

Chapter 14

TO THE PRESENT (1987)

Ron Earney was elected Commodore in August 1973, with Brian Marshman, Vice Commodore and Ron Moody, Rear-Commodore. Reg White was still the Club Captain with Robbie Miller, Secretary.

On September 27, 1973, the Club Development and Maintenance Committee was authorised to proceed with the alterations to the old clubhouse and dinghy shed at a cost of \$9,544 plus 10% with the work to be completed by Christmas.

These alterations, which were proceeded with forthwith, consisted of the following:-

1. Extending the ground floor to make it rectangular in shape.
2. Establish a sailing and Race Committee room at ground level.
3. Improve the balcony railings.
4. Extend the door and window on the north wall.
5. Establish a kitchen with servery to the main clubhouse area on the first floor.
6. Painting and general internal restoration.

Sometime later a radio shack was also constructed on the first floor giving the shore based radio operator a panoramic view of the racing course.

Thus facilities were considerably improved for the Cadet Squadron and race officials putting the old clubhouse to excellent use.

In March 1974, Mr. Reg White, who had served the club magnificently for many years in the capacities of Honorary Secretary and Club Captain, indicated that for health reasons he would retire from the position of Officer of the Day at the conclusion of the sailing season.

In August 1975 Ray Abikhair, standing from the floor, was elected Commodore with Ron Moody, Vice Commodore, Ian Watson, Rear-Commodore and Graham Martini, Club Captain.

The Club continued to progress with membership continuing at a steady level and early in 1976 a further development of the clubhouse was planned. This involved the construction of an outside balcony accessible from the mezzanine floor. And the Associates Committee volunteered to accept the financial responsibility for this extension.

Another development was a complete reorganisation of the yard. This involved the re-arrangement and re-laying of the lines for cradles and included a budget of \$10,000 to be spent on back fill and shale.

In October 1976 Mr. T. Hawkes reported to the General Committee that \$9,170 had already been spent on the back fill and that the lines would be poured by mid-November.

This reorganisation of the yard was completed early in 1977 and greatly improved the arrangements in this area and facilitated the movement of cradles and boats.

During Ray Abikhair's term as Commodore a severe storm badly damaged the jetty used by the club officially known as the Bellarine Street jetty. Obviously this necessitated a major repair and Commodore Abikhair and his Committee decided that in addition to the repair the jetty should be

extended 30 metres to the north with an additional arm 30 metres to the east to create an additional L.

Before this work could be undertaken it was necessary to obtain government approval. So Commodore Abikhair led a delegation consisting of himself, Vice- Commodore Ron Moody, Rear-Commodore Ian Watson and Club Treasurer Eric Gibson to wait on the then Minister for Public Works, Mr. Digby Crozier.

The delegation received a sympathetic hearing from the Minister and eventually approval was given to proceed with the work.

The Geelong Harbour Trust, now the Port of Geelong Authority, agreed to carry out the work at cost and to finance the project, money was made available by the Geelong City Council, the Tourist Authority and a levy on club members .Total cost was in excess of \$100,000 and when the task was completed there was provision for considerably more boat accommodation at the jetty .And furthermore this jetty eventually became the starting point for the new marina. In August 1977 Ron Moody took over as Commodore, with Ian Watson Vice-Commodore and Ken Elliott Rear-Commodore. At the same time, Bob Lucas was elected as Club Captain.

The Associates balcony project was progressing slowly but steadily. A separate bank account had been opened from which all accounts were to be paid and this account was to be serviced by the Associates Committee.

The balcony was finally completed at a cost of about \$21,000 and was opened by Mrs. Barbara Wookey, then President of the Associates, in time for the opening of the 1977-78 season.

The most important event, so far as the Club was concerned, during Commodore Moody's term of office was the staging of the National and World title series for Dragon class yachts over the 1978-79 Christmas-New Year period. An enormous amount of planning and effort went into these two important events which are covered in Appendix Three of this History.

Another task, personally undertaken by Commodore Moody, was the decorating of the interior of the clubhouse. This was achieved by the hanging of numerous burgees from other clubs, plaques and other regalia.

Commodore Moody was also involved in the organisation of the inaugural Great Circle Race around Tasmania, which he considers to have been a much more demanding race than the Sydney to Hobart. Unfortunately, due to lack of support from the appropriate authorities, the event was discontinued after only three years.

In August 1979 Ian Watson succeeded Ron Moody as Commodore, with Daryl Clarke Vice-Commodore and Guyon Wilson, Rear-Commodore.

The club continued to run smoothly although the financial situation was causing some concern. This was highlighted when in March 1980, Commodore Watson reported to the General Committee that wages were escalating, while sales (in the bar) were declining. This situation could no doubt be attributed to the increasingly stringent laws being introduced with regard to drink driving. The flag officers remained the same at the Annual General Meeting in August 1980 and discussion was taking place with regard to further extensions to the clubhouse.

It was generally agreed that the location and facilities of the kitchen were unsatisfactory and also that more space was required for dining facilities.

It was determined that the original plan of development of stage 2 would be proceeded with. This involved an extension to the east to provide the necessary additional facilities. In April 1981, the tender of Wycome Industries of \$46,074 plus 10% to \$51,300 for the additions would be accepted. An additional \$15,000 would be made available for furnishings. This work was to commence in June 1981 and to be completed by September 1981.

But despite this resolution there was a nagging doubt in the minds of the committee as to whether this extension to the east was the right way to go. At a meeting on May 14, 1981, it was resolved that Wycome industries be asked to defer the execution of the recently signed contract. At the same time the honorary architect, Mr. Alec Chomley, was requested to study the possibility of extending the west lounge to the north, relocating the kitchen to the north-west corner and establishing a loading bay. This was done and Wycome Industries quote of \$106,000 was accepted in December 1981.

To assist in the funding of these extensions a levy was struck on all members with variations for different membership categories; for example, \$80 for ordinary members and \$40 for senior members. The committee was also authorised to borrow up to \$99,000 on overdraft from the A.N.Z. Bank.

This extension was finally carried out with twenty feet being added towards the north and the kitchen and loading bay established as planned. And the old kitchen was converted into an area for serving bulk liquor.

The new extensions have proved to be a great success with considerable relief to previous congestion in the old kitchen area. Thus, once again, the wisdom and forethought of the flag officers and committee at that vital time has been thoroughly vindicated.

Another significant happening about that time was the development of a new format for the quarterly club magazine, Seachest. The Newsletter, as it was then known, had been edited by your historian and printed locally for the past two years at an annual cost to the club of \$2,600. An approach was made to the club by the late Mal Fulton, proprietor of the Melbourne based firm, Mutual Publishing Co. Mr. Fulton, who was already producing a number of quarterly magazines for metropolitan clubs offered to produce the magazine in a sophisticated form at no cost to the club except postage, providing that he had the sole rights to sell the advertising in the publication. Cost per annum was calculated at \$638, a very considerable saving.

It was resolved that the club would proceed with the new format for a trial period of one year, or four issues of the magazine. This move proved to be a most successful one and 25 editions will have been produced up to the end of 1987. Over the years Seachest had been produced on a stop-go basis but it is pleasing to note now that we have a very satisfactory, well accepted club magazine on a continuing basis.

In the meantime, in August 1981, Daryl Clarke had been elected Commodore with Guyon Wilson Vice Commodore and Bob Lucas, Rear Commodore. And Graham Martini took over as Club Captain.

Just prior to Commodore Clarke taking over, in July 1981, a violent north-westerly storm once again whipped the Bay up into enormous seas which came crashing into the Yacht Club or Bellarine Street jetty. The seas were devastating and completely uncontrollable, to such a degree that the recently constructed concrete decking on the jetty was lifted off in many areas and tossed into the seething water. This resulted in the jetty being demolished to such an extent as to render it completely unserviceable.

Then, once again, came the hassle as to who should accept the financial responsibility for the necessary repairs. Whilst the jetty was officially a public facility there was also little doubt that the Yacht Club was and always had been its prime user.

Much discussion and negotiation then took place between the Club and the Port of Geelong Authority. The contentious point was, was this damage to the jetty the responsibility of the Yacht Club which had undertaken to carry out maintenance to the facility after it was extended in 1977 or was it the responsibility of the Port of Geelong Authority who, after all, owned the jetty?

There was considerable correspondence on the subject and finally the P.O.G.A. repaired two sections of the jetty to make it usable at a cost to the club of \$2,300.

But the main repair was still not carried out as the disagreement between the two bodies continued on into 1982. Eventually the P.O.G.A. informed the Club that they would carry out the work at a cost of \$150,000 to the Club. This, of course, was completely unacceptable and also way beyond the financial capability of the Club.

Then two things happened. Mr. Rob Williams, a member of the Club and an executive with Leighton Constructions was at that time engaged in supervising the construction of the new container wharf at Corio Quay. Mr. Williams agreed, on a private basis, to examine the problem and submitted a letter to the club giving an estimate of \$60,000 to complete the repair. A copy of this letter was sent to the Port of Geelong Authority, requesting their approval to proceed with the drafting of the necessary specifications. By this time it was April 1982 and the P.O.G.A. then stated that their revised estimate was \$67,000.

But there was still the big question of funding the project and in August 1982, Commodore Clarke accompanied by Vice-Commodore Wilson and Treasurer, Eric Gibson, waited on the responsible State Minister seeking advice re repairs to the jetty. In the meantime a windfall of \$40,000 had been received from the State Government as a contribution from the Government receipts from the Golden Casket Lottery.

Eventually the Port of Geelong Authority carried out the repairs at a cost of \$67,000, leaving the Club responsible for the \$27,000 balance.

A very important event in Commodore Clarke's term of office was the hosting by the Club of the Australian Championship Series for Yachting World Cadet dinghies. This most successful series took place in January 1983 and is covered in more detail in the appendix to this history on the Cadet Squadron.

Now the question of a marina for Geelong was really hotting up. The Geelong Regional Commission was at that time developing plans for what was known as "The City by the Bay", and a marina development was an important ingredient in those plans.

General consensus at that time was that the marina would be established in the area between the Cunningham and Yarra Street piers, This, of course, did not suit the Club which, naturally, desired any marina to be constructed, to be located between the Yarra Street pier and the Eastern Beach.

The plan for the "City by the Bay" was put on public display at this time showing the marina in the area between the Cunningham and Yarra Street piers. But there was considerable opposition to this concept and a number of local bodies, including the Yacht Club, voiced their objections.

At this time, the Club's Marina Committee had been re-constituted under ' the chairmanship of Ray Abikhair and a very important step in the right direction took place when Ray Abikhair and Guyon

Wilson met with Mr. Rod MacKenzie, the then Minister for Lands, and Mr. Colin Atkins, Chairman of the Geelong Regional Commission.

At this meeting the Yacht Club representatives were able to draw together the thinking of the Government and the G.R.C., both of whom were now convinced that the correct location for the marina was between the Yarra Street pier and the Eastern Beach.

It was also made clear at this time that any marina construction would have to be undertaken by private enterprise, as the Government had determined that it would not be financially involved.

In August 1983, Guyon Wilson was elected Commodore, with Bob Lucas Vice- Commodore, Kevin Bell, Rear-Commodore and Ray Bews again Club Capitan.

About this time the Government was investigating the establishment of a National Sailing School in Victoria and after some deliberation, it was determined that this school would be located on land to the east of the Yacht Club, occupied, at th.at time by an amusement park. The headquarters of this school was eventually built but, due to lack of funds, was not completed until May 1987. It is now operational and under the control of the Ministry of Education in Canberra with the East Geelong Technical School forming the major part of the Committee of Management. It is known as the National Sailing and Water Safety School (Victoria) and the Yacht Club is represented on the committee.

Another step towards the building of a marina was taken late in 1983 when the State Government announced the selection of six preferred sites for marinas to be established around Port Phillip Bay. And one of these sites was Geelong. The Minister confirmed that the site in Geelong would be between the Yarra Street pier and the Eastern Beach. Early in 1984, the Port of Geelong Authority commissioned the engineering firm of Kinhill Steams to examine the viability of a marina in that area but with the main arm coming ashore in the area of the sandy beach near the swimming enclosure.

In March 1984, Past Commodore Ian Watson visited Hobart and on his return to the club reported that he believed he had seen the type of marina construction which would be most suitable to the conditions and environmental requirements of Corio Bay. Ian's opinion was based on the fact that there was considerable similarity between the Derwent Estuary and Corio Bay. Both were quite large in area and both were sheltered from most but not all directions. The marina in Hobart, which had proved to be eminently satisfactory, had been constructed by sinking large vertical piles into the seabed and then attaching horizontal concrete wave attenuators to a depth of one metre below the surface at low water. These wave attenuators were designed to repel each wave back into the one following on, as the word implies, to "reduce in force". The Port of Geelong Authority was still considering the employment of a "floating type" breakwater but after testing this method in heavy seas in Melbourne, where it proved to be most unsatisfactory, abandoned the idea.

And any idea of constructing a breakwater by means of a large rock wall would have angered the environmentalists as well as being far too costly. So it seemed that the Hobart concept was the obvious one to adopt.

In late June 1984, Commodore Wilson and Vice-Commodore Lucas met with the Chairman of the P.O.G.A., Mr. Neil Samuels and P.O.G.A. Officer and Club member, Des Allen, to discuss the marina situation.

At that meeting Mr. Samuels made it abundantly clear that if the Yacht Club wanted a marina, it would have to build it itself, as the Kinhill Steams report had indicated that it was not a viable proposition. Following that meeting, on July 10, Commodore Wilson wrote to Mr. Samuels informing

him that following his report to the Yacht Club executive, he wished to request a further meeting with the P.O.G.A. to fully investigate the possibility of the Yacht Club becoming financially involved in a marina project.

As a result of this meeting, a further meeting was arranged with the P.O.G.A., Yacht Club representatives and the Minister for Lands, Mr. Rod MacKenzie. And in the interim, Mr. Samuels had agreed to the Club's proposal in using the Bellarine Street jetty extension concept as well as the wave attenuator type construction, but at the meeting with Mr. MacKenzie, the Minister was quite emphatic that any marina to be built in Geelong would have to have a public sector.

The Club was asked to prepare two plans for the marina, one using the Bellarine Street jetty extension and the other with an arm coming ashore at the Sandy Beach.

The Minister also stated that the Port of Geelong Authority would represent the public sector.

With the support of Mr. Samuels, the Bellarine Street jetty extension plan was accepted and in November 1984, the engineering firm of Taylor Thompson & Whiting was commissioned jointly by the Port of Geelong Authority and the Club, to carry out a feasibility study of the project.

This study, which involved the driving of test piles and the development of plans was carried out at a cost of \$35,000, shared equally between the P.O.G.A. and the Club, proved to be most satisfactory.

The next step was to come to suitable agreement with the P.O.G.A. regarding the financing of the project, which in essence, consisted of the construction of a 221 berth marina at a cost of 2.3 million dollars, with berths to be shared equally by club members and the public.

But before proceeding, the Club made two important moves. Firstly, it secured from the Government a 56-year lease of the proposed marina area and, secondly, it put the proposal to a well-attended meeting of members. The meeting of members unanimously supported the proposal and most importantly, on a show of hands, some 65 boat owning members committed to take a berth in the marina.

The Club then entered into a joint venture agreement with the Port of Geelong Authority and a company known as Bay City Marina Pty. Ltd., was formed to supervise the construction. The contract was let to the Australia wide company of John Holland (Construction) Pty. Ltd., and the project got under way.

A little over 12 months later every one of the club's allotment of berths had been taken up.

There is no doubt that Guyon Wilson's time as Commodore had been a most rewarding one and the achievements made a fitting tribute to him, the flag officers and members of the committee.

In August 1985, Bob Lucas took over as Commodore, with Peter Jackson as Vice Commodore, John Backwell as Rear Commodore, and Ern Armstrong as Club Captain.

During Commodore Lucas's term of office plans were prepared to extend the female toilet, provide space upstairs for a new committee room and other developments. However, it was considered that any such major developments were a little premature and it was agreed that any action would be deferred until such time as the marina was fully operational and there had been time to observe just how the marina development would affect the operation of the club.

It had been noted that, following the construction of a similar marina in Hobart, the day to day activities of the Royal Yacht Club of Tasmania had changed dramatically. Because of the now easy

access to their boats, Hobart members were spending much more time at the club and it had even been necessary to have lunches available every day instead of only at weekends.

One major change however was the removal and storage of the billiard table, now seldom used, and the conversion of the billiard room into a spacious functional Committee Room. This, in turn, allowed the former Committee Room to be converted into much needed additional office space and a suitable location for the newly acquired computer equipment.

Two very important events during Commodore Lucas's term were the hosting by the Club of two World Championship Series.

In January 1986, the Club conducted the World Series for Thunderbird Class yachts. This most successful series was won by Royal Geelong Yacht Club sailor, Bruce King with his crew of Barry Walker, Frank Hammond and David Collins. Bruce won six heats of the seven race series and as he could discard the other placing he achieved the perfect score.

Then, in December 1986- January 1987, the Club again conducted the Australian and World Championship Series for Dragon Class yachts. This is covered in Appendix Three of this history.

During Commodore Lucas's term the R.G.Y.C. team had won the prestigious Geelong Advertiser Trophy in both 1986 and 1987.

So when Bob Lucas handed over the reins to new Commodore Peter Jackson on August 6, 1987, the Club was not only in great shape but, with the new marina development, on the threshold of an exciting new era.

Bob Lucas had created a unique club record by serving as a Flag Officer of the club for no less than ten years in all four positions of office. He had been Club Captain from 1977 to 1981, Vice-Commodore 1981-83, Rear-Commodore 1983-85 and Commodore 1985-87.

Supporting Commodore Jackson were John Backwell as Vice-Commodore, John Gamer as Rear-Commodore and Ray Wookey as Club Captain. Kevin Bell took over as Secretary and Roger Kennett as Treasurer.