

**60TH ANNIVERSARY STRADBROKE FERRIES – SEALINK
NORTH STRADBROKE ISLAND MUSEUM ON MINJERRIBAH
THURSDAY 1ST AUGUST 2024**

I WOULD LIKE TO BEGIN BY ACKNOWLEDGING THE QUANDAMOOKA PEOPLE, THE TRADITIONAL CUSTODIANS OF THE MINJERRIBAH LAND ON WHICH WE GATHER HERE TODAY AND PAY MY RESPECT TO THEIR ELDERS PAST, PRESENT AND IMMERRING. THERE HAS ALWAYS BEEN A VERY STRONG RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE ELDERS AND STRADBROKE FERRIES, NOW SEALINK, AND THIS IS EVIDENT BY THE DECISION OF THE COMPANY TO NAME THEIR VERY FIRST VESSEL MYORA AND THEN CONTINUE TO NAME OTHER VESSELS FROM THE JANDAI LANGUAGE.

I WOULD ALSO LIKE TO ACKNOWLEDGE BEN RENWICK THE GM OF SEALINK SEQ FOR HIS ONGOING COMMITMENT TO BUILDING NEW VESSELS AND WORKING CLOSELY WITH THE COMMUNITIES OF ALL THE ISLANDS WE SERVICE.

IT HAS NOW BEEN 60 YEARS SINCE THE VEHICLE FERRY MYORA MADE HER FIRST VOYAGE FROM REDLAND BAY TO DUNWICH, ON WHICH THERE WERE 12 CARS AND 18 PASSENGERS.

FIRSTLY, I WOULD LIKE TO TELL YOU A LITTLE BIT ABOUT FRANK DOBIAS SENIOR, THE FOUNDER OF STRADBROKE FERRIES. HE CAME TO AUSTRALIA AT THE AGE OF 23 AFTER SPENDING TIME IN A RUSSIAN PRISION WHEN HE WAS CAUGHT TRYING TO FLEE FROM HIS HOMELAND OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA TO GERMANY. IT DIDN'T TAKE HIM LONG TO HIT THE GROUND RUNNING AFTER HE ARRIVED HERE. HE SAW SUCH GREAT POTENTIAL, AND ALONG WITH SOME OTHER CZEC MATES WORKED HARD FROM DAY ONE.

HE CAME TO MINJERRIBAH IN 1952 AND BY THE TIME HE WAS 38 HE HAD BUILT THE DUNWICH SERVICE STATION, RAN THE STRADBROKE ISLAND BUSES BETWEEN THE 3 TOWNSHIPS, AND STARTED THE FIRST ISLAND TAXI. HE ALSO WORKED WITH TAZI THE SAND MINING COMPANY IN SHOVELLING SAND INTO BAGS AND TRANSPORTING THEM IN HIS TRUCKS ACROSS THE ISLAND.

HOWEVER, HE SAW AN OPPORTUNITY TO DO THINGS BETTER FOR THE SAND MINING INDUSTRY AND THAT IDEA STARTED AT THE KITCHED TABLE OF THE FAMILY HOME JUST A FEW HUNDRED METRES FROM HERE.

HE APPROACHED THE MANAGER OF HAYLES CRUISES ABOUT STARTING UP A BARGE SERVICE TO TRANSPORT THE SAND IN TRUCKS, BUT THEY WERE NOT INTERESTED. HOWEVER, ONE OF THEIR SKIPPERS, GEOFF FORD, DID SEE THE POTENTIAL AND BECAME THE OTHER FOUNDING MEMBER OF STRADBROKE FERRIES.

I WOULD ENCOURAGE YOU TO READ THE FULL STORY – ALTHOUGH I THINK WE HAVE ONLY JUST SCRATCHED THE SURFACE OF FRANK’S LIFE IN THIS DISPLAY. THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT WITHOUT HIS VISION, PASSION, HARD WORK AND TENACITY WE PROBABLY WOULD NOT BE STANDING HERE TODAY.

THERE HAVE BEEN MANY CHALLENGES OVER THE PAST 6 DECADES AND THERE ARE PROBABLY MANY MORE TO COME, HOWEVER WE HAVE TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT STRADBROKE FERRIES, NOW SEALINK, HAS BEEN A LIFE LINE FOR THE MINJERRIBAH AND SOUTHERN MORETON BAY ISLAND COMMUNITIES, BUSINESSES AND VISITORS. MY INVOLVEMENT WITH THE COMPANY GOES BACK MORE THAN 30 YEARS AND I KNOW THAT MANY OF THE LOCAL CLUBS AND EVENTS WOULD NOT HAVE EXISTED IF IT HADN’T BEEN FOR THE SPONSORSHIPS THEY RECEIVED.

I REMEMBER IN THE EARLY 1990’S WHEN STRADBROKE FERRIES TOLD THE OPERATORS THAT THEY WOULD MATCH \$ FOR \$ ANY ADVERTISING FUNDS THEY COULD RAISE TO PROMOTE THE WHALE WATCHING SEASON. WE RAISED \$6,000 SO THAT MEANT WE HAD \$12,000 TO SPEND ON OUR FIRST CAMPAIGN.

IN 2002 THE COMPANY EXPANDED ITS BUSINESS AND CREATED STRADBROKE ISLAND HOLIDAYS, WHICH WAS TO BE THE MARKETING ARM FOR NOT ONLY STRADBROKE FERRIES BUT TO WORK CLOSELY WITH THE ISLAND OPERATORS IN PROMOTING THEIR BUSINESSES AND TO RAISE THE PROFILE OF THE DESTINATION.

THERE HAS BEEN 60 YEARS OF STRONG RELATIONSHIPS THAT HAVE BEEN FORMED WITH THE COMMUNITY AND BUSINESS OPERATORS, WHICH HAS ALL PLAYED A MAJOR ROLE IN THE SHAPING OF THIS COMMUNITY AND STRADBROKE FERRIES, WHICH IN TURN HAS BROUGHT EMPLOYMENT AND GROWTH FOR BOTH THE ISLAND AND THE COMPANY.

OVER THE YEARS I HAVE BEEN TOLD MANY FUNNY AND INTERESTING STORIES FROM BOTH LOCALS AND CREW. I WAS TOLD THAT WHEN THE MOONGALBA WAS BUILT AT INDEX SHIPYARD AT LYTTON THE CREW ARRIVED THERE THE MORNING THAT SHE WAS DUE TO BE LAUNCHED – ONLY TO FIND THAT SHE HAD LAUNCHED HERSELF THE NIGHT BEFORE AND WAS SITTING ON THE OPPOSITE BANK. IT WAS SUGGESTED TO ME THAT IS WHY BOATS ARE REFERRED TO IN THE FEMALE CONTEXT – IT HAS SOMETHING TO DO WITH BEING IMPATIENT!

THIS EXHIBITION OF STORIES AND MEMORIBILLIA WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE WITHOUT TWO VERY SPECIAL PEOPLE WHO ARE NO LONGER WITH US. I WOULD LIKE TO ACKNOWLEDGE GREG FENTIMAN WHO WAS THE GENERAL MANAGER AND THEN MANAGING DIRECTOR FROM 1985 TO 2006. HIS DETAILED KNOWLEDGE OF THE BOATS AND THEIR MODIFICATIONS WAS SHARED WITH US 10 YEARS AGO AND HAS FORMED A VERY IMPORTANT PART OF THIS HISTORY.

A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO MY DEAR FRIEND LYN SRBECKY WHO WAS A DIRECTOR FOR 33 YEARS AND WAS A WEALTH OF KNOWLEDGE AND PASSION FOR THE COMPANY AND TOOK THE TIME TO DOCUMENT SO MUCH OF THAT HISTORY. LYN'S DAUGHTER DARLENE IS HERE ON HER BEHALF TODAY.

THE DOBIAS FAMILIES HAVE BEEN VERY GENEROUS WITH THEIR STORIES AND PHOTOS THAT HAVE BEEN PROVIDED TO US. FRANK (JUNIOR) WHO IS HERE WITH HIS SON JAMES MUST BE VERY PROUD OF THEIR FATHER AND GRANDFATHER.

I WOULD ALSO LIKE TO ACKNOWLEDGE BILL STUBBS WHO WAS THE CHAIRMAN AND DIRECTOR OF STRADBROKE FERRIES FROM 2005 UNTIL 2011 WHEN THE COMPANY WAS SOLD. BILL WAS UNABLE TO BE HERE TODAY BUT I KNOW THAT HE COULD ALSO CONTRIBUTE MANY STORIES TO THIS HISTORIC OCCASION.

THERE HAVE BEEN SOME EXCITING CHANGES OVER THE PAST 13 YEARS. ON THE 13TH DECEMBER 2011 STRADBROKE FERRIES WAS PURCHASED BY TRANSIT SYSTEMS. I KNOW THAT GRAHAM LEISHMAN, ONE OF THE OWNERS, HAS ALWAYS HAD A PASSION FOR BOATS AND IT WASN'T UNUSUAL TO SEE GRAHAM AT TOONDAH HARBOUR ON SOME OF THE BUSY DAYS ENJOYING WATCHING THE MANY HUNDREDS OF TOURISTS SETTING OFF ON THEIR HOLIDAY. THANK YOU TO GRAHAM AND JAN FOR ATTENDING TODAY.

IN NOVEMBER 2015 TRANSIT SYSTEMS SOLD ALL OF ITS MARINE OPERATIONS TO SEALINK TRAVEL GROUP. THIS HAS ALLOWED THE COMPANY TO EXPAND AND BECOME PART OF A MUCH LARGER MARINE BUSINESS WHICH OPERATES TO 16 ISLANDS AROUND AUSTRALIA, AS WELL AS PROVIDES SERVICES ON MANY CAPITAL CITY HARBOURS AND MAJOR RIVERS. THE COMPANY HAS 118 VESSELS PROVIDING PASSENGER, VEHICLE AND FREIGHT FERRY TRANSPORT SERVICES.

SO, WHAT WILL THE NEXT 40 YEARS BRING? I HAVE NO DOUBT THAT SEALINK ARE COMMITTED TO CONTINUING THE LONG STANDING RELATIONSHIP WITH THE COMMUNITIES. I CAN ONLY HOPE THAT IN 40 YEARS' TIME THAT SOMEONE IS STANDING HERE SHOWCASING THE 100 YEAR HISTORY AND OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENTS OF THIS EXCEPTIONAL COMPANY.

HEATHER TRUMAN