



MEDIA RELEASE

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TACOMA IS GOING HOME TO PORT FAIRY

The historic Port Lincoln based 84-foot wooden tuna clipper MFV Tacoma is returning to Port Fairy, 73 years after it was launched in the town. The MFV Tacoma was built by brothers Bill, Alan and Hughie Haldane on the banks of the Moyne River between 1944 and 1951.

This is the second serious attempt to enter the Moyne, after strong winds made conditions too hazardous in February 2011. The last aborted entry was due to rising seas and strong winds. The vessel was returning to Port Lincoln after a week in Hobart as one of the feature vessels in the 2011 Australian Wooden Boat Festival.

Weather permitting, the MFV Tacoma will steam from Port Lincoln with a crew and eight paying passengers and arrive in Port Fairy on the noon high tide on Monday 25 March next year. The vessel will be moored in Port Fairy until 1 April and be open to the public.

The vessel has been restored and preserved over the past 15 years by a group of skilled and enthusiastic volunteers. They are all members of the Tacoma Preservation Society (TPS) www.tacoma.org.au

“We are keen to return the vessel to Port Fairy to ensure an important part of the town’s maritime history is preserved. It will be a nostalgic time for all onboard and I think it will bring back a lot of memories for some of the older residents of Port Fairy to see her again,” Mr. Ross Haldane, son of boat builder Bill Haldane and TPS President said.

The water depth of the Port of Port Fairy is tight for the Tacoma. “In the work we’ve done preparing for this event, it will be beneficial if some dredging was done at a couple of specific spots. Those negotiations are underway,” Ross Haldane said.

It took the Haldane brothers seven and a half years to build the MFV Tacoma. It was launched on the high tide at 0338 on the morning of Monday 5 November 1951. An important chapter in the history of the Australia fishing industry began with the launch of the MFV Tacoma. It was the first purse seine vessel in Australia, and it pioneered the multi-million-dollar tuna fishing industry in Port Lincoln. Its design was based on vessels being used in the expanding tuna fishing industry in the Pacific North-West of Canada and America.

The plans for the vessel came from the Western Boat Building Company in Tacoma Washington in the US. The company was very helpful in providing support for Bill Haldane and his two brothers in the difficult time following WW2. As a result, the brothers decided to name the vessel Tacoma.

There were sixteen people on board on Sunday 6 January 1952 for the MFV Tacoma's maiden voyage to Port Lincoln: the three Haldane brothers, their spouses and seven children. Also, on board were all their household possessions including wardrobes, bikes and beds, Hughie Haldane's Alsatian dog *Wolf* and two cats.

Other crewmembers were cook Tom McDonald and Port Fairy locals, identical twin brothers Jack and Keith Bellamy. They watched the vessel being built. On completion the Bellamy boys were asked to join the crew. They jumped at the chance of a life adventure. Their mother was less enthusiastic and reluctantly agreed to let them go. The twins celebrated their 18th birthday on the voyage to Port Lincoln in 1952.

Keith Bellamy was tragically lost at sea from the MFV Tacoma in February 1959 when he was poling for tuna off the south coast of South Australia. Ninety years young Jack Bellamy will be in Port Fairy when the Tacoma returns to the Moyne next year.

The Haldane brothers were fishermen at a very young age at Port Fairy. Before the Tacoma, the boys had demonstrated their boat-building prowess by constructing three smaller fishing boats, Petrel (23ft) Amaryllis (40ft) and Dolphin (40ft). Their father Hugh Haldane had been a shipwright on the River Clyde in Scotland. He had taken a job as Lighthouse Keeper and Harbour Master at Port Fairy and provided useful advice during the construction of the Tacoma.

The massive blue gum keel logs, the largest of which was 70 ft (21 metres) and weighed 8 tons, were felled in the Otway Ranges and delivered to Port Fairy by rail in 1944. They were hand shaped using adzes and crosscut saws.

The South Australian (SA) government under Premier Playford wanted to develop a new purse seine fishing industry in SA and provided the Haldane brothers with a 20,000-pound loan to complete the vessel. The loan conditions included the three Haldane families moving to SA from Port Fairy, the Tacoma be based at Port Lincoln and the fish they caught were to be marketed through SA fish markets.

The Victorian government attempted to intervene and encourage the Haldane brothers to change their position and remain in Victoria. The decision became something of a political football and was widely reported. The 6 January 1952 departure for Port Lincoln meant Victoria had literally 'missed the boat.'

"The impact the Tacoma had on the South Australian fishing industry and Port Lincoln was significant and long term. Our parents were true pioneers, and we are really pleased the Tacoma is returning to Port Fairy.

We are receiving greatly appreciated support and interest from the Port Fairy community for Tacoma's homecoming," Ross Haldane said.

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