

Ross Island Amateur Angling Club

A brief history 1959-2011

(Compiled by Kev Hawke, with special thanks to George Kann, Gordon Lavarack and club members)

The inaugural meeting to form the Ross Island Fishing Club took place at the Bellevue Hotel, on the 28th of September, 1959. Present at the inaugural meeting were:

Ces Rissman (initial Chairman)

Mick Godfrey

Oakey Hart

Eddie Gleeson

Eddie Hinspeter

Tom Monk

Nev Abbey

Frank Beatley

Frank Ekitt

Blue Hines (initial Secretary)

All who attended the inaugural meeting donated five shillings to meet advertising costs and initial expenses to get the club underway. By the 31st of October, 1959 there were 28 foundation members. All members who joined the club before the 31st of October, 1959 were deemed foundation members. Those who joined after this date needed to be nominated and seconded by a club member, which is still the case today. The first club president was Ces Rissman followed by Gordon Lavarack in 196_. The first committee was formed on the 19th of October 1959 and they adopted their club rules from Townsville Amateur Anglers for the first two trips, until the club could formulate its own rules. The first patron was Rex Prior a real estate owner and later Jim Neale, publican of the Bellevue Hotel.

The club was not financial enough to purchase its own fishing vessel so they hired a boat from Hayles Magnetic which ran a ferry service to Magnetic Island. Because Magnetic Island was a popular weekend picnic spot and home to the Picnic Bay and Arcadia Surf Life Saving Clubs, boats were not readily available. Thus if there was not a major event happening on the island a ferry was available to the club for weekend hire. If all vessels were tied up on Sunday, which was the busiest day on the island, then a day trip was run on the Saturday.

The first fishing trip for the fledgling club was a day trip on the 24th of October 1959. The hire of the boat for the day was 50 pounds. When a weekend trip went the hire fee was 94 pounds. On a day trip the boat left Hayles Magnetic Wharf at 4:00am on Saturday morning and returned at 7:00pm in the evening. The cost for a day trip for members was 2 pound, 7 shillings. A trip deposit of 1 pound, 1 shilling was held by the club. Early skippers on Hayles boats were Ces Hall, Cedric Thus and Billy Humphries.

Fishing in the early days was quite different to that experienced today. There were no bunks on board and members “rolled a swag” wherever they could find a spot. Food was stored in eskies of individual members. Beer was always in plentiful supply. Fishing lines were in the 120 lb class with 10/0 Suicide Hooks. Sinkers were old railway dog spikes, later replaced by lead as members acquired moulds to make them. There were no bag limits and each member kept their own catch. Fish were stored initially in large wooden crates with large blocks of ice. This method was replaced by large galvanized, coolite lined tanks. These were stored on the riverbanks near Hayles Warf between trips. Bait was generally mullet supplied by Alan Dale. A full boat (which was generally the case) consisted of 34 members. The club also chartered boats out of Lucinda, especially when Hayles Boats were unavailable. In 1967 the club started chartering the “**IDLE HOUR**”, a boat with sounders and up to date navigation. This boat also took 34 members and was owned and skippered by Frisco Watkins. As the pressures of modern living and changed leisure activities took hold in the sixties those wishing to fish dropped away and the club struggled to fill the 34 ‘births’ on the hire boat. Therefore, they moved to smaller charter boats that catered for 15 fishermen such as “**DIANA**” out of Lucinda and “**ELRAY**” out of Townsville.

In the late sixties, the then Treasurer, Merve Pask, indicated that the club was viable enough to own its own boat. In 1969, club boat ownership began with the purchase of the “**COMPAS ROSE**” a wonderful old duck on the sea. She served us well until 1981 when she was sold and the “**SAXON**” was purchased. The “**ROSE**” was moved to Cairns where she served as a survey vessel for some years eventually burning to the waterline in an onboard fire.

In 1977, George Kann, at the A.G.M. set a target to upgrade from the “**COMPAS ROSE**” to a large more comfortable vessel. The target period to raise funds and research the vessel was three years (achieved in four). Much research was conducted by members before the “**SAXON**” was purchased in 1981. She has been a reliable vessel for the past 30 years. The club is currently accumulating funds and researching the possible purchase of a new vessel to replace the ageing and tired “**SAXON**”.

Purchasing and maintaining vessels and keeping the club viable is a costly exercise and relies heavily on fundraising and hand work from members. In the early days the club ran goose clubs from the Bellevue Hotel with a draw at the Friday afternoon session, which prior to the drink driving rules, was very popular. There were ten draws with ten prizes on offer. Gordon Lavarack remembers standing for hours at the pay window, at the railway on pay day, selling tickets. These goose clubs were popular but more popular was the annual 250 club (\$25) with a grand prize of a new car valued at \$2400 or the equivalent in cash. The build up to the grand draw was conducted over 20 weeks with a consolation draw every four weeks. This was a well patronized event and returned the club a profit of \$2500 which was used for club administration. This type of fundraising lost popularity as is the case in many of the social activities we engage in on a day to day basis. However, our association with hotels and raffles, in whatever form, has remained constant. Over the years we have had associations with the Bellevue, Empire, Commonwealth, Mansfield, and currently The Royal, The Seaview and Bohle Barn

Hotels. These raffles are run by a hard core of members and are available source of income, subsidizing trip fees and boat maintenance.

The original concept that formed the basis of the club's formation was competitive fishing with prizes and recognition at the Annual Awards and Presentation Evening. Competition fishing between members began on the first trip in 1959. The club adopted the rules of the Townsville Amateur Anglers for its first two trips until it could formulate its own. Competition fishing also extended to interclub meets in 1963. The format for this competition was each club put up a team of six fishers to fish a day competition. Ross Island Anglers joined with Townsville Amateur Angling Club to conduct an interclub competition. They called themselves the North Queensland Amateur Fishing Clubs Association, affiliated with Q.A.F.C.A.. As the competition expanded to include other clubs it became known as the Townsville and District Amateur Fishing Clubs Association. Well known clubs that joined the competition at the time were The Police and Citizens Club, Rheens, Mansfield, Dalrymple, Federal and Hermit Park Clubs. Later the Barrier Reef Club evolved out of a merger with the Police and Citizens Club It then went on to become the Coral Reef Club. Out of this myriad of clubs the Ross Island Anglers were the only club to survive, a testament to the hard work and dedication of so many members over the years, some of whom still remain in 2001 as life members.

An estuary/reef competition also existed between the Rossies and Barrata Colts – a Burdekin Club. This competition was popular in the 70s with a one day creek/estuary leg followed by a reef leg. This competition invariably was won by the Rossies, but provided an excuse to socialise well into the night after competition ceased for the day. George Kann on the reef legs is well remembered for providing ice creams on the return journey. Beer and ice cream? Yes, most joined in and didn't seem to care about the combination.

During the last eighties and into the nineties and present, changing fishing laws and the need for conservation have seen the demise of competitive fishing and a move to fishing for fun and socialisation. Such is the need to relax and socialise nowadays, if you go with Troy Odgers as skipper, the time between day fishing and night fishing is filled with a relaxed meal in the galley made up of pre meal snacks of Mersey and King Island cheeses, twiggy sticks, olives, crackers and smoked oysters. Main course is beer battered reef fish with chip wedges delicately washed down with a good red and finished with a fine port. (And no, we haven't gone soft, just sophisticated!)

Annual presentation nights have always been the highlight of the clubs social calendar right from the clubs inauguration. The first social and presentation nights, as they were know, were held initially at Brothers' Football Hall, Gill Park and then at Cutheringa Bowls Club. Catering for these functions was done by the Women's Ancillary formed in 1960 with Mrs. P Hicks as Chairwoman, Treasurer Mrs. G. Payne and Secretary Mrs. E. Keranoeske. Wave Day was the driving force behind the catering as in real life she was a also a caterer. Her husband was a club member – the fare provided on these nights was quoted as being “terrific, a good feed.”

In 1962 the club investigated purchase of their own club house and on the 17/7/1962 they paid three hundred pounds for a building on The Strand. The purchase price consisted of one hundred and fifty pounds from club funds and one hundred and fifty pounds from club members. The first meeting held at the club house was the Annual General Meeting on 13/2/1963. At this meeting the club resolved to affiliate with the Queensland Amateur Fishing Club Association (Q.A.F.C.A.) as a country club. This was achieved that same year. The clubhouse was resumed by The Harbour Board in the late 1970s and the club then used a number of hotels as their 'headquarters', eventually settling on The Royal Hotel in Stagpole Street in the early 1980s, where the club remains to date.

While this history is but a snapshot of an illustrious and successful club, fifty one years old, there is much more that could be told and recorded. This is a much bigger task later. My purpose in compiling this piece was to record the early history of the club before it was lost.

In closing I would like to quote a sentiment that George Kahn unearthed while digging through past records. It is from the club secretary in his annual report of 1963: "IT is not one man, not even the executive, BUT the whole membership who will decide whether the club will progress or NOT." I believe the quote holds true today, forty eight years later.

Tight lines,

Kev Hawke.