



City of Port Phillip Living Heritage Project
Edited transcript – Leonard “Dugga” Beazley
Interviewees: Leonard “Dugga” Beazley [DB] and Frances Beazley [FB]
Interviewer: Cathy Dodson [CD]
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Double-ender boats

0.29.55 (part one)

CD: ...Explain to me, as someone who doesn't know really very much about boats at all, what the differences are between double-enders and the couta boats. What are the differences are in the shapes and why do you prefer one over the other?

DB: Well a couta boat, it's got what you call a transom. It's square at the back, you know? And its stern is shaped like a wine glass. They call it a wine glass stern, but a double-ender is virtually the same shape on the bow as what it is at the stern. A double-ender boat is built for net fishing. When you had a double-ender with a pointy stern on it, when you were shooting nets, putting nets out on the water, they wouldn't catch on the stern of the boat. And when you're pulling them, we used to pull them back in backwards, and the boat would come nice and straight. And then you'd pull the nets over the stern. But with a couta boat, a couta boat was built to fish in Bass Strait. That's why it had a deeper draft, to keep the propeller in the water all the time. Because a double-ender out in the big swell – You go out through the heads, and the waves go from being, you know, a little chop ...

... Into a big roll. And when you go over a big roll the boat would go over like that, and the propeller come - It doesn't come out the water but it cavitates. Where as a couta boats' propeller is always deep in the water... And a square stern boat was better for couta boat fishing, than what a double-ender was, because catching couta you just used to stand in the stern and hook them. Pull them in on hand lines. So the stern of a couta boat is roughly five to six foot wide, so there was plenty of room to put two or three lines, you know? But a double-ended boat it comes to a point, so one man down in the back would fill all the room up.

CD: So are there differences in the number of blokes you'd need on a boat to operate them properly for fishing? On each of those two boats? Or would they have a similar size crew?

DB: The type of fishing we were doing, two was enough.

CD: Ok, in the double-enders?

DB: In the double-enders. In the couta boats they used to – they had two types of couta boats. One was about 21, 22 foot and they were usually one man boats. You know, someone wanted a boat to work on his own? But the ones, the 26 footers, you'd usually find there was a couple of blokes in them. There might have been a couple of partners who'd got a boat built, you know?

CD: Does anyone still use couta boats for fishing?

DB: No, no couta boats. There's not one couta boat left in the fishing industry in any way whatsoever. Hasn't been one for 50 years.

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DB: And the double-enders, I was the last fisherman in Port Phillip Bay to use a double-ended boat to go fishing in. It was on the 15th of February 2016. This year. In the *Greta*.

CD: In the *Greta*. And did you know on that day that it was going to be the last day?

DB: Yes. Yes.

CD: So what did that day feel like?

DB: Ah, well, it was pretty - When I went, I got up early in the morning and went and shot the nets. And I thought to myself, this is the last time I'm going to be doing this. And I had this old bloke who used to go with me, and Todd went with me, my son-in-law. The next - well I came back home, you know, and got them out of bed. This old bloke, who I grew up with you know, he's a bit older than me, but he lives around the corner. He used to come fishing with us a bit, so I got him to come. I said to him, "Look Bomber." We used to call him Bomber. He's still alive. I said to him, "You'd better come with me in the morning, it will be the last time."

CD: Did you catch many fish that day?

DB: No, well we never actually got much. The only reason I shot the nets was, the time before we went out - They were shark nets, gummy nets. And we wasn't getting many gummies, but the time before we went out and I got a load of seaweed in them, you know? And I would have had to bundle them up like that and bring them home. So I thought to myself, "what I'll do, I'll take them out and shoot them on the reef, round the back of Williamstown." Because what I'd done, when you get seaweed in them, you just leave them in the boat, and it ferments. It's a vegetable, you know? And you leave them there, say for a week, and it all ferments, you go and shoot them out, you know, and you pull them back in and they're like brand new. It all just drops out or washes out.

DB: So I thought I will go and shoot them out on the back of the reef and I thought I won't get much. I won't get much, but you know, it will clean the nets up. And I think, I'm pretty sure we got two big butterfish, and one snapper. *[Laughs]* Yes.

CD: How would that compare with a fishing haul that you would get, you know, in previous years? What would you normally expect to catch?

DB: Oh, well if I had've went there in previous years with those sort of nets, you would have just got the same.