

## FISHERIES AROUND TASMAN PENINSULA

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The waters around the Tasman Peninsula have sustained commercial fishing for more than 150 years. Prior to 1950 the area was a major supplier of rock lobster (crayfish), and scale fish for the Hobart market. Since 1965 abalone diving has become a most important commercial fishery. Recently the peninsula's protected bays have become prize sites for aquaculture. Initially this form of marine farming was directed at shellfish, particularly oysters and mussels. Cage culture of rainbow trout and Atlantic salmon recently has become important.

**Key Words:** Tasman Peninsula, Tasmania, commercial fisheries, recreational fisheries, aquaculture.

From SMITH, S.J. (Ed.), 1989: *IS HISTORY ENOUGH? PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE USE OF THE PRESOURCES OF TASMAN PENINSULA*. Royal Society of Tasmania, Hobart: 117–119.

### INTRODUCTION

The waters surrounding Tasman Peninsula have been a rich source of seafood for more than 150 years. Like much of the rest of Australia it is the invertebrate fisheries which are of overriding importance. The spiny rock lobster (crayfish), crabs, oysters, scallops, mussels and abalone have all been harvested from this area. The ports of Nubeena and Dunalley have traditionally provided the shore base for local fishermen; however, in recent years larger and faster vessels have reduced their importance relative to Hobart.

The availability of light-weight, trailerised, outboard-powered small boats — generally 3–7 m long — has stimulated a substantial expansion in recreational fishing around Tasman Peninsula. Eaglehawk Neck, Fortescue Bay, Port Arthur and Murdunna, as well as the traditional ports, are now the popular centres for the amateur crayfisherman and diver. The pressure of this recreational fishing has forced many commercial fishermen from the inshore grounds.

The area now produces around 150 tonnes of crayfish and 300 tonnes of abalone. Small catches of crab, octopus, scallops and squid are also made but the crayfishermen and abalone diver now dominate the industry. Commercial fishermen now receive more than \$5 million a year for their catches from the waters surrounding the peninsula.

### CRAYFISHING

In the light of recent high-profile campaigns of conservation groups it is not surprising that concern for protection of our natural resources is widely assumed to be a modern phenomenon. In fact the health of fisheries today is due to conservation measures instituted in the past, in some cases over a century ago.

The success of these measures can be gauged by a record harvest of crayfish in the 1984–85 season despite almost two centuries of exploitation. The framework of today's conservation measures was set down in the *Crayfish Protection Act* of 1885. This act followed a Royal Commission of 1882 which reviewed the industry and the resources on which it was based and recommended a minimum size of 10 inches overall. Whilst the current minimum size is slightly different, the survival of the industry is due almost entirely to this law introduced 101 years ago.

By 1881 crayfishing in this area was already well developed. In the report to the Tasmanian Parliament of the 1882 Royal Commission, entitled *Tasmanian Fisheries*, Robert Smith a local fisherman told the Commission, "We get crayfish anywhere but they are not so plentiful as formerly." Francis Rush reported, "The average weight of a full grown male is 4 lbs, big fish weigh 7 lbs. The run is now smaller than it used to be; they are much scarcer. This arises from over fishing and catching the female fish." Fishing was by hoop nets also called rings. Whilst

pots were used in the Bass Strait, they were considered destructive by southern fishermen and not legalised here until after another enquiry in 1924.

William Henry Martin described himself as a "deep sea fisherman" and described his vessel as "an ordinary openwell boat (of average size, 33 feet 6 inches long, 7 feet 5 inch beam and 2 feet 7 inches deep). The present boats are safe, and 10 men drowned, mainly due to bad handling. I don't think it would be of service to have the boats decked."

The main grounds for crayfish were from Wedge Bay to Maria Island and Martin fished down to 45 fathoms. The average male crayfish weighed 4 lbs (about 2 kg) with big fish over 3 kg. An average-sized fish returned about two cents to the fisherman and it was common for the fish to be used as bait to catch striped or real trumpeter.

This season the average-sized crayfish in the catch was 730 gm but worth \$8 to the fisherman.

Throughout the past 100 years small numbers of giant crabs have also been caught along with the crayfish.

## OTHER FISHING

Port Arthur and Marion Bay have always supported intermittent dredging for scallops; however, the most important area for this shellfish has been Norfolk Bay. A small settlement of scallops in Norfolk Bay around 1948 was fished in 1950. It may have been spawned in the D'Entrecasteaux Channel and carried to Norfolk Bay as pelagic larvae by water movement. A major settlement in 1953 sustained substantial fishing in 1955, 1956 and 1957 — some 300 million scallops being taken during those three years.

Despite regular testing by scallop boats in transit from Channel ports and Hobart to the east coast grounds, during the last 18 years no evidence has been found since of significant settlements.

Whilst one of the oldest fisheries in the area — crayfish — is perhaps still the most important, the youngest, abalone, is the most valuable. About 24 divers fish the waters of Storm Bay and around Tasman Peninsula. In 1985 these divers harvested 328 tonnes of abalone, some 700 000 individual fish. At today's prices this represents about \$4 million to the divers. This fishery has been in existence for some 22 years and Tasman Peninsula has been a favoured diving site throughout that time. Following some early instability, the grounds have yielded a consistent harvest for almost 20 years and seem likely to continue to be productive whilst the present strict management rules apply.

## DISCUSSION

In answer to the question "Is history enough?", history is certainly enough to warrant a visit to Tasman Peninsula, and it is enough to justify the preservation and display of the historical heritage. However, it is clearly not enough in terms of the potential contribution the area can make to the economy of Tasmania. There are many examples here of the difficulties which may be encountered by regions which depend on single industries. This region cannot expect to be protected from the currently volatile economic situation which is likely to alter the viability of all industries including tourism. The present economy of Tasmania is straining to maintain the past standard of living and life-style of the Tasmanian population. Assuming a general desire in the community to at least maintain the quality of life we currently enjoy, then we must ensure that our economic potential is utilised to the full. To close off benign industries in this region would be to deny a much needed contribution to the well-being of all Tasmanians.

In terms of fisheries, the future of the region involves three industries — traditional commercial fishing, recreational fishing and marine farming. All are subject to rigorous restrictions and controls which ensure that they do not adversely affect other activities on land.

Potting for crayfish and diving for abalone will continue to be the most important commercial fisheries and it seems likely that they will operate at much the same levels as at present. They will return substantial economic benefit to a relatively small number of fishermen. The vessels involved and the processors of the catch will have little significant impact on the region. Some small-scale commercial netting and deep-water drop lining on the edge of the continental shelf will also be a feature of this industry.

Recreational fishing has expanded dramatically in the past 20 years and Tasman Peninsula, with a number of substantial protected bays adjacent to popular fishing grounds, is one of the major recreational fishing areas in southern Tasmania. It seems likely that most recreational fishing in this area is conducted by residents, be they permanent or part-time. Pirates Bay is an important game fishing centre but unlikely to develop much more than its present standing due to competition from other centres in warmer areas and to the depressed state of the world's stocks of southern bluefin tuna. Recreational cray potting, netting and spear fishing may grow in importance if nett disposable income of the population and leisure time increase.

Whilst no reliable statistics exist on the amount of fish caught by recreational fishermen it is conceivable that now, or in the near future, total recreational catches in this area may approach those of commercial fishermen. This growth of recreational fishing may not create significant demands on the infrastructure of the peninsula, other than those created by an increase in part-time residents. There may be demands for additional jetties and boat ramps, together with some traffic congestion as recreational fishermen take trailerised boats to launching ramps. The appearance of some sheltered anchorages may change with an increase in permanent moorings for recreational vessels.

The most dramatic developments in the fisheries around Tasman Peninsula will be in the field of marine farming. Tasman Peninsula is a highly desirable aquaculture site due to its substantial expanses of semi-protected clean cold water, its proximity to markets and the existing developed infrastructure at centres like Nubeena and Dunalley. There are already seven marine farms established in the waters around the peninsula and a further seven adjacent to Forestier Peninsula. A further eight applications have been made, mostly for sites in Norfolk Bay. Half of the farms are involved in the culture of Atlantic salmon and rainbow trout, the remainder in culturing oysters and/or mussels. Marine farming is a highly desirable industry for this region as it generates substantial employment without major impact on the environment.

Applications for new farms must be publicly advertised and objectors may appeal against ministerial approval of new farms. Farming operations

are subject to annual licensing and rigorous controls on environmental impact. Experience elsewhere has demonstrated that marine farming and tourism are complementary industries. The farms themselves attract visitors and the high-quality seafood produced on the farms is in considerable demand by visitors. Many marine farms require no shore-based support facilities; thus if the farming operation ceases, the environment quickly returns to its original state.

The government has recently announced a moratorium on applications for new marine farm sites in Tasmania, nevertheless applications under consideration prior to the moratorium are likely to result in some new salmon farms in the area and one or two additional shellfish farms. A major government project to evaluate the reseedling of former scallop-fishing farms will, if successful, lead to several private scallop farms in the vicinity of Tasman Peninsula. It is considered that Norfolk Bay will be an attractive area for these operations.

## CONCLUSION

The waters and reefs around Tasman Peninsula will continue to provide a valuable harvest of crayfish and abalone for both the commercial and recreational fisherman whilst there is effective management and enforcement. Smaller catches of crab, octopus and squid will also be available. The growing importance of aquaculture is recognised and provision has been made in management plans for commercial and recreational fishermen to coexist with marine farmers.