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Ron Dempster Award - Alf Hogan 2006



Alf Hogan



Alf accepts the Award from President Peter Stonely

The Ron Dempster Award is given to an individual for outstanding contribution to the enhancement of recreational fishing in Queensland.

This year the State Executive has nominated a very worthy recipient – Alf Hogan

Alf Hogan was born and raised in Innisfail during the 50's and 60's so learnt to fish and swim before he could read and write. During school holidays Alf helped his uncle on the family cane farm at El Arish. He fell in love with the Jungle Perch in the creek behind the farm, so went to the University of Queensland in 1968 to study fish biology. Six years of part-time study plus two as an army conscript passed before Alf obtained his BSc. He then spent almost five years applying for jobs as a fisheries scientist, eventually succeeding in 1980 when appointed by the Queensland Fisheries Service, then a part of the Department of Harbours and Marine. All his girlfriend Kay could say at the time was "Where the bloody hell is Walkaman?"

The Walkaman fisheries facility in 1980 consisted of Dave Bull, Mal MacKinnon, a tiny homemade "hatchery", six ponds that were poorly designed, leaked, were choked with paragrass, and surrounded by swamp, and they were designed for Nile Perch. Some real challenges for a novice technician. On arrival at his dream job Mal handed Alf a shovel and said "Let's build some more ponds!" Six more

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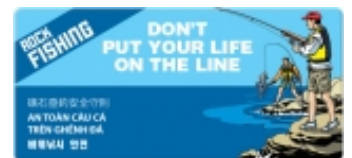
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ponds were built, then another six then six more for the Nile Perch. At this time Walkaman was largely an agricultural field station managed by John van der List. John assisted all greatly in getting the fisheries part of Walkaman up and running. He was endowed with a very dry entertaining sense of humour. He didn't want to give away any good agricultural land, so fisheries were given the swampy areas at the back of the station that needed draining. This turned out to be the best areas for aquaculture ponds. Have a look where they're all situated now.

After Mal left, Alf was promoted to biologist in charge of the fish breeding and stocking, and assessment of freshwater fisheries in the northern part of the state. He even had a stint as Officer in charge from 1989 to 1992.

In between building ponds, Alf was given the task of developing hatchery technology for sooty grunter fingerlings to be used for stocking dams and rivers to improve recreational fishing. He was successful in that and stocked sooties from Brisbane to Mt Isa (that wouldn't be allowed under today's policies)

He also had a project to determine the reproductive biology of his beloved Jungle Perch, and showed that they are marine breeders based on sperm mobility tests. He did this successfully despite a zero budget.

Alf is perhaps best known nationally as the developer of the Barramundi fishery in Queensland impoundments, particularly in Lake Tinaroo and Copperlode dam. He discovered that the stocked Barramundi fingerlings had a natural instinct to go over the spillway and head for salt water to breed. This killed all the fish so Alf came up with the unique idea to build a Barrier Net to keep them in the dams. He raised the money, employed them and then monitored their effectiveness.

Most of his work was for impoundments but when the rest of the state came on board, the question was asked "Why can't we stock fish in open ended waterways and improve the recreational fishing there as well." Alf had another challenge. With a lot of effort by Alf and quite a few from southern areas, the Government of the time allowed the setting up of fish stocking groups all over Queensland to stock both impoundments and open ended waterways with numerous species of fish local to that area. It was Alf's hatchery and pond technology that allowed a lot of these small groups to develop their own hatcheries, breed and grow their own fingerlings from local brood stock. Alf's formula for determining the number of fingerlings to be stocked in a particular creek or river is still used today.

Alf became known as the face behind the fish stocking movement and in particular the stocking of Barramundi and Sooties, the face for many TV shows. He has been interviewed on just about every fishing show in Australia and others like Landline and Countrywide, about stocking of impoundments and even a couple of overseas fishing shows in Japan, US and even UK. It also gained him a lot of success in arguments with bureaucracy over closed seasons, bag and size limits.

Handling big fish for breeding was the norm for scientists like Alf but when he returned and saw large fish dead where he had sampled, caused Alf quite a lot of concern. He then did studies on what happens to fish when they are held up by the jaw or another part of the head. A fish swimming naturally in water has its body supported by the water and never feels its own weight but when it is lifted by the head it stretches the neck and effectively kills the fish. Alf has now put together a very successful publication on DVD on how to handle and release large fish. This has been very popular in angling circles worldwide.

By the early 1990's, Alf realized that despite his best efforts with fish stocking and understanding freshwater fish biology, no habitat means no fish. He thus became more of a fish ecologist, and specialized in, assessing the potential impact of water infrastructure, rapid identification of aquatic biodiversity and the construction and rehabilitation of wetlands.

With the development of the 'Electro-fisher' he was able to travel most of the Northern coast and Gulf waterways and identify the fish species that lived there. He identified new species, and now has one named after him, and species that had never been recorded in these waterways. Some that were thought to be only salt water species, were found tens of kilometers upstream from where their habitat was thought to have ended. Some were thought to be in isolated pockets and rare and endangered but were found elsewhere.

These days many recreational fishers are turning to our freshwater impoundments and waterways for their sport. People like Alf have a passion for fish species and their habitat and are prepared to put that extra effort in to make them what they are today.

And by the way, Kay did find out where Walkaman was. They got married and had three kids. After 25 years things have changed as one of the kids said "You pay someone else to dig the ponds these days, Dad."

With this in mind the State Executive are proud to nominate Alf Hogan as our Ron Dempster Award recipient for 2006.

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