Fishing Tales from Great Barrier Island

By Fred Medland (Born 1926)

As with all fishing tales and short and long yarns there is a beginning. Some begin in the slack times between bites, in the pub next day after the physical work is done, but the best are told on arriving home late with breath that smells of Captain Morgan's throat lubricant to find a cold tea, it's dark and it has rained in the last half hour. Now there's a bin or, in our case, a sack of assorted fish to clean. Snapper, the odd cod, kahawai, a gurnard and, if we were lucky, a monstrous hapuka.

If we were boat fishing and managed to lift a craypot we might be rewarded with ten to a dozen crayfish. No escape slots in those days to let the yellow eels and octopus in and out until they had devoured your crayfish. In our day pots were lifted each morning (except Sunday) and re baited again in the evening if it wasn't a full moon. Our craypots were made from supple jack vines so had a limited life if lost during a storm; a block of wood was used as a float (no name required). This all happened in the late 1930s to 1950.

My first fishing trip about 1936 or 1938 when I was 10/11 years old was a well prepared days outing. Tanekaha rods and cotton fishing lines. Our sinkers were odd nuts and bolts, even a spark plug, and if we were keen, old lead heads off roof nails. The hooks we used were made by a firm using the name "Alcocks" (much to the satisfaction of a local resident, E. Alcock of Tryphena). On this fishing trip we had lunch of home made bread, a small billy to brew tea if we had time, and an old "Enos" fruit drink bottle of milk. We made sure to carry matches as a back up to make a fire if anyone was hurt.

Our prime number one bait was eel caught the night before, filleted and toasted over a hand full of scrub to bring out the oil and toughen it up. Two cattle dogs went with us; maybe if a wild pig was found we could try out our home made knives, held onto our belt using some of Dads home tanned leather for a sheath. The dogs we took were "Blackie" and "Bingo" and in later years we had "Wave" and "Atom".

We walked through Mitchener's Farm (after making a phone call to them to seek permission). That was before Mitchener's Road was formed. We went up past the head of the river and the fossils, climbing over the Big Ridge hill to the east but south of an area known as "the crater" where the Osbornes had a number of beehives. We came to a big high rock with a hole through it and this was where we would fish.

In our fishing group were my father John who had a beautiful Tanekaha rod, Trevor my brother and I who had only hand lines. Lionel my younger brother had a line on a small bamboo rod. Sugar bags were used as a knapsack or Maori pikau and they did a good job of carrying a load, your hands were free and the weight placed to your comfort on your back.

We timed our arrival at the fishing rocks for low tide, as we wanted to collect at least two sugar bags of kina and the area wasn't a good kina rock, too many snapper about. These were used as burley or ground feed.

Dad had chosen the day well, no wind, tide was low enough and next to no swell. It makes all the difference on an open coast, very exposed and South America out of sight over the horizon.

The day suited our hand lines and dad's reelless rod. He used about 5 metres of line and one hook as the bottom was very rough and sinkers didn't last long. A stone tied on with flax made a good substitute for a sinker. As we broke up kina and threw them in the fish activity increased. Hundreds of bright sky blue maomao darted in and out of the sea egg burley. In their feeding activity they signalled to other fish that there was feed about. The first fish we caught was the active brown kelp fish, not an eating type of fish. Catch about 12 or 15 of these and you had usually cleared the area of them. Now the Kahawai showed up and if we could catch 3 or 4 we were set with a good range of bait for the day.

When it was lunchtime and the billy had boiled and the first bite of a nice corned beef sandwich had been taken the first good snapper would take your bait. These fish have well worn teeth and a very dark skin indicating that they are rock or kelp feeders. It was a hard job to eat all our sandwiches at times. The fish were now arriving. We were using a big slab of kahawai or eel on a single hook on about 6 metres of line, no sinker. Our lines were cotton and with a choice of white, brown or green, green was the most common. We waited for the fish, throwing in crushed sea eggs until sooner or later another big snapper arrived. Sometimes a big fish would take some of our small baits causing panic and the loss of a hook as this caused them to straightened out and become useless. The fish would be back in a few minutes and we would be ready, a sharp hook and the snapper joined the others we caught! After catching a number of fish they were filleted to lessen the weight to carry home. I have seen as many as 6 to 8 snapper with an average weight of about 8lb each caught in about 2 hours.

On one fishing trip to this area some years later perhaps 1944/1945 I caught a monstrous kingfish. Short of bait we had used 'jelly' to kill sprats, using one whole sprat, hoping to catch a big snapper. With the help of a gust of wind I managed to throw out to about 30 metres. The water erupted as kingfish fought to take the sprat. I had never seen anything like this before. One kingi took the bait and dived deep, the line winding stick doing a dance on the rocks. Holding the winding stick my line spooled out until there was no line left. I held on and walked along the rocks trying to ease the pressure, hoping the hook and my cotton line would hold. Other kingfish were milling around no doubt wondering what the hooked fish was doing. After about 20 minutes the kingfish gave up and I managed to work it in to a gut in the rocks using an incoming wave and then surfed it up where it was left high and dry. I grabbed it before the next wave and it was all I could do to hold and carry 351bs (16 kilo) of kingfish up the barnacle-covered rocks. No shoes in those days, just bare feet. Looking into the deep sea I could see more big kingfish still swimming around waiting to be caught but I had more than enough weight to carry home. I removed the gut and the head, along with the gills to reduce the weight. This fish and all fish that we had caught were washed in seawater and covered to keep blowflies off and then left to drain.

After a much needed mug of tea we began the two hour trip home with plenty of stops. Most of my kingfish was smoked in our smokehouse, using ti tree. The other fish weren't wasted, they were fried or eaten as fish cakes. We had no freezers in those days. I wish that on some of these fishing trips we had had a camera with us but as it was wartime camera film wasn't in the shops to buy.

I recall about 1946/47 two trawlers were trawling off the North to South East coast of Great Barrier Island. I understand two brothers skippered these vessels, 'The Margaret' and 'The Dorothy'. These boats had their rest times anchored in Medlands Bay. If we were going out fishing in our clinker built boats we would call on them with some homemade butter and sometimes milk and eggs. In return they offered us fish but we enjoyed fishing ourselves and what we really wanted was a couple of coils of worn winch rope. One day the boats suggested we have a day on

board while they trawled. We accepted and we anchored our two boats. I went on the ‘Margaret with my brother Trevor. My cousins Ivan and Samuel went on the other boat. We travelled out to sea for about 5 miles. The crew read us all the safety rules including; no stepping over a moving rope, go around; no hands in your pockets you can play billiards at home!

Running out the net was achieved by fastening a rope on a marker buoy and anchor steam down one leg of a triangle and across the base. The net with its paravane boards was played out and then we made a turn back to the marker buoy and anchor, running out rope all the way. I would guess about 1 mile of rope on each leg. The net would be about 3 metres deep and the center or belly was made of much heavier cord. A hole was tied with an easy release knot to dump the catch over the hold. Trawling was dependant on weather, sea, wind and how much fish was expected. A good operator would jump on the towing rope to try and guess the size of the catch. Two main engine driven winches, one on each side of the wheel house hauled the net in and two home made rope coilers took care of the rope after it was wound in 15-20 coils on each side, up to 1.5 metres high. I saw one coil with each turn placed exactly on the turn underneath up to 2 metres high. A complete trawl would take about 3 to 5 hours depending on the sea conditions and catch size. The net would surface some distance behind the boat, where the catch weight would be guessed; can we lift it all at once or divide the catch? The catch was about a tonne so was handled in one lift, positioned over the hold and the holding end trip knot freed, releasing a cascade of all sorts of fish, snapper mainly but also the odd stingray and small sharks, into the ships hold.

Three men were working the boat, the skipper, engineer and deck hand, sorting the fish which were then stacked in layers and covered with ice. Any fish or object that was unusual or had some interesting colour or shape was put aside and later put in big glass jars with a liquid in them, which I presumed was to preserve them. Later they were taken to the Auckland Museum for study by a crewmember who had a relation working there.

Some years later a large number of fishing trawlers, fishing in the Bay of Plenty area, found they could catch fish "at the back of the Barrier" saving a large amount of time travelling. These boats trawled the area hard and anchored at Medlands or Kaitoke beaches. I recall occasions when 12-15 fishing boats were anchored at one time. Sometimes the weather forced the boats to the western side of the Barrier. A number of these boats left their anchors in Medlands Bay, and these were found later by shellfish and crayfish divers. The trawlers must have taken hundreds of tons of fish from the Barrier and Gulf areas. Fishing continued even when catches were low.

On the Barrier we saw the effects of this over fishing; no snapper, paddle crabs by the hundreds eating the shellfish, no tuatua and hundreds of sea eggs eating the sea weed.

During the 1930/1940 years heavy storms came down from the Norfolk Island area and the worst storms from the Kermadec Islands. Tons of seaweed washed ashore, torn from the rocks by 6 metre waves and thrown up on the beach in a high wall, 2 to 3 metres high, about 1 hectare in area. After about a week the seaweed fly laid their eggs in the decomposing seaweed, they in turn hatched into small but active maggots and about 90% found their way into the sea at high tide. Piper, sprats and kahawai were there in their millions along with the bigger fish, school Kahawai, Kingfish and lovely John Dory. We would stand on the seaweed and catch big snapper, waiting until the other fish and the small fish got out of the way.

In later years when .22 rifle cartridges could be bought I shot big snapper through the small of their tail, waded in and picked them up after doing a "down trow". A small charge, walnut size,

of "jelly" or gelignite gave us enough bait for a days fishing and big piper to eat. It wasn't unusual to get a big Kahawai, but they were hard to get, as they are very easily frightened.

I recall night fishing off the Kaitoke beach after dark when we wanted big fish to smoke. We didn't mind fishing at night, using a kerosene lantern in the bottom of the boat. We found a lot of sharks at the northern end of Kaitoke and any we caught using a large hook 100 yards of sash cord were kept. Their livers contained saleable oil used in paint, and we didn't let many go. Next day the shark liver was cut into strips and laid out on a black-tared sheet of corrugated iron where the hot sun melted the oil out. After a week the smell was as high as Mt Hobson and you had to keep the rain off it or the oil quality was down graded. Leftovers were pig feed or garden fertilizer. The Cresent Paint Company paid about 2 shillings and 6 pence a gallon (4.5 litres) (30 cents).

One very dark night three of us were drift fishing off Kaitoke beach and we had been hearing diesel engines noises for some time. It wasn't until we woke up that we realized a trawler was running out a trawl net that came in between us and the beach, about 300 metres in shore. Lucky for us we had not put out our "stone in a bag anchor". We managed to pull our lines in as we heard the net towing rope cutting through the water. We were very lucky as no one was showing any navigation or riding lights.

Around 1944/45 my father John and Mum Nellie took us all to visit Walter and Jean Blackwell at the Sugar Loaf. Jean was Mum's sister. On the way home later that afternoon we saw, on Medlands Beach, a big snapper in the company of some smaller fish and they were eating tuatua in about 160mm of water. Just their tails were visible and they were 3 metres off shore. My father had my sister Lois in a carry bag made of canvas on his favourite Tanekaha rod. He quickly dumped Lois in the sand and harpooned the big snapper through the mouth. Away went the 12 lb fish out to sea but the drag on the big end of the rod bought the fish into shallow water where Dad waded in and caught it. Uncle Jim didn't want any fish as it had been caught on a Sunday which he believed was not a day for catching fish. However, Uncle Sam and Aunt Muriel joined us for a Sunday tea of freshly caught fish.

The Blackwell and Todd families caught sharks off Mulberry Grove beach using a harpoon, 50-60 metres of window sash cord, and an old 12-gallon oil drum. The procedure was to harpoon the shark, throw the drum overboard then wait until the shark drowned itself. In the 1930s they made good money extracting oil from sharks and I think some stingray liver was also used. Some of the bigger sharks teeth were removed and sold to the jewellery manufacturers. I understand there was a good demand for good-sized teeth (may have been overseas).

During their migratory life porpoise, dolphin and whales were often seen offshore and all around the Barrier. On one occasion I was up on Goat Hill and looking out over the sea there were hundreds, perhaps thousands of dolphins moving north. Another sight I'll never forget is the little pink-footed seagull. They were here in the millions, on the local wharves, where they would roost at night. Their white droppings covered the timber woodwork until it was completely "painted". In the hot sun the smell was overpowering and when it rained it was very slippery and dangerous to walk on. On Medlands Beach they could cover an area 200-300 metres long and 50-60 metres deep.

During the 1950's to the mid 1970's fishing from a boat around Great Barrier Island could be very exciting.

On a short trip with George Mason in the early 1950’s we caught 5-6 big school kahawai around the reef in Medlands Bay and then moved down the coast behind Goat Hill 50 metres off the rocks. There we scaled and gutted the kahawai into the sea. The blood and guts did the burley

job and in a few minutes the big snapper arrived. We caught about 10-12 really big fish which all finished up in the smokehouse. A number of cod and parrot fish completed the catch for the evening. The craypot was baited and we arrived home just on dark. All these fish were dark in colour showing that they had lived and fed amongst seaweed. Fifty years later I reminded George about our fishing trips and I could see his fingers moving as he remembered the fish we had caught and the way they could bite and pull.

Every tidal fresh water stream on the eastern side of Great Barrier had a number of mullet in it and they were fair game for us if we were short of bait. Smoked mullet were very nice but were inclined to be oily so we smoked them flesh side down. The little sandy beach at the southern end of Medlands Bay was for a number of years known as Stingray Bay (also known as Reids Bay) due to the large number of rays there. They made good pig feed and cray bait. I caught three or four by standing in the shallow water with a big rock on my shoulder waiting until a stingray came close enough to drop the rock on. This either killed it or in its fright and panic it would go up on the beach. These were cooked for pig feed and the hens loved them too, the egg flavour revealed when the hens had had too much.

Medlands Beach always had good shellfish; plenty of mussels on Memory Park Rock, two big patches of tuatua at each end of the beach, paua and sea eggs on the rocks. While crayfish could be lifted out of a gut in the rock near where Medlands boat shed was located with this amount of shellfish it attracted fish to come in to feed. It was no trouble to catch fish at any tide, off the beach at high tide or off the rocks.

I recall Mother giving me two mutton belly flap squares and saying "here take these down and catch a fish for breakfast". I did. Those two baits caught 6 good snapper off the beach and I still had two well-chewed pieces of bait left.

Fishing was the same on the western side of the Barrier but we found bait was harder to get and at times we had to shoot a shag to use as bait. I remember during the time I was employed to do main line maintenance for the Post and Telegraph Department Cyril Eyre and I would shoot a shag and, under the shag roost in Schooner Bay, using floating lines, catch some of the biggest snapper I have ever seen. The shags coming back home to roost, over full with fish, couldn't make a landing on the high branches so they would drop a fish from their beaks or regurgitate half digested fish. The snapper waited for this to happen every evening and Cyril and I caught about 5/6 big fish, all we wanted. Some of these we smoked. Cyril Eyre used pohutukawa for firewood and made a first class job. Any left over shag bait was used in the crayfish pot the next day.

When Medland Bros and Cyril Eyre were building the Tryphena wharf in about 1936 I remember catching a big snapper off the end of the partly constructed wharf. The snapper was big, full of roe, and going into the Hauraki Gulf to spawn. About the time the wharf was completed in about 1939 there was good fishing off the wharf and its steps. We caught many sprats and piper while waiting for the weekly boat.

During the war maintenance was carried out on the fender piles and one day some one harpooned a monster stingray, well over 2 metres across. The harpoon line had tangled around the wharf piles and the stingray lay dead on the bottom 2.5 metres down but we couldn't see the harpoon which may have been pulled out. Later a real big blue shark, about 3 metres long, came in trying to get at the stingray's liver which they really like. Edwin Alcock who was in the NZ army fired a shot at the shark using his army rifle .303 and later we saw the shark with a mark on its back. Next morning the shark had gone and so had the stingray. Just the harpoon was left, tangled around an old anchor. We didn't swim off the wharf for years after that!

There are many unique fishing experiences we enjoyed that aren't possible today.

A group of us boys were fishing off Medlands Beach towards the Sugar Loaf end and on the way home, after dark, we checked our cousins set eel lines under the bridge on Masons Road. There were no eels hooked so just to have some fun we hooked two small snapper onto the eel line and put them back into the drain. Some days later our cousins told us that there must have been a very high tide as they had caught snapper off the bridge. We never said a word but with Mum and Dad we had many a laugh about it.

Another time my brother David Medland and my cousin Charlie Blackwell had been out fishing and were clever enough to catch a hapuka about 301bs (1213kgs). When they landed at the old boat shed slipway they knew they were being watched. One boy said to the other "lets slide the fish under the boat and back up again 3 or 4 times". Each time the fish passed under the boat it was held up in plain view enabling our Uncle Sam Medland to see and count the fish he saw. The boys knew Uncle Sam had Grandfather's old telescope so could see what fish they were unloading. The boys returned home very happy with their days fishing, a good catch of hapuka. Two maybe three days went by before they met up with Uncle Sam when he asked "my word boys, you did catch some hapuka the other day, but what on earth did you do with them all, we didn't see any?" With big grins they told Uncle Sam they had eaten most of it but did give a small amount away. Have you ever seen a cat after stealing butter or cream grin that was the grins that David and Charlie had on their faces.

Crayfishing outside Medlands old boat shed on the western side of the rock is in a gut, quite deep with an under water hole on the sea end. This gut used to house a number of crayfish. A net was baited up with a leg of old mutton, 2 or 3 days old, and lowered into the hole area using a long pole, 4 metres long. This pole pivoted on a post set into the rock. This post is still in the rock today. It took all our strength to lift the net after about a 45 minute wait. The net was about a metre in diameter and could hold 12 to 15 crayfish. These were not all big ones but certainly more than half were. I have filled a wheat sack with crayfish and had to get the old horse to carry them home the next morning. In those days there must have been hundreds of crayfish about. Some times we would catch the packhorse type and these were always thrown back as well as the small ones of the usual variety.

In the mid 1970's when we were living at Kumeu Noeline and I, with our daughters, Lynda, Joanne and Leonie, returned to Great Barrier Island for regular holidays.

Noeline and myself had been given sections in the John Medland school paddock, which was part of my father's farm. My father, John Medland, had foreseen the day when the land would have to be sold, produce prices were going down, freight costs going up and there was no incentive by the government to aid farmers in remote areas. He surveyed off a number of sections and left Mother, the boys and one-daughter sections of their choice. Noeline and I sold one of ours for $800 and decided to build a cottage down "The Lane" in Medlands Bay.

We started building in 1974 and it was around this time that we had some unforgettable fishing excursions during the school holidays, fishing around the rocks and down behind Goat Hill. We had better fishing gear then and I had a beautiful Mitchell reel, given to me by Noeline and the girls, as a birthday present. We would spend most of the day crawling over and under rocks where the sea life was very interesting. We saw the occasional crayfish, caught some of them using a section of net, bait in the middle, and dropped in the right place. We waited until the cray started to eat or to remove the bait. When we lifted the net the cray became tangled and then it was ours. In most of the holes in the rocks that had been covered by the tide we would look for paua,

but we found more down in crevices. At times we could see them but they were out of our reach. The sea eggs down some of these holes were at least 110mm across and we used them for burley. They did a very good job. Some of our fishing spots behind Goat Hill were fishable only at low tide and in one place the water was very deep. We caught some very nice fish there, including the odd kingfish that had ventured into this deep-water area. I have never landed a hapuka off the rocks, but once I had a small one on my line at the reef and lost it at the rocks in front of me. I knew what it was thought.

Among the mostly sedimentary rock formation that makes up a lot of the cliff face there were a lot of fossils. Some timber, carbonised by heat was quite black. In one place, visible only at ½ tide, there was a complete tree stump with roots. The stump was about 2 metres across and 1½ metres high and it had a hole down its centre. The root pattern, over an area of about 10 metres, sat out on its own on a fairly flat rock. A lot of these fossils were partly petrified. This rock formation is about 12 million years old. (see "NZ a Drift", by Dr Stevens).

On one trip up the "Big Ridge", past the "Goat Hill", to the hole in the rock fishing area, while Lynda and Joanne fished, Leonie and I tried to find a way down onto the rocks further south. We started down from above a goat cave high on the cliff face but there was no track. There was a lot of loose rock among big old pohutukawa trees. With their massive root systems these trees held onto the rock face. When we eventually made it down to the sea we found a water filled cave which stopped us from going south and a sheer rock bluff which stopped us from joining Lynda and Joanne to the north. A short boulder beach was between us. If we had been able to get around the boulder beach we would have found a sulphur deposit from a hot water spring. I found this spring years later while collecting fishing net floats. I also found a white painted highway road marker with reflector paint on the top. I wedged this in a crevice up the cliff face but it got washed away in Cyclone Bola some years later.

Leonie and I returned up through trees and rocks to get back to Lynda and Joanne who had caught some good fish. After lunch we caught more fish, collected a number of paua, explored a boulder beach and then headed home. Climbing a grass covered hill on the south side of the crater Lynda found a native orchid plant in the grass. She set to using Joanne’s fishing knife, with its yellow handle and stainless blade, to dig into the soil. Unfortunately the blade broke off leaving the yellow handle in Lynda's hand causing some distress to Joanne who had found this knife on the rocks near the boat shed.

On the 5th January 1977 David and I went in his boat up to Whakatautuna Point. The day was warm and the sea a good colour, blue, perfect for deep water fishing. We caught plenty of small snapper and every now and then a good-sized fish. We also caught two blue cod and a number of golden snapper with their big eyes and large mouths tangling up our lines. One of the last fish to be caught was a 15lb hapuka, making the trip very worthwhile. To get good fish you had to go out into deep water because off the beach it was mainly kahawai and sometimes a small snapper. A large number of paddle crabs were in the sand and over tuatua beds and they could eat your bait in about 10 minutes.

Since then fishing has deteriorated with longliner boats working offshore, using lines over 5km long with hundreds of hooks. The Government’s catch quota system has resulted in a large number of small operators selling out to big companies offering good money for their quota. Once there were no restrictions on fishing in the Gulf where snapper breed, but the Government has reduced the number of fish allowed to be caught by recreational fisherman, making stupid rules such as ‘if you have 9 snapper only 2 or 3 kingfish are allowed’.

Today to try and catch fish you have to buy a top class reel and fibreglass rod, top grade nylon monofilm line and special curved hooks that rust away if they are lost. Added to that you need a special block of frozen burley for bait only to find the areas you fished as a boy with your Father and he with his Father is now a Marine Reserve. If you want fish and chips at the local takeaway on Great Barrier Island they cannot use locally caught fish it has to come from the mainland.

I conclude with an article by Trevor De Cleene MP in the NZ Herald, dated 16 January 1990, when he reports on his fishing days.

"It's no longer the Bay of Plenty

For 30 years or so I have actively fished out of Tauranga. It is true that even when I began, the days of Zane Grey, the famous American western-writer, were long gone. On the walls of the social room at Mayor Island his photographs showed fences made from the bills of marlin caught in the waters surrounding "the Mayor", nevertheless in 1959, 14 or more boats serviced the needs of anglers and marlin were boated in their hundreds.

In small bays such as the "bait pond", pelagic fish, the like of kahawai and trevally, were in such schools that 10 minutes or so sufficed to catch enough bait for the day's trolling. Even at sea far from reefs great shoals of mackerel, kahawai, trevally and maomao dotted the ocean.

A sure sign of game fish was the roar of the shoal and the surge of white water as it acted in unison to escape the predator shark or marlin working it from blow.

A pot or two cast overboard on the way out yielded crayfish for the table. A stray line sunk beneath the schools yielded snapper in abundance.

Merely clad in woollen long underwear and a jersey we moved among the rocks on the shoreline feeling for, and taking, crayfish and paua.

This was typical of the New Zealand coast at this time. Holidaymakers from Wellington travelled to the Wairarapa rocky beaches out from Blackhead and Waipawa to throw their pots from rocks at low tide to recover more than enough crayfish for themselves and their friends.

From my own 18ft 6in (5.6m) clinker open boat with a series E. Ford 10 petrol engine, three of us took 21 groper in one and a-half hours in 90 feet (27.4m) of water, not one under 40 pounds (18kg) weight.

This was the New Zealand as I knew it as a young man. Fish in the sea for all- deer and pig in the hills - rabbits for sport and table, and the only young man carrying a knife a New Zealand hunter, superbly fit.

Now, of course, it is the gilded, tattooed, emaciated city-slicker with the only gleam in his eyes the product of drugs rather than lust for life. He is the knife carrier of the new decades.

If Captain Cook, the great navigator, were again to round East Cape from Poverty Bay, I very much doubt if he would, from the activity at sea, call the Tauranga area the Bay of Plenty.

The greed of mankind has, in those 30 years, rendered it a virtually lifeless sea - a comparative desert where once the oasis bloomed.

Eight crayfish licences work the zone. The floats and ropes of the pots dot every reef up to 60m beneath the surface. They foul the propeller shafts of the boats at night and their baskets of bait entrap an increasingly scarce supply of the delicacy.

Does the New Zealander dine upon its flesh? Nay, not so! It is to the American, Japanese and European markets that the fish are sent. Most New Zealanders cannot afford to feast on the harvest of their own coasts.

The marlin - what of the marlin?

Joe Walding told me that in 1974 while returning by air from the United States, the aircraft developed engine trouble and landed in Guam. He said there were freezers full of marlin, broadbill, tuna - all the product of the Japanese dory liners interrupting the movement of the fish to New Zealand.

I caught, tagged and released a black marlin off Cairns in Australia. Three years later a badge from the Game Fishing Club of New York certified to its catch off the South American coast.

Their travels now face "wall of death" nets and the sport fishing fleet of Tauranga is no more. Only six weeks ago, we saw a purse seiner operating out of Tauranga working "The Schooner".

A big school of mackerel was close in on the rock where it couldn't be got at. The boat waited as the alcoholic waits outside for the pub to open. As soon as the school moved from the security of the shallows, around went the dory - the mesh closed and more New Zealand fish were sent to be used for crayfish bait off Western Australia. There are four such large boats operating out of Tauranga. While foreign boats chase the tuna around the Pacific in winter, these boats stay in New Zealand and rape our pelagic fish, making the green all red with their blood.

A spotter plane on a frosty morning with the ocean like glass, sees every ripple of the survivors. It sends the purse seiners to their slaughter of our now limited stocks of fish. All this I have seen and ponder upon.

Are the televisions, motor cars and stereos really worth the privacy of the heritage we should be preserving for our children? Will the resource be so raped that even the breeding stocks offish will go? Will there be anything to bequeath to the following generations?

My children, observing the comparative deserts of sea today, can only believe the photographic evidence of times gone by. What it was like in the "old man's days". Surely, some sanity must tell us: keep the big fishing boats well offshore, let the stocks revive, prevent the trawlers coming close in to the breakers. At least give our amateur fishermen a chance to enjoy the sea air and the beauty of their coasts. Let them eat off the sea's bounty, even if it has to be in competition with the Japanese, Taiwanese and all the other "eses.

What profits it a man who gains a Mercedes, if in the process he can't even catch his own snapper?"