

Basic Detail Report



Alma Gray

Vessel number

HV000860

Date

1890s

Description

Alma Gray is a classic wooden couta boat that was built in the 1890s, likely in Queenscliffe Victoria. It is 25 ft in length overall, 22 ft at waterline, and has a 10 ft beam,

and 2.6 ft draught. Its displacement is 3 tons. For over fifty years from 1945 to 2000 Alma Gray was used as a commercial fishing boat under the ownership of professional fisherman Jack Gray. During this period it became a Merimbula icon on the NSW south coast. As of 2024 it has been offered to the Merimbula-Imlay Historical Society, who are preparing the vessel for restoration and display. It is currently moored on Merimbula lake. Alma Gray's carvel hull is thought to be mostly NZ Kauri, its mast Oregon and sections of its cockpit plywood. Its laid deck is coated in heavy non-skid paint. It is fitted with a 3 blade bronze propeller with approximate diameter of 400mm. Alma Gray does not have a centreboard casing, however is fully rigged with mast, bowsprit, boom, gaff and all standing and running rigging. During the early 1990s its hull was refastened, a new keel was fitted and several hardwood planks were renewed on the bottom of the vessel. A new Yanmar diesel engine was also fitted. In 2008 Alma Gray was fully restored and in 2014 it was surveyed and determined to be well built and very well maintained. In 2024 Alma Gray was assessed by Merimbula based surveyor Andy Duvall. The hull planking was determined to be original and in good condition, with no areas of rot or significant damage observed. The hull framing is original and in good condition, the deck beams and shelf also original with no significant material loss. The deck is in reasonable condition, the cockpit combing in need of replacement. The bowsprit is not original however is good quality timber and in good condition. All painted and varnished surfaces are in need of being scraped back and refinished. Overall Alma Gray's structure is in very good condition given its age. Couta boats served in the Victorian fishing industry from the late nineteenth century to the 1970s. These boats were operated by a crew of two, and launched from the southern seaside towns of Port Phillip, such as Queenscliff and Sorrento, and the Victorian coastal towns of Bass Strait, Lorne and Port Fairy. The target fish were barracouta, which were caught with lures on a short line and rod. In the early years of the industry these fish were plentiful and once a crew caught their daily quota, the essence of speed was necessary to return the catch to buyers so as to maximise financial returns. The design of the Couta boat acted as a stable platform to catch and land fish, and also safely navigate the often rough seas of Bass Strait with speed in order to make a quick sell on return to port. Whilst fishing was the prime function of the couta boat Christmas holidays and Easter time provided the opportunity for the fishermen and their families to socialise. These events evolved into regattas sailing races became formalised with sponsors

(usually local hotels) and annual cups were awarded to the winners. There were up to 50 couta boats in each of the coastal villages hence, competition for the fastest boat became a serious element for many fishermen.