

Milton Ulladulla Times

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More pressure on abalone industry

by Cheryl Chenevier

Thursday, 4 May 2006



Discussions between the NSW Minister for Primary Industries Ian MacDonald and a New Zealand abalone company have local abalone divers concerned about the future of the industry.

Increased fees, reduced fishing grounds and quotas as well as sanctuary zones in recently established marine parks have already had adverse effects on licence holders.

Wes Weston of Milton, a commercial abalone diver with more than 40 years experience in abalone diving and fishing, believes he has the necessary background and knowledge of the industry to make informed comments on zones in marine parks.

Abalone fisherman Wes Weston with his boat, Kunara has doubts about the future of the industry.

Mr Weston believes the government is creating an industry which will end up being just for the management.

"It's like any company that runs top heavy, it will go broke.

"It was supposed to be a shared fishery for security but it has brought nothing but insecurity."

Mr Weston pays \$45,000 per year for his licence including abalone, tuna, trap and line but restrictions leave him with fewer grounds to fish and reduced quota.

Another abalone diver and owner, John Smythe said abalone divers are paying \$1million per year for four fisheries officers, a manager and some researchers.

"Although the government has a core responsibility and function, they are making us pay to police the illegal sector to protect the resource," Mr Smythe said.

"We are seeing some changes at the grass roots level as some divers are leaving the industry and process workers and deckhands have been put off.

"It's all cost sharing."

Mr Smythe said there have been talks about New Zealand buying out the NSW industry.

"They know there is no future in buying a few licences so they want to buy out enough shares to have control," he said.

"They would manage it differently by pooling quota with a core of well set-up, trained divers and implement finer scale management and implement enhancement strategies to recolonise depleted reefs."

Mr Smythe said there has been no management initiatives from within the Fisheries Department except the independent body policing the Total Allowable Catch.

"They reduced our TAC by 70 tonnes this year in recognition that the department is not doing anything," he said.

"It's not rocket science if we could just spread our effort over larger areas."



[ABC Online](#)

Abalone divers say fees crippling industry. 02/05/2006. ABC News Online

[This is the print version of story <http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/200605/s1628237.htm>]

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Abalone divers say fees crippling industry

Abalone divers on the NSW far south coast say their industry is at crisis point.

The divers, who produce most of the state's multi-million dollar shellfish, say they are being asked to repay hundreds of thousands of dollars in State Government management fees.

Divers' spokesman Dennis Luobikis of Eden says the more than 30 divers understood the fees had been waived as part of a cut in quotas last year.

Mr Luobikis, who is a member of the state management advisory committee and an abalone diver for more than 30 years, says he has never seen the industry in worst shape.

"Anyone who's relying on the abalone industry on the south coast of NSW at the moment for a living is facing ruin," he said.

"The management fees and charges that the Government has put on us at the moment is absolutely ridiculous, coupled with being cut out of half our grounds is just having a crippling effect on all of us."



JAPAN'S DIVING DIVAS

Ama demonstrate their trade as part of abalone festival

By KAREN RAVN
Herald Correspondent

It could happen again someday. But don't hold your breath.

After all, until Friday morning, it hadn't happened for more than a century. And even Emiko Yoshida and Reiko Miyamoto can't hold their breath that long.

The stars of Friday's show at Whaler's Cove at Point Lobos, Yoshida and Miyamoto hold their breath professionally. They're "ama" -- Japanese for women divers -- and they make their living in Japan "free diving" for abalone and other seafood. That is, they use only their own lung power, no breathing gear, in dives that typically last about 80 seconds.

Their abalone diving exhibition at Whaler's Cove Friday, the opening event of the Abalone Festival and Symposium 2006, was the first free diving anyone had done there since 1897.

"Back then, three divers went into the water and came out very quickly," said Sandy Lydon, historian emeritus at Cabrillo College and director of the festival. "They said very politely, 'We're not going back in there.'"

Yoshida and Miyamoto were a tad wiser than those guys. They weren't sure they wanted to go into Whaler's Cove at all when they were first invited to the event.

That is because they knew what the earlier divers had to discover for themselves: The water temperature is 17 to 18 degrees lower here than in Japan.

"When the women heard how cold it was, they questioned coming," said Kurt Loesch, historian for the Whaler's Cabin at Point Lobos. "It wasn't until they were told they could have wet suits made for them that they would come."

Full-body wet suits made of heavy-grade material, that is.

In Japan, ama generally wear thin wet suits that cover only the upper body. And even those are a big change from traditional white cotton outfits that provided little in the way of warmth -- or in the way of cover either, because they became semi-transparent when wet.

Actually, until the 1890s, the ama dived topless. And, of course, they also dived maskless and flipperless in those days.

Except for the changes in equipment and dress, Japanese free diving has stayed basically the same during the past 1,500 years, according to a 1998 article in "Michigan Today" by anthropologist Bethany Grenald. She met Yoshida and Miyamoto when she was in Japan studying the ama for her dissertation and dived with them Friday.

Unchanged are the tools -- short and long "awabigane" -- that the ama carry with them to pry abalone loose from the rocks they cling to for dear life.

Also unchanged is the "hanzo" -- a wooden float that looks like a bushel basket bobbing on the water as it marks the spot where an ama dived. Besides using her hanzo to "keep her place," an ama can rest on it between dives. She also hangs a "sukari" -- or net basket -- under it, where she stores each dive's catch.

Yoshida and Miyamoto carried awabigane. Both had a hanzo with a sukari attached. But they only really used their hanzo.

That is because they were diving for what Lydon emphasized were "artificial, imitation, faux abalone" because it's illegal to dive for real ones in these parts.

"Are you sure we can't take the abalone?" the ama asked at first, being unfamiliar with the idea of an "underwater reserve."

Lydon assured them he was very, very sure.

Abalone have legal protection here because they were overfished early in the 20th century. Before that, Lydon said, "divers described the ocean bottom as being carpeted with abalone. There were whale skeletons on the bottom, and the skeletons themselves were covered with abalone."

Overfishing happened here -- and not in Japan -- because in Japan they stuck to free diving, and here they didn't.

After the three 1897 divers came up from the cold, Lydon said, "They sent for helmet divers to come in 1898."

The helmets had compressed air, which made diving a lot easier. The ama used them in Japan, too, for a little while. But they were soon banned because officials didn't want diving to be all that easy. It was their way of conserving their ocean resources, Grenald wrote.

No one would call the life of an ama one bit easy. In her article, said Grenald -- who learned to dive in Monterey Bay -- "I was awed at their courage and spirit, as women as much as 40 years older than I would gamely slog through nauseating waves, between great rocks, in conditions that my old dive instructors in Northern California might quail at the prospect of swimming in."

Yoshida and Miyamoto are examples of such older women. Yoshida began diving when she was 12 years old and has been diving for 60 years. Miyamoto, her younger sister, is a relative "novice" with only 50 years under her belt.

There are some men divers in Japan. In fact, the divers who came to Whaler's Cove in 1897 were men. But most divers are women, probably because, studies have shown, women are physiologically better able to cope with the cold.

The two-day celebration of abalone that began Friday and continues today at the Custom House Plaza has been in the works since August, said Tim Thomas, historian and director of public programs for the Maritime Museum of Monterey.

Yoshida and Miyamoto came to Monterey -- it is their first time leaving Japan -- just for the festival. They arrived Thursday and will return home Sunday. After all, Japan's abalone season begins Monday.

A number of people watched the diving Friday morning with special interest. Among them were descendants of the Kodani family, Japanese-Americans who grew up watching the divers at Point Lobos.

Also in the crowd were Dave Doelter Mason and his mother Rae Mason Gilmore. Mason is the great grandson of Pop Ernest Doelter, who ran a popular restaurant -- it was called Pop's -- at the foot of Fisherman's Wharf many years ago.

"He's the one who figured out how to pound abalone to make it softer so people could eat it," Gilmore said.

Or, as Mason put it, "He invented the abalone steak."

And then there was Roy Hattori. Now 87, he was a helmet diver here in the late 1930s -- the only one who was an American-born Japanese.

He remembers all too well how cold the water was.

"This is not the Japanese current," he said.

He also remembers when the bottom of Whaler's Cove was "solid with abalone."

Friday morning, the visibility was poor, Grenald said, and there was a lot of seaweed.

For those and perhaps other reasons, the closest thing to a live abalone anyone saw was a solitary shell.



Monterey hosts first International Abalone Derby

MONTEREY, Calif. In the seaside city of Monterey, people don't just eat abalone anymore. They also race them.

More than 200 people were in Monterey yesterday to watch the city's first International Abalone Derby.

About 120 mollusks competed for the title of "World's Fastest Abalone."

The sea creatures have a muscular appendage that allows them to cruise the ocean for food. Abalone can travel as fast as two feet per minute.

The derby lasted about two hours and contained 15 heats, two semi-final rounds and a grand finale.

When the race was over, the contestants were eaten.

(AP Credit: San Jose Mercury News)

The Mercury News
MercuryNews.com

Posted on Sun, Apr. 30, 2006

What speed! What power! What abalones!

FASTEST MOLLUSK WINS BY A FOOT

By Ken McLaughlin
Mercury News

Angels Camp in Calaveras County may be world famous for its springtime frog-jumping contest. But Monterey may soon become internationally known for its abalone races.

Yes, *abalone* races.

As cynics sneered and children giggled with delight, Monterey on Saturday held its first International Abalone Derby. One hundred and twenty mollusks competed with each other for the honor of being crowned "World's Fastest Abalone."

One 10-year-old spectator, David Engen of Oregon, couldn't contain his excitement. "I've never seen an abalone race before," he said.

In fact, most of the more than 200 people who stopped by to watch the derby never even realized abalones *could* race. They quickly learned a little-known fact about abalone anatomy: The sea creatures have a foot.

It's the same muscular appendage whose strong suction power allows the mollusks to clamp down on rocky surfaces. The foot also permits the mollusks to cruise the ocean for food.

The race's mistress of ceremonies, Paula Suzuki of Aptos, told the crowd before the first heat that abalone travel at the speed of about two feet a minute. In a tiny pool, that can look pretty darn fast.

The contestants -- red abalone with names like Seabiscuit, Ab O'Steel and Uncle Bob -- were farm-raised by the Monterey Abalone Co. The mollusks -- most four inches long and 4 years old -- were placed in the center of the pool and covered by a plastic bucket. When the bucket was lifted, the heat was on.

The contestants carried tiny flags with numbers so the crowd could tell them apart. Their goal: Make it to the perimeter of the pool first.

"I've got my mortgage on this abalone," joked Tony Hill of Santa Cruz, one of the volunteers at the abalone event.

More typical were Tom Martinez, 30, and his fiancée, Tammy Vasquez, 32, of San Jose. The two were checking out wedding sites in Monterey when they heard some taiko drums and wandered over to the event -- perplexed and enchanted by the notion of mollusks making a run for it.

"I guess you can say that the wedding has been delayed by an abalone race," Martinez said with a laugh.

Some spectators cheered on the mollusks from bleachers set up outside the Maritime and History Museum in downtown Monterey. Others crowded around the makeshift track -- a kiddie pool with a few inches of water in it.

The abalone race was the most offbeat event in Convergence 2006: The Abalone Connection. The event -- part festival, part symposium about all things abalone -- was the brainchild of Monterey Bay historian Sandy Lydon, who hopes to make it an annual event.

The Aptos resident has spent the past several years tracing the connection between Japan and the Japanese abalone divers who harvested the mollusks in Monterey Bay waters a century ago. About 30 Japanese crossed the Pacific for the event, which also included a poetry contest that challenged people to think of words that rhyme with abalone.

The race lasted about two hours and contained 15 heats, two semi-final rounds and a grand finale.

Any what will happen to the winner, Lambo, and all the other contestants?

Said Monterey Abalone Co. co-owner Trevor Fay: "They will be eaten."

April 29, 2006

SantaCruz
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From the Santa Cruz Sentinel



MONTEREY

A blast from the past: Japanese dive for abalone at Point Lobos

BY TOM RAGAN
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

MONTEREY — If you always thought it was cool how you could hold your breath and dive for that nickel at the bottom of the swimming pool, check this out:

A pair of Japanese sisters — one in her late 60s and one in her early 70s — put on wetsuits and dove for abalone at Whaler's Cove at Point Lobos State Reserve on Friday.

The dive was a historical re-enactment orchestrated by local historian Sandy Lydon, who flew to the Japanese city of Tateyama last year to recruit professional abalone divers Emiko Yoshida, 72, and Reiko Miyamoto, 68.

How Lydon managed to get these two to take the bait and swim in what comes precariously close to frigid waters on a very overcast day is just about anybody's guess.

Hypnotism?

Lots of yen?

"Let's just say we made it comfortable for them to come here, and they have never been to the United States before," Lydon said.

But more than anything, the sisters were genuinely interested in the historical connection between abalone diving in their hometown and this cove — a connection that dates as far back as the late 1800s.

In their hometown, diving for abalone is, was and most likely always will be a way of living. It's something they've been doing virtually all their lives.

It's something their parents and grandparents did all their lives, too.

When the townspeople over there discovered there was abalone in Monterey in the late 19th century, they traveled here by steamer across the Pacific Ocean to dive for it, dry it, pack it and ship it back to Japan, according to Lydon.

Favored for their succulent meat and prized for their shiny shell, abalones were harvested until the 1930s, when the abalone industry started to stutter after the region surrounding the cove became a state park.

Then the abalone cannery eventually closed.

Then the abalone itself began to disappear due to a resurgence of the sea otter population — and the food chain marched on.

Then World War II rolled around and the Japanese-Americans were imprisoned, which abruptly ended any semblance of abalone diving that had existed up until that point, Lydon said.

Until Friday.

"This is the first time in a long, long time that anybody has ever gone into this cove and dived for abalone," said Lydon, as dozens of spectators watched from the rocky shoreline. "Think about it: The last time anybody went diving for abalone here, it was one of their ancestors from their hometown."

As the two sisters swam into the cove, their first words were "samui!" or "cold!"

And those were their last words too as they began to swim around the cove looking for the abalone that had been secretly planted by a few of the rescue folks on hand in case anything bad happened. The water where the sisters live is warmer by about 20 degrees.

The two women floated on barrels, a common practice among abalone divers.

In the end they found three abalones — the very three that were planted.

For the sisters it was a chance to see Monterey and the United States. And even though they leave Sunday, it's been worth it, they said through a translator.

For Lydon, who's about as knowledgeable as they get on the history front, the re-enactment culminates 40 years of researching the subject.

But he's always been particularly fascinated with the Japanese people, which is why he wrote a book on them. It's called "The Japanese in the Monterey Bay Region."

Contact Tom Ragan at tragan@santacruzsentinel.com.

Convergence 2006: The Abalone Connection

A series of events will be held today in Monterey to celebrate the 109-year historical connection between the Monterey Bay region and Japan, as well as all things abalone.

- 9-5 p.m. Abalone Symposium, Maritime Museum of Monterey, 5 Custom House Plaza.
- 12-4 p.m. Abalone Fest, featuring the first International Abalone Derby, at Custom House Plaza, Monterey.
- 7 p.m. Celebrating the Abalone, a presentation of stories and songs, Golden State Theatre,

MAGNET

<http://eden.yourguide.com.au/home.asp>

Poaching ring busted

Thursday, 27 April 2006

Two men have been arrested in Sydney over the illegal receipt of abalone.

On the evening of Friday, April 14, fisheries officers from the Fisheries Investigation Unit conducting an investigation into an illegal abalone receiver, raided a residential premises at Dundas in Sydney and intercepted a vehicle that had allegedly delivered illegally taken abalone to this premises.

More than 93 kilograms of abalone (shucked meat weight) from 602 abalone, which included abalone taken from NSW and Victoria, two freezers, a set of scales, two prohibited size eastern rock lobsters, a Toyota Land Cruiser 4WD with hidden compartments and dive gear were seized.

As a result of the raid a 42-year-old man from Dundas and a 35-year-old man from Coogee will face court charged with possessing more than the maximum quantity of fish and possessing fish illegally taken and possessing prohibited size fish.

The maximum fine for each offence is \$11,000 and/or three months imprisonment.

NSW Department of Primary Industries Special Operations manager Tony Andrews said illicit abalone receivers paid large amounts of money for illegally taken abalone and fostered a demanding international black market.

He said any information relating to illegal diving or fishing activities should immediately be reported to the nearest NSW DPI Fisheries office.

Recreational divers are allowed to take and possess two abalone with a size limit of 11.5 centimetres.

In relation to eastern rock lobster, recreational divers are allowed to take and possess two per person with a size limit of 10.4 centimetres.



- Officers from the Fisheries Investigation Unit uncovered this haul of abalone during a raid on a Sydney property recently.

Council opposes coastal collecting

By KEVIN HOWE
Herald Staff Writer

Pacific Grove's tidewaters should be a "collection-free" zone, according to a letter unanimously adopted Thursday by the Pacific Grove City Council.

The vote came in response to pleas from conservation organizations concerned by what they see as a takeover of the city's waterfront by the state and Stanford University's Hopkins Marine Laboratory.

Last month, the state Marine Life Protection Act Blue Ribbon Task Force forwarded three plans to the state Fish and Game Commission that call for varying state controls between the Coast Guard breakwater and Lovers Point.

Of the three plans, the task force recommended the proposal that would allow some kelp harvesting for the two commercial abalone farms in Monterey Bay, as well as scientific specimen collection in various areas and continued fishing for squid, sardines and anchovies.

Plans propose extending Hopkins' marine reserve and dividing the city shore front into three sections

The Pacific Grove Tidepool Coalition has argued that the city holds title to underwater lands to a depth of 60 feet and has protested what it considers a usurpation of city jurisdiction over the Pacific Grove Marine Garden Fish Refuge by naming it a state marine protected area.

The Fish and Game Commission is trying to establish protected marine areas along the coast from Santa Cruz to Santa Barbara counties.

"It appears the council is beginning to understand the significance and the importance of keeping our refuge intact and not splitting it up and fragmentizing it for different purposes with different regulations," said Jim Willoughby of the Pacific Grove Tidepool Coalition. "We believe it would be a nightmare for the Fish and Game to enforce."

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20/04/2006 11:03 AM - (SA)

Outrage as green court faces closure Aly Verbaan

The future of the Hermanus environmental court looks grim as the regional justice department contemplates a proposal to shut it down.

Despite a conviction success rate of 85% in 2005, justice minister Brigitte Mabandla is considering the closure of the green court as one of six proposals received by the ministry.

The proposals were submitted by a task team which was established to determine the viability of the environmental court - which has regional status - as a permanent legal entity.

The recommendation to close the court instead comes as an unpleasant surprise to all but the poachers.

Undisputed success

The environmental court was set up in 2003 as a pilot project by former justice minister Penuell Maduna and the then environmental minister, Valli Moosa, in the hope of curbing the illegal activities of what they termed "triads, mafia and other groups" in South African waters.

The effectiveness of the court is not in question. Last week public prosecutor Phil Snijman obtained what is considered a record sentence for two first-time offenders.

Mogamat Adams (31) and Sarel Maree (22) were found guilty of transporting and processing more than 18 000 abalone and received an effective five years and 18 months imprisonment respectively. An appeal against the convictions was denied.

A total of 93 555 abalone were forfeited to the state and more than R1 M in fines were imposed in the first eight months of 2005. Chief prosecutor at the Hermanus magistrate's court Susan Kayser told the Hermanus Times on Tuesday that she was dismayed the proposal was even being considered, adding that "until last week I was under the impression that more environmental courts were in the pipeline, not less".

Hermanus too isolated

Spokesperson for the department of environmental affairs and tourism, JP Louw, said the issue was more complicated than simply closing the court.

The proposal apparently suggests the closure of the courts as a corollary to a proposal to focus on training the legal profession more thoroughly in environmental matters. "The idea is if we can train more prosecutors and judges in environmentally sensitive issues, the need for specialised courts would fall away," said Louw.

He added that areas like Johannesburg and Sasolburg are in desperate need of legal measures to control pollution and effluent from factories. "In these cases it doesn't help to have environmental courts in places like Hermanus. We need that expertise all over the country."

But members of the Marines, falling under marine and coastal management (MCM), a subsidiary of DEAT, expressed dismay on hearing of the potential closure: "We will be swimming against the tide, so to speak, without the environmental court. It is a deterrent to poachers that their cases receive immediate attention by prosecutors

who know all the loopholes. That won't be the case if things go back to the way they were before the green court."

Press leak

Western Cape Regional Court president Gadija Kahn disagrees. Kahn told the Hermanus Times that prosecution of poachers "will not suffer in terms of quality if the court is decentralised". She said serious cases would be referred to the Somerset West regional court and receive immediate attention under the newly-implemented Case Flow Management project, which determines which cases receive priority.

Kahn explained that most of the successful cases are plea bargains and that valuable resources and energy are wasted on district cases being heard in a regional court.

She said that Somerset West court prosecutor Marilyn Cannon "is perfectly capable of representing the state in environmental matters".

Kahn expressed her irritation that word of the proposal had "been leaked" after a recent meeting in which participants were expressly forbidden from speaking to the media. She said no decisions have been made at this stage, but a follow-up meeting is planned for 3 May where all role players will further discuss the fate of the green court.