and in the first area we put all the snails back again, and then we'd go in every year and pick them off again and see what the population of snails was doing, and Sue was also recording the coral cover and how it was effecting the coral. The coral in that area survived, despite this very heavy infestation. Further south down at Warra station there were also areas which were very heavily infested, but the coral survived. My personal feeling is that *Drupella* has been given the total blame for this - the coral destruction, when in fact it was not just *Drupella* that was the problem. The problem was overgrazing, *Drupella* is just one example of a coral grazer, and the problem is - I personally believe it's over fishing that has caused the problem. The - of course when you catch fish, you only catch fish that take a bait, and you don't catch the fish that eat algae, you don't catch the fish that normally feed on coral, and the fish that we are catching are the ones that normally feed on those other fish, or they feed on anything that's smaller than themselves, - in the food chain. But, they principally are feeding on those small coral feeders, so once you deplete an area of the fish that are grazing on coral - those coral grazers are going to build up in numbers and start to have an impact, their grazing is going to start to have an impact on the coral.

Side B: 11.1 mins

PW Do *Drupella* have any predators?

GT Well that's - *Drupella* have an extremely strong shell and it seems unlikely that any - we haven't yet found a fish that can actually eat the adult *Drupella*. But of course the juveniles almost certainly would have been predated on.

PW Another person whom I interviewed told me that in those earlier years they remember particularly shell collectors wandering around over the reefs and they nominated these essentially as elderly retired people, often women, and they were taking enormous numbers of shells of attractive species and things, is the *Drupella* a shell that is attractive?

GT No, no. They wouldn't have been interested in *Drupella*. There were - there was a guy who was very - a guy who was involved in swimming pools who used to trade in shells, and have a huge shell collection, and I know that he used to go out for instance into Lighthouse Bay and pick up spider conches and come back with twenty spider conches at a time, and - in the early days there, people said, "Oh you'll always find spider conches in Lighthouse Bay." By the time I actually got round to going out there to see if I could find one and see what one of them actually looked like when it was alive in the water. I found it extremely hard, we did eventually find one of them. I should add that it was interesting that at - Tantabiddi itself the corals in the lagoon were very badly damaged by *Drupella*, but recovered, and there's still a very good stand of lagoon coral at Tantabiddi, and yet the reefs offshore were devastated. The same thing - it's interesting also to look at Coral Bay, because at Coral Bay the - main corals throughout the bay itself are *Faviids* and they weren't effected nearly so much by the *Drupella* but the offshore reef platform, the back reef as we call it again was very much badly damaged by *Drupella* but - but has survived in a much more intense than than the reefs further north, at you know, Tantabiddi, Ned's Camp, etcetera.

PW Geoff, would it be fair to say that in spite of all the scientific research that's been undertaken in the region, that it's still - in a fairly rudimentary stage; that our knowledge of the total marine environment there is still quite inadequate?

GT Well I s'pose with hindsight one will always look back, and when we look back on our knowledge twenty years ago of all sorts of things it seems inadequate, medicine or whatever. It's interesting when you think that it was only in 1980 that people really realised that coral has a sexual spawning, and in fact it's one of the things that amuses me because if you look at Isobel Barnett's book on the Great Barrier Reef up there, there is a picture in there of a big slick of pink coral spawn, and it's so distinctive, the coral spawn from the colour, the pink colour, maybe it's in the printing. But in fact the caption underneath says, local fishermen call this coral spawn, but it is in fact a slick of *Trichodesmium* which is a common sort of algae, it's a sign of bacterium actually that grows in the ocean. We used to have plagues and plagues of this - *Trichodesmium* occur often late summer before the coral spawning at Exmouth, but it's very distinctively an orange colour, rather than the pink slicks you get with coral spawn, and it's quite obvious that Isobel Barnett at that time was poo-pooing the idea that the local fishermen had with the coral spawning. And really, I mean I sort of, I feel that to some extent that I've suffered a little bit like this. The people discount local knowledge so much, I think it's bit like learning any trade. I feel medicine suffers like this. When I trained in UK we - and I always feel that it doesn't matter what trade you're learning, whether you're going to be an electrician or a plumber, that the best place to learn it is on the job. And that certainly was the way we were thrown in at the deep end doing medicine in UK, and had to learn very much on - the wards. Nowadays there's always this great tendency for people to spend hours and hours in lecture theatres learning theory, and in the same way it's with marine biology. There's two ways of learning marine biology, you can go and sit in lecture theatres for hours and hours on end, and listen to people lecturing to you and read books, or you can spend hours and hours on the water, and diving under the water and making your own observations and also hopefully reading to back up and exploring the books to back up what you've seen, and sometimes I think that the latter is the better way of learning.

Side B: 16.4 mins

PW Can you see yourself becoming more intensively involved in the Ningaloo region again?

GT Well I would dearly love to - it's very hard that at the moment I've got three children that I'm trying to educate and - I can't see that for the next ten years I'll be able to change what I'm doing at the moment, living down here in Busselton, but I would actually dearly love to spend a lot more time up there again. I would - I do feel there is an awful lot more to be learnt about the Ningaloo region.

PW Are there any areas there that haven't been looked at all scientifically, which people should have looked at?

GT Well I personally, I actually am trying at the moment, along with Allan Pearce of the CSIRO to publish a paper on the ocean currents of Ningaloo, I think it's extremely important - everyone has focussed so much on the Leeuwin Current over the past ten or fifteen years since it was discovered and many conclusions have been drawn about coral spawn dispersal, coral spawn larval dispersal I should say there - assuming that the Leeuwin Current is the predominant current, and right from the very start from about 1986, '87 - when at that time of year we were out there looking for whale sharks and waiting for the coral to spawn, and observing the coral spawning; and every time we went outside the reef, the current wasn't going south at all, it was going north, and so when I did the aerial surveys, we actually made observations of which way the current was going, and you can see by the plume of green water coming out through the gaps in the reef, by which way it turns, whether the current is running north or south along the reef front. And so we documented those observations, and I went and took my observations to Allan Pearce, and we've been trying to observe with his satellite photos which way the currents are running at Ningaloo. The problem is that the satellites are - don't have a high resolution, and the current along the reef front is really only one to two kilometres wide - and so - which is only one pixel on the computer, so it doesn't always pick up the current that's running outside the reef in the northern end. You can see it much more clearly in the southern end where the continental shelf is much wider. But there's little doubt that in fact the current - there is a count - what I call a counter-current system working there at Ningaloo - I do talk about it a little bit in my book, and there's almost always a large eddy that you can see coming off the Leeuwin Current, south of Point Cloates, which I think is produced by the geomorphological shape of the coast, and so in effect one ends up with a circular movement of water up there. I think it's particularly important in terms for the oil industry to appreciate that in terms of oil spill and contingency planning - they love producing computer models of where oil slicks are going to travel, if there's a spill on a particular point, and I would love to know what data they are going to use if they start planning for any - rigs outside the reef at Ningaloo, because the studies haven't been done. The only study that I'm aware of it the limited observations that I've made, and I'm not quite sure where we are with it (the paper) at the moment but hopefully, Allan Pearce and I are going to publish this paper fairly soon.

Side B: 20.2 mins

PW A lot of the studies that I seem to see as a non-scientist relate to big things - is there much work done on the small things to do with the system, like the plankton, and the benthic fauna which live in the sand areas and things like that. Has there been much attention to that?

GT - Very little I think, and - I tried to get a - get a - find a scientist who'd be interested in coming up to do studies on the zooplankton - particularly after we - well I think it was, this was way back in about 1987 - because I proposed a theory, this was a very small paper that I published in the West Australian Naturalist, where I proposed (in) a paper that the coral spawn released a huge amount of nutrition into the water for the zooplankton and that this was producing a bloom of zooplankton on which the whale sharks were feeding, and I first proposed that theory way back in about 1987, '88. I think the paper wasn't actually published until '89. But - I tried to find a scientist who was interested in studying the levels of zooplankton, but it is such a complex field, and very difficult to study, and one of the problems is that the zooplankton make a vertical migration, they go down during the day, often to deep depths, and sometimes into the sand, and then come out and migrate to the surface at night. And of course it was very thrilling for me eventually to be able to - find that the whale sharks come up to feed at dusk, and observe them and film them feeding at night, into the early part of the night anyway, and it was almost as if one turned a switch, the very first time that I witnessed this event, it's quite incredible to see, because as soon as the sun hits the horizon, all of a sudden the whale sharks appear - There was nothing to see at all until the sun really was on the horizon, and just as the sun disappeared over the horizon, all of a sudden whale sharks started appearing all around us.

PW Geoff - in those earliest days, which were the richest parts of the reef - if we looked at it on a cross section, would the the richer representation of fish be on the outer sides of the reef - or on the inner sides, or in the middle, or was there any zones of distinct types of species?

GT Oh well the - well that again is another - the - that is another thing that we've - well I can't say I've

discovered, but has become evident along Ningaloo Reef. Inside the reef one has - particularly, it's mainly snapper that people are catching, are fishing for.

PW They are in the more sheltered waters are they, the snapper?

GT Oh yes, in the sheltered -

PW The lower energy waters?

GT - Yes, in the lagoon, the shallow waters of the lagoon are only ten to fifteen foot deep through most of the northern part of the reef, and just sandy bottom, occasionally patches of reef, and the snapper move around in those areas. Outside the reef you've got a totally different situation, as I say, it's high energy with big, a lot of wave action, and it drops off quite steeply down to - sort of rocky limestone reef which has lots of areas covered in coral. But what we have seen at Ningaloo is that there are along the reef, and actually I try to keep quiet about this in terms of, I don't really want fishermen to know this (chuckle) along the reef there are what I've called feeding stations - and there are areas where all of a sudden for no apparent reason, you have a huge profusion of life, they can be quite hard to find, even when you know one of them is there, and until we have GPS satellite, and even with GPS, if you try and translate from one person's GPS to another, sometimes you may be a hundred, two hundred metres out and fail to find this particularly rich area. There's one particular one that that's happened to me on more than one occasion, but for instance there's an area about half a mile south, or not even that, four or five hundred metres south of the Ned's Camp gap, where for two or three years there was rock, the size, about a half an acre in size, that was covered in small fish - they were mostly little cardinal fish, pomfrits, sea pike, millions of them, the whole of - they almost certainly were at the bottom of the food chain, and had aggregated into that area, and around there one could find just about any species of fish you might want to see at Ningaloo, whether they be coral trout, huge great potato cod, occasional sharks - trevally coming and stalking those fish, I've got quite a lot of photographs of this sort of thing - Spanish mackerel coming in, but very often would be a fish ball of anchovies, sitting over the top of the whole thing, which had also sort of located itself into that area, and the mackerel would be coming through up above, trying to feed on those, and you could sit there and just watch the food chain in action, going on all around you. Now there was that area there, if you moved away from it, the reef was relatively barren, all the way round. - A friend of mine, Simon Jones, Perth Diving Academy, discovered a similar situation just off Ned's Camp, where there was a big rock wall going from ten metres down to twenty-five metres, and again, in one area of that wall there were over a million fish, conference types, just absolute profusion, so much, you know such, that there was a wall, when you look at the rock wall, all you see it fish, you don't see, you can't see the rock wall. He called it wobbegong wall actually, because on ledges in behind the fish, there were about five wobbegongs (carpet sharks) sitting in their own little pockets in that area. Down in the bottom there were coral trout, there were snapper, - there were two resident potato cod there at that spot as well, and again, just extremely exciting diving. There was another small - you had to go about a mile north along the reef to yet another one of that that was there, back, certainly in the '93, '94 whale shark season, when we were diving on these spots fairly regularly, and there was - another one, fairly good, but not quite as profuse as the other two, about a mile north. So it seems like there were these feeding stations, now again, the Muiron Islands, there is what was at one time called the cod hole at the Muiron Islands, about two thirds of the way up on the west side of South Island, there was a similar situation, and again the profusion of these little pomfrit fish over cardinal fish, and pomfrits over the reef, seemed to be what was causing - this huge aggregation of fish. - And to dive in areas like that, it's just like sitting in an aquarium, and that's what, you know, they are the real jewels of Ningaloo Reef, those areas, and you could go and dive elsewhere and think, "See there's - Ningaloo keeps hardly got any fish on it at all." - And quite why one was getting those - they are not permanent either, because the first one I referred to south of Ned's Camp, when I dived on it in 1986, it was extremely depleted, there was still small pockets of the fish, but really there was nothing to be seen like had been there two or three years before. Now I suspect that these things wax and wane, and it may be that there is another one has formed, you know, nearby; but when we dived, we had a Japanese film crew there I think in '84, and they dived on - they'd dived all over the world and they reckoned that that first sight that I mentioned was one of the best dives they've ever had in the world, you know, this was a world class dive site.

PW When you see things like that obviously they could be profoundly moving and they be moving to the

point of almost a spiritual experience to see something like that?

GT Oh, (laugh) I could talk about those sort of things, you know. I mean it's one of the great excitements of all those experiences at Ningaloo that you know, I think they - people try to put religious significance on a lot of these things; it's like when people confront dolphins and they feel that, they try to suggest that dolphins have some sort of special power, but I've seen the same thing with the whale sharks, and peoples - people who are maybe rather fed up with life and - living very hum-drum lives. I remember in the early days friends occasionally coming out with this on the whale sharks, and they were just so excited that about the whole experience of diving in the water next to a whale shark, that all they could talk about, every time you saw them for the next month, was what an amazing experience it had been. They were obviously extremely animated and it had been an extremely enriching experience in their lives, and -

PW So many people do see these things in a spiritual context?

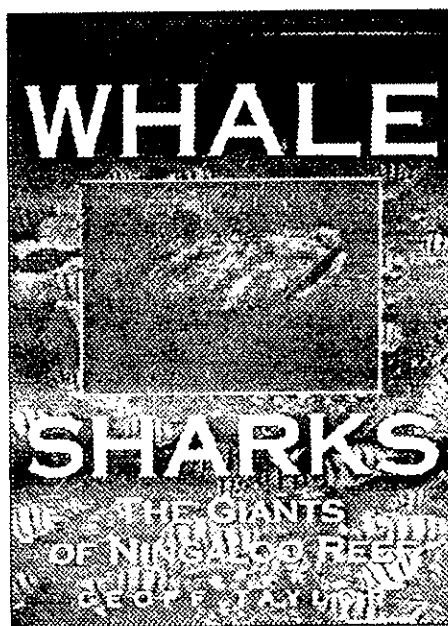
GT Yes I think so. I think it brings one back to nature, back to ones - makes one confront one's situation in the world, one's mortality - I mean, 'cause again for what people they can see, they can see it as a slightly dangerous experience, jumping into the water next to a big shark, and so for a whole variety of reasons I think people find it a very enriching experience.

PW Well Geoff, this interview's been an enriching experience, and I would like to thank you very much for it - is there anything that you felt you would like to add that I haven't asked?

GT Well we could probably talk for hours (chuckle) about Ningaloo. There are so many things that happened over the years up there, and there probably are other things that - we haven't talked about, we haven't talked about the humpback whales, we haven't talked about the manta rays and the schooling of manta rays that happens every year. - We haven't even mentioned the excitements of the dugongs and I probably should mention to you that I had an amazing experience at Shark Bay recently.

Side B. Interview ends: 31.9 mins

Unfortunately the interview terminated at this point because Geoff had to return to duties at Busselton Hospital. I thank him for making himself available from his busy schedule. His beautifully illustrated book, *Whale Sharks: The Giants of Ningaloo Reef* was published by Angus and Robertson in 1994, and some copies were still available in early 1998



Transcript of Interview

Interviewee: Phillip Athelston Tickle

Address: Siesta Park, Caves Rd. via Busselton. WA 6280.

Phone: 08 97554016

Date of birth: 7 October 1930.

Interview date: 10 February 1998.

Place: Siesta Park, via Busselton.

Side A 32.1 mins

Side B 15.7 mins

Total: 47.8 mins

Interviewer and Transcriber: Dr Paul R. Weaver.

Subject: Ningaloo

Side A: Fishing resort operator at Busselton. Pioneer charter fishing operator. Commenced recreational fishing at Ningaloo c. 1962 while pro-fisherman in south. Early recognition of how places quickly became fished out eg. Abrolhos - Shark Bay. Expanded fishing horizons to keep ahead of crowd. Fisheries Dept. management of fisheries is too reactive, not pro-active. Giant cod (7 foot) - show and release. Freezing fish to bring home - social catalyst. Fisheries Dept. acts in interests of pro-fishers rather than fish species. Filleting very wasteful, encourages larger catches. Secretiveness needed about fishing spots. Some nor'west snapper eat hard shell molluscs, including cowries. Fisheries Dept. supports non-sustainable practices - eg. trawling at Geographe Bay, fish traps outside reef at Ningaloo. Phil used gaff for octopus. Octopus main bait used at Ningaloo - also imported raw fish (mulies). "Snapper" at Shark Bay generally more ravenous than Coral Bay. Octopus decimated by fishers. Phil now pursues game fish out from Tantabiddi. Fish play minor part in diet - more fun in catching. Oysters - enjoys - still some good places - secret.

Side B: Lucky escape from big wave set. Personal affinity with sea. High technology now needed due general fish scarcity. Boats - preferences. Coral Bay resort - mistakes. Fish plaster casts.



- PW This interview is being done on the tenth of February 1998 with Phil Tickle of Siesta Park in Busselton, Phil for the record could you please give your full name and date of birth.
- PT My name is Phil Tickle, I was born in 1930 - seventh of October 1930, and that was in Perth. I'm now resident at Busselton.
- PW And Phil, you're the proprietor of the Siesta Park holiday camp aren't you?
- PT Yes, the Siesta Park Holiday Resort - I started off with my father in 1946, and presently my wife and son are involved in the business. My son is managing and I'm more or less relegated as the helper.
- PW So in a way you could say that most of Western Australia's fishermen have come to see you at some time or another?
- PT Well yeah, we get a lot of fishermen here and I go elsewhere myself quite extensively fishing so I meet a lot of fishermen yes.

PW And that's what we are here to talk about today, and particularly your association with the Ningaloo Reef region - can you tell me when you first became involved with Ningaloo Reef?

PT Oh, not precisely, I'd have to check it back - my daughter, let's see, she was - thirty six years old - she was a baby on one of our first trips. It was around about thirty six years ago, and it was the year that they were investigating a site for the Coral Bay Resort, it wasn't built at that stage and (at) the bay itself there was only a drover's shack, and - they had a caretaking staff on site at Maud Landing with three or four caravans, one of which we rented, and we actually went fishing that year from the beach at Maud landing.

PW Were you thinking about taking on the resort up there?

PT Oh no, no. No way, I started going there as an adventuring thing, I always tended sort of to drift north in the winter time, starting off in the Abrolhos Islands - in the very early fifties, I think it was about the fifty one or -

Noise as PW rescues tape recorder from falling off table.

PW Well how did you first hear about Ningaloo?

PT I can't recall exactly, except I think a friend of mine had been north and told me about the marvellous fishing at Maud Landing - I don't think it was - probably called Coral Bay at that stage, I think it was Maud Landing was sort of the name of the area, and having been to, first of all the Abrolhos, and then we moved up to Sharks Bay when that was very much a frontier town with a sheanng shed pub, and - we just sort of kept drifting north as the populace started to find these places, we sort of moved out to somewhere that was virtually untouched, and at the stage we got to Maud Landing it was - a very infrequently visited place, and hadn't been spoiled at that stage.

PW Have your fishing activities always been as an amateur?

PT No, I did fish for an eight year period as a professional in the sixties, I built a boat which was thirty seven foot long, and I was mainly charter operating. I was probably the only licensed charter operator south of Fremantle in those days - they used to call it Master of Harbour and Rivermanship in those days because it wasn't such a term as "charter operator," but - I also professionally fished, which was only line fishing. I started off with my father as a babe in arms virtually, fishing as an amateur of course, with my brother, who was an amateur - from a shed we had at - what is now known as Marmion Beach, in those days it was called "Ovals" and we had the second shed there, after the old stone shed, and we used to fish from the beach there of an evening. We'd go out and camp at the shed, or my father had a little double ended sailing boat we used to go fishing for dhufish and things around the reefs there.

PW Where were you professionally fishing?

PT I was professionally fishing from here - in the area virtually bounded out to Naturaliste Reef and down as far as Hamelin Bay, and Geographe Bay generally

PW Well at Ningaloo, how long would your visits last when you were up there?

Side A: 5 mins

PT Oh we'd usually go up for a couple of weeks, occasionally it may have even been three - I'd generally go, firstly with the family, and then as the family increased I'd generally go away with a friend, usually with two boats - two pairs we generally were, or quite often we'd just go up on our own, with just another male friend and - I'd usually take one of my kids with me, so usually the one that wasn't going to school, that hadn't started school, the four year old would usually come away with dad for a fortnight, and we used to have a great time you know, picking on the reefs, getting oysters, and - my children grew up appreciating life as it was and I always pointed out to them that they probably wouldn't be able to do the same things and enjoy the same freedoms as they were with me, when they themselves were going out with their kids

PW Well by that then you had some recognition that the beauty of those places was finite, that it wasn't going to last?

PT Oh yes certainly, this is one of the reasons we kept moving, to see things as they were in their unspoiled state - we'd quite often hear people that had been to these unspoiled places how it abounded in fishing, you'd never fish them out, and I'd say, "You'll fish them out." I'd seen it happen. I'd seen it happen down here, I'd seen it happen over at the Abrolhos, the diminishing of fish, and I'd seen it happening at Sharks Bay, and - the same thing of course is now happening at Coral Bay - where they're having to try and control it. I've always had a very strong argument against the Fisheries Department controls in that there are - latent developer, they only seem to realise what's happening when it's well and truly happened and they are very poor on the long-term planning, and this is the thing that I'm fighting all the time, is the recognition of the fact that we should be looking after the fishery and not the well being of the few fishermen that are hoping to survive a bit longer in the fishery.

PW What's been the primary problem with the decline of the fisheries?

PT Well I think the methods of fishing haven't been controlled early enough, I mean it's not a matter of who catches the fish - alright there's a thousand people fishing with a fishing line, some of those people can be expert and they need not necessarily be the professionals, there's a lot of amateurs I know that are far more - their techniques are far better and they'll catch more fish with a line than a professional will - but when it comes to trapping, set lining, set netting, trawling - the methods of fishing can decimate a fisheries population and a habitat, when it starts destroying the habitat, this is when we are getting to the stone end of things, when we've got to start dragging the bottom to scratch out the last few fish; and unfortunately this seems to be the way that fisheries progress, as the numbers decline and the professional can't make a living with a line, they allow him to diversify into traps or nets or trawls, and all they're doing is reducing the fish population, and catching sufficient to keep those fishermen viable for a bit longer, but they all eventually fish themselves out of existence, so I mean can't see really that we're gaining much.

PW When you started fishing at Ningaloo which was about the 1960's, the late 1960's do you think?

PT - What does that make it, ninety eight now, thirty eight, yearh probably be - it was - it was at the time I was professional fishing, which was in the early '60s. I started going up there as winter - holiday, even though I professionally fished I still loved fishing, as most fishermen do. I think - fishing gets in your blood, but - yearh, it would have been round that time.

PW What was the fishing like then?

PT Oh, it was absolutely amazing - of course the fishing inside the reef was good, but we were one of the few boats that - I had a fifteen foot boat that was quite good little sea boat, and up there I always carried what I considered to be adequate safety gear, although I only ever had one motor. I had oars, I could row, I had a collapsible mast and a little yacht spinnaker thing that I could rig as a jury sail to get somewhere, and of course as you'd know, up that coast you've always got a strong southerly comes in so you can always head north, and it was always the plan if I ever got caught - 'cause we were usually fishing on our own in those days, then we were probably the only boat along the coast, and we reckoned we could sail up to Point Cloates or somewhere where there was an opening and get in, so - though we never had any problems, I usually kept a well maintained outfit that didn't break down, so -

Side A: 10.1 mins

PW What sort of fish did you used to catch?

PT Well of course inside the reef, the spangled emperors and the - well nobody used to worry about the lesser fish trevally, we used to try and avoid those sort of fish, but inside mainly spangled emperor, and outside it'd be spangled emperor, red emperor - mackerel of course. Generally speaking in those days you'd just fish - and I had a little echo sounder in the boat, even in those days and you fished the drop-offs for the mackerel.

and quite often we'd - and it's a thing I've never seen since, but we used to see spangled emperors schooling on the top. You'd see backs breaking the surface and wonder what they were, and go across and see a mass of these brown backs breaking the surface, and they were spangles, so we'd just pull up and drift amongst them and throw out a floating line and catch them, and the fish then were, you know, quite prolific along the back of the reef, anywhere there was a bit of a sandy hole in the depth of water that was safe to anchor, and you know, surrounding rocky ledge, which was generally all reefy coral out the back; you'd anchor in a sandy patch with a little bit of burley and you'd have your colony, you know, your blue boned groper and your spangles, and the odd, you know, grop - course cod of all types and - of course the very big cod, you'd see quite often, but - we never used to worry about them because they weren't much good to eat anyway, and now of course it's good that they're being protected.

PW Did you ever catch any of the big cod?

PT Oh yearh, yearh. We occasionally brought one in to show people - we'd carefully get it into the boat and usually get a bag each in our hand slide him over the gunwale, into the bottom of the boat, and they were generally very quiet, they'd lay there and we'd keep a wet bag over and then take him in and show him to the people on the beach, and then let him go again and we'd watch him swim back out to the reef. But they are good survivors, they seem to be able to hold up very well out of the water

PW Were these the fish that they call the potato cod?

PT Yeah, well we used to call them in those days, just call them groper, thinking they were the same as the nor'west groper, but we found since that there are variations to the cods, but they would be the potato cod, or the brown spotted cod.

PW What was the biggest one you ever caught?

PT Oh, I suppose about seven feet - anything bigger you wouldn't get it in the boat anyway by handling it.

PW That's seven feet from tip to tail?

PT Oh yearh, yearh.

PW And did you get many of those?

PT Oh well as I say, we used to try and avoid them actually, you'd quite often have one under the boat that'd race up and grab the odd snapper, but you know, it was very rarely we bothered to try and catch them.

PW The other types of fish that you mentioned - what sort of sizes were they?

PT Oh I suppose the spangles were generally eight to ten pounds, you'd sometimes - I'm talking pounds of course.

PW That's okay.

PT But occasionally you'd get a big one, twelve, fourteen I suppose would be a really good one. But I think the size is - they still catch some big ones, but not as many of them. Baldchin groper similarly, about eight, ten pound.

PW And when you'd go out on a day's fishing, how many fish would you bring back?

PT Yearh well see, in those days we used to take a freezer up, and like everybody then used to bring back a heap and give them away to our friends and - it was great to come back. Everybody used to look forward to our trips north because they knew they were going to be - inundated with fish when we got back home, but - we generally have a freezer - stuck in the back of the ute

PW Were these domestic freezers -?

PT No - I had one made up. It was a car air conditioning - or later, - well sorry, the early ones were just an ordinary - little freezer I think we had to start with, that we used to run with a lighting plant, or we usually tried to camp near someone that did have a lighting plant and use their power, and go - sort of share the fish with them

PW How many fish could you carry in that freezer?

PT Oh well, filleted I s'pose - an estimate I s'pose there - we'd probably be able to bring back the equivalent of forty or fifty fish at least I would think.

PW Hmm, and do you have any idea of the weight of the fish that you used to bring back?

PT -No, not really. I s'pose there'd be - there's about a five cubic foot freezer we'd have in those days, which would have - been quite a lot of fish now when you take just the fillets, and - we usually used to have friends up there that we could give a lot away to on the job, so we would be catching a lot more than that, a lot more than I'd say that we either should or would catch these days. And so the whole outlook in those days was different, there were heaps, and plenty, but I could see it happening as the years went on. Mind you when I used to take my kids up there, I always used to teach them the conservation ethic where they shouldn't treat on, you know, corals and take anything off the reef. 'Cause the first few years we went there, the mainly the other people we used to see there, there were very few people like ourselves then that used to go up on fishing camps. They were mainly shell collectors, and we could see a lot of eastern states people particularly, a lot of old ladies very strangely, you'd get a couple of old dears that were probably old widows, that had an old "Combie" (Volks) wagon, and you'd see them walking along the beaches at low tide, and they be tracing the signs in the sand and picking out olive shells, or whatever sorts they could find, and of course the reefs used to get picked very heavily, and I could see then there was going to become a time when - 'cause we used to pick up the cowries and show them to the kids, and they'd, you know, appreciate what sorts of shells they were, and how and where they lived under the ledges, and we were always keen divers, we used to get a lot of crayfish, and - so they were taught, you know, not to take anything that they didn't want - or couldn't use, and this has always been my main argument with our Fisheries Department, they concentrate more on fining amateurs for selling fish to - conflict with the professional fishermen's income, rather than conserving the fish stocks, and I think the wastage aspect should be you know, brought home more squarely to people that they shouldn't catch fish they wont eat or used, and the worst thing I see happening here is people throwing fish or crabs in the bin that they - have caught too many and can't handle.

date A: 15 mins

PW That's down here at Siesta Park?

PT Oh yeah, yeah, it happens a bit here, although people are generally getting better with it and I certainly talk to the kids if I see them spearing a crab, or doing something that I think - catching stingrays, which I consider to be our beach cleaners here, and yep.

PW Back up at Ningaloo, did you ever sell any fish?

PT Yeah I sold fish in the early stages, well of course I did have a licence too the first couple of years, and I did sell fish for a couple of years after that, I made sure I entered them on my income tax so I could only get pinched for catching them illegally, but that only lasted for another couple of years after, and we used to bring back a few whole ones and sell 'em on the way home to cut out petrol, that's about the extent of it, but I certainly never made a business of going up there fishing for fish

PW Did a lot of people do that sort of thing?

PT Oh I think a lot were doing it yeah, we used to strike blokes that had kangaroo shooter's type freezers and you know, they were just filling them up as best they could, although most of these blokes I found were very inept fishermen and didn't seem to be catching much, and they were taking back what we considered to be rubbish anyway, but it does happen and - but it was mainly I think just groups of people, a lot of farmers

would go up there in a big group and they'd stock up their freezers for the next six months, which I didn't consider to be bad anyway. As long as that fish was being used, and this is why I say - wastage in my opinion, a fish that's just caught, and same with people filleting their fish up there, as we used to, just take off the best section of the fillet and leave all the wing bits and throw it away, you are wasting three quarters of the fish. I actually wrote to the Fisheries Department suggesting they license people to - like these old people that stay there for three or four months to collect the fish to sell them as cray bait to a firm and somebody like the Flying Doctor got a cut, and they perhaps got a cut, and it was managed properly so it could be regulated, but they weren't interested, they just said the fishermen found it was cheaper to buy bait from Taiwan, in the meantime all the wastage, which is probably three quarters of the fish that come ashore up there, just being either dig into a hole or carted back off out to sea.

PW Was most of the fish going for human consumption?

PT Well I'd say it was all going for human consumption, how do you mean?

PW Well, was there anybody catching fish for cray bait?

PT Oh, not with a line as far as I know, there probably would have been some of the professionals may have been netting mullet of something for cray bait there - but no I think generally speaking there weren't a lot of professionals up there in those days. You used to get the southern fishermen'd go north and fish generally outside for snapper or mackerel, but they'd only be the odd ones that'd get as far as Ningaloo, most of those used to go to Sharks bay and places like that.

Side A: 20.1 mins

PW After you had started fishing in that region, when did you start to notice some sort of decline taking place?

PT Oh it's hard to say I s'pose, but I s'pose it would have coincided with with the, you know, the increase of people going up there, which were increasing year by year. We went steadily for twenty or so years, I used to go every year to - somewhere or other. Either down at Warra (Warroora) Station or on the what we call the Boorabudja (Bruboodjoo) or the nine mile, or up to Ningaloo near the Ningaloo Station, we sort of had our various favourite camping spots and as they sort of started to get crowded, we used to try and find another one, you know, that wasn't so well used. But you could see it happening, it was just a thing that you were very aware of, that the fish inside the reef weren't so plentiful and you had to you know, find the time - mind you it's always been the same anywhere, that you'll get a week on, a week off with fishing, they seem to have their on moments and off moments. We always used to try and pick the medium tides and the moon being down as much as possible, and it usually used to work out. We usually used to pick the right week to go. (chuckle).

PW Did you notice any other changes taking place on the reef system apart from lowering of fish numbers?

PT Well I never sort of observed the kind of decline of any coral, except I know in the early days we got stuck on the coral in Coral Bay, which these days you realise that you - when I say we got stuck, we got caught on a falling tide and had to sort of pole our way out with oars, and breaking down this stagnom coral in doing so, and these are the sort of things now that of course we find by even dropping our anchors into this stuff, and you know, banging it with a boat, or you might damage a prop, but you're probably also breaking an irreplaceable bit of coral. It wasn't sort of worried about in those days, but of course now you are very aware that what you're destroying is a - you know, almost irreplaceable.

PW Did you used to discuss with other fishermen that things were going down and with the fishing?

PT Oh yeah, I think I always have. I've always been a thinker and you know, about what we're doing in our environment, and I probably have discussed this with various people, some would agree, others probably - I think most us (have) selfish motivation. If you're getting heaps and - the same with most fishermen will argue whatever they're doing is alright, but what's that other bloke that's causing the problem. But I think we've got to realise that we've all got to modify our ideas, and the same with our Fisheries Department.

should realise that it's a different ball game, it's not the wild west any more.

PW Did you tend to be secretive about your favourite spots, and not tell other people?

PT Oh yeah, and I respected - 'cause I had a lot of professional fishing friends wherever I went that used to show me the ropes to start with, and I'd always respect their spots and keep it in confidence, and I'd generally only fish it once and only lightly, of if I did catch a surplus of fish I'd either take it to them - yeah, I certainly do believe that you know, that we shouldn't share spots around.

PW And is this because the resources in those spots are finite?

PT That's right, it doesn't matter where you're fishing, up there or down here, there's little oasis situations in a very big bottom, and the fish just live around these isolated areas, and once you've fished them out, they either take a long time to restock, or they don't. And if people with their cheap fiestas are going to keep fishing the same spots they're going to find in a very short time they're not going to get any fish on them any more.

PW Have you any idea how long it takes for a location to restock?

PT Well it probably depends on the type of fish, to a degree, but I think generally speaking - it can take years before they even come back, only a few fish out of a family of fish that - have been coming back to a place year in, year out - it takes another family, or another fish or two to find that and build up a family to come back to it, and this is what we find here, you know we've had spots that have been good for years because we've just virtually you know, farmed them - might fish one, once or twice a year, others we might fish seven or eight times a year if they're the sort of fish that you get in, like snapper that come in in schools and you know there's plenty more. We always try to leave some there, we don't sort of keep fishing all day until we fish them out, we reckon we always just taking the odd one or two, but, yeah, once a place is fished down to its, you know, bottom level I think it takes a long time to build up again.

Side A: 25.1 mins

PW Phil have you ever read any scientific material on life cycles of fish? -

PT Oh quite a lot, in fact with my argument with the Fisheries Department I've spoken to people like - Keith Sainsbury, CSIRO and I've read papers by all sorts of scientists - Barrier Reef Marine Park studies, and the Nor'west Trawl Fishing studies and - Oh I do fully understand I think the types of you know, issues that are involved with fishing, and - I don't think I'm - short sighted enough to think that it's just - you know, one or two people doing the damage. I think we're all doing damage, it's a case of what's sustainable, and I think sustainability is the name of the game, and what the Fisheries Department is allowing to happen in a place like Geographe Bay for instance, or trap fishing off Coral Bay, it's certainly not sustainable, their just allowing the fishermen to diversify and make their living a bit longer.

PW In the past at Ningaloo, did you ever examine the stomach contents of fish to see what they were eating?

PT No, occasionally we'd get these, I forget what they called them, they were long snouted sort of a snapper. They're one of the emperor family, and they were noted for feeding on cowry shells and this sort of thing, so occasionally we'd sort of have a look to see whether they had any whole cowry, they'd usually have a lot of crushed shell, but occasionally you'd find whole, you know, little scallop type fish and cowries, but no never sort of seriously. I usually do with my fish down here to see what they're feeding on. If I catch jewie usually I look to see whether he's got a you find all sorts of odd things like little leopard sharks and stingrays and things you wouldn't think they'd be too - interested in, but yeah, well I s'pose I do quite often study their stomach contents.

PW What do you use for bait at Ningaloo?

PT Generally octopus that we'd - either catch on the reef, or we used to take up some from down here to start off

with, but generally it'd be octopus or, if we had a tuna or something that was a nice you know, fleshy, bloody fish, that was also good bait. Long toms or stuff that had a - but generally at Coral Bay we found the fish were - oh mulies of course later on, we used to use a lot of those, but they're probably the best bait, but we generally found that Coral Bay, you had to have a more tasty bait than you did for say your snapper at Sharks Bay. They'd eat anything that sort of moved and it looked a bit silver and it - so you went there for something tough and would stay on the hook, whereas at Coral Bay we found the fish there, particularly baldchin Groper and the others, you had to have fairly selective bait that was good bait

PW How did you catch your octopus?

PT Oh just walk around the reefs at low tide and hook 'em out with a little gaff hook, a small gaff hook as a rule, or hang on to 'em with a gaff hook while you got your hand in there and sort of peel them off

PW Was there plenty?

PT Oh there was plenty in those days, you'd just go down and get your half dozen or what ever you wanted and - but you know, as the years went by, and here's a thing, you know, when people start picking the reefs, (indistinct) there wasn't anything on the reefs. The occys used to squirt at you as you went past, they were all gone and you know, the pressure of fishing certainly decimated them, they were very prolific in on the reef in the early days, you'd go to some reefs that were noted for octopus and they'd be in every second hole, you know, twenty feet apart or (indistinct) all over the reef sometimes.

PW This decimation was mainly around the Coral Bay area?

PT Oh yeah.

PW Did it occur up along other parts?

PT Wherever people got to, of course there were a lot of tracks in, and in other places you had to perhaps walk to you know, half a mile or more along the beach.

PW Do you still go to Coral bay, or the Ningaloo region?

PT No - Oh well I've called in there a couple of times on my way to Exmouth 'cause I, you know, I'm quite keen on the game fishing side of thing these days and I go to Exmouth, so I have called into Coral Bay on a couple of occasions, but what I see there I'm not particularly wrapped in because it's more like Cottesloe Beach, you know, there's people sitting around with towels, there's concessionaires taking out, you know, glass bottomed boats and it's just a clutter really and - it you know, its nice for some people but it doesn't appeal to me any more, no.

PW Do you go to any of the other parts of the reef occasionally?

PT Oh, well, not really, I just sort of don't get time really, I - if I've got time I take in two fishing "comps" (competitions) at Exmouth. Well when I say we don't go to Ningaloo Reef, I do, because we fish out from Tantabiddi quite a lot, but - we're just fishing outside for game fish as a rule

PW In the time that you've been going up there, one of the matters that I'm interested in is the health of fishermen. Have you had any problems with - any health issues relating to your fishing? For example sun cancers and things like that, shin cancers?

PT No, no, I haven't had any sun cancers yet, touch wood, but I am pretty slack as at my protection - I very rarely wear a hat and I very rarely use sunscreen, but no I haven't had any - certainly can't think of any health problems I could relate to Coral Bay

PW Do you think - you've obviously eaten a lot of fish over time, has this been beneficial to your health?

PT Well strangely I don't eat a lot of fish. I like catching it but - once a week is enough for me as a rule, but - all my family like fish, so they eat - really enjoy it, well I certainly enjoy it once a week, or possibly twice, but not a lot.

PW In the heydays of fishing at Ningaloo did you used to eat fish regularly then? Or did you mostly eat that fairly rarely too.

PT Oh no, still fairly rarely. I've always loved shell fish and oysters: 'I'd would sell my soul for a bucket of oysters' I often say but - I like a bit of crayfish, but same thing, I used to find it more fun catching them than eating them.

PW What is it about oysters?

PT (chuckle) I don't know, just the flavour I think. I like oysters *au naturel* but I'll eat five or six dozen of those any time.

PW Could you do that at Ningaloo?

PT Oh yeah. there's places at Ningaloo. There's some good oysters, not a lot of places, there's a lot of oysters, but they're very heavy shelled - very old oysters that are - you can tell an oyster by his anal (annual) rings. - his growth rings, and - most of 'em are like rocks with a little fish inside. But there were the odd places and - I better not disclose where they are 'cause there's still a few there and I might go and get some, but - a few more (tape ends)

Side A: Tape ends 32.1 mins

Side B: Tape starts

PW We were just talking about oysters Phil and you told me the exact places just as the tape ran out so everybody's going to miss out on that.

PT (chuckle) But there are some good ones there, but they're very few and far between, as is the case mostly up the coast, this is the thing I've found - very interesting about places, wherever I get to I always look to find the best place to get a feed of oysters, and whereas there's always oysters once you get up north in these tidal regions, there's very few places you get what I class to be "good" oysters, or large oysters. And the few little spots I have I nurture very secretly so that I can go and have my feed, and all my kids love them just as much as I do, so we - the Tickle's're really sweet on the oysters.

PW How many kids have you got Phil?

PT I've got two daughters and a son, they're all very keen divers and fishermen.

PW Are they adults now?

PT Oh yes, they're all adults. In fact my grandchildren are growing up the same way, they've - they've both got - the three of them have got families now, although the two year old - two and a half years now, is a very keen fishing fanatic, in fact that's all he talks about and all his first words are names of fish - and he can identify most of the fish in a fish book (chuckle) and he's going to be a real problem, that boy I think

PW What are the names of your children?

PT Oh well, Shelly's got two girls, Kelly and - Robin's got - Matt and - Greg's got - Blake

PW And do those families go up to Ningaloo?

PT - No, actually we've been going to Sharks Bay lately, into the South Passage, or near Steep Point, and we

have a little family weekend up there, 'cause my daughter lives in Geraldton, it's only a short run, but - no we haven't had any family trips, or I don't think the others are going to that way either.

PW You have a small holiday cottage at Shark Bay?

PT Oh no, no we camp, we - I take the boat across to the passage and they go in by four wheel drive through Useless Loop, and we camp for, say with these days with all the kids for only about two or three nights and do a bit of diving in the passage and - fish for fish, you know, in the boat sometimes, and a bit of exploring - we have a great time. The kids really love it.

PW Have you ever had any lucky escapes when you've been fishing at Ningaloo? Boat capsizes?

PT No, no, oh well when I say no, lucky escapes, we had a couple of thrills with big waves that have come up out of nowhere, but

PW Like a "king wave" are they?

PT Yearh, there's a place out around the back of the main opening of - Maud's Landing when you turn south - I've seen a wave break there in - I think it's about fifteen fathoms of water which is - usually as long as you've got a sounder going - you keep in enough water, you're pretty sure the wave's not going to turn over, but - these were three of the biggest waves I've seen up there (chuckle) that - shaped up, and we just sort of cut one, and then - felt we were over it and then we saw another one coming up and we just managed to cut that one, we had mackerel lines out the back at the time too and so these things were flying along the top, and so we just cut three as they broke, but you know, a friend of mine actually did come to grief with his fishing boat - on the top end of Dirk Hartog Island with a big wave, and so - yearh, they can be a problem up that way.

PW Did your friend perish?

PT No, he got out with a broken leg, it was a thirty foot fishing boat that he got caught trolling for mackerel and he was cleaning the fish while his deckie was steering the boat and never saw this one looming up, and it just end for ended the boat and drove it under, yearh.

PW Do you see yourself as being part of the ocean, do you personally relate to the sea in any way?

PT Oh I think I do, I certainly - when I've passed on I think they'll be scattering my ashes over the bay, but, that's Geographe Bay, but no, I've always loved the sea and I certainly respect the sea, I've - well I've always had a great affinity towards the sea, and as I say, I fully respect it, I like it in its good moods, and I curse it in its bad moods, but I still love it.

Side B: 5.1 mins

PW Have you ever had any religious - associations with the ocean? For example some people take part in Blessing of the Fleet ceremonies, and while you are an amateur and wouldn't do that, those peoples still have a religious association with the sea. They see that God is - along side them in their fishing activities and perhaps keeping an eye on them.

PT No no, no I'm not a very religious person, I believe in the Christian principles, but personally I'm a - I don't like being hypocritical too much and I'm not a great religious person

PW And you've never prayed for a greater catch? (joint laughter) Or given thanks?

PT No, I think it's just good or bad luck, you've either got it or you haven't that day, yearh

PW We touched briefly on fishing literature in the past, on scientific literature, are you an avid reader of fishing literature, like commercial magazines?

PT Yep, yearh, I, you know, of course subscribe to the - Fisheries bulletin or magazine, and I'm always interested to read anything that I see in the papers concerning fisheries and any other stuff that I get, or programmes that I see (on TV) I'm very interested, yearh.

PW Do these influence your fishing decisions?

PT Well how do you mean about my fishing decisions?

PW Well where you might go next; if you read about a good location somewhere - do you think, 'Hmm I might try that next time.'?

PT Well I s'pose there could be an influence there, I don't say that I rushed off - every time I've seen a you know, a report of some good fish being caught, I think I sort of know enough spots or areas that I'd like to try without chasing them but - no I don't think it's influenced me a lot that way.

PW Over time have you changed your technology?

PT Oh yearh. I've always sort of been somewhere near the leading edge. I actually had the first echo sounder south of Fremantle, because my parents brought back an old Pye recorder from one of their trips to Hong Kong in the fifties, and I was probably one of the early ones to get a GPS and now I've usually got a pretty up to date sounder. I believe these days if you want to get out and catch fish you've got to have the right equipment, because that's they only way we're catching them now, we're just getting them down to the last dregs unfortunately.

PW Do you spend a lot of money on fishing technology?

PT No, no, what I saying, I've got a good sounder, a good GPS - I just - I've got the same boat that I've had for the last five or six years, and I had the previous one for five or six years, and they're only smallish boats - I look after my equipment and I trade it when it's needed, but I don't sort of get carried away with buying a lot of fancy gear; as long as it's functional.

PW How big are your boats?

PT Oh about five point six metres, this one. And that's generally the sized boat I've had, you know, fourteen to sixteen feet, something that's easily trailable that you can take into awkward places, launch from beaches and over reefs and -

PW What sized motor has it got?

PT Oh, this ones' got a ninety.

PW Ninety horsepower?

PT Yearh.

PW When you first started fishing at Ningaloo what sort of boat did you have then?

PT - First trip up there we had a fifteen foot Steber, and it had a fifty horse Mercury on as I remember, yearh

PW What was that boat made of?

PT Fibreglass, hmm. Yearh I've generally had fibreglass boats although I did have a period I went through, I had a few "alli" boats but - generally been fibreglass, but generally speaking I've looked for something that's - you know, an open type boat that's fairly seaworthy and - just big enough to carry the sort of gear that you need to carry.

PW What sort of lines did you use?

PT Oh always hand lines, I've never been a rod fisherman until recent years, over the last fifteen years I've been going north game fishing, but - I still only use rods for in competition fishing I still like to use the handline for the sort of fish that we go to catch a meal

PW Have you always used monofilament?

PT Yearh, well not always, I can think back to the time before monofilament was invented and we used to use heavy cord, you know, cord lines. But since nylon's come in.

PW Would you have used cord lines at Ningaloo?

PT No, no.

PW And have you ever used nets up that way?

PT No, I'm very anti-nets, I don't think any amateur fisherman should own a net - possibly there could be some - some you know, variation to this in places where there's only fish that you need to net for, but I think the methods of fishing are the things I've always argued against and I think its - if you've got to use a net to catch a feed of fish it's the very reason why you shouldn't be using it.

Side B: 10.5 mins

PW How about set lines?

PT Oh, I can't see any reason for an amateur to use a set line

PW So you've never used a set line either?

PT No, I've never used set lines.

PW Did you ever get out of sight of land when you were up fishing off the other side of Ningaloo?

PT Oh, yearh, quite - not when we were fishing - along the Ningaloo Reef itself, but you know, these days where we're game fishing at Exmouth we often do, yearh.

PW Do you think that there's any improvement in some parts of Ningaloo since some of the management programmes have taken place?

PT Well to compare it immediately before the management took place - I couldn't say really - I should think there possibly has been, its a - I don't think it'll ever come back to what it used to be, because I think there's just the pressure of (indistinct) coming on, I think the best that we can hope for is that it marks time and doesn't get any worse. But it may come back, I don't know

PW Well Phil you've told me a lot of interesting things here, but is there things that maybe I should have asked and haven't asked you?

PT - You want to turn it off for a while while I just sort of have to think

Tape paused at 12 mins.

PT Yearh well, as far as things that I've noticed up there I s'pose, the development of the Coral Bay Resort, - when it started off, the person that started it off obviously thought he was going to attract people from Britain and overseas that normally would have been going to the Bahamas - because we had the perfect

climate and some great coral, and plenty of fishing, that everybody was going to flock to it, but having been in the holiday industry all my life and knowing how people react, it's a very slow process to build a business up, and I think they started off far too quickly. It was set up like a Bahamas resort, it had all the contrivances you could imagine in it's time. It had dinghies with outboard motors, it had Mini Mokes for hire, it had underwater SCUBA gear type submarine (chuckle) propellant things you could hire - it just had too much stuff, too early, they had very poor management, and every thing fell into disrepair very quickly. They had a desalinating plant that only lasted about twelve months I think and it started to conk out. And all their equipment was put in without a lot of thought, too quickly, and the whole place more or less went over the top and they just never had the custom, they never had the amount of people that were prepared to spend the sort of dollars that they'd anticipated, but it seeded a shame to me that it was - was exploited so rapidly, and probably attracting the sort of people that don't appreciate the reef, although now, I think, with our conservation outlooks have changed a lot, and I think it's probably being managed quite well, considering the numbers of people that are going there, but it's still a headache and it's a shame that (to) see it developing so much, and then the thought of a marina going in that was going to be, I forget how many thousand (chuckle) units were going to go in at Maud Landing that was going to be a total disaster. But I think that has subsided, I don't know whether you know any more about that. But there - just because we've got a good bay and you know, a good sheltered aspect there, it tends to be, you know, over exploited to the point its what people go there expecting, or hoping to get, isn't there any more. I think this happens in a lot of places and its tending to happen where I am here, there's developments going ahead too fast at a rate we can't cope with, and - hopefully the Ningaloo Reef will start marking time and - telling people, "If you want to come in you come in at our pace and you do things in respect to the area." because it is a beautiful area.

PW Phil I see above your head on the wall are some enormous - casts of fish that you've obviously caught in the past. Were they caught in the Ningaloo region?

PT No, no. They're all local fish, and the only reason I got them up is to show, you know, people the sort of fish we catch here. They're not necessarily the biggest fish. It's just - you know, when I've had a specimen, and a bag of plaster handy, I make a cast and make one.

PW Well fish are certainly an interesting subject Phil and you've told me lots of interesting information. I thank you very much for this, and I wish you well in the future.

PT Right, thank Paul. I wish you well in your endeavours too.

Side B, interview ends: 15.7 mins.



Transcript of Interview

Interviewee: Anthony Girdwood Tomlinson

Address: PO Box 242, Exmouth, WA. 6707.

Phone: 08 9949 1770

Date of birth: 16 April 1942 (56)

Date: 15 March 1998

Place: Learmonth residence

Side A 31.4 mins

Side B 30.7 mins

Total: 62.1 mins

Interviewer and transcriber: Dr Paul R. Weaver

Subject: Exmouth Gulf (adjacent to Ningaloo)

Personal entry into fishing industry - English immigrant seeking fortune. Pioneering days of prawning at Exmouth. Kailis now dominant operator - one independent trawler in friendly opposition. Severe collapse of prawn stocks in past due to overfishing. Recovery of stocks through management scheme - but probably will never equate what existed at beginning. Consolidating of trawler fleet still necessary. Experiments - live prawn exports unsuccessful. Season varies - lunar phase - species sought - preliminary surveys. Trawling - method, gear description, duration of trawls. Jellyfish scourge. Maximisation of catch - experimental shift to dragging four trawls instead of two in 1998, inspired by Gulf of Carpentaria fishery. Payment of fishermen - 15% of marketed price per trawler, less peripheries. Bye-catch - sensitivities - less now than in past - nothing wasted because other species consume - anglers contribute to ecological imbalance.

Side B: Bye-catch - reduction strategies - species - many types of crabs few molluscs - juvenile mullet in Sept. - large sharks trawled. Vermin species - rays, sawfish, shovel nose sharks. A few dolphins and turtles trawled. Turtle resuscitation. Large prawns most valuable for Japanese market. Ningaloo environs not thought to be economically viable. Recreational camper at Ningaloo in past, with children. Fishing significantly declined on northern end of Ningaloo. Large pelagic fish declined, esp. Sp. mackerel since establishment of Dampier fleet. Crews generally curious about marine zoology, appreciative of more information. First Blessing of the Fleet at Exmouth, 1997. A greater spiritual dimension appreciated in fisher life. Transit between Fremantle and Exmouth very dangerous. Navigation - technological changes. Pressure on trawlers to operate in adverse weather.



PW This interview is being conducted at Kailis, Exmouth, on the fifteenth of March 1998, with Anthony Girdwood Tomlinson, otherwise known as Thomo. Thomo could you please for the record give your full name and your date of birth.

AT Just talk straight into this? (microphone) My name's Anthony Girdwood Tomlinson born in - on the 16th of April 1942.

PW Well thanks for seeing me Thomo - you're working at Kailis and you're a skipper here - is that correct?

AT I've been a skipper here since 1970.

PW And - what are you a skipper of?

AT Prawn trawler - the one I have at the moment I've had since 1980, which is seventy four feet long and ninety odd ton, called the *Point Cloates*.

PW Do you fish in the gulf itself, or do you go further afield?

AT No we fish entirely in the gulf for prawns - I have tried occasional other types of fishing outside, but only purely because in our off season which is quite a long one, four and a half months over summer - rather than tie the boats up the company has always looked for different ways of bringing in some sort of income in that closed season, apart from prawns, and - the only one that ever showed any signs of success that we tried was - stern trawling for fish, which was outside the gulf, up towards Barrow Island. But in fact although we caught quite well for the short time we did it, there were reasons that it wasn't viable, mainly because we had to travel so far to and from the grounds, and lose a lot of time steaming, and the fact that we only got two trucks a week, which you had to time your unload for those two days, and in the end that fell through, but mainly it's just been prawning in the gulf, in Exmouth Gulf.

PW Have you fished anywhere else?

AT Only when I first started my fishing career in Dongera, crayfishing for a couple of years.

PW Can you tell how that started?

AT What the crayfishing?

PW Well how you got into fishing?

AT Oh, well, I'm a ten pound Pommie migrant as a matter of fact, and when I first came to Australia in 1965 I think, I stayed with some friends of my parents over near Sydney, and she had a newspaper clipping she'd cut out, saying where all the best paid jobs in Australia were, unskilled jobs, and the one that caught my eye was crayfishing out of Geraldton in Western Australia, so when I finally got around to W.A. I went up to Geraldton, and in the end I got on a boat in Dongera. And - in the second cray season the skipper I worked for in Dongera, a bloke called Theo Rose who actually died a few years ago, he was one of quite a few crayfishermen in those days that - after the whites, he used to...

PW That's the white crayfish?

AT The white crayfish season, yes. He used to sling on a trawl winch and a few nets and come up to Exmouth Gulf for the prawning, so I came along for the ride, and I found it a lot more interesting than crayfishing, and - although I did one more cray season, I really preferred the prawning and I've been here ever since.

PW Did the crayfishing realise your youthful hopes of making a lot of money?

AT Well when it first started, no. Because the skipper I first worked for was caught by the Fisheries Department for having too many pots and had his licence taken off him, so I only did it for a couple of weeks, and then the next bloke, Theo Rose, well we didn't have a very good season anyway, so I really didn't make a lot of money, but it was alright.

PW Can you remember the name of the bloke who you first fished with?

AT Oh, yes he's a legend on the coast, he's still alive, a fellow called Dickie Carr.

PW And he's still fishing?

AT No, he's - stopped fishing now, but he is an incredible man. I mean, any crayfisherman today has probably heard of Dickie Carr, as I say, he's a living legend thus bloke

PW Where does he live?

AT - I think it's - a place called Walkaway, or somewhere around there, sort of inland from Geraldton somewhere, at the moment.

Side A: 5.1 mins

PW Would he be an old man now?

AT Yep, I've heard he's pretty crook, I believe he has cancer

PW So you came to - Exmouth - was that when Kailis were involved here?

AT Yes, they'd actually started in about '63 I think, and what happened, some crayfishermen, the same as we did with the fish trawling in the off season, in the off season the crayfishing, they used to go looking for alternative methods of an income, and since they were catching prawns in Shark Bay, a few of them thought, 'Well we'll have a go in this little gulf further north.' And they did find prawns, you know, quite a lot, and Michael Kailis, who was just starting his illustrious career and had just bought the crayfish processing plant in Dongera, which he still owns to this day - was interested enough in trying to talk some of his crayfishermen into going up to Learmonth and he came up and had a look at the place, and bought an old mullet canning factory belonging to the Hunt Brothers, and - started a shore base for these boats - who, you know, obviously fishing miles away from anywhere, had trouble with fuel and stores and refrigeration and so on, and he gave 'em a shore base to unload to, and was able to supply all the necessaries, and from there it just grew.

PW Did the Kailis's ever act as fishermen, or have they always been - middlemen so to speak, have they gone to sea?

AT Michael did work as a deckhand, I think on a crayboat, but only for a very short time, I don't think it was his bag at all, and no they - virtually you could say they've always been -

PW Shore based?

AT Yes, yep.

PW How many boats are operating here at the moment?

AT At the moment there are sixteen, no sorry, fifteen - there are sixteen licenses, fifteen belonging to Michael Kailis, and one independent, but this year we are experimenting because the overheads of operating a trawling fleet keep going up, and yet the market price of prawns hasn't, and it's been pretty stable for a long time. We're trying to cut down our expenses, and - this year we are pulling out one boat, although we've kept the license, we're pulling out one trawler, and trying experiments with slightly bigger nets on a couple of our other trawlers to see if we can make up the catch for the boat that we pulled out, and if we can prove that we can make up the catch, then I believe the plan is to pull out another two next year so that the company will end up with only twelve licenses, and the independent will make the thirteen.

PW Does the independent operator work here in conjunction with Kailis, or does he have to operate somewhere else?

AT Oh no, he liaises with us every day - we have a sked (schedule) every morning for all the boats, to find out when they're coming in, or if they're coming in, how much they've got, and any mechanical problems, and we always call this bloke up, the Koness(?) and -

PW That's the name of his boat is it, the Koriess?

AT That's the name of the family that owns it, the name of the boat is the *Odete Sea*, which is a freezer boat, they unload independently, but they work in with us for using the jetty, occasionally they use our engineers. They're pretty independent, but - no we all fish together and yep.

PW And they are part of the community here?

AT Yes.

PW Do all the fishing people, all the skippers of those boats live here at the Kailis facility?

AT No. They used to at one stage, but over the last few years there's been a significant movement to living in Exmouth, and in fact I think there are only about four, maybe five skippers that actually live down at the fishing village here in Learmonth, and the rest of them - quite a few of them have actually bought houses in Exmouth, and even quite a few of the crew live in Exmouth now, whereas five or six years ago we all lived down here in caravans and whatever.

PW With the budget, like trying to increase the sizes of nets, has this cause concern amongst the skippers and crews about their future up in this region?

Side A: 10.2 mins

AT Not really, because what has happened in the the early eighties, I think 1981, '82, we overfished the gulf, there were twenty three licences at that time, and - there were virtually no limits, we could use whatever sized nets our boats were capable of towing. They used to fish - prawns sometimes run in daylight hours, especially after a cyclone early in the year, and we used to fish 24 hours around the clock, there were no nursery areas, and we all thought, you know, there were so many prawns that it was never - there'd be a never ending supply. Well the whole thing crashed, and - the Fisheries Department was actually given a mandate by the state government at the time to bring Exmouth Gulf back to being a prime export fishery, as it used to be. And this required a lot of measures. Straight away we had a season with definite limits, beginning and end. We had three nights off every month over the full moon period, when the prawns tend to stay under the mud, change their skins and you don't catch much anyway. We always used to have a full moon night off, if there were no prawns around, but only the one, and now we have three. The size of the gear was limited - there were different sections of the gulf separated, like we have the whole eastern southern end of the gulf is now a nursery area where we never trawl, and there are other areas where we only trawl for two three months of the year. Mainly the idea was to protect the tiger prawn which was the most valuable of the ones we catch, because that's exported to Japan, but by protecting the tiger prawn we also protected quite a few of the others, and because prawns have such a short life cycle, they were able to bring the fishery back fairly quickly, I mean, we went through a few lean years, but now it's extremely well managed, and - you'll probably never get the brilliant seasons we used to get back in the seventies but - you know, the peaks and troughs have been brought closer together. They'll probably never get a really really bad season either, or not as bad as it could be, and by pulling a boat out - and allowing - see each boat's limited to two seven and a half fathom head rope nets, which gives them a total of fifteen fathoms of head rope that they're allowed to take. By voluntarily taking a boat out, we still have that fifteen fathoms of net to play around with amongst the rest of the fleet, so in fact we haven't even used that all, so in fact there will be actually less fishing effort, even though some of the boats are using bigger nets. So - we're not all that concerned, I mean you always are concerned to a certain extent, but as far as management goes, we can't probably do much more that we're doing at the moment, the seasons vary now, it all depends on the - climatic conditions and the ecological conditions, mainly over the summer, when the - juvenile prawns growing in the seagrass beds and the shallows across the other sides of the gulf, and the settlement of the larvae and all that, which is totally out of our hands. So no, we're not really concerned in the long term.

PW When does the prawning season start, and when does it end?

AT Around about the first of April, beginning of April, might be the end of March, depending on the moon

phases, no good starting on the full moon of course. Usually around about the first of April and usually ends about the middle of November.

PW There's no date set by regulation, like for example there is with crayfishing?

AT No, no. It's flexible - because of the moon and whatever, yearh, it's decided every year by management meetings, and you know, in conjunction with the Fisheries, and - we know well and truly before we start exactly when we're going to, like this year it's the first of April, I think we finish on the fifteenth of November, I've got it written down somewhere, but we know when we are finishing too.

PW In arriving at the opening date, is there ongoing surveys of the prawn stocks at the moment, are people examining them to see what's occurring out there?

Side A: 15.1 mins

AT Yes, my boat and one other have been doing surveys for the Fisheries for a long time now - in the early part of the year we do what they call "recruitment stock surveys." We've already done one this year, and - we've got another one, a full night survey starting on the twentieth of March, and then there's a third one, after the season's started. When the season starts we're confined to area A, which is up the top end of the gulf, which is mostly king prawn area, and we don't come down the bottom where the tigers are until they're a reasonable size, so we do a survey after the start of the season in the bottom, again in just two boats to check on the size and quantity of the tiger prawn, and although there are opening dates set for the tiger season, - these are again flexible, I mean, if the survey shows the tigers are very very small, well obviously we're not going to go in there and start catching them until they've grown a bit more, so that is flexible.

PW When - you catch these prawns in the surveys, do you process those, or do you just return them to the water?

AT Oh no no, they're processed. You can't return prawns to the water - at one time we were looking at exporting live prawns to Japan, and we were bringing in what looked like perfectly healthy prawns that were jumping all over the place, but it appeared that nine out of ten had damage to the gills, and eventually died. You know, we got some for Japan, but not enough to make it worth while. So virtually any prawn you trawl up. It's no good throwing back over the side, and even though they are small - still, there is a market for fresh prawns.

PW Can you tell (me) how does a trawl operate, does it drag along the bottom or is it suspended in water, or whatever?

AT No, the prawns live right on the bottom in the mud, and they come out just on the surface of the bottom, to feed at night - our particular species don't rise very high off the bottom, so our nets are pretty well on the bottom, they have what you call the "ground chain" which ideally drags along the bottom with the net suspended about eight or ten inches above it, the bottom of the net. And in front of that you have a separate chain a bit shorter than the ground chain, called a tickler chain, which is pretty well self explanatory. That drags along the mud and tickles them up and makes them jump so that they get into the net, but the net's only opened to a height of maybe a metre at the most above the sea bed.

PW And how wide is a net?

AT Well each head rope is seven and a half fathoms, but of course that's stretched straight across, which doesn't happen, so I'd say they'd probably open to a width of roughly thirty six feet, whatever that is in metres

PW Which is wider than the boat isn't it?

AT Oh yearh, oh yes, yes. We tow two nets, one each side on long arms, trawling arms

PW So the width of the net is controlled by the length of the arms, is that right, they lunge out. You don't use otter boards or anything?

AT Oh yearh, yep, yep, yep. You know, a set of two set of boards each side, a winch each side for two separate nets, hmm.

PW Does it take long to - set up your net before you can start hauling - when you decide that you are on a ground that you're going to start prawning, how long does it take you to sort of - from that decision to actually commencing the trawl?

AT Probably three or four minutes.

PW And then how long would a trawl run?

AT Well that depends on circumstances - early in the year when you - you're getting small prawns which take longer to sort, you don't want to trawl for too long, because you don't want to spend too long sorting them, because of the quality. You don't want them out of, you know, in the warm air for longer than you can help, so you tend to do fairly short shots of - probably between an hour, hour and a half, two hours, two and a quarter max. maybe. But as the weather cools down and the prawns get bigger, and they're easier to sort, you can sort 'em faster - well you can lengthen your shots and in fact towards the end of the season we're often trawling for three hours, you're only doing four shots a night. But it also depends on the bottom you're trawling, you know. Most of the bottom of the gulf is pretty flat and smooth, there's not much sponge there, but there are times we're in pretty heavy country, and yet you can't trawl for too long because you're bags just get too full, and they start getting full of mud, so it depends. But - we very rarely trawl shorter than an hour, and very rarely trawl longer than three hours.

side A: 20 mins

PW Can you tell how full you're net's getting from the boat?

AT No, no. You can't.

PW You can't judge it from the speed or drag or anything like that?

AT The only time you can judge it like that is if you get a load of jelly fish, which are the absolute bane of our existence. We haven't had them for the last two seasons, but there are a few around this year, and jellyfish migrate vertically, they hang around the surface in the daylight hours or when - the moon's really bright, but when it's dark they go down to the bottom and they won't fit through your mesh, they just fill the net up till it's like dragging a couple of big buckets through the water, and - usually there's more in one net than the other, and it actually spins the boat around.

PW You have tow separate nets that you drag together do you?

AT Hmm, side by side.

PW Side by side. Why do you do that?

AT Well, when I first came here nobody had ever thought of that, they only towed one net, and - as a matter of fact, the operation of towing two nets is simpler than towing one net, although it doesn't sound as though it should be, but it is, and it's a fact that, if you trawl one sixteen fathom net, or we'll say fifteen fathom net, that's fifteen fathom head rope, you will not catch as much as you will by towing two seven and a half fathom nets, you will catch at least a quarter as much again by towing two small nets than you will with one big net. And that goes even further, I mean, up in the Gulf of Carpentaria they tow four nets, and four little nets will catch more than two big nets, so we're experimenting. One boat is going to tow four small nets this year, and we will just see how it goes, but theoretically, and it's been proven in the Gulf of Carpentaria, you should really catch a lot more than the boats that are just towing the two nets.

PW Is there a lot of maintenance on nets?

AT Well in the old days we used to have to do it all ourselves, we were supplied with six nets a year I think, and

as they wore out you had to fix them yourselves, and we could all make and mend nets, but now we have a net maker based in Perth, in Thorndie, who makes - he's been making the nets for years and years, and as they stretch out of shape, or get, you know, pretty well riddled with holes, now we've got it too easy, we just roll them up and send them down to him to fix, put on a couple more new ones, and he sends 'em back reconditioned ready to go, and - we're spoilt in fact.

PW Is he employed by Kailis, or is he an independent net maker?

AT He does do a few for other - customers.

PW He's not an employee of Kailis?

AT I don't think he is - no, but he.

PW Could well be by the sound of it. (chuckle)

AT Yearh, it be ninety percent of his work's done for Kailis, yep.

PW Are the nets turned around fairly quickly by the net maker, from when you send them away to getting them back?

AT Oh yearh, that's - well I actually made some nets for the company, years and years ago, and those days I could make a net from scratch, and have it ready to fish in a day, and of course this bloke's probably faster than I was then, and yearh, we can get 'em back pretty quickly. But there's always a certain stock on hand, I mean if you do really have a disastrous hookup and you destroy both your nets and you've got non left on board, there's always spare ones on shore, which you can come in and - usually you carry some anyway out there.

PW When that happens, if a net's badly damaged, is there any form of chastisement which comes back to the skippers from the company, or does that accrue a black mark against your name?

AT Well not unless you make a habit of it - as I say we are allowed six new nets a year, and any amount of reconditioned nets, and - I think by rights you shouldn't really get through more than ten nets a year all up - one or two fishermen do get through considerably more than that, but - no, it's just - you know, as long as it's within bounds, no, there's no real comeback, and it cost's you money by ripping out a net, so nobody tries to do it deliberately.

Side A: 25 mins

PW How do you mean, it costs you money?

AT Well by lost time - mainly.

PW Oh, yes. How are crews and skippers paid, by the amount of prawns that they catch, is that a share of the catch is it?

AT Yes, a skipper gets paid approximately fifteen percent of the market price, and out of that he has to pay his crew.

PW That's the wholesale price is it, or the retail price, wholesale price?

AT Whatever the company gets for it when they sell 'em to Japan or whatever, whatever they sell them, yearh. And what they have done, in the bad old days when most of the boats were privately owned, and it's happened to me and it's happened to just about every deckhand that worked in those days, a lot of the owner skippers were very reluctant to pay anything, you know, and a lot of crews were robbed blind, and - the company has stipulated that of our fifteen percent, the skipper is not allowed to pay less than twenty two

percent to any crew, and - which is mostly pretty reasonable

PW What the twenty two percent would be split between the whole crew?

AT Well I'll get fifteen percent, of that fifteen percent, I pay - call that fifteen percent my hundred percent, and in my case I pay one crew twenty and one twenty seven, because he's got a ticket,

PW Of your original fifteen percent?

AT Yearh, yep. And the only other expenses we have, we have to pay ten percent of the fuel costs, that's mainly for taxation purposes - our own stores.

PW That ten percent of the fuel costs also come out of your fifteen percent?

AT Hmm, yep, yes, and the crew pay whatever their percentage is of that.

PW As well?

AT Yearh, (chuckle).

PW This sounds very complicated - and the other time, what's fifteen percent from a hundred percent, well that's eighty five percent. So eighty five percent goes to Mr Kailis.

AT Yep.

PW And he doesn't pay any of the fuel tax?

AT Well yearh, he pays the other ninety percent of the fuel.

PW Oh, right, yes.

AT And don't forget he's got a pretty big plant to run here.

PW Of course, yes.

AT You know, maybe up to a hundred, between fifty and a hundred staff.

PW Plus buying the boats and everything else.

AT Yes, and insurance and license fees and mechanical repairs, we have our own team of engineers on shore.

PW Yes, enormous overheads.

AT Hmm, they are, and the power of course alone is humungous to run a place like this, when it comes from town; rates, whatever, so - Learmonth in fact, even in the worst years, at least broke even, has generally managed to make a profit, but not a huge profit. I think it generally has a turnover of about fifty million dollars a season on average, but they wouldn't make a lot of profit out of that, at least you know, unless it's a really really good year and the market price is pretty good

PW I've heard about bye catches relating to prawning and do you have a big bye catch with your hauls? Or is that a sensitive issue?

AT Oh it is sensitive, it's getting more sensitive all the time as a matter of fact. There was an article in *SCUBA Diving Magazine* last year written by a reporter who went out on the private boat, the *Odeum Sea* and it happened to be an opening night when they opened a new area on the tigers, and because that hadn't

been fished in nine months, there's nine months since it was closed the year before, well there was a lot of bye catch, because all the fish had come back to the grounds, and he was horrified, and he wrote a really scathing article about you know, all this terrible waste, but in one way - well what's happened is that the gulf's sort of become accustomed, and this is my opinion, and I've been here longer than anyone, the gulf's sort of acclimatised itself to the trawling operation. We don't get as much bye catch as we used to thirty years ago, but it can be not far off, I can't think of any species we used to get then that we don't still get, and - there are plenty of nights when you get hardly anything but prawns, you know, just pure prawns. Well this bloke never saw nights like that, and you see these horrible bye catch videos on television of the bye catch being shovelled down the chutes, you know, and you think, 'God, what a waste,' but in fact what happens, it's not wasted, if it was wasted the beaches would be littered with dead fish. - As soon as it hits the water, you've got a cloud of sea birds, terns and gulls and shearwaters and whatever that help themselves to all the floating stuff, but beneath them you've got sharks, quite often you've got tuna, and dolphins of course are always there, they follow the boats all night, and whatever actually sinks to the bottom, I mean, that's scavenged by all the crabs and other prawns, and in fact nothing gets washed ashore in the end, and I think this gulf probably has a bigger population of dolphins that it would have without the trawling operations. Certainly got a bigger population of sea birds, and - I think really we could continue operating like this forever without effecting the amount of bye catch, and another way of looking at it I think is that the fishing has deteriorated over the years because it's getting, you know, Exmouth's getting more and more popular with anglers, and all the fish the anglers catch are at the top of the food chain, and so really, there's probably an explosion of smaller stuff further down the food chain.

Side A, tape ends: 31.4 mins

Side B starts

PW Just before we turned the tape over Thomo we were talking about bye catches, and you mentioned that you thought that increasing numbers of amateurs were also pressuring the fish stocks and such around this area, but just before we move off from bye catches, what sort of - quantities are we looking at - is there a ratio on - how many prawns you would get to be bye catch? I have heard some fairly large figures, like seven to one, with the one being the prawns and the seven being the bye catch. Would that sort of ratio apply here sometimes?

AT Oh sometimes yeah, there's no doubt about it, but usually at the opening of a new area - which has been closed for months, and the fact that there is that much bye catch there and it's come back from not much when we finished operations, shows that it, you know, it recovers pretty quickly, and - what was I going to say - Oh there are times when it's almost the other way around, you know, seven prawns to one of bye catch. Years ago I did a feasibility study - Kailis was thinking of opening a fish meal processing plant as well, because of the bye catch we were wasting, and we tried things like keeping it for cray bait, you know, but it was never popular with crayfishermen and was just a hassle, so - I had to - keep a sample of every shot I did, fill a basket at random off the sorting table of whatever came, including sponges and every thing, and then when we sorted the rest of the catch, sort each basket and pick the prawns out from it and put them in bags and label them you know, and that sort of thing, a proper feasibility study it was, and - this mob came to the conclusion that there was no where near, no where near enough bye catch to warrant starting a fish meal plant. They'd have to have boats actually fishing for that sort of stuff. But, well it's a problem - I know in the eastern states they've tried a lot of these bye catch reduction devices - the last two seasons there's a reward to the top two catching skippers - they and their wives have been sent to Washington for a holiday by the company, and part of that involves one day spent at the flume tank at the marine college in Launceston, and they've gone there to study the bye catch reduction devices, and we started experimenting with one towards the end of last season, so I guess you know, we will eventually get around to do it.

PW It's a matter which concerns the company? -

AT Well it does, we ourselves I don't think are terribly worried about the effect we're having, because as I say, it recovers, so much of the gulf is protected, the bye catch recovers very quickly.

PW Can you tell me some of the things which you see in a bye catch, I've never seen one, and I've never seen

any films of it, what sort of stuff do you pull up here?

AT Well - you get a certain amount of sponge for a start, although most of the bottom is flat, some of it's sandy, some of it's muddy, - quite often you don't get any sponges at all - starfish, lots of crab, lots of crustaceans, mostly an incredible array of small crabs, you know crabs are often one thing that do survive because of their hard carapace.

PW Are there lots of different species of crabs?

AT Hmm, hmm, yes, and of starfish. A lot of the starfish are like the flower type, you know - we don't get all that many molluscs, apart from squid and small octopus, the squid we keep anyway, and the octopus, we - get paid for them - but bailer shells and conches, you get the occasional one of them

PW Are they large?

AT Oh some of them are pretty huge, yearh, especially the conches, hmm.

PW And they survive?

AT Hmm, if the crew don't keep 'em, you know, they're not supposed to (chuckle) and - you get some marine worms, but not a lot, because you don't usually dredge under the sea floor, but as far as the fish go, they're usually very small, and it's not because they're juvenile fish, it's because they're small species, like trumpeters and dollar fish and - small - we get whiting, a lot of - what's the name of it - get a few sand whiting but not many, but the other one, trumpeter whiting¹ I think, quite a few of them - there's all kinds of small fish, butter fish,² -

Side B: 5.2 mins

PW Do you get mullet?

AT Funnily enough in about September of every year you get a certain amount of small mullet, only about six inches long, and that's the only time you get them. You never get the - I don't know what they are doing out there because you get them out in quite deep water - there's not many, you know, we keep a few for bait, that's about it, but otherwise no, we don't get mullet. - What's not very small, tends to be very large, you know, you get enormous rays, sharks - mainly shovel nosed³ and bowmouth sharks, but we get a few of the man eating types like whalers and tiger sharks.

PW Do they survive the haul or -?

AT Yearh usually, oh it depends - if - the shovel nose and the rays of course do, but the - yes, yearh they survive, but the whalers and tiger sharks, it rather depends if they go into the net head first early in the shot, they usually, you know, they're pretty well drowned, if they're in tail first they're fine, and if they only got in towards the end of the shot, they're pretty lively. But usually they survive

PW Are there any species like that, that prawn fishermen regard as vermin?

AT Well I really think that the shovel noses aren't all that popular, mainly because they're very big and they just go berserk sometimes and thrash around before you can get them over, and half you catch goes over the side, or is crushed. I think they do eat a certain amount of prawns too because they, you know, poke around on the seabed, and the bowmouth, which I've read in some fish book grows to about two metres, well I think that, we've had 'em well over three metres

PW Is that a shark?

¹ *Sillago maculata*

² *Pentapodus* sp.

AT Yearh, very - it's like a prehistoric looking thing, great knobs down its spine, and an incredible great round head, yearh, an incredible looking thing, and very very heavy. And the rays, well the - what we call bull rays, I think they're a cow tail ray, they can be absolutely enormous, and they're very very slimy, and they are just a real nuisance, but.

PW Do they tend to get dispatched before they are shoved back over the side?

AT Well in the old days they used to quite a lot, but I never kill anything I don't have to, and I think most of the skippers are the same now - the unfortunate one is the saw shark, we don't get many now, but occasionally you get a saw shark and the only way you can get it out of the net without wasting half the night is to cut it's saw off, because it just catches in the net, you know, but luckily we don't get to many of them. And of course we get quite a lot of sea snakes, and turtles, which is another - we don't get a lot of turtles - but we do get them, and I'd say ninety nine percent of the time they survive too, they're pretty tough, turtles.

PW Can you do anything with turtles that don't survive, are you allowed to process them or anything?

AT No, no we're not. What we do if there's a turtle that - we have actually guidelines for handling turtles. If they're apparently dead, we get 'em onto the deck as gently as we can, and prop their back end up on a basket or something so the water tend to flow out of their lungs, and - leave them there, and quite often, it's amazing how often it happens, you'd swear the turtle was dead, by the time you are coming up to the next shot, it's crawling around on the deck, quite fit, you know. So, no, we don't kill a lot of turtles

PW In the past when you caught turtles, did turtles tend to get utilised for meat and stuff like that?

AT No, never have, since Andy Cassidy was doing it, but since they were banned, no.

PW But prior to the banning did people used to process, butcher them for a bit of meat?

AT Oh, not that I recall - unless there was a big barbecue planned or something, maybe - but I imagine it's quite a messy job, and I don't think anybody really could be bothered.

PW What about other animals like dugongs, do they ever get caught up in trawls?

AT Very rarely, mainly because they stick to the shallows in the sea grass beds

PW Dolphins, do they get caught up occasionally?

Side B: 10 mins

AT Well in all the years I've been here I've had four dolphins, which considering that they follow every trawler all night and day, that's pretty amazing. Two of them were drowned, and they weren't in the net, they had a just one loop of the "lazy line" around their tail fluke, and they were sort of suspended in mid-air as you pulled the cod-ends up, and that was a long time ago, so whether they've learnt since then, I don't know. Since then I've had one baby dolphin, probably two and a half feet long, which was alive and squeaking it's head off, and we got him back over and mum came and swum back off with it - chuckle. And I had another adult dolphin which landed on the sorting table, and he was alive, but he or she was bleeding from the - from the mouth. Whether it was an internal injury or whether she just cut her lips trying to get through the net, I don't know, but we slid her back down, and - as far as I could see she swam off. But no, we don't get many dolphins at all, it's quite amazing really.

PW Well you've told me some - many things that I never knew about the prawn trawling industry, is there other things that you might care to add that I as a naive questioner don't know the right question to ask?

AT Well I don't know really - we catch the three main species - the tiger, the western king, and the endeavour prawn. The tiger prawn's mostly exported to Japan, and the bigger they are the more they're worth. Kings

and endeavours -

PW Are they sold individually are they?

AT Well they've got 'em down to one kilo packs now, yes.

PW And they're sorted by size, so you would you buy a one kilo pack of a certain size?

AT Yep, they're all graded, yearh. We do a little bit of grading on the boats, not a lot, it's mostly done in the factory, on the shore. Yes, and - the big ones are pretty valuable, but we don't usually get a lot of the big ones until later in the year, you know when they've had time to grow

PW How big do they grow?

AT Oh, I don't know, what.

PW A foot long?

AT No, not quite, no. But apparently they do up in the Gulf of Carpentaria, for some reason they don't seem to grow quite as big here, but.

PW Almost like a small crayfish?

AT Yearh, you get some nearly a foot long I suppose.

PW And what would an individual weigh, a kilogram?

AT No no, it wouldn't weigh that much, I'd have to ask Coral, because they go on sizes as so many to the pound, you know.

PW But probably one would be enough for one person to eat if they are that large I s'pose?

AT Oh, no, you'd probably need two or three for a decent feed 'cause half of it's head anyway you know.

PW Do you eat prawns yourself?

AT Oh yearh, yearh. Yes.

PW Regularly?

AT On the boat we quite often do, yes.

PW You cook them while you are out on the boat do you?

AT Hmm, hmm.

PW How do you do that? Do you just boil 'em up -?

AT Oh no, usually in a mornay or breadcrumbs or

PW Very sophisticated by the sound of it? (chuckle)

AT Oh it's pretty simple really

PW Is this a matter of choice that you don't like other - do you cook up other things from the sea as well on the boat?

AT Oh we all enjoy squid, and we get very very few scallops, but if we ever look - a few years ago they had an absolute record breaking scallop year in Carnarvon, and there must have been so many that some of them was forced out of Shark Bay and found their way up here you know, and we might get a couple of dozen scallops a night. Well we used to save them and when you had enough for a feed, we used to have a feed of scallops, but that's an exceptional exception. The only other thing really is fish, because to save on fuel, except when we're catching tigers fairly close to home, and you get more mo... - the fresher the tiger prawn is the better quality obviously and the more we get, so usually when we're fishing for tigers, we come in every morning to unload. But later in the year when the tiger spawning season starts, which is usually around about the end of July, the Fisheries closes off most of the main tiger spawning area, which is probably close to two thirds of the gulf, in fact, to give them a chance to breed, you know. And - oh, where was I?

PW Closing areas off with a chance - giving things a chance to breed.

Side B: 15 mins

AT Yeah, I forget what I was getting at now. (chuckle) Oh yeah, that's right, yes, well when we're fishing up at the top end of the gulf, which is a fair way from home, and economise on burning fuel steaming backwards and forwards to the prawning grounds, we'll stay out for two nights, and anchor out in the day between you know. - If it's rough well we usually go behind an island, or something for a bit of shelter, but if it's reasonably calm we generally anchor on lumps up around the top end and fish, and mostly nowadays we don't fish for money, we don't, unless we get a heap of Spanish mackerel, for which we get quite a good price. We usually just fish for a feed for ourselves and families, you know, and so we end up eating quite a lot of fish as well.

PW Have Kailis's ever investigated the potential of the fisheries on the other side of the cape, along the Ningaloo Reef?

AT Not that I know of, no he's never been - never been really interested in scale fish, except that time we dallied - dabbled in stern trawling, but that was further north. No he's never really - I don't think there's anything out there to make it - feasible, certainly not on a large scale, and even the charter boat skippers have a job making ends meet, full time ones.

PW Have you fished for yourself around on the Ningaloo Reef system at all

AT No, I've done nearly all mine - angling in the gulf here.

PW Have you ever been along the Ningaloo Reef?

AT Well I've steamed up and down it quite a few times. I've camped there in the old days, you know. I've been up and down Yardie Creek. I've done a bit of diving on it, yes, but probably no more than anyone else around here

PW And would that have gone right back to the times when you first came up here?

AT Yes, yep, yep, yep. And probably saw more of it back in those days, especially when the children were young, you know, because we used to take them camping quite a lot

PW Were fish prolific around there in those times?

AT Oh, more so than now. Hmm.

PW Did you you used to catch much fish recreationally with your family?

AT Not a lot, when we went around the Ningaloo Reef it was mostly just for a bit of skindiving, a look at the

coral and whatever and - I didn't usually go fishing, I had a bit of a busman's holiday. But I know angling up the top is certainly nothing like it used to be

PW This is a commonly held belief amongst locals is it?

AT Well if they have been here long enough they believe it alright, humm, humm. And with the pelagics, I mean there is still a lot of Spanish mackerel around here, but nothing like there used to be before they started catching 'em up Dampier way you know, and - probably tend not to be quite as big overall either. Bottom fish, well - no they're definitely no where as good as they used to be.

PW With your fishing activity, there's - obviously your company has a lot of contact with various fishing scientists from time to time with doing surveys and such, do you get literature back from those organisations that you can comprehend?

AT Well if we do it probably goes to the office, Garry Passmore -.

PW It doesn't filter down to the crews and the skippers about the scientific aspects of species populations in the sound?

AT Yearh - oh yes, but it's generally sort of up to them, you know, we have a professional fishermen's association and we get a lot of that sort of literature and - the fishermen know about it if they are interested, and they'll tell their crew if they think their crew would be interested, and if they are interested there's nothing to stop them going to the office and borrowing the literature to read, you know, as long as they bring it all back. It's all there, there's no secrets or that sort of thing about it really.

PW No no, I wasn't - suggesting that, but I was just trying to find out what sort of interest there is amongst - people who are working on the water, in that type of material. Do you read that sort of stuff yourself?

AT Oh yes. In fact I get a fair bit of it, and our manager often passes some on to me, you know, that he thinks I might be interested in, and asks for comments and things like that. Oh yearh, most of the crew are pretty well up on what's happening around the place, in that respect.

PW Do they take a zoological interest in the animals that they're harvesting, or is it purely a means to an end for them.

AT Oh no, most of them are quite fascinated by some of the stuff that comes up, I mean, zoological, not scientific, probably, I mean.

PW There's great curiosity amongst them?

AT Yearh, yearh, oh yes. Not all of 'em are just in for a you know, money at all costs and to hell with anything else you know. No most of 'em show quite a lot of interest.

PW Is there a high turnover of crew?

AT - Some years yes, some no - we've got some crew that have lasted here for years - others do a season, maybe two, and then they disappear for a few years, and then they come back and, you know. Partly depends on the skipper and how he operates, whether his crew's happy.

PW Do you have a choice in which crew you take on with you? Do you interview crew and decide if they are going to join you?

AT Oh yes, I mean, yearh - yes - I - haven't had to for a long time because - I just seem to end up with a reasonably good crew every year you know, and I often keep the same ones. I've had both, both my youngest daughters work for me at different times, and one of them wants to come back. But

PW Does she want to become a skipper?

AT Well it's - she has that in mind.

PW Do you have any female skippers in your fleet?

AT No, we have had in the past, but no, we don't at the moment.

PW Is there opposition to female skippers in the industry?

AT No I don't think so, not up here anyway. The one year we did have one, well she lasted a season, but she never did - I don't think there was any antagonism towards her, but - oh it just didn't seem to work.

PW Tell me about the skill requirements of a good skipper - is there a real need for a special understanding between the skipper and the environment as to how well he succeeds with the catch?

AT I think - I think it helps, I mean most of us like a lot of jobs, experience does count for a lot, and when I first started skippering a boat, I thought I knew everything, and it wasn't till I started skippering full time I realised how little I knew, and the skippers talk amongst themselves, and the crew talk among themselves, and there are probably more prawns caught in the Kailis bar there than ever were caught out in the gulf, you know. And you sort of work out where to be at certain phases of the moon, stages of the tide, times of the night even, you know, and everyone has their own little pet theories, but oh yearh, we show a lot of interest in the prawns from that respect, and we get a lot of information from the Fisheries Department too you know, they pass on just about everything they know, and - yearh, but experience's count.

PW Are there any religious aspects to prawning - on the boats up here, like you have your blessings of the fleet in other parts of the coast, do you have that sort of arrangement here?

AT We haven't had up until now, until the new Exmouth marina went in, and the opening of that was actually a Blessing of the Fleet, was the first one we've ever had, now whether - I know of no plans to have one before this season starts.

PW Did that occur last year?

AT Yes, yes.

PW Did your boats participate in that?

AT Most of them, there wasn't room for all of them.

PW And you were in there as well?

AT Yep, yep, yep. And yearh, that was the official opening of the marina and - Blessing of the Fleet sort of combined.

PW Was it a multi-denominational type of blessing with representatives from different churches?

AT Oh no, it was only the one, I think we've only got the one priest in Exmouth, I'm not to sure about that (chuckle)

PW So you had to fit in with everybody?

AT Yes, I think he's Catholic, but - the blessing was very multi-denominational, put it that way

PW It was universal?

AT Yes, yes.

PW How was that received by the industry, did they enjoy it?

AT I think Michael Kailis was a little bit upset, because in all the speeches, he had this huge fleet of beautiful trawlers sitting out there and they were hardly mentioned really, I mean all he got - some charter boats got a mention, and then our fishing fleet, I mean it got a mention, but he would have preferred it to be the centre of the whole thing, you know, which it wasn't, and I think he got a bit upset, but no, most of us enjoyed it and we thought it was pretty good, hmm.

PW Would you be looking forward to another one each year?

AT A blessing?

PW Yes, yearh.

AT I really would like something - it seems a bit unfair, you know, that we don't have one, I mean we never have - even if they had one in Fremantle before we left it would be something, but - I know that the blessing of the crayfishing fleet's a big event, and it probably would be nice to have something

PW To have a spiritual dimension added to your work, yes.

AT Yearh, I don't think most of the fishermen look on it in that respect, but I mean it would be a day out and sort of.

PW A form of recognition of your involvement in the community?

AT Hmm, yearh, yearh, hmm.

PW - You mentioned departing Fremantle. Do your boats move up and down between Fremantle and here do they?

AT Yes, we have to bring them up every year from Fremantle, and.

PW You take them back for servicing?

AT We take them back at the end of the season to Fremantle, yes, yes.

PW How long does it take to make the voyage from Fremantle to here?

AT - Oh, mostly between 72 and 84 hours probably to get up, depending on the speed of the boat. I think we got up in 77 this time, but I had to throttle back because the boat I was in company with, they'd given them a new engine and new propeller and he was a bit slower than usual, so -

PW Do you come as a fleet or do you come individually?

AT I've often done it individually through force of circumstances, I've often been the only one to stay up here in instance going fish trawling at the end of the year, and had to go down by myself, and doing the yearly surveys, I've often had to come up by myself, but since the predecessor of the *Odette Star* which is called the *Miss Odette* owned by the same Prior fishing company disappeared on its way to Fremantle with all hands I think it was about 1977 thereabouts, we really don't like sending any boats up or down by themselves - preferably at least two together, and that's what we try to do.

PW Do you navigate with GPS systems, or do you use running fixes on the coast as you're coming up?

AT Oh, we use radar and GPS now, amm. Yes - I mean, when I first started you navigated by compass and etc.

sounder, and that was it, and it was hand steering as well, we didn't - even have an automatic pilot and that

PW When you are communicating between your boats, do you have codes that you communicate with each other, secret codes for catch sizes and things like that?

AT Oh, that has been used in the past, but - nowadays - I mean, I've got a little CB, marine - CB radio to talk to a couple of the blokes with, they're the only ones that have got 'em, but otherwise people just tend to use different channels, you know, to talk with their particular mates, and we tend to laugh at codes now, because there are no secrets anymore really, when you unload every day, or every second day, however quiet - I mean if you got onto a good patch of prawns and you had it all to yourself for that night, and cleaned up, no matter what, how much you try to keep it secret, someone's going to look at what you weighed in that morning, and - you'll have half the fleet there the next night, you know, so. And with the radar and everything, 'cause the gulf's pretty small, it's very hard to sneak off by yourself and clean up.

PW Does the overall catch vary between boats, over the course of a season, are they markedly different?

AT Not as much as it used to - at one time you could - we used to tie, you know - towards the end of a season if it was - you'd already sort of caught a lot of prawns, made your money, but the season still had a month or two to go, and you're gettin' pretty sick of it, and you go down the beach and it was blowing half a gale - 'Oh, I'll give it a miss,' you know. And we used to all, you know, be half your fleet'd be tied up, maybe two or three nights straight, just 'cause didn't want to work in the rough weather, well the company's got around that, they tried all different types of incentives, financial incentives to work every night; now it's got to the stage where in fact we do work every night, I don't know, it's just worked out like that - whatever the weather, unless it's a cyclone, on really really rough nights - they sometimes give you an option of working or not, but if you decide to take the option of not working you've still got to go out to your boat in case it drags through the night, drags ground, so when you're out there you might as well work, but you've always got the option if you think it's too dangerous that you can just knock off and go and anchor somewhere behind an island and shelter, but it's very rarely taken.

PW Is it a hard life?

AT It is quite a hard life - and it can be very hard when you catching a lot of prawns, mainly because of the broken sleep, and the long hours, I mean, I have to fill in claim forms for compensation or something if one of my crew gets injured you know, 'How many hours a week do you work?' and you know, it's well over a hundred actually on the job. Well over a hundred, and although you're not working (physically hard) all the time, you're still out there on the job, and you get broken sleep, you're up and down, and it's probably not all that good for you.

PW Well Thomo, look you've told me a wonderful amount of information, and it's been a really excellent interview, and because the tape's running out we're going to call it quits here, but I'd just like to thank you very much for the opportunity to hear your story, and I can assure you that it will be a very valuable historical record in the future, and I'd just like to wish you good luck for the future too.

AT Oh, thank you Paul.

PW You're welcome

Side B, interview ends: 30.7 mins.



"Thomo" with Kailis trawlers anchored in the background - at Learmonth, Exmouth Gulf

Transcript of Interview

Interviewee: Josephine Patricia Wann
Address: Sandalwood Peninsular. PO Box 499, Exmouth. 6707
Phone: 0899 425962
Date of birth: 12 January 1937
Date of interview: 9 March 1998
Place: Wann's house at Leeman
Side A 9.8 mins
Total 9.8 mins
Interviewer & transcriber: Dr Paul R. Weaver

Subject: Ningaloo.
Side A: Tagging turtles for CALM. Personal relationship with ocean. Role of a fisherman's wife. Fishing decisions more influenced by climate in senior years - avoidance of heat and cyclone season.



Note: This interview should be read in conjunction with Ray Wann's, which was done on the same date.

- PW This interview is being conducted on the 9th March 1998 with Jo Wann, at Leeman. Jo for the record could you please give your full name and your date of birth -
- JW Josephine Patricia Wann, born on the 12th of the first 1937.
- PW Jo could you tell me a bit about you experience with tagging turtles at Ningaloo?
- JW - Well we were approached by CALM because - there wasn't any turtle tagging done in the area. There was some done out on Muiron Islands, but they needed someone who lived in the area who was willing to tag turtles, and also who - could do retagging of the turtles, for growth rate etcetera, and we could do that with using our - net. We'd get the turtles in our nets, and so often we'd get turtles that we had retagged maybe some years before. Anyway, we went ahead with the programme. CALM came out and showed us how to tag the turtles and we started tagging them in 1989. Yearh, '89.
- PW Was there a lot of turtles around then?
- JW Yes. - We mainly get the smaller turtles, about 400 mils (mm), up as large as a metre, but mainly smaller turtles, we - they come in right in very close in along the shore, in amongst the mangroves, getting the weed and feed.
- PW When did commercial fishing of turtles cease?
- JW I am not sure
- PW Had it ceased by the time you started tagging?
- JW Oh yes, well and truly
- PW Do you ever remember seeing them catching turtles commercially?

JW Oh yes, yes.

PW Can you describe that?

JW Arh, well we used to see the "mother ship" as we knew it, and the smaller boats which were large dinghies, and they would chase around after the turtles and harpoon them. But we never - I never ever saw them close up, we would just see them on the ocean, and that's what they were doing

PW What did you think about that?

JW I didn't think there was anything wrong with it because there was many many turtles there, and - they were making a living the same as we were.

PW You were an active participant with your husband Ray as a fisher - fisherman's wife, or a lady fisher - did you do everything involved with fishing?

JW - Earlier days not as much, because I had the children, and usually I had Ray to look after, and usually we had some one, or two chaps working for us and so I had a pretty full time job there, but in latter years, yes, I've been - there's just been him and I working together

PW And do you haul the nets and - things like that? We're getting some (silent) instructions from Ray here. (chuckle).

JW Yes, yearh, I do, I haul the net, do everything alongside him, yearh.

PW Cleaning the fish?

JW Yearh, yep, everything.

PW And - did you ever go out by yourself sometimes if Ray wasn't feeling too well?

JW Only for things like to skin a net, if we had a set net out, and I've gone out down and taken the fish out of it for some reason if he's been held up if there's been a freezer breakdown, or something like that. Only in emergency.

PW Did those things used to happen fairly frequently?

JW No.

PW You've moved around a bit, has there been a favourite place where you've stayed?

JW Not really, I've - no, not really. I've always loved Ningaloo though. (chuckle).

PW Now it comes down to the serious business here, when I've spoken to other fishermen's wives I've managed to get a favourite recipe. Do you have a favourite recipe for cooking the fish that you've caught?

JW - Well yes, just cook it (laugh). No I don't really - I like plain food so it's just simply plain fried in a little bit of oil, that's all.

PW Mostly your fish is fried then?

JW Yes.

PW And any particular types of fish that you like to eat?

JW - No, because most fish has it's own individual taste, and you know, it's just I appreciate whatever it is.

PW You don't have a favourite?

JW Not really.

PW Did you have a favourite Ray, I didn't ask you (in your interview). What's your favourite fish?

RW (Ray Wann) Mullet.

PW Mullet?

RW Yes.

PW That's the sea mullet - yes you wouldn't be alone there.

RW It's got to be fresh, but I prefer sea mullet.

PW A lot of fishermen have said they like gardies as well?

RW They're not bad, but you wanted me favourite and that's a mullet.

PW That's a mullet, and there's plenty of those around still?

Side A: 5 mins

PW Have you had social relationships with other fishing families over time?

JW Very little. We've usually lived isolated because - mainly where you're fishing you need to have that area to yourself, without any competition, and so - and it's always been isolated, so we haven't had the opportunity, more than anything else.

PW Have you found that you've been pestered by amateurs interfering with your activities in the past?

JW We've always shifted when it - when it starts to become a problem, off we go.

PW Your relationship - I asked Ray about his personal relationship with the sea and he felt that he did have - some sort of relationship with the sea there, have you felt that you've had a relationship with the ocean, a personal relationship?

JW Oh yeah, a love hate one, (chuckle)

PW Could you describe those feelings to me?

JW - Well I feel a lot like Ray does, I've got great respect for the ocean, and even in its fury I've got a love for it, it's just something that's in you, but whereas Ray's always had his, mine had to grow - It just wasn't natural to me.

PW Do you fear the ocean?

JW Yes I do. - Fear, I don't know whether it's an actual fear or a great respect - but it's there

PW When your family, when your men go to sea, do you worry about them?

JW Never, I know they never take risks. I trust them implicitly

PW The turtle tagging programme, is that ongoing?

JW Yes it is, yes.

PW When will you do some more turtle tagging?

JW Well as soon as we go back, as soon as we go back to Exmouth we'll start on it again. Whenever we are there it's ongoing.

PW And when will that be?

JW - We're not sure, at the moment. When the cyclone season's over, but we've got a bit old now, and that's why. The heat knocks us around a bit up there, so while it's hot and it's cyclone season we'll stay here.

PW The heat knocking you around, is that something you noticed in the past, or is this something that's coming with older age?

JW It's coming with old age. (laugh)

PW You don't have an air conditioned tent then?

JW - No, we have a caravan which is air conditioned, but we don't really use it a great deal because it's not a good idea to get used to the air conditioning and be in the air conditioning and then have to walk out in it, forty six degrees and you got to go out and work in it, so we tend to avoid it.

PW Do you think both of you will keep fishing for a long time to come?

JW God willing.

PW - In the professional sense - how much longer do you think you might continue in that respect?

JW Well I leave that entirely up to Ray, because he's the one that says what we'll do with regard to that.

PW Was it Ray that I heard a while ago say that he's finding it harder to get up every morning? (chuckle)

JW No, he doesn't find it harder to get up in the morning, it's just - it's just the older age, and slow down.

PW That's something we didn't actually touch on (in Ray's interview) the working hours that you went fishing. At Ningaloo was it always in the daytime that you fished?

JW Yes, yearh.

PW Always in the daylight hours. Did you ever go out at night?

RW No.

PW Was there a reason for that?

JW Yearh, when the sun goes down I go to bed.

PW Time to go to bed?

RW We did at one stage do a little bit of night fishing at Shark Bay, but - on the snapper, the pink snapper. But never at Ningaloo, never anywhere else, it's always day fishing. If you can't make a living during the day well you should give the game away I think. Unless you are a trawler or something.

PW Well Jo I thank you very much for this short interview - I wanted to get that business down about turtles.

there, which we started talking about after we'd finished with ray's interview there. So thank you very much and I wish you - all the best for the future as well.

JW Thankyou.

Side A. Interview ends: 9.8 mins.

Note: This interview should be read in conjunction with Ray Wann's, which was done on the same date.



Jo Wann at one of their Ningaloo camps, circa 1970s



Transcript of Interview

Interviewee: Raymond Horace Wann, with Josephine Wann

Address: PO Box 499, Exmouth, 6707.

Phone: 425962

Date of birth: 22 July 1931

Date of interview: 9 March 1998

Place: Leeman house

Side A 32.1 mins

Side B 26 mins

Total: 58.1 mins

Interviewer & transcriber: Dr Paul R. Weaver

Subject: Ningaloo & S. coast.

Side A: Family entry into fishing industry after WW2. S. coast fishing - Hopetoun - salmon seining. Youngs cannery at Hopetoun. Stocking bream in Little Jertacurtup R. Dan Hunt. Move to Exmouth. Canning at Exmouth. Exmouth personalities. Familiar with Ningaloo Reef from early 1950s. Reef provided passage shelter for boats. Plenty of fish but exploitation impractical. Boat, *John Jim*. Wann fishing camps on Ningaloo from about 1957. Sending fish to Golden Gleam, Gtn. Never fished on outside of reef, plenty on inside. Turtle hunting days. Fish species caught. Living off the land. Increasing numbers of amateurs forced camp moves. Pro. SCUBA divers took a lot of large fish from reef. Apathy by Fisheries Dept about complaints in past.

Side B: Landrovers and freezers essential. Financial arrangements with Golden Gleam. Termination of pro fishing on Ningaloo. Now fishing in Exmouth Gulf. Muirons. Increasing pressures on fish. Amateurs take many undersize fish. In past time was divided between Ningaloo and cray season further south. Most financial return has been from crays. Time now divided between Exmouth and Leeman. Built first fishing camp at Leeman. Personal relationship with ocean. Non-swimmer. Social matters. Abrolhos fishing - Wallaby Grp. Ningaloo region - natural catastrophes and recovery. Much less fish now. Snapper used to eat drupella snails - overfishing of snapper caused drupella plague.



Jo and Ray Wann

- PW: This interview at Leeman, with Ray Wann, on the ninth of March 1998. Ray for the purpose of the record, could please give your full name and your date of birth.
- RHW: Raymond Horace Wann, 22/7/31.
- PW: Ray you've been a fisherman for most of your life?
- RHW: Yearh, since I was fourteen years old, yearh.
- PW: Where did you start fishing?
- RHW: Down at Hopetoun, (correct spelling) salmon fishing and shark fishing down at Hopetoun, at the twelve and

thirteen mile beach, as you probably know where they are, do you?

PW Were you fishing with your father?

RHW No, with the brothers, the brothers came - when the two brothers came back from the war. (WW2)

PW What were their names?

RHW Vic and Alec, Wann. And they with their deferred pay, bought an old twenty eight foot boat, and then we went down to Hopetoun.

PW Had they been fishing before the war?

RHW Only amateur, you know, they - always used to go fishing down to Doubtful Island or Point Anne, or somewhere like that, and they were very keen amateur fishermen and after the war they decided they'd like to go fishing.

PW Was that a - choice of last option for them?

RHW Oh first option, that's the first, that's what they wanted to do.

PW They'd been thinking about that during the war had they?

RHW Oh even before the war they talked about it, in fact they used to have an old shed for - car, and they used to try and get down with an ice box down to Doubtful and catch fish and fetch back and try and make a living out of it sort of thing. That's when they were young and silly.

PW Had they lived down that way before the war?

RHW No, not lived there, they lived in Dumbleyung, but they'd gone fishing down that way all the time.

PW And you'd been born in Dumbleyung had you?

RHW Yearh, oh yes.

PW And was that on a farm?

RHW No we were in the town, the old man had a market garden, a greengrocer's shop, and used to cart a bit of stuff backwards and forwards from Perth, a bit of a carrier business. Used to cart wheat, and bag salt, twelve kids in the family, any thing you could do through the depression, anything you could do to make a living at all - didn't matter what it was - he cut fence posts - anything at all, he'd do to make a living. Of course all the boys were around the place workin' on farms, and none of us, you know, you all had a job before you were fourteen, there was no stoppin' home and sort of doing nothing, so that's where we started down there then

PW At the end of the war, how old were you?

RHW About fourteen, yearh.

PW About fourteen. And did they say, "Look we're going fishing Ray, lets..."

RHW I don't even think they did, I just tagged on (laughing) I'd been kangaroo shooting with the old man before that, I left school when I was thirteen, because I got through sixth standard, and there was no high school or anything in Dumbleyung, and the teacher couldn't teach me anything, and correspondence was no good, so I just left school.

PW Initially they were fishing for salmon?

RHW No, we were fishing for shark initially - with the twenty eight foot boat we took down, we were shark fishing, and then, I can't tell you the exact time, probably inside six months, we decided we'd swing onto salmon as well - like - all fish go in a season so in the off season for sharks we'd go salmon fishing.

PW You've showed me some photographs of salmon fishing on the beach, were they taken at about that time?

RHW They were taken at that time, but they were taken at Doubtful Island - we used to go at Hopetoun for a certain amount of the year, and then we'd go around to Doubtful Island for the back, what we used to call the back run, the spawning run.

PW What methods were you using to catch your fish?

RHW Seine nets, a fourteen or fifteen foot dinghy, and a big seine net with about a fifty foot deep bunt in the middle of it, so you could put awe anything up to, our biggest catch at that time was forty seven ton of cleaned fish in one hit.

PW And where were the fish going?

RHW All down to Hopetoun, Dan Hunt had built a cannery there, and then what he couldn't handle in Hopetoun, used to go to Albany, Hunt's Canning Company in Albany.

PW So Hunt was canning salmon at Hopetoun as well?

RHW Hopetoun was the first cannery, him and a chap by the name of Ted Young built the cannery there, and that went for quite a few years, and then for some reason he closed that there, and then he just had the one in Albany.

PW Did you do any estuary fishing on the south coast?

RHW A little bit of it, not a lot. We would go and do a bit of bream fishing and mullet fishing in the estuaries down there, but - there was no real fresh fish market there, we could sell a little bit to - Hunty - the cannery. But - there was no fish in Stoke's Inlet, there was no fish, that was dry, you could just drive anywhere across the estuary, it had a sand hill probably 150 foot high across the mouth of that

PW That was immediately after the war?

RHW Yes, yearh. 'Till the time we left there, which was, you know, probably six years after the war anyway, and that still had the great big sand hill all across Stoke's - Phillips was - that's out towards the Mount Barrens, where they've got the ranger's cottage down there now, that was just completely dry, that was dead too, there was no fish in that whatsoever, but right up the top end in one of the offshoots, in what they used to call "the steer" there was a couple of pools way up there had bream in 'em, and it wasn't all, oh, just not that many years ago now that it burst that bank open and, the same as the Young River, and then of course the bream, the mullet and all the rest of the stuff got back in it then, but where we used to do quite a bit of fishing was in the Little Steer, River, still got the property there, little - Jerdacuttup River (33° 43' S 120° 17' E), and an old lady by the name of Mrs Daniels, many, many years ago, she had a cart, horse and cart, a hundred gallon tank, and she caught bream out of the Steer River and she carted them across in the hundred gallon tank and put 'em in the Little Jerdacuttup, and that's where the bream originated from in the Little Jerdacuttup River, so I know that's a fact, because that's my brother in law's grandm other did that, and that was a well known story when we were down at Hopetoun, that's how the bream got in there

Side A: 6 mins

PW When do you think she was doing that?

RHW Oh, I haven't got a clue, but it was way back around about the turn of the century, or somewhere like that, they were an old family that had been down in that country for many many years, so -

PW What was her family name?

RHW Daniels.

PW Mrs Daniels?

RHW Yes, there's still the Daniels still down around Hopetoun and - Esperance. Mainly around Hopetoun, along the Jerdacuttup River, still got the property there.

PW Where was she catching the black bream?

RHW Up in the Steer River.

PW In the Steer River

RHW In the Steer River - either the top end of the Phillips it was actually - probably a day's travel in those days by horse and cart, and she carted a few across in a hundred gallon tank and put 'em in that river, and they thrived, so we fished there for years, there and Hopetoun, and then the salmon finished down there, and Dan Hunt saw us, and he wanted to take up, he'd flown up to Exmouth, and he saw what he thought was tons and tons of sardines, in the shallows up there. And he'd built a cannery in Esperance in the meantime to catch salmon with big boats, around towards the South Australian border, and it was never successful, they couldn't - catch the salmon, they couldn't get them in, they could catch the salmon sometimes, but then the seas'd be too rough and they couldn't get them on board the boat, so virtually, his cannery never canned a fish there; and he saw us and he asked up if we'd come up to Exmouth and fish for him up there if he built a cannery. So needless to say, those days virtually built the cannery for him, we travelled up and we worked - and built the cannery, and carted a lot, we used to drive the truck back to Esperance and pick up stuff and cart it up and such like; and I, you know, was twenty one, I was twenty at the time, so that's when that first started, we left down there and went up to Exmouth. And then he got

PW That must have been 1951?

RHW Would have been 1951 or '52, because - I think it was '52 we got the first cyclone, there was a bad cyclone through, and that did a lot of damage, but what the whole thing was with it up there then, all the sardines he thought he saw were what they call hardyheads, smelt, and he couldn't can them. (tape pause) And he couldn't can the smelt, so we used to go fishing for mullet and gardies and all that there, used to can anything like that, and then we'd go out and get the big fish, and he, we used to fly all that south on the MMA, we used to, he had a big freezer up there, we used to fly it, put it in the airtight containers and send that south.

PW Hunt sounds like he was a remarkable man?

RHW He was the biggest scoundrel ever born. He made all his money, he made a lot of money in Darwin during the war, and - so we were told on pretty good authority, he got out about one jump ahead of the rope

PW What sort of things was he making his money from in Darwin?

RHW It was earthworks, earthworks through the war, and I don't know - we never ever found out the true story, but we do know he had to get out of Darwin in a hell of a hurry, so he was a bit of a scoundrel, but also an honest man. His word was as good as his bond, sort of thing. He never signed anything, I don't think he ever signed anything, but if he gave his word, that was it. A damned hard businessman, but if he said something was right well that was it, he'd never go back on his word

PW And did he pay well?

RHW No he didn't, he just paid and that that's all. Well to give you an idea, we used to catch the salmon, clean them, scrub them, ice 'em down and deliver them to the cannery for seventeen pound ten a ton, that's thirty five dollars a ton, which wasn't a lot of money, not those days even, but that's what he, you know, he had the monopoly, and that was it.

PW And it would be fair to say that he always paid?

RHW Oh he always paid, oh yes, yearh, he always paid, but then Dan didn't have anything to do with that. Actually it was his accountant, he had a good accountant, but no, he always paid, he was never ever snide or anything like that.

PW Can you describe the cannery at Exmouth that you built? How big was it, what did it look like?

Side A: 9.9 mins

RHW Well it was mainly, we - had a big freezer, I can't tell you the exact size of it now, probably a 20 by 20 freezer, that's feet I'm talking about, real measurement. And - we had one of the old Nissan Huts, you remember that, we had two Nissan Huts joined together for the actual cannery part of it, and - it was a - one of the old time canneries, you used to have to - say nowadays everything is done with the vacuum sealers and all this sort of thing. In those days you used to have to do everything by hand, you would cut your fish up into certain size, put a certain weight in the tin, you would put it into what they call a part crimper, and that was like a big separator sort of thing, you turned the handle, and it would just close the lid round the tin without sealing it right up, and then you had to put it in the big boiler, they all went in racks and went in the big boiler, and it was steamed for, I thing an hour to get it right up to temperature, and it had to come out then and go in what they call a crimper, while it was still boiling hot, so there was no air in it whatsoever, to get all the air out of it, and then you crimped it entirely, and then of course they - put it back in and cooked it for another two hours after that to dissolve all the bones, and then they came out, that's the cans, and then they just stood then, for maybe a week, to make sure that there was - see a lot of them, they might have a pin hole or something in, if they did the can wouldn't compress in, and anything that didn't compress in was just tossed out and the rest were washed and put a label on it and packed and put in cartons and sent away.

PW An this occurred up at Exmouth?

RHW This was at Exmouth, yearh, this is where Kailis's factory used to be, before they had to shift it right at the end of the Learmonth airstrip, Kailis put his factory there, he used a lot of the old stuff when he first put his prawning factory up there.

PW Did Hunt sell to Kailis?

RHW No no, we got wiped out, we got wiped out the next year with another cyclone.

PW That was the end of the canning?

RHW That was the end of the canning then, yep.

PW What fish were you canning at Exmouth?

RHW Gardies, mullet, whiting - bream, canned - near anything, and he never put a label on it as - as a product - a salmon, or anything. It was just "fish" So that was what we used to can, and - our trouble was we couldn't catch that much fish there, we'd go down and we'd fish for a day, then we'd have to work in the canneries for about four or five days to help him out, to get the fish through so we could go fishing again, and of course we never got paid for that.

PW And was it all men working in the cannery?

RHW No, no, we had two or three girls up there. Fay Wignal was up there, Jackie Howell, another couple of girls, I can't think of their names now, Laury was up there, Elaine was up there, his wife. - Harry Morntz and his wife were up there, he was the manager, that would have been about all the women, I think.

PW A lot of kids up there at that time?

RHW Yearh, there was Billy and - John and - John and three, two more Lefroy kids, that's how many kids were there. They were on Exmouth Station. And Broads had the lighthouse out on the, right on the tip, (NW Cape) but they didn't have any kids.

PW Did any of the fish for that cannery come from around on the Ningaloo Reef?

RHW No, no. That was too - many many miles - too far away in those days. We used to go around there occasionally and troll for mackerel - but that would be just be sent south with the big fish.

PW How aware were you then, this is the 1951, 1950-51 approximately, how aware were you of the Ningaloo Reef and what it actually was?

RHW Well, very little, we, you know, we we, it was damned nice to travel inside there - with the boat when there was a stinking southerly blowing, and there was the - the whaling station was there.

PW Did you realise there was this massive expanse of coral?

RHW No, nobody did, nobody talked about it, nobody mentioned it. We knew it was coral reef and such like, but most of the time it was just a damned nuisance in case we were going to hit it with the boat. You know that's what it amounted to, you didn't want to run into one of those big niggerheads, or anything like that, that was - and it was good for fish, but apart from that nobody had a clue what was you know, any value to it or anything like that. It was just there and that was all there was to it.

PW How far south would you have come from Exmouth on the Ningaloo Reef in the early 1950s?

RHW Oh only down as far as Cardabia (sheep station), near enough Coral bay, just north of Coral Bay

PW So how far would that be?

RHW Oh, sixty miles, yearh, fifty or sixty miles down.

PW An how far past Coral Bay does the reef extend?

RHW Not all that far. It comes down to about Warra (Warroora sheep station) probably about another ten mile down.

PW Well you had seen almost all of the reef?

RHW Even then, I had seen it, yes, but not - to any great extent, not like we did in latter years, no

PW And what was the fishing like then, was it (indistinct)?

Side A: 15 mins

RHW Well as I said, fished inside the reef there at all. All we did was travel inside it, because we couldn't do anything with the fish. See all the fish had to go back to Exmouth, back to Learmonth, which was a hundred mile away just about, and that's the only time, we just travelled in there if we were going somewhere, we'd travel inside the reef to get out of the stop.

PW What reasons would you travel that distance?

RHW Well to fetch the boat back down south, fetch the *John Jim* back down south for slipping and such like. - She had to come back down every twelve months and go on the slips.

PW Where?

RHW Oh, usually to Geraldton, yep, or occasionally you'd go back to Perth, but I wouldn't be on the boat then, you know what I mean, it would just go back down to Perth. - Then I quit up there then, once we got the second cyclone, I got out then.

PW What sort of draft boat could travel the full distance inside that reef?

RHW Oh, depending on the tide, about six foot, there's a couple of spots you've got to really watch, but -

PW Did you ever run aground?

RHW Yearh, - the first year - time we went up there with the old *John Jim*, she drew about six or seven foot:

PW What was the name of the boat?

RHW *John Jim*, yearh, she ran aground at Point Cloates. So - we - were in a small little twenty four footer, I was, with the brother, so the skipper went back out on the big boat, and we went up inside the reef.

PW Tell me about that incident when you ran aground, what happened?

RHW Nothing, he just - it was only on sand, he just ran, went on the ground, and we run an anchor back out for him, and he just winched himself back out and turned around and went back out again.

PW So there was no drama?

RHW No, well see the boats in those days - nowadays if you run aground (indistinct) anything, you're doing about twenty knots, you could be in trouble, but those days, flat as a biscuit was about seven and a half knots. So you weren't going very fast, and they were great big heavy boats with solid keels and suchlike on them, and - Oh she went aground several times up there, a couple of times on the reef.

PW Did it have a sail?

RHW No, not the *John Jim*, no.

PW What was the construction of that boat?

RHW A wooden boat, with a copper sheath on it, and an old six cylinder Gardner motor. It was about - weighed about two ton, and it developed seventy horsepower.

PW Was the boat built of Jarrah was it?

RHW No. It was an eastern states boat, but I couldn't tell you exactly what it was built of from over there

PW Tell me Ray, when did you first start fishing seriously on Ningaloo?

RHW I'd need mum for that. (His wife Josephine Wann b 12 Jan 1937) How old were you when you first went up there?

JW Three I think, three or four

PW When did you get married?

RHW The year before we built the camp in here (Leeman).

JW '57

RHW When did we first start fishing up there sweetheart?

JW Up where?

RHW At Ningaloo.

JW When did we first start there (indistinct) sixty six.

PW 1966?

RHW & JW Yeah.

JW It was the off season for the crays here

PW An what motivated your decision to go up there fishing?

RHW Well for a starter - Golden Gleam - processing works in Geraldton, wanted to can mullet in the off season for the crayfish, so they put in the same type of cannery as what we had up at Exmouth, same sort of plant, and we went up there to try and catch mullet for them. 'Cause I had all the gear and such like here, I had the freezer truck, and boats and the whole lot of it, and we went up - first we went to - we were going to go to Bill's Bay, which every one knows now as Coral Bay, and we camped at Bill's Bay. We unloaded most of our stuff there and camped there for, oh I don't know, a week or more I suppose, and decided that there was just no fish there, not enough to do anything with, no fish of any kind. Snapper, anything; it was all live coral and of course you don't get much fish on that. So then we went up to - we took the boat up to what they call Boora Boodja (Bruboodjoo) which is nearly fifteen mile further north, no ten mile north of the homestead sweetheart. (in answer to an indistinct interjection by JW). That's about fifteen mile north of Coral Bay, its Boora Boodja (Bruboodjoo) Bay, a little nook in there, and - we went up there and we started fishing from there then, and we were catching mullet and snapper and - mullet and snapper mainly, and then we used to go up to Ningaloo (HS) and catch a lot of snapper, but we used to catch a lot of mullet out on Point Cloates itself, on the flats up there. And fetch them back and freeze them, and about every - oh whenever we got a load Golden Gleam would run a truck up and pick them up and fetch them back to Geraldton.

PW Were you fishing on the outside of the reef?

RHW No, never fished on the outside of the reef in my life. We used to catch all the fish - more fish than we could handle on the inside of the reef, right up in all the years I went up there I never went outside the reef. So that answers your question doesn't it (laughing) Well that's how many fish were there too, because we didn't have to go outside the reef to catch all the fish we needed

Side A: 20 mins

PW Were there many fishermen operating like yourself?

RHW The first year we up there, the only other person we saw was a chap by the name of Max Dease, came in of the - came up to see the skipper on the *Nardi Mar* that was turtle fishing. That's the only other stranger apart from the people from the station that we saw.

PW What was name of the boat?

RHW The *Nardi Mar*. And his name was Max Dease, was working for Tropical Traders. He wasn't on the boat, old man Plugg was on the boat. He was a Dutchman, old man Plugg and his two sons. They were on the boat - could have been three sons on the boat catching turtles, and they used to anchor inside the reef, and Max Dease came up, he worked for Tropical Traders (who) owned the boat I think, but he came up to see them. He's the only stranger that we saw then in - over five or six months that we were up there. - And that'll give you an idea of how many fishermen were up there. There were none, absolutely.

PW So that was his first time as well?

RHW Oh yes, he only came up by road to see this chap. Because the bitumen used to end then at Northampton, and it was a two wheel track virtually from Carnarvon out, so you didn't get a - lot of people go through. You used to get the mail truck about once a week and that was about it.

PW Had anybody told you about Ningaloo Reef when you first arrived up at Exmouth?

RHW Nobody, no, nobody even virtually knew the reef was there. Old Edgar Lefroy would have known, and Gerry his brother probably would have known, but nobody else up there virtually knew that there was such a thing as Ningaloo Reef. It was just a reef and that was all there was to it. It was a - something not worth mentioning as far as - as far as that went, you know what I mean. You were talking about it, oh yeah, you could get in it on a passage through it, and you could anchor in behind it and you could - Fraser Island was all right to get in behind there if there was a good southerly blowing and things like that, but apart from that it was just a reef.

PW Can you describe the reef a bit more to me. How wide is it?

RHW Well, how long is a piece of string. It varies, the same as it does - it would be from probably fifty yards to five, four or five hundred yards, and its all broke, it's all broken. Places you could walk on it, places it's as hard as concrete to walk on, and other places you can't walk on it with thigh boots, you just go out of sight in the - all in the cabbage coral and staghorn coral. A lot of places it will go dry, and a lot of places virtually it'll never go dry at all, it's always got a certain amount of water over it.

PW But it's maximum width is about half a kilometre?

RHW I would say around about half a kilometre. Yep, and (the distance offshore) it varies probably from - a hundred and fifty yards. You can convert this later on if you want to, to - probably four mile off the shore. There's not a set pattern anywhere off the shore at all. Places you can, as I say, you've got a job to get a boat through, only on a high tide.

PW And in those early days, there was a lot of fish?

RHW Oh, there was - you'd just pull up, you wouldn't shift and you'd catch eighty or ninety snapper, just in a little boat.

PW Pink snapper?

RHW No, its the nor'west snapper. No. There's very, very few pink snapper ever in there, behind the reef there

PW Other big fish?

RHW Oh, big cod, and trevally, and all sorts of fish like that, yes.

PW Turtles?

RHW Turtles everywhere, 'till the boats had been there a couple of years, and they just about wiped them out then

PW What do turtles eat?

RHW Well, you've got two or three different types of turtle. So your green turtle lives mainly on seaweed, and your loggerhead, he eats shells and octopus, and pretty near anything he can lay his mouth to, he'll have a go at anything, but the green turtle, he's the one that they were mainly catching and he's mainly a weed eater.

PW And what was the third type?

RHW There's hawksbills, and they are weed eaters, as far as I know, I'm not quite sure about their diet.

PW So you said hawksbill, loggerhead and green turtles?

RHW And greens, yearh, they are the three, virtually the three up there.

PW Did you ever eat any turtle yourself?

RHW Oh yearh, used to eat a lot of it. They used to give us turtle meat off the boats, and its very tasty. It's about half way between - it's a white meat, half way between chicken and rabbit I suppose, but very nice meat to eat. That's only just, we didn't eat the green meat or anything like that, but they'd just save it, the butt of the wing - that's just like a leg of mutton.

PW And is there a lot of meat in a turtle?

RHW No, there's only the two front flippers, that's all. Probably about - like a - about like a leg of mutton on each wing, that would be about the size of it, and the rest of it then is - well it's virtually green, what they call green meat, and I think they used to just mince it all up and make soup out of it, I'm not quite sure. I didn't eat any of the other, I know that.

Side A: 25 mins

PW And were the turtles - existing along the entire length of the reef?

RHW Yes, yep, from one end of it to the other.

PW What about Dugongs?

RHW Same thing, but they haven't - they never - they were there then, they didn't seem to change very much, the dugongs were still there, well they're still there now, and they didn't seem to vary very much in numbers at all. The Exmouth they did a little bit, they didn't actually - I don't think they varied that much, that's inside the Gulf, but - where all the people and traffic are now they've shifted from there and gone over to the other side of the Gulf where it's quieter.

PW In the past did the dugongs come right down the full length of the Ningaloo Reef?

RHW - We've seen them along the full length of it, yes, but you know, they seem to be there at - mainly about July August, September. That's when they seem to come their thickest. Whether they shift from somewhere else and get there, I don't know. But yes they come right in along the shore and you'll see them just feeding along, there'll be eight or ten, twelve in a mob (indistinct).

PW Did you ever catch dugong?

RHW Not deliberately, no, no

PW Did you ever eat them?

RHW Yearh, and they're very nice too - but - when you get a young one but - they'd be about half way between

pork and veal I suppose. I'm talking about many many years ago now, you know. But - we never ever ate many, or anything like that, but yes, we've eaten 'em.

PW Were they ever essential for you sustenance though, did you catch things like dugong and turtles regularly?

RHW No, no, I'm only talking about - you're talking about eating them, I'm talking about (how) we've eaten a dugong, and the turtle, we never ever caught a turtle to eat. It was only given to us of the turtle boats. We never hunted them or anything like that.

PW When you were living up there, where did most of your food come from?

RHW Kangaroos, fish, and stuff we took with us, because we had the big freezers and we used to just take stuff with us and, we lived of the land most of the time, goats, sheep, from the station. You'd get plenty of sheep from the station, whenever you wanted a sheep, you'd just go and ask for a sheep, and they would give you a sheep, there was no worry at all to them. So that's mainly what we used to live on. We never used to have many green vegies, or anything like that, but then nobody up there did anyway.

PW When did you start camping adjacent to the Ningaloo Reef?

RHW Well that was in '66, that's when we said.

PW In '66?

RHW (Converses with JW) Yearh, inside the reef in '66. Yearh.

PW Did you camp at many places over the years?

RHW Not really, we camped and what they called the Bruboodjoo, that's fifteen miles north of - Coral bay, and then we camped at the Ningaloo Homestead. But we fished up and down the coast, you know what I mean. We might go up to Yardie Creek, and along there, down to Warra. We'd camp some places for a week or two, but most times that were our main camps and we'd just fish the rest of it as is, as was.

PW Was your main camp at Bruboodjoo?

RHW That was there for quite a few years, and then we shifted that entirely and went north to Ningaloo

PW What did you do that?

RHW Amateurs, started to come in, and once the amateurs started to come in I've never seen anything run a place quicker than amateurs can. That's irresponsible amateurs, well these weren't amateurs, they were "shamateurs". Most of them had freezers and bigger boats than we had, and freezers twice the size that we had, and they were just carting all the fish back to Perth and selling them, but they never had licences, you know what I mean, they were just doing this and - it's stopped now, but it went on for many many years.

PW Was there a lot of people doing that?

RHW Yearh, quite a few, yearh. Oh probably eight or ten anyway that we know of.

PW How did you get on with those people?

RHW We didn't.

PW They were the enemy?

RHW Yearh. (laughing)

PW Did you ever have confrontations with them.

RHW No, no, no, you never confronted them or anything like that, we just kept out of their way. I used to just try and get there first and get what I wanted out of it, and then shift out of it, and it just got to the stage, I shifted, I was (indistinct) compete with them or going to even try.

PW What sort of methods were those people using to catch fish?

RHW Oh well, they were skindiving, they were - line fishing and skindiving at the same time. A terrible lot of scuba diving, they got an awful lot of fish with that. I can't mention any names, because they're still alive and suchlike, and that's all there is to it, but the Fisheries (Dept.) would know who I was talking about.

PW Were there ever any prosecutions?

RHW - Yes I think there was in latter years, but not 'till latter years, they got hold of two or three of them. I'm not quite sure how some of the cases ended up, but they prosecuted them, yes

PW And how many professional fishermen would have been there?

RHW Then? (conversation with JW)

PW Did you complain to the Fisheries Department about the shamateurs?

RHW Oh yearh, but if you complained there was no such thing as a Fisheries inspector anywhere north of Geraldton in those days. So they weren't interested.

PW Did that annoy you?

RHW Course it annoyed you, but it was the same when we first came here, (Leeman) with selling undersize crays from here, you could complain to the Fisheries up in Geraldton, we sent one chap from here, right round through Moora, right up to Geraldton once to tell the Fisheries there was a chap here cooking caccas, by the 44 gallon drum full to take away and sell, and Geraldton sent back word that they had to contact head office first before they would be allowed to come down and see if they could do anything - that's how good the fisheries inspectors used to be, you know what I mean. They've changed now because they've had to change, but you could get no (indistinct) from the Fisheries Department at all in those days. So that's all there was to it.

PW Why do you think that was the case - were they undermanned? Under resourced?

RHW No, they - it was a case of, "they're not doing much harm, just let it go"

PW So they were apathetic?

RHW Yearh, they were apathetic, and that's all there was to it, and they didn't - you know, to go from - they always used to - the story was always with your shamateur, that it was too hard, they actually had to catch them selling the fish and getting the money, accepting the money, so therefore it was too hard to catch them, so they wouldn't do anything about it. And it wasn't until public pressure and suchlike got onto them, mainly other amateurs that caused a - finally caused them to do something, there was a bigger outcry then, but one fisherman, or two fishermen saying something didn't worry them at all. But then after a couple of years - I'm not sure what time Harold Dodd started fishing up at - Ningaloo boundary - he wasn't up there earlier on, and I'm not sure what time Dodsie did go up there, but it would have been within two or three years of us starting, I s'pose, but of course we were - forty mile apart I s'pose, which is a damned long way in those days.

PW Did you have things like radios?

RHW No!

PW But you had a portable radio to listen to the news I suppose?

RHW We had a - little radio, that's all, portable radio.

PW Did you ever have any dangerous experiences on the reef?

Side A ends: 32.1 mins

Side B starts

PW You used a four wheel drive vehicle to move around?

RHW Oh yes, always, you had to have a four wheel drive.

PW What sort of vehicle did you have?

RHW Oh, those days it was Landrovers, and then we had a big Dodge truck with a - big freezer on board.

PW Were Landrovers reliable?

RHW Yep. One of the most reliable vehicles ever made, in our opinion, but it wasn't 'till we sort of stopped fishing up there, and started doing longer trips on the bitumen and such like, that you realised how slow a Landrover was. That's when - the only time I changed from them then. But apart from - through the bush the Landrover was a phenomenal vehicle.

PW You had an agent I suppose in Geraldton, is that where your fish used to go to?

RHW Well no agent, we only used to sell to the factory, to the cray fishing factory that was

PW Was that a co-op was it?

RHW No, it was a private factory, Golden Gleam they used to call it.

PW And you sold exclusively to them?

RHW Yep, yearh.

PW And was that for a fixed price?

RHW Yes, you came to an agreed price, you know, they'd pay you so much for mullet, so much for snapper and such like, and - you just worked on that, there was never any - nothing in writing or anything like that those days

PW And how often would those prices be revised?

RHW Once a year, you went up, went up this year, that price stayed exactly the same 'till you came back, and then the next year they'd say, "oh yearh, same price, or gone up a penny a pound" or something like that

PW Would you actually have a meeting about the price?

RHW No, no, no, no, no, just -

PW Did you have any say in the price you were paid, or did they -

RHW No not a lot, they were pretty - good, you know what I mean - we sort of knew, within reason, what they could turn it over for, and they used to say, or Jim - Jimmy Davis used to say, "well we can get such and such for it, and we'll give you so and so, that's our costs and give us a penny a pound profit" or something like that, and that'd be it. Never get anything in writing, not for crayfishing, not for anything, that's - people were reasonably honest mostly - there was a few nasty ones around, but we never had much to do with them.

PW Is it still like that?

RHW Pretty well, yearh, a lot of it is. You don't get anything in writing for a crayfish, you know, what your crays will be, or anything like that, your fish or anything, you just you know, you sell 'em, and take what you get.

PW And is you price still fixed through a season, or does it fluctuate?

RHW No, when we're up there for catching fish now, we're - we virtually get a price for the season, and that's it.

PW And is that the way other fisherman operate up there now?

RHW Yearh, well what you will have to realise is there are now only four licensed net fishermen in Exmouth Gulf, so there's not a lot of fishermen up there, you know what I mean.

PW And how many of those would come around onto the Ningaloo system?

RHW Nobody! Nobody! There is nobody since they made it a national park. I handed my licence in. I handed my concession in as far as the Ningaloo Park went I said, "Well it was fair enough, they wanted the fishermen out of it." So I just said, "Well I'd just rescind all rights to fishing there, I'd been fishing for years and years and years." But I just handed it back in. I don't know why I did it now because I should have kicked and screamed and got something out of it, what the fisheries do to you, but - I didn't at the time, I just said, "Well that's what they want to do," so I handed it back.

PW There are some islands north of the Ningaloo Marine Park, what are they called?

RHW The Muirons.

PW The Muiron group. How many islands are there?

RHW Only two from memory. North Muiron and South Muiron I think.

PW Are they still available to professional fishermen?

RHW Yes, yearh.

PW And do you fish there?

RHW No, no, I fish just right down in the bottom end of Exmouth Gulf, that's all. I only just use the little dinghy, I'm net fishing, I'm not - fishing for any big fish at all now, so -

PW Are there other fishermen working up in the Muirons?

RHW There's not, not there's not many fishermen actually fishing out of Exmouth itself, but the charter boats go around there a lot. They go out round the island an awful lot, they're out there all the time.

PW Do you think that the marine park should have been extended to include the Muiron Islands?

RHW No, I don't think so, not if they are going to exclude all fishing in it, because why, you know what I mean.

you virtually have got a lot of pelagic fish going through which are not natural to the area, you know what I mean, they're not - if you don't catch them there, they're not going to stay in the area, so why bar people from fishing in these areas, which they have done in all the best parts of the National Park, and - its a little bit - they are a little bit too one eyed with what they want to do with the National Park as far as I'm concerned. You've got to have these areas, I'll admit that, but - they - are too - oh I don't know - it's too argumentative I suppose, but no I don't think they should let those Muirons, there's an awful lot of sea between the National Park and those islands, you know, it's an awful lot of ocean, so no, I don't think that should have been in the national Park. They've got a lot there now.

Side B: 5 mins

PW Ray, you mentioned when amateurs started to come on the areas where you were fishing, this was sufficient for you to move further out, that suggests there has been a significant change to the availability of fish over time, because of (indistinct)

RHW Of yearh, I could go back now to the places where I used to fish, and where I would pull up and catch eighty or ninety fish, then I might get one now, because nowadays, like I used to fish, I used to go along there, the reef, everytime - every year we went up, and I would only ever fish one spot, once. I would not go back to that spot that year, I would just go to another spot, another spot, and when we'd finished up there, each place had been fished just once. Now there was always fish left on those spots, you go back up next year and other fish'd come back in to join them. Now, there's a hundred amateurs along there. There's nowhere that's not fished all the time. And the fish just don't get a chance to build up you see, they just - and of course where I used to use what we call a 9.0 hook, which is a hook about that long, and it would only catch a snapper about that long, they use hooks this size, and of course they're catching fish this small, and of course that's next year's, and the year after and the year after they catch. They just use little hooks and catch the little fish, and they are supposed to throw them back, but they don't.

PW Would it be fair to say that amateur fishermen are now taking far more fish than professionals ever did?

RHW They're taking them all. There's no professional fishing inside the Ningaloo Reef. That's got to answer your question. There's no professional fishing inside the Ningaloo Reef. It's all amateur.

PW But there used to be - and -

RHW Yes there used to be, and it ended up with the amateurs taking more, a lot more, probably five time, ten times more that the professionals were, 'cause there was only a couple of professionals fishing there.

PW There's no closed season?

RHW No!

PW Was there a closed season when you were fishing there?

RHW No, never a closed season, there was just no such - as I say, when we were fishing there, there was no interest at all in the reef,

PW Were there any seasonal considerations you made when you fished there?

RHW Well yes, our seasonal consideration was like we were crayfishing down here, and we used to knock off in May, and then go up there. That was, we only used to fish for the winter months, some of the winter months up there.

PW Was that a matter of economic survival?

RHW No, no, that's when the best weather was up there

PW But you couldn't make enough money in crayfishing here to tide you over till the next season?

RHW Yearh, yearh, yearh, that's why we never fished - I never went outside the reef - I only had a little sixteen foot boat up there. We never - we went up there more for the lifestyle - than to make money out of it

PW So it was more a matter of filling in the time between the crayfishing season?

RHW Yes, yes, give the crew something to do, and - add a few dollars to carry on with.

PW So most of your fishing productivity has been from crayfishing?

RHW It was in those days, yes, yearh. Later on we went up there and used to make a living of it, when I finished crayfishing.

PW And you're now based at Leeman, which is where we are doing this interview?

RHW No, I'm based at Exmouth, we're only just down here for a short time now

PW So is this your holiday cottage here is it?

RHW Yearh, we only bought this place last year - we still live at Exmouth.

PW I see - and how long have you been down here this season?

RHW When did we come down, mid November.

PW So, it's a very nice house and you moved from one house to the other, backwards and forwards each year?

RHW Oh, we've only got a tin shed up there, you saw what we've got up there, (no PW) Our nearest neighbour when we're up there is fifty kilometres away.

PW Oh, so you don't have a house like this at Exmouth?

RHW No, no, we're right out in the bottom end of Exmouth Gulf.

PW Yearh, but I misunderstood you when you said you were based at Exmouth, that was then, but your primary base now is here at Leeman isn't it?

RHW No, it's still at Exmouth, no we'll be back up there very shortly, now, we won't be back 'till November, December again. See we come down for the cyclone season now, to get out from the cyclone season and that's all.

PW So do you regard Exmouth as your home?

RHW Still Exmouth is our home, yearh, yearh. We're not there twelve months of the year now, it's only just the last couple of years we haven't been there twelve months of the year, you know, fishing

PW And you have a historical connection with Leeman, which is where we are now, you fished here, you were a real pioneer for Leeman?

RHW Oh yes, we fished here for many years, yes.

PW When did you come to Leeman?

RHW In - when we first came to Leeman, would have been, we built the camp in '58, '57, '56

PW And you were the first person to build a camp here?

Side B: 10 mins

RHW First to build a camp, yes. There was a brother and myself came in. I wasn't actually the first fisherman - I was with the first fisherman sort of thing, but there were two or three of us together - but Mum and I built the first camp, which we used to live in tents the first year, lived on board, just the first season we were here and then lived in a tent at the foot of the jetty, or where the jetty was (is). And then, there was no jetty there, and then the next year - you (his wife) came up and we built the camp here.

PW And now it's a thriving town of about 300 people? With the Wann name all over the place, in parks and roads.

RHW Oh yeah, well the old man used to be here too. He did a lot of fishing out of here and-

PW Your father was a professional fisherman?

RHW No, no, he was just an amateur, no. He couldn't -

PW Is he still alive?

RHW No, he's been dead many years now. He couldn't have afforded to be a professional fisherman when he was young with twelve kids.

PW Something I've asked people about in this series of interviews is (about) religious beliefs related to fishing. Now some people have associations with things like the Blessings of the Fleets and such. Do you get involved with those types of activities?

RHW No, if I get a hook in me finger or something, I tell God all about it, and that's about as close as I get to it I suppose. No, I'm not religious, no.

PW Do they have a Blessing of the Fleet ceremony here at Leeman?

RHW No.

PW Where do they have them?

RHW They have one at Jurien Bay now, I believe.

PW Do they have them further north?

RHW One in Geraldton? Yeah, one in Geraldton, but nothing further north of there.

PW But you've never become involved in any of the others?

RHW No, no.

PW Has there been a reason for that?

RHW No, not really. Well virtually years and years ago they didn't used to have it, or they held it at Fremantle and we were up here, which was too far to go to Fremantle, just to be in that. And then - further north, we are not there, there's nothing up there, and that's all there is to it. So there's no reason against it, or anything like that, if that's what you mean, oh no, no, no.

PW Do you you have a spiritual relationship with the ocean?

RHW I think so. To live on the ocean for a fair while, if you don't sort of, if you can't talk to it and live with it, and treat it with absolute respect, you couldn't be out there for too long.

PW Can you tell me a little bit more about that?

RHW Not really, no, it's just something - you've either got it in you - or you haven't got it sort of thing. But you've always got, I don't know, it's just something that you love the ocean I s'pose. - If I want to go on a holiday anywhere I want to go with some sea.

PW Do you feel as though you're a part of the ocean?

RHW No, 'cause I hate water, (laughing) and I can't swim. No, it's a funny thought, no I can't - you're going a bit deep for me there. But you've got - you must, you know what I mean, you've just got to have that respect and such like for the ocean, and realise what it can do, and -

PW I'm interested that you can't swim, because a lot of fishermen can't swim.

RHW No, I know that, yearh.

PW Why have you not made it your business to learn to swim?

RHW Well put it this way, you see all these aeroplanes going 'round up in the sky, you've seen plenty of planes. Now if their motor stops, they can't fly, but if my motor stops the boat'll still float. And when one of them blokes up there learns to fly, then I'll probably learn to swim.

PW Have you found that fishing has given you a good economic return over the years, has it been a good livelihood?

RHW Has been a good livelihood, yes.

PW Outstanding?

RHW No, no. Might be outstanding for some of 'em now, but not when we were fishing, mainly for crayfish, or wet fish. You never make a lot of money out of wet fish, but yes - we've made a living out of it, that's all I can say.

PW Would you describe yourself as a wealthy fisherman?

RHW Certainly would not, no. Nowhere near it.

PW Would any fisherman describe themselves as being wealthy?

RHW Oh yes, very much so. A lot of the crayfisherman now, the would be (getting phenomenal money

PW You've had a cray fishing licence?

RHW I did have, I used to have two of them, two boats, yearh.

PW And - what's happened to those licenses?

RHW Well I sold out many, many years ago. I'd had enough, I'd had enough bouncing around out there before daylight lookin' for you gear and water three foot deep over the decks and such like, and in those days we only used to have little boats, you know, compared to what they've got now.

PW And your son has a cray fishing license?

RHW Jay, no he leases a boat, because when I sold out, you know, there was no money or anything in crayfishing in those days. I sold one boat with a hundred pots, that's pots and all and ropes for twenty five thousand dollars, and the other boat, a thirty six boat with a hundred and three pots on it, and a house, which is still down here in Leeman, for fifty thousand.

PW Hmm, you could almost sell one pot for about that price these days?

RHW Yearh, very close, yes (laughter) - still never regretted it, you know, it's just something that's happened and that's all there is to it.

PW Have you had any marked changes in technology that have dramatically effected - the way you have fished?

Side B: 15 mins

RHW No, not me personally, you know what I mean, my type of fishing - the type of fishing I am doing now, or Mum and I are doing now, is - just very very similar to the way it was done fifty years ago, a hundred years ago. That's net fishing as such like up in the Gulf. The crayfishing has done, but then I'm not mixed up in that pool now so it hasn't altered my fishing method whatsoever.

PW Are you using a seine net in the Gulf, are you now?

RHW The beach seine, yearh, and set nets, gill nets.

PW And you and your wife get out there together and - fish together?

RHW Yep, yep, that's all, no other crew, just the two of us.

PW And what's your wife's name, for the tape?

RHW Jo.

PW Jo, were you from a fishing family?

JW No, no, not at all, I was a city girl.

PW How did you meet Ray?

RHW He was my girlfriend's - I was a nurse, and he was my girlfriend's uncle, and she introduced us.

PW Where did you meet?

JW I was - my girlfriend and I were going to Port Headland to nurse for a six month stint, and he started off by giving us a lift to the airport.

PW (chuckling) Was this a cunning scheme was it?

JW No, it was, actually we needed a lift. (laughing)

PW And he just happened to be there hey?

RHW They got out to the airport and they had that much excess luggage, they took every cent that I had to pay for their excess luggage to get up - and I'd never seen them before in my life.

PW And you thought a bloke like that must be worth a second look?

JW No, - it was just something that grew.

PW Yearh. And have you enjoyed being a fisherman's wife?

JW Yes, yes, I have Yearh.

PW You've been an active participant in the fishing activities for most of your marriage?

JW Yes, yearh, yep. Apart from, you know, the years of bringing up the kids, and that sort of thing, we - I stayed in Perth with the kids while they did their schooling and - apprenticeships and things like that, and Ray was away fishing then and we would just go with him for the holiday times.

PW How many children have you?

JW Four, we had four, we lost one, we had three sons and a daughter.

PW And you children are called?

JW Jay, Brad, Brian who died, and Mane.

PW And Jay is the oldest, and he's sitting alongside us being very quiet. How old is Jay?

JW - Forty this year.

PW Still a young man, and he has been with you on your fishing activities all through most of his life as well?

JW Oh yes, yearh.

PW - did it seem natural for him to become a fisherman?

JW - Well yes and no, but in actual fact we didn't encourage it, because we always thought it was better for the boys to have a trade of some sort, serve an apprenticeship, and then they could do whatever they wanted, that they had something in their background, because fishing, you didn't know what was going to happen in the future with that, and so that was more or less what we encouraged them to do

PW Have you always found fishing a risky activity, as far as - what your catch is going to be?

JW Well yes and no, especially as time's gone on when, like neither Ray nor I had a good education, and we sort of thought well, in the future you had to have better education, and you had to have some sort of a trade that you could fall back on, so that if things weren't to good, well you had something which you could do.

RHW In most of our days of fishing, you were battling to make a living, you know what I mean. You made a living but you really had - no money in fishing, even in crayfishing for many many years there was very little money in it, you really worked hard for - every penny you got, not dollars those days, but - you didn't make much money out of crayfishing. It was, you know, when I first started we were getting about one and tuppence a pound, or one and a penny a pound, and we were paying tuppence halfpenny a pound freight from the Abrolhos, and in back into Geraldton and - you'd end up with about eleven pence a pound out of it.

PW You fished on the Abrolhos as well?

RHW Oh yes.

PW Which island?

RHW The southern group - I'm sorry, Wallabies, when I first started, in a little fifteen foot dinghy - slender built dinghy, with a three horse power Seagull outboard on the back of it.

PW How long were you on the Abrolhos?

RHW Oh, I fished there for a couple of years.

PW Did you build a cottage over there?

RHW Well you couldn't call it a cottage - a hut, yes, that's all that was there. But yes she was pretty rough over there those days.

PW Ray, you've told me a lot about Ningaloo, but is there anything I haven't asked you which I should have, and you'd like to tell me?

Side B: 20 mins

RHW No, I don't think there's much I could - you've pretty well covered it, you know we just fished there, and as I say, those days the Ningaloo Reef was just a - nobody was interested in the Ningaloo Reef, as such. It's only just in the last ten years, twelve years sort of thing they've started to really say, "Well alright this is a bit unique."

PW When did you last actually go to the Ningaloo Reef?

RHW Christmas before last.

PW About two years ago, and is there a noticeable difference in what you saw then compared to the early 1950's?

RHW Yeah, are you talking about the actual reef, or the foreshores, or the -

PW Anything?

RHW Well yes, the foreshore, along the foreshore and such like is - has been degraded to a certain extent over the years by humans going in here, camping there, and running over vegetation and - sand drifting and things like that, but the actual reef, no we - we've noticed changes that if a scientist went up one year, and went up the next year while we've been there, he would faint, because you'd go up and there would be a pristine piece of reef, I'm talking about, you know, a mile long and - a quarter of a mile wide sort of thing, and there would be every type of shell and clams and life and such like that you could think of on it, and we'd get a bit of a blow through the year, and you'd go back up there next year and it'd have three inches of sand all over the top of it, and everything dead, you know, and anybody that didn't know, would say, "Oh what a catastrophe, what a catastrophe." - Two years time it would be back to about what it was before again, once the sand washed off it again. But we've noticed over the years we've been going there, that happened very, very often in different patches of reef, and not always the same patch always, there'd be different patches it would happen to a different times. Would be a build up of sand outside, and come over the reef on a big sea, and it would just flood it with - sand, and of course that sand kills anything.

PW Do you think there's less fish now than there was?

RHW Oh, there's not a hundredth of the fish there that there used to be, no where near it.

PW And has the variety lessened as well, do you think?

RHW Well there was never a big variety there, we would go up there, really apart from skipjack - we used to catch a few for bait, we would fish for - three or four months up there and we wouldn't catch probably more than ten fish that weren't snapper. There was, you know, there's not a lot, there's a few blue boned groper and a few wrass, and few different fish like that, but of course we never fished for them, but apart from small fish, the small colourful reef fish, there's not many other different fish up there. The red emperor and all that sort of thing, they don't come inside the reef, they're only out in the deep water. So, not apart from the - absolute lack of fish that there is there now, you're darn lucky to go and be able to catch a feed now, even if

you know how to catch a fish, and - as I say, along the land, they've knocked that 'round a fair bit in different places, because it doesn't - we've had blokes from CALM come up, even to where we are now, and we've got one strict rule, you never run over a piece of spinifex or grass or anything like that, you stick to the tracks. So - they come up and, "oh yes, this is good, this is good", and "oh yeah you haven't knocked anything around." And they get in their bus and turn around like that and run over the bloody spinifex. Now how many times have we seen that happen? Time after time after time after time, and these are the people that are supposed to know what they are doing.

PW These are CALM officers?

RHW Yes, yes, and different other ones in the departments like that, yeah. They really - they've got it all in theory, but they've got nothing in practice whatsoever. They don't realise once you wheels gone over something like that it's dead! And it aint gonna come back up in that country

PW Have you read any of the scientific papers relating to Ningaloo Reef?

RHW Arhh, browsed through some of them, yes, but science beats me, you know what I mean - as I said, we've never had much of an education, and when they start to get scientific names, and scientific this and all the rest of it, well - it leaves you for dead compared to what a bit of common knowledge is on a lot of it. Like a lot of the trouble with the - crown of thorns starfish, and then the - drupella shells eating the reef, the snapper lived on those drupella shells, they were always - every time you gutted them they were just chock a block full of the crushed up drupella shells. The snapper have all been cleaned out and what are the shells going to do now, they're going to thrive aren't they, you know, you don't have to be a scientist to work that out, and you don't have to be a scientist to see what the snapper eats. All you have to do is to catch one and cut him open.

PW So that you feel that the drupella plague was due to the - lowering of snapper numbers?

RHW I don't say it was entirely due to it, but certainly partly due to it, yes. Because each one of those snapper would have to eat forty or fifty of them every day.

PW Did other fish eat drupella?

RHW No, not that I've seen - oh, the blue boned groper might, but then there's not many of them up there, or the baldchin, whichever you like to call him. There's only very, very few of them up there, but he's the only other fish that would eat - crush that shell up.

Side B: 25 mins

PW And do you get the *Western Fisheries* magazine?

RHW Yep.

PW And do you read that pretty thoroughly?

RHW Oh yes, yeah, yeah.

PW Do you think that's a good magazine?

RHW Yes that's not bad. You've got to have some sort of magazines like that that give you a bit of an idea what's going on.

PW And do you read professional magazines?

RHW Well what do you mean, *The Professional Fisherman*. - Yeah, we get both them - we read them - yeah, we read them.

PW You get two magazines do you? What are they?

RHW *Pro West* and *Western Fisheries*, I think it is they call it now

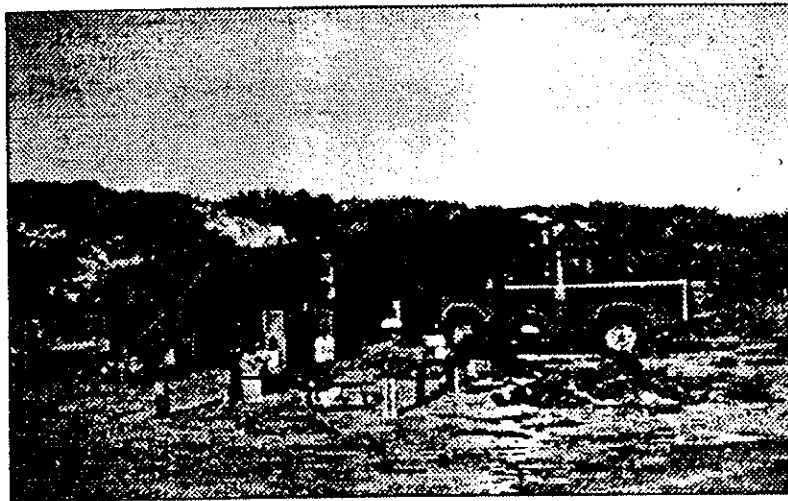
PW Well Ray you've given me heaps of good information in this interview, and I would thank you very much for telling me these things, and we'll call it a day for you. Thanks

RHW It's about time too, I was starting to get a bit hoarse. Thanks a lot (laughter)

PW I wish you all the best in the future with your fishing, thank you

RHW Thank you.

Side B: 26 mins. Interview ends.



Wann's camp - Ningaloo, mid 1960s



Wanns shooting the net - Ningaloo - 1960s