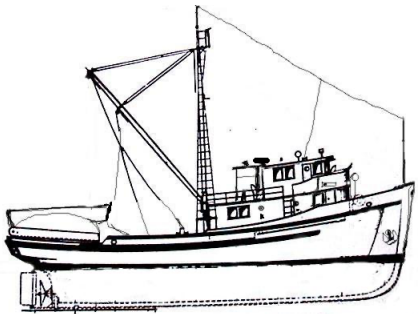




MEDIA RELEASE

5th November 2026

MFV TACOMA CELEBRATES 75 Years

The historically significant 84 ft wooden tuna clipper MFV Tacoma, built by brothers Bill, Alan and Hughie Haldane on the banks of the Moyne River at Port Fairy in Victoria turns 75 today. The vessel has been fully restored and maintained over recent years by an enthusiastic group of dedicated volunteers, all members of the MFV Tacoma Preservation Society (TPS).

“We are delighted the Tacoma has reached this significant milestone. None of the original tuna fleet based in Port Lincoln in the 1950s is still afloat. Tacoma is the only survivor. We will celebrate the occasion on board with a birthday cake, a festive glass and three hearty cheers for this magnificent vessel,” Ross Haldane, son of boat builder Bill Haldane and TPS President 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 November 5th, 1951. A bottle wrapped in blue and white ribbon and filled with salt water from what was to become her homeport in South Australia, Port Lincoln, was broken on her bow.

“The impact the Tacoma had on the South Australian fishing industry and Port Lincoln was significant and long term. We are delighted the Tacoma is celebrating 75 years today and 92-year-old Jack Bellamy will be onboard to mark this special occasion,” Ross Haldane said.

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 Northwest.

“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 Dad and his two brothers in the difficult time following WW2. As a result the brothers named the vessel Tacoma,” Ross Haldane said.

There were sixteen people on board on Sunday January 6th, 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 of their household possessions including wardrobes, bikes and beds, Hughie Haldane’s Alsatian dog *Wolf* and two cats.

Other crewmembers were cook Tom McDonald and identical twin brothers Jack and Keith Bellamy. The Bellamy brothers lived near the Haldanes and watched the vessel being built. On completion the Bellamy boys were asked if they wanted to join the crew. They jumped at the chance of a new adventure at sea. The twins celebrated their 18th birthday at Port Adelaide on January 15th, 1952, on the maiden voyage to Port Lincoln.

Keith Bellamy was tragically lost at sea from the MFV Tacoma in February 1959 when he was poling for tuna south of Coffin Bay in SA.

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 cross-cut saws.

They were fishing and building at the same time and ran out of money during the construction. Requests for assistance from the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments were ignored. The Victorian post war Cain government didn't respond to correspondence, the Commonwealth government didn't believe there was an offshore pelagic resource, and the Commonwealth Bank considered the whole venture too big a risk.

However the South Australian (SA) government Minister for Fisheries Frank Moorhouse wanted to develop a purse seine fishing industry in SA. He convinced Premier Playford to provide the Haldane brothers with a 20,000-pound loan. The loan conditions included full repayment of the loan with interest, the three Haldane families move to SA from Port Fairy, the Tacoma be based at Port Lincoln and the fish they caught marketed through SA fish markets. The Haldane boys agreed to the SA government loan conditions.

When the loan arrangements with the SA government were made public, the Victorian government strongly encouraged the Haldane brothers to remain in Victoria. The Victorians however had literally missed the boat!

"The decision became something of a political football and was widely reported. Without the SA government, the construction of the Tacoma might not have been completed, and we wouldn't be celebrating today. We need to say thank Premier Playford and Minister Moorhouse," Ross Haldane said.

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