
Whaling Station History

In 1950 an Australian Company was formed ~ "Whale Products Pty Ltd" and Tangalooma was chosen as a site for the largest land based whaling station in the Southern Hemisphere for 4 main reasons: the site was sheltered from the Ocean; had a large supply of fresh bore water & was the migratory path of Humpback Whales and was also close to a major shipping Port ~ Brisbane.



Captain Alf Melsom was bought from Norway to direct the project as he had over 40 years whaling experience. Originally there were three 38metre Norwegian Whale Chasers each complete with a 14-man crew. Australians were hired and trained to eventually take over the enterprise from the Norwegians.

The first 2 Humpback whales were harpooned in June 1952 near Cape Moreton and the operation was underway.

International regulation stipulated that all whales taken must be a minimum of 10.7 metres (35 feet) and no lactating females.

By October 1952 the station had caught and processed the yearly quota of 600 whales, with the season being only 124 days long!

The Whaling station was manned by 120 men who worked 12-hour shifts, 7 days a week. A skilled tradesman was capable of making an award salary of 19 Pounds per week and could earn an average of 5 000 pounds per season.

In the first few years the Whaling Station was a thriving business with each animal being worth approximately 1000 Pounds (\$2 000). One whale yielded approximately 9 tons of oil, the most valuable resource, which was used to make margarine, glycerine, cosmetics and pharmaceuticals. The meat was used for pet food or human consumption overseas, and the bones, offal and low-grade meat turned into a meal for stock or fertiliser.

In the late 1950's vegetable oil was introduced and then in 1959 there was a fall in world whale oil prices and the yearly quota of whales was increased to 660 whales per year.

By 1961 the whales were becoming scarce and light planes were being employed to spot the whales from the air. In May 1962 in desperation the Tangalooma Whaling Station purchased 2 new chasers, by August that year only 68 whales had been caught and the Whaling station closed on August 5th due to economic reasons. Not long after this closure both Byron Bay and Norfolk Island whaling stations also closed due to the lack of whales.

During the 10 years of operation at the Tangalooma Whaling Station 6 277 Humpback Whales and 1 Blue Whale were taken. This operation seriously decimated the East Coast population of Humpback Whales to less than 500

individuals from the original population which was estimated at approximately 15 000.

In June 1963 the Tangalooma Whaling Station was sold to a syndicate of Gold Coast businessmen who turned it into a Resort.

In 1965 / 1966 Humpback Whales were placed onto the "Protected Species" List.

It is estimated that approximately \$32 000 000 was earned each year from whaling in Australian waters. Currently Whale Watching in Australian earns around \$70 000 000 per annum.

Whale Watching is a far more sustainable industry and much kinder to the whale populations of the world.

