

PROPOSED LOCAL HERITAGE PLACE

Flensing Deck and Factory, Tangalooma Whaling Station (former), 0 Tangalooma, Moreton Island (LOT PLAN: Part of 8_SL8209)



SUMMARY

Constructed in 1952 as part of the former Tangalooma Whaling Station, the flensing deck and factory on Moreton Island are important and rare remnants of Brisbane's maritime industrial history. The establishment of the Tangalooma Whaling Station to catch and process humpback whales took place at a time when humpback whale by-products were seen as valuable commodities. While the whaling station brought employment and a new industry to Brisbane, this part of the City's history ended in 1962 after overhunting had depleted stocks of humpback whales. This made continuing operations by the Tangalooma Whaling Station uneconomical.

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HISTORY

A history of Moreton Island

Moreton Island, a sparsely populated sand island is located 70 kilometres from Central Brisbane. Moreton Island is the third largest sand island on the planet and lies on the eastern edge of Moreton Bay, with the Coral Sea lying to the east of the island. Named Moreton Island, by Lieutenant Matthew Flinders on 28 July 1799, the island takes its name from Moreton Bay, which Lieutenant James Cook (1728-1779) named in 1770. European settlement of Moreton Island began in 1848 when a pilot station was built near Bulwer on the north-western side of the island to guide vessels through the passages of Moreton Bay.

Moreton Island's strategic location saw it become an important location for navigation into Moreton Bay and the defence of Brisbane and surrounding areas. Cape Moreton Lighthouse, located at the north of Moreton Island, has been an important navigational aid since it began operation in 1857. In addition, a lighthouse at Comboyuro Point was opened in 1877. Similarly, during the Second World War, Fort Cowan Cowan became a vital part of the defence of Brisbane. The fort was commissioned in 1935 by the Queensland Government and was constructed by 1937. It was operational throughout the Second World War as an Examination Battery. In this role, Fort Cowan Cowan was responsible for identifying and determining the intention of vessels entering Moreton Bay and the Port of Brisbane. Fort Cowan Cowan was officially closed in 1960.

Though some small-scale mining took place after the Second World War, industry on Moreton Island during the 1950s focused on the operations of the Tangalooma Whaling Station. Since the closure of the whaling station, the main economic developments on Moreton Island have focused on tourism. However, when Moreton Island became part of Greater Brisbane in 1974, Brisbane City Council sought to allow 60 per cent of the island to be zoned for sand mining – Moreton Island is rich in rutile and zircon deposits.¹ The Queensland Government supported sandmining on the island.

Following the findings of a 1976 environmental study commissioned by the State, Queensland Government established a Committee of Inquiry into the future land use of Moreton Island – referred to as the Cook Inquiry after the Committee's Chair, Queensland Government's Valuer-General, Neville Cook.² In 1977, the report of the Cook Inquiry recommended that 91.2 per cent of Moreton Island become a 'national park' while the 6.4% should be open to mining – these views were accepted by Queensland Government in 1981.³ The decision to allow some mining to potentially occur led to activism from those who did not want mining to happen on Moreton Island.⁴ Notably, in 1978, the Moreton Island Protection Committee was formed with the aim of preserving the natural beauty of Moreton Island. As part of their aims, in 1980, the Moreton Island Protection Committee nominated Moreton Island to be listed on the Register of National Estate.⁵ Moreton Island was entered onto the Register of National Estate in 1981. In 1984, the Federal Government announced that it would refuse export licences for material extracted from Moreton Island.⁶ Eventually, in 1986,

¹ Frank McBride et al, *Brisbane: 150 Stories, 1859-2009* (Brisbane, QLD: Brisbane City Council, 2009), pp. 262-3.

² Australian Parliamentary Paper (PP), 'A Report on Sandmining on Moreton Island, October 1981' (1982), pp. 2-3; Ross Fitzgerald, *From 1915 to the Early 1980s: A History of Queensland* (St Lucia, QLD: University of Queensland Press, 1984), pp. 358-61.

³ PP, 'Sandmining on Moreton Island,' p. 4; Fitzgerald, *From 1915 to the Early 1980s*, pp. 358-61.

⁴ State Library of Queensland (SLQ), *Moreton Island*. (Moreton Island Protection Committee, 1982).

⁵ SLQ, John Henry and Alistair Melzer, *Moreton Island a Place We Want to Keep: Expanded Summary of Information Relevant to the Nomination of Moreton Island for the 'Register of the National Estate'* (Moreton Island Protection Committee, 1980).

⁶ McBride et al, *Brisbane*, pp. 262-3.

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it was announced that mining would not occur on Moreton Island and in 1993, the national park was enlarged to 96 per cent of the Island.⁷ Since the 1990s, Moreton Islands' key industry has been tourism with a heavy focus on environmentalism, especially as the local whale population became resurgent from the 1980s onwards.

The planning and development of the Tangalooma Whaling Station

Whaling had been an important industry in Australia until the 20th Century, though less so in Queensland, where whaling ships only occasionally frequented the State's waters.⁸ However, after neglecting the whaling industry for many years, the Australian Government saw the opportunity to expand this industry after 1945.⁹ As Australia controlled a significant proportion of Antarctica, a critical living space for humpback whales, the Federal Government signed the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling in 1946. This guided Australia's regulations on whaling operations. The decision to re-establish the whaling industry was driven by increased worldwide demand for oil derived from whales and the perception that other countries, most notably Japan, were profiting from whaling operations in waters south of Australia.¹⁰ As the Premier of Western Australia, Ross McLarty, reflected in 1947, 'national advantages which will accrue from the establishment of this [whaling] industry need not be stressed.'¹¹ In 1949, the Commonwealth Government passed the *Whaling Industry Act* and established the Australian Whaling Commission.¹² Subsequently, in 1950, the Australian Whaling Commission established a whaling station in Carnarvon, Western Australia.

As well as the establishment of the Carnarvon whaling station, private companies also sought to become increasingly involved in the whaling industry. In late-1950, Whale Products Pty. Ltd. (Whale Products) was established to undertake hunting of humpback whales off Australia's east coast.¹³ Humpback whales, a species of baleen whale, were so named because when they roll over and spout, their back appears to be arched, or humped.¹⁴ While primarily residing in Antarctic waters, Group V humpback whales migrated north to breed and are regularly found in Queensland. These Group V whales travelled close to land and could be hunted for their highly prized by-products, oil, and bone meal. Group V referred to the geographical feeding area and corresponding migratory patterns of the whales in the Southern Ocean.

Under the terms of *The Companies Act, 1931 to 1942*, Whale Products was incorporated in Sydney on 26 June 1951 to undertake business in Brisbane.¹⁵ Whale Products' parent company, Whale Industries Ltd. (Whale Industries) was registered in Sydney on 6 June 1951.¹⁶ Whale Industries purchased the capital of Whale Products, Farm Margarine Pty. Ltd, and Hi-Protein Pty. Ltd, and

⁷ Margaret Cook, *Shifting Sands: Memories of Moreton Island* (Ashgrove, QLD: Moreton Island Protection Committee, 2005), p. 91.

⁸ David Jones, *The Whalers of Tangalooma* (Melbourne, VIC: The Nautical Association of Australia, 1980), p. 5; David Jones, 'The Whalers of Tangalooma, 1952-1962' in Murray Johnson (ed.), *Brisbane: Moreton Bay Matters* (Brisbane History Group, 2002), p. 87.

⁹ Helen Doyle, 'Whaling,' in Graeme Davison, John Hirst, and Stuart Macintyre (eds.), *The Oxford Companion to Australian History* (Melbourne, VIC: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 680.

¹⁰ R.L. Wettenhall, 'The Australian Whaling Commission in Retrospect,' *The Australian Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (1961), p. 80; Shirley Scott, 'Australian Diplomacy Opposing Japanese Antarctic Whaling 1945-1951: The Role of Legal Argument,' *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 53, no. 2 (1999), pp. 179-92; Cook, *Shifting Sands*, p. 69.

¹¹ National Archives of Australia, A461, G345/1/1, Premier of Western Australia to Prime Minister Ben Chifley, 29 September 1947.

¹² Wettenhall, 'The Australian Whaling Commission in Retrospect,' p. 80.

¹³ Jones, *The Whalers of Tangalooma*, p. 6.

¹⁴ Jones, *The Whalers of Tangalooma*, p. 13.

¹⁵ Queensland State Archives (QSA), PR1758036, Certificate of Incorporation for Whale Products Pty. Ltd., 26 June 1951.

¹⁶ 'Advertising,' *Truth*, 5 August 1951, p. 47.

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each of these companies played a role in capturing and processing whales and their associated by-products subsequently issuing shares in these companies to raise funds for operations.¹⁷ Whale Products captured and processed the whales while the other two companies refined and marketed the whale oil and bone meal.¹⁸

In February 1951, Whale Products applied to the Minister of Lands for the lease of 200 acres of State-owned land on the north-western corner of Moreton Island fronting 'water.'¹⁹ In making this request, Whale Products made clear that it was their intention, pending being granted a license from the Australian Government to hunt whales, to start operations in time for the 1952 season.²⁰ Subsequent discussions with the Queensland Government focused on selecting a suitable site for future operations. Before Tangalooma was selected, three other options, all on Moreton Island, were considered as the site for the whaling station. These included Bulwer, Comboyuro Point, and Cowan Cowan.²¹ Whale Products selected Tangalooma because of its 'proximity to the migration track of Humpback Whales' and its position relative to Brisbane.²²

While the intention had been to lease a 200-acre site, Whale Products was eventually granted a special lease for 30 acres on Moreton Island. While several conditions were placed on the lease, such as allowing access to the site by government officers, Whale Products accepted the terms on 19 June 1951.²³ Permits to build the whaling station and associated amenities was granted in July 1951.²⁴

Whale Products had employed Brisbane based architect Mervyn Rylance to work on the design and layout of the whaling station at Tangalooma.²⁵ Rylance was involved with the project from 1951 until at the least the late-1950s, as there were ongoing discussions between Whale Products and the Queensland Government over the potential expansion of the site. As early as late-1952, at the end of their first season of operations, Whale Products enquired with the Department of Public Lands about the possibility of 'additional space' for the erection of further plant and machinery.²⁶ In 1954, the Department of Public Lands provisionally reserved an area of 16.5 acres for further expansion pending 'definite particulars' being provided by Whale Products.²⁷ Further discussion on this issue continued throughout the 1950s though ultimately, the land was not granted to Whale Products.²⁸

¹⁷ 'Company Plans Catch Whales Off Q'ld Coast,' *Morning Bulletin*, 27 June 1951, p. 4; 'Whaling Venture being Planned for Moreton Island,' *Daily Mercury*, 27 June 1951, p. 1; 'Whales Coming to Queensland,' *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 28 June 1951, p. 5; 'Advertising,' *Truth*, 5 August 1951, p. 47.

¹⁸ 'Advertising,' *Truth*, 5 August 1951, p. 47; Jones, *The Whalers of Tangalooma*, p. 7.

¹⁹ QSA, PR1758036, Robert Chrichton-Brown, Chairman of Directors, Whale Products Pty. Ltd. to the Minister of Lands, Queensland Government, 9 February 1951.

²⁰ QSA, PR1758036, Robert Chrichton-Brown, Chairman of Directors, Whale Products Pty. Ltd. to the Minister of Lands, Queensland Government, 9 February 1951.

²¹ QSA, PR1758036, Minute by the Surveyor-General, 14 February 1951; QSA, PR1758036, Minute by the Land Commissioner, 27 February 1951.

²² QSA, PR1758036, R. Chrichton-Brown, Chairman, Whale Product Ltd. Pty. to the Secretary, Land Administration Board, 4 April 1951; Jones, *The Whalers of Tangalooma*, p. 6

²³ QSA, PR1758036, Proposed Special Lease to Whale Products Pty. Ltd. for 30 acres on Moreton Island, 1 June 1951; QSA, PR1758036, Thynne and Macartney Solicitors to the Under-Secretary, Department of Public Lands, 19 June 1951; 'Moreton Whaling Station to be Established on West Coast,' *Brisbane Telegraph*, 27 June 1951, p. 2.

²⁴ 'Whale Station,' *The Courier-Mail*, 25 July 1951, p. 3.

²⁵ QSA, PR1758036, Minute by the Land Commissioner, 28 February 1951; QSA, PR1758036, Survey Sketch Map by Mervyn Rylance attached to a letter from R. Chrichton-Brown, Chairman, Whale Product Ltd. Pty. to the Secretary, Land Administration Board, 4 April 1951; QSA, PR1758036, Mervyn Rylance to the Secretary, Land and Administration Board, 12 October 1951.

²⁶ QSA, PR1758021, Thynne and Macartney Solicitors to the Secretary, Land Administration Board, 23 December 1952.

²⁷ QSA, PR1758021, Thynne and Macartney Solicitors to the Secretary, Land Administration Board, 9 September 1954; QSA, PR1758021, Secretary, Land Administration Board to Thynne and Macartney Solicitors, 15 October 1954.

²⁸ QSA, PR1758021, General Manager, Whale Products Pty. Ltd. to the Chairman, Land Administration Board, 3 December 1957.

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Nevertheless, by September 1951, work had started on the construction and layout of the whaling station at Tangalooma.²⁹

Before starting his private practice in Brisbane in 1933, Rylance had trained and worked in London and Brisbane. Before 1939, Rylance became well known for his Mediterranean style houses. In 1935, Rylance was an award winner in the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (Qld) 'Small Homes Competition', which was 'the most important competition in domestic architecture' at that time.³⁰ However, after the mid-1930s, Rylance became one of many Brisbane-based architects who rejected stylism in favour of the philosophy of European Functionalism, producing modern houses that differed markedly from earlier work by Queensland architects.³¹ After the Second World War, Rylance continued in private practice undertaking residential projects as well as some commercial commissions such as Tangalooma Whaling Station. Rylance ceased private practice in 1972.

While Rylance was employed to design the layout of the Tangalooma Whaling Station, Whale Products also employed a Norwegian engineer, Chris Christopherson, to install the equipment at the station.³² Essential equipment, including the cookers and three chasers (whaling boats), were sourced from Norway. The cookers were located in the factory building on which the flensing deck was located.³³ Power for the factory was provided by steam that was generated by oil-fired boilers located on-site. Built of concrete, the flensing deck measures roughly 50 metres long by 20 metres wide.³⁴ The concrete, used to prevent seeping into the factory, was surmounted by timber decking that was 'taken up at the end of each season and cleaned.'³⁵ The flensing deck was connected to Moreton Bay by a two stage turpentine log slipway.³⁶ Hatches located on the flensing deck led to the cookers, also known as digesters, located in the factory below, where a shredder plant was also located. The cookers, produced by the Norwegian company Kvaerner, were used to extricate the 'whale oil.'³⁷ After being cleaned of impurities in separators, the extracted oil was stored in storage tanks awaiting shipping. Also, a Huse plant in the factory was used to shred 'meat to meal' and was the first such example of this machinery in Australia.³⁸ As well as the factory and associated equipment used to power the site, there were ancillary buildings for related operations, such as the blacksmith who repaired equipment such as the harpoons used on the chasers.³⁹ There was also a laboratory on-site, which, amongst other activities, was used in 1954 in the 'close study of the ovarian cycle' of humpback whales.⁴⁰ Up to March 1952, Whale Products spent £200,000 installing the factory, flensing deck, slipway, plant and machinery and associated amenities.⁴¹

²⁹ 'Whaling Plans being Expedited,' *Maryborough Chronicle*, 11 September 1951, p. 3; 'Whaling Company Active,' *Cairns Post*, 11 September 1951, p. 3.

³⁰ Michael Kennedy, 'Domestic Architecture in Queensland between the Wars' (MA Thesis, University of New South Wales, 1989), p. 74, 76.

³¹ Kennedy, 'Domestic Architecture in Queensland between the Wars,' p. 101, 106.

³² Jones, *The Whalers of Tangalooma*, p. 36.

³³ 'Whaling base equipment,' *Brisbane Telegraph*, 12 December 1951, p. 2.

³⁴ Jones, *The Whalers of Tangalooma*, p. 37.

³⁵ Jones, *The Whalers of Tangalooma*, p. 37.

³⁶ Jones, *The Whalers of Tangalooma*, p. 37.

³⁷ Jones, *The Whalers of Tangalooma*, p. 37; J.N. Tønnessen and A.O. Johnsen, *The History of Modern Whaling*, translated by R.I. Christopherson (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982), p. 707.

³⁸ Jones, *The Whalers of Tangalooma*, p. 37.

³⁹ Jones, *The Whalers of Tangalooma*, p. 38.

⁴⁰ CSIRO, *Annual Report of the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization for the Year ended 30th June* (Canberra, ACT: Government Printer, 1954).

⁴¹ QSA, PR1758036, Acting General Manager, Whale Products Pty. Ltd. to the Secretary, Land Administration Board, 21 March 1952.

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Whaling operations at Tangalooma

Whaling operations started at Tangalooma in June 1952, with the first humpback whale caught on 6 June.⁴² By early August 1952, the company had already caught and processed half of its allotted 500 whales for the year.⁴³ By September 1952, the quota for Whale Products had been increased to 600 catches, though a later request to increase the quota further was refused.⁴⁴ Approximately 90 per cent of the whales caught during the first season of operations was done within 'five miles of Cape Moreton.'⁴⁵ After a successful first season of operations, the capture and processing of whales stopped in early October. The whales captured 'averaged 41 ft. and included the largest humpback (52 ft) ever caught in Australian waters.'⁴⁶ Shipments of whale oil began to be transported overseas in August 1952, with the first shipment sent to Liverpool for use in the making of margarine. Shipped on the Blue Funnel ship *Jason*, this was the 'first bulk liquid cargo to leave Brisbane in a cargo ship.'⁴⁷

While Whale Products employed Australians and several other nationalities, the crews and workers originally came from Norway.⁴⁸ Many of these workers were seasonal and often travelled back to Norway after the hunting season, though some were recorded as settling in Australia.⁴⁹ Whale Products employed the Norwegian Captain Alf Melsom as their Whaling Manager. Melsom, a well-known whaling expert, had initially come out to Australia in 1949 to advise the Australian Whaling Commission on the 'successful development of the [whaling] industry.'⁵⁰ His arrival in Queensland was widely reported in newspapers.⁵¹ As a result, Whale Industries made Melsom a company director to recognise his importance to their endeavour.

As well as Melsom and the original Norwegian workers, the establishment of the Tangalooma Whaling Station led to the announcement that Whale Products would initially employ 100 people at the site.⁵² Even before the start of the 1952 hunting season, the Norwegians employed by the company were also being used to train recruits in the skills necessary to undertake the hard work involved in whaling.⁵³ As a result, by 1953, the company employed English, Irish, Scottish, Swedish, Romanians, Yugoslav, Maltese, Polish, Greek, and Australian workers, alongside the Norwegians originally employed.⁵⁴ By 1960, the multinational workforce was described as a 'happy family.' The workers were described as 'a classic example of how men from [different] countries work smoothly together in a booming Australian' enterprise.⁵⁵

⁴² 'First whale captured,' *Brisbane Telegraph*, 6 June 1952, p. 3.

⁴³ 'Preparations for Whaling Season,' *Queensland Times*, 1 April 1952, p. 3; 'Whaling Vessels,' *Cairns Post*, 1 April 1952, p. 1; 'Whaling Station at Tangalooma,' *Warwick Daily News*, 27 May 1952, p. 5; 'Caught half the Whales,' *Brisbane Telegraph*, 9 August 1952, p. 3.

⁴⁴ 'More Whales,' *The Courier-Mail*, 13 September 1952, p. 3; 'Tangalooma Refused Extra Quota,' *The Courier-Mail*, 9 October 1952, p. 3.

⁴⁵ 'Expect Full Whale Catch,' *Brisbane Telegraph*, 18 February 1953, p. 10.

⁴⁶ 'Tangalooma Ceasing Operations Today,' *Brisbane Telegraph*, 9 October 1952, p. 9.

⁴⁷ 'Whale Oil Flow Begins,' *Brisbane Telegraph*, 23 August 1952, p. 3.

⁴⁸ 'Local Men in Crews on Whalers,' *The Courier-Mail*, 16 January 1953, p. 4.

⁴⁹ 'Tangalooma Ceasing Operations Today,' *Brisbane Telegraph*, 9 October 1952, p. 9; 'Double on Tax,' *The Courier-Mail*, 25 October 1952, p. 3.

⁵⁰ Wettenhall, 'The Australian Whaling Commission in Retrospect,' p. 80; 'Whaling Coming to Queensland,' *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 6 May 1952, p. 2.

⁵¹ 'Company Plans Catch Whales Off Q'ld Coast,' *Morning Bulletin*, 27 June 1951, p. 4; 'Whaling Venture being Planned for Moreton Island,' *Daily Mercury*, 27 June 1951, p. 1; 'Whales Coming to Queensland,' *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 28 June 1951, p. 5; 'Advertising,' *Truth*, 5 August 1951, p. 47.

⁵² 'Moreton Whaling Station to be Established on West Coast,' *Brisbane Telegraph*, 27 June 1951, p. 2.

⁵³ 'Train Whalers,' *Sunday Mail*, 9 March 1952, p. 5.

⁵⁴ 'First Whalers Put to Sea Next Week,' *The Courier-Mail*, 28 April 1953, p. 5; 'Whaling to Start Soon,' *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 7 May 1953, p. 9.

⁵⁵ 'International Bride' of Whalers at Tangalooma,' *Good Neighbour*, 1 December 1960, p. 4.

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Operations at the Tangalooma Whaling Station consisted of two distinct but related elements. First, there was the hunting of the whales, and second, there was the flensing and processing of the carcasses into their valuable by-products. Crews undertook the hunting of whales on whale chasers. Equipped with harpoons and winches, these ships, measuring around 115 feet long, were specifically designed for hunting and catching whales. The process of capturing a whale saw the chasers hunt down and shoot the whales with a harpoon with a two-pound time fused warhead.⁵⁶ The warhead was designed to explode when it entered the whale. Once being harpooned, the whale was drawn to the side of a chaser, where a crew member used a flensing knife to cut off its tail flukes to make the carcass easier to handle.⁵⁷ The chaser then delivered the dead whale to Tangalooma Whaling Station, where it was transported to the slipway to await the next stage of the process on the flensing deck.⁵⁸

The first chaser arrived in Queensland in May 1952, just before the whaling season.⁵⁹ Due to their role in the hunting of whales, chasers were explicitly designed to operate in the hostile waters where whales lived and migrated. The initial three vessels used by Whale Products, *KOS I*, *II*, and *VII*, were all built in Britain in 1929 as Thor Class whale chasers.⁶⁰ Before coming to Australia, a Norwegian company operated the chasers in Antarctic waters. In contrast, during the Second World War, the vessels were requisitioned for use by the Royal Norwegian Navy and Royal Navy in various roles.⁶¹ Over time, the original vessels were replaced by newer ships. For example, in 1957, the *Firern*, renamed *Tangalooma*, replaced *KOS VII* while *Thorbyn* and *Thorgrim*, renamed *Looma 2* and *Looma 3*, respectively, replaced *KOS I* and *II* in 1962.⁶² The vessels were sold off when operations ceased in 1962, but *KOS I* and *KOS II* returned to Moreton Island and were sunk as artificial reefs in 1971 and 1972.⁶³

Once the chasers brought the whales into the whaling station, they waited for a dinghy to come out and collect the whale carcass. The dinghy connected a line to the chaser from a bowser on the slipway. The whales were then released from the chaser and transported to the bottom of the slipway.⁶⁴ Then, this line was replaced with a heavier line that transported the carcass up to the

⁵⁶ NAA, A12111, 1/1960/16/151, Tangalooma Whaling station, on the east coast of Australia, is a classic example of how men from many countries work smoothly together in a booming Australian enterprise. The station, on Moreton Island, about 30 miles from Brisbane Queensland, has a "crew" of 142 for an eight-to-10-week season in June-August each year. Captain Bjorn Laurantz, of *Kos 1*, takes a shot at a whale off Moreton Island, c. 1960; NAA, A12111, 1/1960/16/153, Tangalooma Whaling station, on the east coast of Australia, is a classic example of how men from many countries work smoothly together in a booming Australian enterprise. The station, on Moreton Island, about 30 miles from Brisbane Queensland, has a "crew" of 142 for an eight-to-10-week season in June-August each year. Warhead is screwed to a killer harpoon. The warhead contains 2 lb. of black power which is exploded by a time fuse when the harpoon enters the whale, c. 1960.

⁵⁷ NAA, A12111, 1/1960/16/152, Tangalooma Whaling station, on the east coast of Australia, is a classic example of how men from many countries work smoothly together in a booming Australian enterprise. The station, on Moreton Island, about 30 miles from Brisbane Queensland, has a "crew" of 142 for an eight-to-10-week season in June-August each year. A "catch" has been drawn to the side of a chaser and a crewman uses a flensing knife to cut off its tale flukes. This makes the carcass easier to handle, c. 1960.

⁵⁸ NAA, A12111, 1/1960/16/155, Tangalooma Whaling station, on the east coast of Australia, is a classic example of how men from many countries work smoothly together in a booming Australian enterprise. The station, on Moreton Island, about 30 miles from Brisbane Queensland, has a "crew" of 142 for an eight-to-10-week season in June-August each year. Dead whale is delivered to tow-boat Tangalooma, c. 1960.

⁵⁹ 'First Whale Chaser Arrives,' *Cairns Post*, 12 May 1952, p. 3; 'From Norway to Tangalooma,' *The Courier-Mail*, 15 May 1952, p. 1; 'Chasers Kept in Sight all way from Norway,' *Brisbane Telegraph*, 23 May 1952, p. 2.

⁶⁰ Jones, *The Whalers of Tangalooma*, p. 24.

⁶¹ Jones, *The Whalers of Tangalooma*, p. 24.

⁶² Jones, *The Whalers of Tangalooma*, p. 25, 29.

⁶³ Jones, *The Whalers of Tangalooma*, p. 29.

⁶⁴ NAA, A12111, 1/1960/16/157, Tangalooma Whaling station, on the east coast of Australia, is a classic example of how men from many countries work smoothly together in a booming Australian enterprise. The station, on Moreton Island, about 30 miles from Brisbane Queensland, has a "crew" of 142 for an eight-to-10-week season in June-August each year. Two humpback whales at foot of slipway, Tangalooma, c. 1960.

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flensing deck.⁶⁵ Once landed, the flensing deck and the factory located beneath played a central role in processing the blubber and bone meal that was so valuable. As such, the flensing deck and factory were the critical elements of the Tangalooma Whaling Station, where the processing of the whales took place.

It was on the flensing deck where the hard work of processing carcasses took place. However, before any flensing could be undertaken, the catch was inspected by an officer of the Commonwealth Fisheries Department. The company was only allowed to capture and process whales greater than 35 feet long. If they did not meet these criteria, the catch came off Whale Products' quota, and the proceeds went to the Australian Government.⁶⁶ Once inspected, the workers began removing the blubber from the whale using flensing knives.⁶⁷ Flensing knives, measuring around 1.5 metres long with a curved blade, could cut through the flesh and blubber like a 'knife through hot butter.'⁶⁸

Given the challenges associated with flensing, the process undertaken was very 'exacting' with the 'same pattern followed [on] every whale.'⁶⁹ The process was extremely bloody, with the flensing deck becoming very slippery. Lines were attached to the whales as cuts were made, and the 'blubber was peeled off the carcass in great, white strips.'⁷⁰ The strips were cut into smaller pieces that were fed down into 'hatches' that led down to cookers in the factory below. This process took roughly an hour to complete.⁷¹ Once the blubber, flesh and intestines were separated, they were further processed in the factory into their useful by-products of oil and bone meal.

During its ten years of operations, Tangalooma Whaling Station became an exciting curiosity to the local community in Brisbane and broader Queensland. Tourist trips were provided to Tangalooma from Brisbane to see the whaling station in operation.⁷² Central to the sites visited by tourists was the flensing deck and its operations. As one visitor recalled, 'the most unpleasant memory I have of [Tangalooma] is that of the clear blue sea around the slipway discoloured by the blood of many whales, and the waves lapping on the clean white beach nearby were red with this blood.'⁷³ As well as being a curiosity for the locals, school children and scout troops also regularly visited the whaling station to learn about the industry.⁷⁴ The company, Whale Products, also benefited from the

⁶⁵ NAA, A12111, 1/1960/16/155, Tangalooma Whaling station, on the east coast of Australia, is a classic example of how men from many countries work smoothly together in a booming Australian enterprise. The station, on Moreton Island, about 30 miles from Brisbane Queensland, has a "crew" of 142 for an eight-to-10-week season in June-August each year. View of the slipway at Tangalooma, with a whale being dragged up to flensing deck. Whales are about 40 ft. long, weigh about one ton to the foot, c. 1960.

⁶⁶ NAA, A12111, 1/1960/16/158, Tangalooma Whaling station, on the east coast of Australia, is a classic example of how men from many countries work smoothly together in a booming Australian enterprise. The station, on Moreton Island, about 30 miles from Brisbane Queensland, has a "crew" of 142 for an eight-to-10-week season in June-August each year. Government inspector measures whale on flensing deck. Whales under 35ft. should not be taken. If they are taken in error, they come off station's quota, but proceeds go to Australian Government, c. 1960.

⁶⁷ NAA, A12111, 1/1960/16/159, Men begin work of removing blubber from a Humpback whale at Tangalooma Whaling Station on Morton Island, about 30 miles from Brisbane, Qld, c. 1960; NAA, A12111, 1/1960/16/160, Men begin work of removing blubber from a Humpback whale at Tangalooma Whaling Station on Morton Island, about 30 miles from Brisbane, Qld, c. 1960; NAA, A12111, 1/1960/16/161, Men begin work of removing blubber from a Humpback whale at Tangalooma Whaling Station on Morton Island, about 30 miles from Brisbane, Qld. C. 1960.

⁶⁸ Jones, *The Whalers of Tangalooma*, p. 35.

⁶⁹ Jones, *The Whalers of Tangalooma*, p. 35.

⁷⁰ Jones, *The Whalers of Tangalooma*, p. 35.

⁷¹ Jones, *The Whalers of Tangalooma*, p. 35.

⁷² Kay Cohen et al, *Lost Brisbane and Surrounding Areas, 1860-1960* (Brisbane, QLD: The Royal Historical Society of Queensland, 2014), p. 295.

⁷³ Jones, *The Whalers of Tangalooma*, p. 36.

⁷⁴ M.S. Somerville, 'The She Blows!', *The Portal* (December 1952), pp. 57-8; 'Scouts to See Whales,' *The Beaudesert Times*, 27 May 1955, p. 1; 'Interesting Day: Scouts Trip to Tangalooma visiting the Tangalooma Whaling Station,' *The Beaudesert Times*, 24 June 1955, p. 3.

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'sympathetic publicity' provided by radio and television personalities Robert and Dolly Dyer. Robert Dyer, born in the US, was a keen game fisher and regularly followed the operation of the chasers to be able to fish for sharks who were attracted by whale blood. Dyer regularly reported on these escapades, much to the benefit of Whale Products. Finally, the operations conducted by Whale Products also became the subject of songs and at least one set of stamps that were displayed at the General Post Office in Brisbane in 1958.⁷⁵

The decline and closure of the Tangalooma Whaling Station

After the success of the 1952 season, Whale Products continued to enjoy great success in their operations from 1953 through to the late-1950s. However, while the capture and killing of humpback whales had been highly successful, almost as soon as the process began, questions were raised about the sustainability of the operations. In August 1952, the Director of the Queensland Museum, George Mack, suggested that hunting was unsustainable due to the slow reproduction rate of humpback whales.⁷⁶ Whale Products disputed this. However, by the late-1950s, Whale Products struggled due to the increased cost of whale oil.

By the early 1960s, the so-called 'lean years' began to affect the operations of Whale Products. This was because earlier successes had seriously depleted the stock of humpback whales off Queensland's coast. In 1961, it became clear that stocks of humpback whales in Queensland's waters had become scarce, and Whale Products was 69 whales short of its allotted quota.⁷⁷ In 1962, the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation predicted that stocks would take ten years to return to normal levels.⁷⁸ Given this, Whale Products were forced to conclude that whaling in waters off Queensland was unlikely ever to be a 'worthwhile proposition' again.⁷⁹ As a result, Whale Products closed its operations in Brisbane and surrendered its lease to the Queensland Government. While Whale Products closed its operations, its parent company, Whale Industries, continued to operate its other subsidiaries until the 1970s.⁸⁰ While some commercial whaling operations continued in Australia until 1978, the whaling of humpbacks ended in 1963 when the International Whaling Commission introduced a ban on hunting humpback whales.

The Tangalooma Tourist Resort

After Tangalooma Whaling Station closed in 1963, this area was auctioned off as a perpetual lease (over State-owned land) and marketed as a site for a 'superb tourist resort.'⁸¹ The site, including at least some element of the old whaling station, including the flensing deck and factory beneath, was initially purchased by Greg Cavill, a Brisbane based hotelier, and a 'syndicate' of businessmen.⁸² The Tangalooma Moreton Island Resort was being advertised for holidays by 1965.⁸³ By the 1970s,

⁷⁵ NAA, J3109, 4/683, Photograph of stamp display in colonnade at Brisbane General Post Office, featuring fishing and the whaling industry. Displayed 14 June to 30 July 1958; 'Sing Tangalooma' – New Sea Shanty,' *The Courier-Mail*, 5 August 1952, p. 1.

⁷⁶ 'No Future on Whaling?,' *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 16 August 1952, p. 2; 'Waling End?,' *Daily Mercury*, 16 August 1952, p. 16; 'Whaling Industry End Forecast,' *Queensland Times*, 16 August 1952, p. 2.

⁷⁷ Jones, *The Whalers of Tangalooma*, p. 11.

⁷⁸ QSA, PR1758021, General Manager, Whale Products Pty. Ltd. to the Chief Commissioner, Land Administration Commission, 2 November 1962.

⁷⁹ QSA, PR1758021, General Manager, Whale Products Pty. Ltd. to the Chief Commissioner, Land Administration Commission, 2 November 1962.

⁸⁰ Jones, *The Whalers of Tangalooma*, p. 12.

⁸¹ 'In Queensland This Week,' *The Canberra Times*, 5 April 1963, p. 2.

⁸² 'Resort Boom to Time-Share,' *The Australian Jewish News*, 14 September 1984, p. 47.

⁸³ SLQ, Tangalooma Resort, Moreton Island, c. 1965.



the new resort at Tangalooma was advertised as an 'inexpensive' holiday that offered 'all-round enjoyment' to explore Moreton Island.⁸⁴ Ownership of the resort, including the remnants of the factory and flensing deck, has subsequently changed several times.

While many of the Tangalooma Whaling Station buildings have been removed, the flensing deck and the factory area beneath have remained as remnants of the site's previous use. These remnants have, over time, been adaptively reused to serve the purpose of the resort. For example, in the 1970s, Tangalooma Tourist Resort converted the flensing deck and factory beneath into a sporting complex.⁸⁵ Two squash courts were built in the former factory while the flensing deck became a tennis court. Since the 1970s, Tangalooma resort has become an environmental tourism venture with the humpback whales as a key attraction. The resort itself has developed into a holiday destination that offers a range of accommodation choices, through sub-leased buildings and lots, allowing individuals to 'owner occupy' or rent through the resort.

⁸⁴ 'Advertising,' *Walkabout* 37, no. 9 (1 September 1971), p. 42.

⁸⁵ 'Island Sport,' *Noosa News*, 19 July 1973, p. 10.



DESCRIPTION

The former Flensing Deck and Factory beneath is a substantial concrete structure located at Tangalooma Point, in the grounds of the Tangalooma Island Resort, at the centre of the western edge of Moreton Island. The structure is located approximately 30 metres from the beach's edge and approximately 50 metres from the high-tide mark. No structures are built between the Flensing Deck and Moreton Bay, providing exceptional views between the two features. Surrounding the structure are areas of open grassy patches, mature palm trees, a series of concrete paths, electric light poles, and a small playground at the southeast corner. The area beneath the former Flensing Deck housed the Factory associated with the whaling station operations.

General description

The Flensing Deck consists of a ground-level concrete floor slab and a raised concrete deck, measuring approximately 54m x 24m, aligned east-west. The upper deck is supported by a series of straight concrete columns, topped with a truncated cone capital. These columns are laid out in a regular grid pattern, aligned east-west with the structure.

A low concrete wall runs around the perimeter of the upper deck, with small openings on the south and north edges, potentially the original locations of winches (since removed).⁸⁶ A large section of the western edge of this wall is open, where the original timber ramp connected from the beach to the deck.⁸⁷ A non-original awning, supported on non-original treated timber posts, has been connected to the lower edge of the deck at this location, angling down to the ground at a steep angle, to provide an extra sheltered area, which is paved at the ground level. The remains of a painted tennis court are located on the surface of this upper deck.

Six circular openings are located near the southern edge of the upper deck, connecting to the lower area, originally used to drop blubber directly into digestors (cookers) below. These openings have been covered over to prevent anything passing through them. In addition, several small metal loops attached to the concrete of the upper deck, likely originally installed to connect chains via pulley blocks to the (now missing) winches around the edge of the Flensing Deck.

The upper deck is supported by individual columns around the structure. and has non-original lighting affixed. A non-original concrete stage area has been installed in the southeast corner of the lower level of the Flensing Deck. Historical photographs from the 1960s indicate that the lower level was originally enclosed, however these walls have been removed.⁸⁸

A separate concrete deck attached to the Flensing Deck at the north edge and the building built in below, is not original.⁸⁹

Significant features

Features of cultural heritage significance include:

- Views between the Flensing Deck and Moreton Bay
- The original concrete structures

⁸⁶ Brisbane City Archives (BCA), BCC-MB-43B

⁸⁷ BCA, BCC-S35-9311099

⁸⁸ NAA J2364, 2728

⁸⁹ NAA J2364, 2728



- Any original fittings, fixtures, and features
- Metal loops/hooks and their location
- Low concrete retaining wall on the upper deck
- Circular openings in the upper deck
- Original concrete columns
- Remnants of original timber planks

Non-significant features

Non-significant features include:

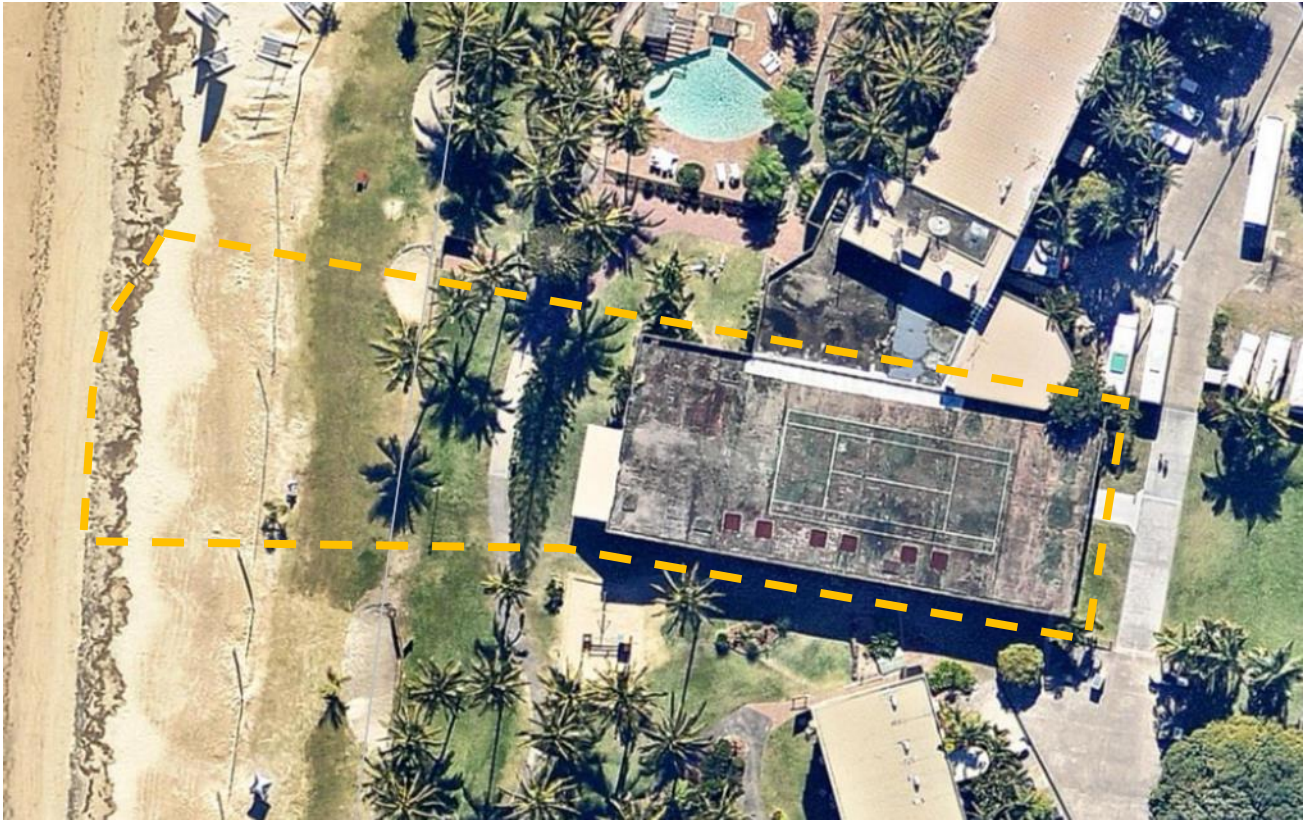
- Non-original concrete deck and building at the north edge of original Flensing Deck structure
- Non-original fittings and fixtures and finishes.
- Non-original concrete stage
- Non-original awning including timber posts
- Non-original paved area
- Surrounding garden beds and plantings

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CURTILAGE

The curtilage captures all significant or original elements of the place as described and consists of part 0 Tangalooma, Moreton Island (part of Lot 8, SL8209), inclusive of the former flensing deck and the land between it and the mean high water spring tide.



Source: Brisbane City Plan Online Mapping

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STATEMENTS OF SIGNIFICANCE

<p>Criterion A Historical</p> <p>The place is important in demonstrating the evolution or pattern of the city's or local area's history.</p>	<p>As remnants of the former Tangalooma Whaling Station the flensing deck, factory structure beneath and their relationship to the bay provide evidence of Brisbane maritime and industrial history and the City's whaling industry in the 1950s. The whaling station was the only facility built in Queensland and provided work for both Australian and overseas workers, most notably Norwegians, until operations ended in 1962 due to the depletion of the natural resource as a result of over whaling.</p>
<p>Criterion B Rarity</p> <p>The place demonstrates rare, uncommon or endangered aspects of the city's or local area's cultural heritage.</p>	<p>Purpose-built in 1952, the remnants of the flensing deck of the former Tangalooma Whaling Station, the factory structure beneath and their relationship to the bay are the only examples of infrastructure associated with a rare form of industrial activity in Queensland. The remnant infrastructure provides rare evidence of Brisbane's whaling industry, a maritime industrial activity that no longer exists.</p>
<p>Criterion C Scientific</p> <p>The place has the potential to provide information that will contribute to the knowledge and understanding of the city's or local area's history.</p>	<p>The remnants of the concrete flensing deck at the former Tangalooma Whaling Station, the factory structure beneath and their relationship to the bay have the potential to yield technical information that contributes to an understanding of the development of the whaling industry in Brisbane and its associated infrastructure after the Second World War. The flensing deck and factory structure also have the potential to contribute information about industrial processes associated with the whaling industry.</p>
<p>Criterion D Representative</p> <p>The place is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a particular class or classes of cultural places.</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>Criterion E Aesthetic</p> <p>The place is important because of its aesthetic significance</p>	<p>N/A</p>

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<p>Criterion F Technical</p> <p>The place is important in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technological achievement at a particular period.</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>Criterion G Social</p> <p>The place has a strong or special association with the life or work of a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons.</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>Criterion H Historical Association</p> <p>The place has a special association with the life or work of a particular person, group or organisation of importance in the city's or local area's history</p>	<p>N/A</p>

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