

SENIOR CONSTABLE UPSTON

Q1 This is an electronically recorded interview between Senior Constable David Upston on Saturday, the 8th of May, 1999 at the Hobart C.I.B, and John Hadley. The time on my watch is now 12.23pm, and also seated in the room directly to my left is Detective Senior Constable Stuart Gray of the Bega Detectives. John, for the purpose of the interview, would you like to state your full name, please?

A John Milton Hadley.

Q2 And your date of birth?

A 18 May, '45.

Q3 And your address?

A 324 Churchill Avenue, Sandy Bay.

Q4 O.K. John, as I explained to you earlier, Detective Senior Constable Gray and I are making inquiries into the 1998 Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race and we're speaking to people that may give us some assistance in determining some findings for the Coroner, and I understand that you're a, a Master of the vessel that travels across the Bass Strait from Tasmania to Hobart, is that correct?

A From Melbourne to Devonport - - -

Q5 Yeah.

A - - - . . . . . Tasmania, yeah.

Q6 Right. And, well, could I have your occupation, please?

A Ship's Master.

Q7 And you've been a Master for how long?

A Since 1979, 20 years.

Q8 All right. And what could you tell me about your, since being Master, your sailing experience?

A Oh, it's been various. I, when I was first Master I was Master of what we called trader class vessels in, in those days. They were roll on, roll off ships, a lot of them trading in the, in the Bass Strait. Some, I was also doing the run from the east coast to the west coast. From there I went through a series of those ships til I joined the, I suppose, the Australian Emblem on the Australia-Japan container trade, and subsequent to that I was, I took a, I was on a, I did a period on a bulk carrier running Western Australia to Japan. Also ran down the east coast. Then on to a worldwide trading car carrier, the Australian Sea Road, that was 1989 to 1994. From there to Australian Venture, which is on the Australian, Australia-Europe container trade, and for the last 2 and a half years I've been on the Spirit of Tasmania on the Melbourne-Devonport run.

Q9 O.K. So your, your Australian sailing experience is quite vast and, as is your global sailing experience?

A Yes. I'd say - - -

Q10 In, in - - -

A - - - I'd say it's quite - - -

Q11 Yeah. In various conditions throughout the world and various storm situations and also in smooth sailing?

A I'd agree with that.

Q12 O.K. With, in particular I show you a photocopy or a, of a portion of Auschart 4-6-0-1, would you agree with that?

A Yes.

Q13 O.K. Now the area shown is the southern portion of Victoria and the island of Tasmania and the waters in between. You sail across these, these waters?

A Correct.

Q14 What could you tell me about them in particular to their, the sea characteristics and the characteristics of perhaps weather experienced?

A The, the portion of Bass Strait that we're, we're looking at on the chart here between the Victorian coast and the north, and the northern coast of, of Tasmania is, is really featured by very shallow water, very few areas of more than 80 metres, 80 to 90 metres' depth. That, of course, gives that area a very, particular characteristics probably not experienced further out, well, in any, in any deep water. It's, it's the characteristics of shallow water. Gales, winds through there tend to whip up seas very quickly, they tend to die down very quickly, they also tend to be very short, steep seas as opposed to, to seas you might expect to find out in the deeper waters east of, east of Flinders Island, west of King Island.

Q15 Right. So could I just get you to highlight in yellow the area that we're particularly talking about now where you say from the shallow depths?

A Well, you could come, take it further down there if you wished - - -

Q16 Yeah.

A - - - but you could say, well, probably it'd be down like, so - - -

Q17 O.K.

A - - - you're talking an area in there.

Q18 O.K. Now it's obvious where you've marked from the, say, 100 odd fathom mark, 100 odd metre mark, on either side of Bass Strait. With the Sydney to Hobart rum line - - -

A Mmm.

Q18 - - - could you or do you know how that sits as far as the correlation of Bass Strait?

A Well, I must - - -

Q19 And I .....

A Sorry.

Q20 Yeah?

A I must admit I'm not very au fait with the courses that, that they use, only, only the, only what, what I read, I suppose, the same as anybody else.

Q21 Yeah.

A Any, any yacht hugging, hugging the coast would, would obviously stay well inside the 100 fathom line down to, maybe even to Cape Howe but then would have to come out

into the deeper waters. But in general, as I understand it, most of the yachts would be, would be further out to sea here in the deep, in the deep areas.

Q22 And there'd be, there's usually significant differences between the Bass Strait and the deeper waters?

A Between the type of seas experienced.

Q23 The type of seas?

A I, I would agree with that, yeah.

Q24 O.K. Can you in fact enlighten us a little bit more about the, the differences in the seas again?

A Well, the seas in, in, in the, in the shallow area that we're discussing are typical shallow water seas. They're, they're very short, sharp, steep. They tend to come up very quickly, die down very quickly. Once you get out into the deeper water, you're talking more about typical deep water, deep water areas. Long swells, they, they can have very heavy seas on top of them but, but long swells and, and a sea that tends to swell, particularly that tends to stay up after the weather's gone and, and takes longer maybe to, to come up than, than in the, than in the shallow area.

Q25 Right. Well, in the 1998 Sydney to Hobart, yachts experienced severe storms - - -

A Mmm.

Q25 - - - in an area off Cape Howe as far as from Eden down into the Bass, well, shall we call it an area south-east of Cape Howe?

A Mmm.

Q26       What would you say the significance of, of that area or, would be usually experienced in severe storms?

A       I'd say, I'd say typical, typical, typical deep sea bad weather. A large swell, a, no doubt, no doubt with the sort of winds that I understand that they had would have been, there would have been a, a, beside the, the very large swell there would have been, there would've been a, a sea on top of that - - -

Q27       Mmm.

A       - - - a short sea, maybe, well, I won't say short sea, there would have been, there would have been waves coming off the top of the, coming off the top of the swells as well.

Q28       Mmm. Well, what can you tell me about the, the current coming across Bass Strait and the, the current that is generally generated down the east coast of New South Wales - - -

A       Well - - -

Q28       - - - and into Victoria?

A       Well, of course, as we know the, the general flow down the coast is from north, down the east coast is from north to south which is, I think is now, now described as eddies rather than, rather than current, but nevertheless the net effect is that you get a southerly, southerly, southerly current. In Bass Strait in the, in the shallow area between Victoria and Tasmania you're, you're talking about a, it's more a, I don't think it's a current so much as a, what they

call a, a sea drift. The, the, because the winds generally blow west to, west to east, there, there's a general flow of, of water from, from the west to the east, but it would be of completely different origin than the, than the east coast current. I mean, this is, the, the water going through Bass Strait is more a, more a sea drift caused by the fact that, that the winds generally blow that way.

Q29 And is that generally constant?

A No. No. No. In some, some cases it's virtually nonexistent. And it certainly doesn't get up to the, to the speeds of the, of the east coast current.

Q30 Right.

A East coast current can, can be up to, on occasions up to 4, 4 or 5 knots - - -

Q31 Mmm.

A - - - whereas through Bass Strait you're talking about a general, a general 1 knot set.

Q32 Right.

A Mmm.

Q33 Were you Master of the Spirit of Tasmania in late December, early January?

A I joined, I joined the Spirit just after the, the problems in, in, in Bass Strait. I, in fact, I joined the Spirit on the, I was due to join on the Sunday, I finished up joining it on the Monday in, in, in, Monday morning early - - -

Q34 Mmm.

A - - - 2 o'clock in Tasmania, because the ship had been required to do an extra trip. It was a non-planned trip because of passengers, that the sea, the catamaran had been unable to sail due to the weather.

Q35 Right.

A And they did an extra trip on the Spirit. So they got me to join in, in Devonport at 2.00am in the morning.

Q36 O.K. At that particular time, and keeping in mind that it is maybe a couple of days after the - - -

A Mmm. It was, I think the day, I think the, actually the trip that, the trip that came in was, that came in from Melbourne was, was part of the, part of the weather. They, they'd had a very, very rough trip over. We didn't have such a bad trip back.

Q37 Mmm.

A But I think it was almost the same day.

Q38 Right. What were the seas experienced by you that particular day?

A Well, I, I didn't have many problems. I left at 2.00am in the morning going, going back in the north, in a nor'-west direction and we, we, it was a bit rough, but not, but nothing, nothing remarkable.

Q39 Mmm.

A But the trip in apparently had, from, the Master that I took over from had told me that the trip in had been particularly rough.



Q40 Right. What sort of wave heights was being experienced by, by the previous Master that he told you and what you experienced?

A Oh, I, I mean I didn't specifically ask him for a height. He just told me - - -

Q41 No.

A - - - it had been rough. In my experience, for him to tell me that it's rough I'd be very surprised if, it would have to be a, a 4 to 5 metre swell and probably more, or sea should I say.

Q42 All right.

A I'll say sea rather than swell, a 4 to 5 metre sea. In fact, it would have been, because the reason the catamaran couldn't sail was because it can't sail in, in a significant wave height greater than 4 metres.

Q43 O.K. Did you have to take into account any, any sea drift whilst navigating, that you could determine what the sea drift was?

A No. No. We don't.

Q44 Right. Is there any way of you measuring the, or having knowledge of the sea drift or - - -

A Well, we can work, we, we, we navigate to stay on our track. We, we know the, we know from experience that, that going north we, maybe we need a, a degree left to, to keep, to keep on track.

Q45 Mmm.

A Maybe, maybe coming south we need a, a degree right. But no, we don't make any attempt to measure it because

it's, it's not really significant to us in the, in the,  
in the - - -

Q46 Mmm.

A - - - in the trip from Melbourne to Tasmania other than  
to keep on the track and - - -

Q47 Yeah.

A - - - and that can, wind itself is probably more  
important than, than the sea drift, so - - -

Q48 O.K. All right. Have you experienced any conditions  
where the sea drift has met with the, the east coast  
eddies that's caused any sort of significant navigation  
hazards - - -

A I couldn't - - -

Q48 - - - or problems?

A - - - I couldn't claim that I've ever thought of that.

Q49 Right. As an experienced Master and travelling around  
the world as Master, how would you rate the area where  
you've got in yellow, encapsulated in yellow on the, on  
the photocopied section of the chart to anywhere else?

A I would say that the Bass Strait itself is, again the  
area that we've talked about, that we're talking about,  
is, can be very difficult for small craft which, the  
bigger the craft the, the, the, the less it, the less  
it becomes significant because, well, what tends to  
happen is it's, it's a short, sharp sea which  
obviously, which it's pretty, pretty plain that if  
you've got some, if you're in a small craft you've got,  
you can have a, have a lot of trouble with. As the

ships have got bigger, I mean the Spirit that we're running at the moment you can do many, I mean you're talking about, oh, maybe one rough trip in a, in a month, whereas in previous vessels the, the, the Empress on the run, the Abel Tasman that I didn't sail in, although I've, we've got, well, I've, I've read the, read the trips, trip reports and things, found the seas much, much, much rougher. O.K. It's really, what we're, what I, what I'm saying is that a large ship in Bass Strait very rarely is going to find much problem with the sea.

Q50       Mmm.

A       A small craft, because of the short, short ..... short steep seas, of course, could, could probably find it, I, I would imagine, could find it worse than, than some of the deeper areas.

Q51       Mmm. Mmm. On the, the side of the, the, the portion of chart that we photocopied here you've got a yellow line to your right. The, the rum line from Sydney to Hobart basically as we spoke about, doesn't go in to Bass Strait, is that right? Perhaps if - - -

A       Yes. I mean, this comes back to your, to the definition of Bass Strait.

Q52       Mmm.

A       I, I don't pretend to, to try and define Bass Strait. As we were discussing earlier, the general description is that the ship, ship, that the yachts leave, leave Gabo Island and head out into Bass Strait. Well,

that's a description and I suppose really it's a matter of opinion with, where the Bass Strait ends and the Tasman Sea begins, where the Bass Strait ends and the Tasman Sea begins. I - - -

Q53 Mmm.

A - - - I think just in my, from my point of view I would describe Bass Strait as the area that we've got marked inside the, the yellow lines. But I - - -

Q54 Mmm.

A - - - but I wouldn't claim any, any particular knowledge over that. I mean, the Tasman Sea and the Bass Strait more or less merge.

Q55 Mmm.

A Where they merge I, I can't really tell you.

Q56 Yeah.

DETECTIVE SENIOR CONSTABLE GRAY

Q57 Just for clarification, John, these numbers on the chart - - -

A Mmm.

Q57 - - - in fact what are they?

A They're, they're metres that I, I was reading it up here, oh, the depth, sorry, yes.

Q58 Right. O.K.

A Yes, yeah, depth in, in metres, yes.

Q59 That's all right. Now so far as your experience, we know that air crew put down flying hours.

A Mmm.

Q60 And I assume that, that mariners use miles?

A           It's in nautical miles.

Q61        Nautical miles?

A           Mmm.

Q62        How many nautical miles have you covered, do you think,  
            in your experience?

A           In my, in my life?

Q63        In your life as a Master?

A           You'd have to put me on a lot of notice for that one,  
            I - - -

Q64        O.K.

A           - - - I really couldn't - - -

Q65        O.K. That's fine.

A           I couldn't even start to guess.

Q66        That's fine, I just thought you might have known  
            offhand.

A           Oh, I could multiply it all out and give you a, I, I,  
            I guess if you took a hundred and, if you took 140 to  
            150 days a year and said that - - -

Q67        Yeah.

A           - - - over the time you went 400, 400 nautical miles  
            every day, you mightn't be that far out.

Q68        Right. O.K. O.K. That's fine.

SENIOR CONSTABLE UPSTON

Q69        All right, John, is there, is there anything that you  
            can probably tell us that may be significant in, in  
            our, in determining this section of the, of the chart  
            here to anywhere else in the world that may be  
            different, that you would have to probably think about

whilst navigating in these waters, apart from anywhere else in the world?

A Well, in a, navigating a ship like I'm operating at the moment, the Spirit of Tasmania, probably only being aware that the, that the seas are different. You, you probably wouldn't, well, you definitely wouldn't operate the craft in any, in any different, different manner. I suppose if, if we went back to something like the catamaran that we were operating, I, I imagine that the short, sharp seas, again because of its, because it's, because of its lack of length, becomes more like a small ship and then you would be aware of the fact that, for a small craft you, it could well be more difficult operating in this Bass Strait area than, than in the, in the, in the deeper areas. And my, my feeling is that that's why Bass Strait is often described as one of the, the rougher places of the world. I, I think I would dispute that for, for a large ship, but for a small ship that may well be, well be true, again because of the, because of the shallow waters creating short, sharp seas which obviously to small craft are, are a big problem.

Q70 Mmm. All right. Well, if there's no further questions, is there anything else you'd like to add that you think that may assist us in, in what we've been talking about today?

A Well, probably what won't, won't, won't assist you very much is that I, I, you know, I don't profess any sort of knowledge of operating yachts at all.

Q71 Yeah.

A It's not something that I've done. But no, other than that I can't - - -

Q72 Mmm.

A - - - I can't, I can't think of anything. I, it would be, from my point of view it would be very interesting to know yachts, how, how yachts were faring in the, in the shallower areas compared to the deeper areas, where the main problems took place, but again this is not - - -

Q73 Mmm.

A - - - information I have.

Q74 Mmm.

A It's something you're doing - - -

Q75 Yeah.

A - - - but I would have thought that, that, that the difference between yachts in close, putting in there close to say Cape Howe etc. how, how, how they, the conditions they were finding compared to the ones that were further out to sea, I think would be an interesting - - -

Q76 Mmm.

A - - - interesting thing to know, but that's about all I have.

Q77 Is it a possibility, though, and when you're travelling up the eastern seaboard from, say, Hobart up towards Sydney - - -

A Mmm.

Q77 - - - is it a possibility, though, that a lot of the seas and the conditions that are experienced through rough, rough weather and high winds and big seas could carry on further than the line that you've drawn here on the map?

A Oh, I've got no doubt the systems travel through - - -

Q78 Yeah.

A - - - and cause, and cause, the same systems will cause, cause the problems out further.

Q79 Yeah.

A The, the difference will be the effect on the sea.

Q80 Mmm.

A Not the, not the systems themselves.

Q81 Themselves.

A The, a gale that blows through here will, will, will still affect - - -

Q82 Mmm.

A - - - out there, but it, it will create a different effect on the, on the sea itself.

Q83 O.K.

DETECTIVE SENIOR CONSTABLE GRAY

Q84 Just something off the cuff here, I suppose. If you had to take a boat, your size boat - - -

A Mmm.



Q84 - - - if it became a situation that it, there was in actual fact a run from Sydney to Devonport - - -

A Mmm. Which there used to be.

Q85 O.K. From your experience - - -

A Mmm.

Q85 - - - how would you run that, knowing this area and that area?

A Oh, we used to just, I mean I'm going back to what we used to do and that was in a, in the, what used to be the Empress from, used to do that run, Sydney to Burnie.

Q86 Right.

A And we, we basically just did the, the run to Gabo and - - -

Q87 O.K.

A - - - of course across here.

Q88 O.K.

A But again we're talking about ships - - -

Q89 Yes.

A - - - of a reasonable size.

Q90 Yes.

A I can say that the, well, that for a ship that size you really can, could see the difference in, in weather on that run. I mean the, the, the worst weather was always shortly after, the worst weather we experienced in those years used to be once you, once you cleared Gabo.

Q91 Right.

A But of course that's more to do with, with getting the, the southerlies coming up. The west, the westerly wind is protected til it gets, protects everything til it gets to Gabo and then suddenly - - -

Q92 Mmm.

A - - - you find yourself out in the seas.

Q93 So it, it, it really is, is a renowned area that people should treat with caution?

A I would think if I was out in a small, I, I, I treat all seas with caution. Particular caution? I, I would think so. I, I, my guess would be that in any ship when I, up to a certain size you, you're, you're wondering what weather you're going to experience when you get around Gabo Island. The weather, it's the, you can draw a line almost and the weather, the weather changes. On many occasions it can be quite calm and then all of a sudden you've got quite big seas - - -

Q94 Mmm.

A - - - as soon as you clear Gabo.

Q95 Can you rely on the weather information from the Bureau of Meteorology as being - - -

A In the - - -

Q95 - - - accurate?

A As accurate? I would say, oh yeah, that's a, that's a, I think, difficult question. I find that the, the forecasts in Bass Strait these days very good in comparison to what they were some years ago. I think that the biggest problem they have with them isn't

predicting the weather, I think they do a very good job at, at predicting the weather. They can't always predict the intensity, they can tell you that the weather is going to deteriorate, that you're going to get bad weather. They can't always predict the intensity, and they can't always get the timing correct. The, the front that they say is coming through at midday may not, may not appear til much later or may come through quicker.

Q96 Mmm.

A So I'd say that their forecasting is basically good, with maybe the exception in some cases of the timing, and ... they can't always predict the intensity.

Q97 Mmm.

A But otherwise I would say, very good.

Q98 All right. When you're, when you're sort of, when you're sailing this, this, these areas - (Tape Beeping) - do you use your own interpolation of the weather rather than, than that from the Weather Bureau - - -

A We use both.

Q98 - - - of what's happening?

A We use both. We get the, but again, the Weather Bureau, when you say that, I mean the, the, the maps that we get are from, from the Weather Bureau anyway - - -

Q99 Mmm.

A           - - - but we do both things. We, we take their  
forecast and we look, and we look at our own  
interpretations as well.

Q100       O.K.

SENIOR CONSTABLE UPSTON

Q101       All right. Well, if there's nothing else you'd like to  
add, the, the time on my watch is now 12.47. This  
interview is now concluded.

INTERVIEW CONCLUDED