

Rod McGregor Commodore 1999 - 2001

I was quite late coming to sailing. Having grown up in Melbourne, about an hour's drive from the sea, my weekends were spent playing cricket and football with absolutely no thought of going sailing.

When Chris and I migrated from Melbourne to Perth in January 1974 I started work at Royal Perth Hospital and after only about two weeks there I was invited to join some of the work colleagues on a twilight grudge match between two of the doctors in the department sailing out of RPYC. I must have shown some enthusiasm because the next week I was asked to join the crew of an Endeavour 24, Palandra, skippered by Dr Peter Jackson.

The following season, 1974 / 75 Peter moved up to half ton racing including offshore events. I was not in a position to continue on the crew as I had weekend rostering commitments. I jumped ship and joined another doctor's crew on a SpaceSailer 22. I sailed on that boat through until 1977.

My boss, David Hartley, who had introduced me to sailing had abandoned keelboat sailing and became a foundation member of the fledgling Shelley Sailing Club where he sailed a Heron. In 1977 he said to me "if you really want to learn to sail, you won't do it pulling ropes on a keelboat. You need to get yourself a dinghy".

I went for a sail with him on his Heron, and within weeks had bought myself a boat as a Christmas present.

I sailed Herons at Shelley Sailing Club for about 13 years. The first year or so I did almost as much swimming as sailing and, indeed, won the Heron Association DUNK trophy on 2 occasions. The first year through sheer weight of numbers; the second due to the spectacular nature of the event. Having capsized and then righted the boat, the sails filled and the boat took off down the course with me hanging on to the transom and my crew hanging on to my ankle. We sailed half the downwind leg in this fashion.

I did improve and my enthusiasm was not daunted.

I initially sailed with a work colleague and when my son Stuart reached about seven he crewed.

I served on the committee at Shelley Sailing Club for some years and served as Sailing Captain and then as Commodore. I also served as Club Coach for some years.

I mention all this time at Shelley sailing Herons as this is when I first developed a love of PDSC. Each year I sailed several State heats and teams races at PDSC and was struck by the atmosphere at the Club. This was in the heyday of 14 sailing with champions the likes of Ray Hancock, Daryl Anderson, Cliff Burton, Rob O'Sullivan, John Cassidy and others. The noise and atmosphere at presentation time was electric. One day I'll join this club.

In 1989 my son Stuart wanted to move up from Mudlarks and was desperate to get a Flying Ant and follow in the footsteps of Ian Murray. I was not keen to join Mounts Bay so instead bought him a JD and we joined the Dinghy Club. For two seasons he sailed his JD at PDSC on Saturdays with me on shore or helping Rod Smith with the kids. I was still sailing my Heron at Shelley. I had turned 40 in 1990 and decided that if I didn't bite the bullet and try to get into high performance skiff sailing I would soon be too old. In 1991 I purchased my first Javelin. It was named Sixes and Sevens. The name seemed most appropriate.

I sailed this with a young lad from Shelley who's younger brother was crewing for Stuart on the JD.

That first season I sailed the Javelin Nationals in Perth with Stuart crewing. I was still learning and he was only 14 so we got blown away a bit when it blew. The next year Stuart and I travelled to Ceduna for the Nationals at Easter with only slightly better results, but we were having fun and learning. We had renamed the boat *White bread Kids* which someone pointed might be a bit provocative given that we were to sail at Ceduna.

That season, Greg Moore, whom I knew through our Heron sailing days, had joined the Club when his son Daniel joined the JD fleet. He was still sailing his Heron with daughter Hannah but had agreed to sail the Javelin with me though he still wished to sail his last Heron Nationals with Hannah at Christmas in Perth the next season.

That year, 1993, at Presentation Night I was approached by Commodore Rod Smith and asked if I would consider nominating for the position of Flag Officer. The Club had struggled on for the past two years with Rod as Commodore and Barry Martin as Vice. They had been unable to fill the Rear Commodore positions. I replied "talk to Greg Moore and if he's in, I'm in"

We were both elected Rear Commodore unopposed at the AGM in 1993. Barry Martin was elected Commodore and Tom Burt Vice. It was some sort of recycling facility as Tom had previously been Commodore at PDSC and both Greg and I had served as Commodore at our previous clubs.

The first two years I served as Rear, Bar and Social but probably the highlight of my first year was the Heron Nationals 93/94. I was right in at the deep end as Commodore Barry and Vice, Tom were both in Melbourne for the 420 and Javelin Nationals. Greg Moore was competing in the Heron Nationals with Hannah and I was holding the fort as Officer in Charge and head of the Race Committee. It was a large busy regatta but went smoothly. By the end of the regatta I felt right at home and confident that I was up to the job.

In 95 one of us had to move up to the position of Vice Commodore. We didn't draw straws as I happily deferred to Greg as I was in the midst of big organisational changes at work. I took on Rear Commodore, Sailing and Ian Arber was elected to join the flag as Rear. These two years, with Tom Burt in charge, were largely uneventful under his experienced leadership.

Greg Moore was elected Commodore in 1997, with myself as Vice. Ian Arber acted as Rear Commodore with special responsibility for the up-coming Centenary of the 14 Foot Dinghy which PDSC was to host at Christmas 1997. The newly elected Rear Commodore was Andrew Farrar.

Andrew took on House and Grounds, and was responsible for a major refurbishment of the bar in preparation for the Centenary. Greg Moore, as Commodore, was responsible for oversight of the centenary celebrations and I took on chairing the Race Committee. Ian looked after the social events and chairing the committee to organise the regatta and attract the sponsorship to ensure such a significant event would be adequately resourced.

The regatta was a great success. As chairman of the Race Committee, I had arranged for an international level judge to chair the protest committee and so engaged Ron Douglas. We only had one protest for the entire regatta, and on that day Ron had to dash to Geraldton on urgent family business. That left me to chair the protest hearing.

The protest involved Stuart Sloss protesting Stuart Vickery, so anyone with knowledge of the protagonists can imagine the intensity of the exchanges at the protest hearing. I escaped without having my tyres slashed as was threatened. It was about ten years before I again agreed to chair a protest panel.

The Centenary Regatta concluded with a lavish affair at Fraser's restaurant. The only blemish was that the speeches went on so long that Perth's best band, The Magnificent Seven, almost got their money for nothing.

The following Year, 1999, I was elected Commodore with Ian Arber as Vice, Andrew Farrar again as Rear Commodore. Greg Vance had his arm twisted and moved from being our trusted Treasurer to become our new Rear Commodore.

Greg Moore wasn't finished and after stepping down from Commodore, took on the role of Secretary.

Not far into the season Ian Arber was offered a promotion he couldn't refuse and relocated to the USA and Andrew Farrar jumped straight up to Vice Commodore.

So far it sounds as though the whole experience had been nothing but fun and achievement, but we had our challenges. Some were of a small scale but intense nature such as a couple of disciplinary hearings; whereas others were monumental, even threatening the continued existence of the Club as we know it.

In about 1998 our lease was about to expire and we had approached the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) as our landlord to negotiate a new lease. They were reluctant to offer a lease at that time as they said that they were reviewing all the riverside leases at the time and would get back to us when the review was concluded. That year they didn't invoice us for our annual rent.

The following year they were still not offering a new lease and again didn't invoice us.

Our lease had expired and we had not paid rent for two years. We were essentially squatters. When the rent was again due the next year, again we were not invoiced. We took it upon ourselves to furnish a cheque for the three years rent with a covering letter. They banked the cheque but we still didn't have a current lease.

In 1998 the ABC and the Western Australian Symphony Orchestra, which had been a subsidiary of the ABC, were incorporated as separate entities.

In 1999 the ABC, under Federal funding pressure, announced its intention to vacate its premises in Adelaide Terrace and move to new smaller premises in East Perth. The WASO was somewhat blindsided by this as the ABC had housed the WASO for its entire existence and the WASO believed that the ABC had given a written undertaking at the time of the incorporation, to continue to support and accommodate the orchestra. The WASO was forced to urgently look for a new home as the ABC intended to vacate and relocate in early 2003, if not before.

In October 2000 Janet Holmes A'Court as Chair of the WASO, Catherine Ferrari, the CEO and Julian Sher, Director, appeared before the Federal Government's Joint Committee on Public Works to argue their case for federal funding of a new home for the WASO. Their preferred solution was a joint venture with the University of Western Australia to develop what they envisaged as the Music Access Centre. This was a new building housing the UWA music department along with a permanent home for the WASO. It was to incorporate lecture, practice and rehearsal spaces, a 1500 seat performance auditorium and a function and exhibition space. The aim was to integrate the UWA music program with the WASO and also extend out to the community and specifically the secondary school music programs to enhance music in the community.

Planning had advanced, detailed architectural drawings had been produced and the project costed. It was to cost 24 million dollars. The UWA had agreed to provide the land and a further 4 million dollars. The State Government was to contribute 8 million dollars and they were looking for a contribution of a further 8 million from the federal government.

It was only at this stage that we were made aware of the proposal, part of which required the removal of both the Dinghy Club and Hale School Rowing Club from the foreshore. The drawings which both UWA and the state government had endorsed showed the building extending down almost to the waterline with the function and exhibition space providing uninterrupted views out over Matilda Bay to the city.

Hale school had already been approached and were happy to relocate to a new facility in Bayswater.

It looked like a fait accompli.

I arranged meetings with Catherine Ferrari, CEO of WASO and also the Deputy Vice Chancellor, Finance and Building at UWA to plead our case. They were not prepared to alter their proposal but would seek to help us with any relocation costs.

The state government was not going to provide another riverfront leasehold and we were being advised to explore the possibility of co-location or a merger with another established sailing club.

I spoke to the Lord Mayor of the City of Perth, Peter Nattrass, who directed me to the Deputy Mayor, Michael Sutherland who was more sympathetic, but they were not part of the UWA / WASO proposal.

I met with Sheila McHale, Opposition Shadow Minister for the Arts, whom I knew personally. She was, again, sympathetic to our plight however she was very keen to see the Music Access Centre developed. The state government had been sitting on the proposal for a couple of years but had not progressed it far.

I had meetings with the president of Yachting WA seeking support and also with the Vice Commodore at Royal Perth Yacht Club seeking both support and sounding them out for a possible co-location should it come to that.

This UWA / WASO proposal hung over our head until after the state election in March 2001 when an urgency motion was raised in the Legislative Assembly seeking an urgent decision on a future home for the WASO. Several proposals were canvassed including establishing the Music Access Centre at the Perth Concert hall but this was to be an expensive exercise, particularly without a contribution from UWA. Cheaper options were also looked at. The UWA proposal remained the preferred option but was contingent on an equal contribution from the Federal Government.

In May 2001 the Federal Minister responsible for the Arts took the proposal to cabinet, and whilst it was supported in principle, he could not give a guarantee the funding would be made available in the next budget. Given the urgency and a lack of funding commitment at the Federal level, the plan lapsed and a cheaper, less ambitious plan to relocate to the Concert Hall was endorsed.

We had dodged a bullet.

Despite all the dramas, both Chris and I thoroughly enjoyed our term as Commodore and Lady Commodore and would encourage any member to put their hand up to lead this great club. You would find that it is not daunting due to the enormous support that you would receive from both your Committee and the membership.