

# Basic Detail Report

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## Tacoma

**Vessel number**

HV000151

**Date**

1951

**Primary Maker**

Jim Petrich

### Description

TACOMA was built by the Haldane brothers William, Alan and Hugh from 1944 to 1951 at Port Fairy, Victoria. The 25.6 metre long hull is wooden carvel construction, planked in oregon on the topsides and jarrah underwater. The stem is a piece of rolled steel plate, and the transom is made up of a series of stepped almost square sectioned planks. Both items are examples of TACOMA's sturdy construction and the Haldanes ability to build things to suit their requirements and resources. The boat was powered by a 240hp Atlas Diesel engine, which was replaced with a 500hp Grenaa diesel in 1971. TACOMA is a tuna clipper and one of the few early examples of this type still surviving in Australia. The Haldane brothers' background included couta and shark fishing out of Port Fairy. They were also aware of the large schools of salmon and tuna in deeper waters, but realized they needed a much larger and more versatile boat to establish themselves in this new venture. They considered the American tuna clipper to be the ideal craft. Through contact with people in the USA who fished for tuna on the Pacific coast they formed a close association with Jim Petrich in Washington, who had prepared designs for these vessels. Building TACOMA was a massive undertaking for the three brothers and their families. A shed was made on the Moyne River bank at Port Fairy, logs were felled and brought in, and largely by their own hands the hull took shape. Ingenuity and perseverance overcame any physical obstacles, but eventually they realized that they would need financial assistance to complete the project. It came in the form of loans from the South Australia, but under the understanding that it would operate from a South Australian port and would be used 'to develop the fishing industry generally, particularly purse seining'. Consequently after its launch in 1951 TACOMA's maiden voyage was from Port Fairy to Port Lincoln in South Australia, via Adelaide. On board for the exodus to the west were the three Haldane brothers and their entire families, plus the Bellamy twins who had helped with the construction, and the cook; in all a total of nine adults, ten children, one watchdog and two cats. By the time they arrived in Port Lincoln there were six more aboard, the kittens born during the passage. TACOMA began its fishing life in 1952 as a purse seiner, fishing for Southern Bluefin Tuna and other pelagic fish in the Great Australian Bight. By the end of the 1954 season this had proven a failure and they changed over to tuna pole fishing with assistance from the American Jangaard brothers who came across from the USA to Port Lincoln later in 1955, sponsored by the South Australian Government. After trials on board TACOMA, with a crew which included Tom Playford, the South Australian Premier as one of the tuna polers the change of method was proved a success with significant catches

taken. Onshore the cannery was now able to process the haul, marking the beginning of a viable industry. The TACOMA and other vessels which joined to establish a fleet also used a light aircraft as spotter planes to locate schools of tuna. A seasonal pattern became established and through into the 1960s they worked the East Coast Tuna fishery from Eden to Sydney from September to December and the Great Australian Bight from Jan to May. A large vessel was needed to cope with the rugged sea conditions including the need to go out to the edge of the continental shelf at times, and the ability to stay out from port for a long period before landing the catch. TACOMA worked the two tuna seasons with individual fishing trips lasting up to 2 weeks at a time with a crew of 8 men including the Haldane brothers and the Bellamy twins. A downturn in the tuna industry occurred in the late 1960s. The Haldanes then decided to change over to the new prawn industry and a refitted TACOMA then became a success as a prawn trawler. Throughout its long life TACOMA was refitted three times including the addition of refrigeration, double rigged booms for prawn trawling, a new engine, and in 1975 it was the first vessel in South Australia to undertake on board processing. In 2003 the vessel was finally retired from service, having been operated by two generations of the Haldane family over 50 years of continuous service. The Haldanes had done their homework well when they chose the design for TACOMA, and remained lifelong friends with the Petrichs in the USA. The name TACOMA comes from the city in Washington State USA where the Petrich's firm Western Boatbuilding made tuna clippers. They were surprised when the Haldanes requested plans for a clipper and had sent a cheque in payment for the advertised drawings. In fact Western Boatbuilding had not received any other orders for plans and did not have a set to sell when the order came. They had to make up a set from their full sized loftings for their own craft. The builders were so pleased that the Haldanes were interested in their design that they returned the cheque and the brothers got the plans for free. In return the Haldanes honoured the builders by naming the boat TACOMA. TACOMA remains very well known amongst past and present people associated with the fishing industry around Australia, and early tuna boats like TACOMA and the young sons of those fishermen form the basis of two of Colin Thiele's childrens' books 'Blue Fin' and 'Magpie Island.' Prepared from material supplied by the Haldane family and the narrative 'MFV TACOMA and the Haldane Family' by John E Plevin.

### **Dimensions**

Vessel Dimensions: 25.6 m x 22.86 m x 6.4 m x 2.59 m, 164 tonnes (84 ft x 75 ft x 21 ft x 8.5 ft, 166.62 tons)