



City of Port Phillip Living Heritage Project
Edited transcript – Leonard “Dugga” Beazley
Interviewees: Leonard “Dugga” Beazley [DB] and Frances Beazley [FB]
Interviewer: Cathy Dodson [CD]
22 November 2016

The buy-out of commercial fishing licences **(near 37.04, part two)**

CD: I did want to ask you about how it all kind of wrapped up with commercial fishing in Port Phillip Bay. I know there was increasing regulation, that sort of conflict that we’ve touched on a little bit between professionals and recreational fishing, and then the buy-out that’s happened recently. Perhaps, I don’t know if there is anything kind of generally you’d like to say about those sorts of issues and how you experienced that?

0.37.04

DB: Yes. Well, the thing was, they’d been after us for a long time. The amateur fisherman lobby had been after us for a long time. It all goes back to Rex Hunt. Rex Hunt started it all off originally you know? He had a lot to do with getting ... Western Port Bay closed about ten years ago.

CD: To commercial fishers?

DB: To commercial fishing. They closed it down to commercial fishing maybe a little bit more than – but just say ten years ago. But since then they’ve been on about the Bay ever since you know? And especially Corio Bay. Corio Bay is a big issue down there because, like I say before, that’s where there is a lot of sea grass and there’s a lot of fish in Corio Bay. That’s where we all targeted in the winter months. And it come to a bit of a, a bit of a boil up about two or three years ago. The amateur fisherman in Geelong, they had a big rally and they marched on the Town Hall with placards and that, about getting rid of the commercial fisherman out of Corio Bay and that you know? So anyway the next thing we know, the last election two years or two and half years ago wasn’t it, roughly? We’re sitting there one night and Denis Napthine come on and he’s down Sorrento somewhere. Next thing we know he’s saying “Oh, if you vote for us we are going to close Port Phillip Bay to commercial fishing over a period of 8 years.” And, yes, he says it’s better if the Bay ... It’s more benefit to the State of Victoria for 750,000 amateur fisherman than what it is for 42 commercial fisherman in Port Phillip, you know? They give the statistics about we contribute about 10 million dollars a year to the economy where as the amateur fisherman lobby there’s 150 million. Something to that effect.

CD: Right.

DB: Yes, anyway that was alright. So two weeks later the other bloke comes out and says the same thing but he says “We’ll do it sooner.” And he did it in 18 months, didn’t he?

CD: So that’s the Labour Party that you are talking about?

DB: Yes. Yes.

CD: So when you heard that on the news, was that a terrible shock? Or -

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DB: Well it wasn't a shock because we were expecting it. But the thing was, we thought well, we're a bit lucky. I'm 75, 74 whatever it was. You know I said "How would it have been if it had have been a few years ago? How would it have been if David had still been alive?" He would have been only, what 48 or something wouldn't he?

FB: Yes.

DB: You know, it would have devastated him. He would have got a lot of his life to live, you know?

CD: We haven't mentioned on the recording that David passed away in 2013, is that right?

DB: Yes.

CD: So it would have taken his job from him?

DB: Yes, yes. So, I had the option of stopping in to it for another six years. You know, but in six years I would have been 82. And at the moment I am quite able, quite able. I can do it, it's still easy for me you know, but what am I going to be like in 6 years? And the thing is, if I hadn't have taken the buy-out, we would have been losing ten percent every year. So in six years I would have come out of it with nothing, only what we earnt in that six years.

CD: So they had set it up in a way that it was financially a big advantage to take it sooner rather than later?

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DB: Yes, it just didn't pay out. Another thing too is, it was costing me \$8000 a year for two fishing licences, you know?

CD: Because you had one for yourself and one had been David's?

DB: Yes, one was David's. It was costing me \$8000 a year for them for a start. And it goes up every year, with inflation like everything else. Every year it's a bit dearer, you know? And then it was costing me a \$1000 a year to pull my boat out of the bottom on a slipway and paint it. We got a mob come here and audit the place.

CD: They audited the shop that you have downstairs, yes?

DB: Yes, and that was approximately \$450 a year wasn't it? And we had to have a PrimeSafe licence for the boat. That was another \$450 a year. Then the boat was up for survey in 2018, and the last time they surveyed it, it was for 5 years. But what's happening, they're in the process at the moment, and we knew this was happening, the Marine Board is being privatised. And it was costing, the last time I had four boats under survey with the Marine Board and they were costing me around about \$4-500 a year to get surveyed. They reckon, when it becomes privatised, they reckon it will be costing, for a small boat, \$1000. And the big one I've got roughly \$2000. So it was costing us a lot of money to stop in the business before we started. And then there's my age was on top of that. You know? And on top of that they're putting us on quotas.

CD: So you would've only been able to catch a certain number of fish?

DB: Eleven tonne of fish.

CD: Ok, and would that have been enough to cover those costs?

DB: Well, at \$10 a kilo it was roughly \$100,000 a year. Out of that it was costing me approximately \$20 000 a year to do it.

CD: Just to be on the water.

DB: Yes, to be on the water, and then on top of that, then I've got to buy fuel, you know? And when I'm long-lining I was using about a \$1000 worth a month, you know? And then, when I'm long-lining I had my son-in-law going fishing and I've got to pay him. So at the end of the day we're not making much money out of it, you know? We wouldn't have been clearing fifty grand a year.

CD: A lot of hard work –

DB: And with the buy-out I was going to lose more, I was going to lose more than that every year in the buy-out.

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CD: So it was a lot of tough circumstances really coming together to say got to go for it.

DB: Yes, yes. Well it was the time you know? I didn't want to do it, but it was just stacked against us to do it. So also I had, when David died he made me take – He didn't make me, but he put Brett on to me. My intentions was when David died I was just going to take Melissa fishing with me.

CD: Your daughter?

DB: My daughter yes. We mightn't have been able to do it as hard but it would have been keeping the money in the family. But he put Brett on to me, which I don't mind Brett, he's a good bloke. But I had to pay him, so I had to work. And after Christmas when the snapper gets scarce, I was going fishing because he had nothing. I was going fishing and I was earning enough to pay him, but we were getting nothing. You know, I was working for nothing. Doing it for nothing. He bought a house down Portland, so that solved his problem. But in the meantime Melissa had met Todd, and married him and brought him home and plonked - *[Laughs]* Instead of her, plonked him on to me, you know? And I didn't mind him, he's alright, but he's 47 or something isn't he?

FB: Yes. Yes.

DB: I said to Frances, I said "Well if I keep going fishing, he'd be quite happy to do that." You know, I says "If I give it up it will make him go and get a job." You know, which he's done. If he had a went fishing with me for another six years –

FB: He wouldn't have got a job.

DB: He would have been in his fifties, and he wouldn't have got a job.

CD: Sure.

DB: You know?

CD: So again, it was all part of the circumstances.

DB: Yes, it was all part of it. We sat down and talked it over about what we should do, you know -

CD: Did it take you a long time to come to the decision?

DB: Well it did. Yes, right up to the death knock wasn't it?

FB: Yes.

DB: We didn't know what to - We had to inform them by a particular date what we were going to do.

CD: Yes.

DB: You know it was the 22nd of February or some bloody thing, I just can't remember.

CD: That was this year [2016]?

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DB: Yes. Yes, so I was - We were still licenced up 'til the 31st March. That was our last trip.

CD: So you mentioned earlier on, when we started talking, that the last day of fishing from the old style double-ender boat was the 15th February.

DB: That was in the double-ended boats.

CD: And you will still fishing in -

DB: Yes, 'til March, but we were using the *Frances*.

CD: Ok, and what sort of boat is the *Frances*?

DB: Oh it's a semi-planed hull, with a big engine, a 350 horsepower engine in it you know? I can go out in any weather in it you know? It was built especially for the job. But it's 25 years old. I've had it for 25 years.

CD: Ok, and do you -

DB: That last two months, February and March, we were virtually out every day. Made the most of it. Right up 'til the death knock, didn't we, the last day.

CD: Did *Frances* go out with you?

DB: No. No.

CD: Have you been out on the water since?

DB: Oh, yes, well I sail.

CD: So you still sail?

DB: Yes.

CD: But you don't fish?

DB: No, no, no. Well I took them, my brother-in-law and that, and his grandson, you know, they were pestering me to go fishing. I took them out two or three times, and we couldn't catch a snapper. [*Laughs.*] Well we were a bit early, went a bit too soon. [*To Frances,*] Weren't we? Went out half a dozen times actually, but they - Yes, they got sick of it because if they had've caught a couple of snapper they'd have backed up again. Yes, but they finished up pulling the plug so, yes.

CD: So in the meantime you've got the boats and you look after them.

DB: Oh, yes, yes. I'll keep the boats as long as I can.

CD: And the pleasure is in that?

DB: Yes, they're my - They're keeping me alive. [*Laughs*]

CD: Yes. They're part of the family, those boats.

DB: Yes. Yes.