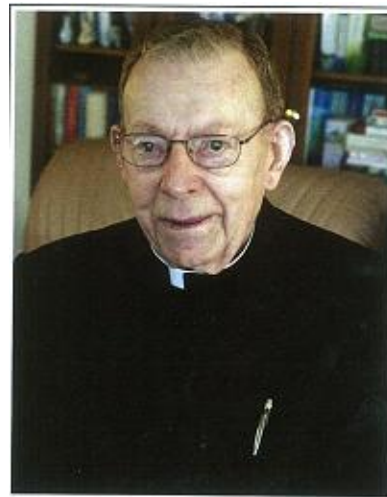


Obituary to BBGAC Life Member

Father Joseph ("Joe") Staunton,  
Priest of the Catholic Church,  
Fisherman

who died on 15th October 2012, aged 88.



There is a long association between fish, fishing and the Christian faith. Jonah and the whale (well not strictly a fish) and Peter the fisherman and disciple of Jesus, the feeding of the five thousand with the loaves and fishes and Jesus telling his disciples Peter, James and John to cast their nets on the other side of the boat where upon their nets filled with fish, when until then the efforts of their night's fishing had been fruitless, however there have been few such intrepid, dedicated and spiritual fishermen as Reverend Father Joe Staunton.

Born in County Mayo Ireland in 1924 and one of nine children, he was ordained into the Catholic Church in 1947. He held numerous positions as an assistant priest on arriving in Australia and he was latterly appointed Parish Priest of Cobargo in 1965, which also included the Parish of Bermagui. This of course is where his long and distinguished association with the Bermagui Big Game Anglers Club began.

Father Joe, as he was affectionately known by all, had always been a keen fisherman. His quarry was not limited by hook, line and sinker as he was a "dedicated fisher of God's people" as well. On joining the BBGAC it was not long before his organisational and diplomatic skills were recognised and ultimately he was elected President of the Club in 1970 and was re-elected a further six times, thus him becoming the longest serving President the Club has had in its sixty seven year history. He is accurately described in the Club's history, Game fishing at Bermagui by Judy Hearn, "as leading the BBGAC into the modern age".

Father Joe realised the world of game fishing at Bermagui was changing with the arrival of what he referred to as the "mosquito fleet". Dozens of boats began to be trailered to the port from far afield and especially from Victoria. He was a proponent for all anglers to be accommodated and he was instrumental in the Club finally obtaining a weighstation as well as being one of the very early pioneers of the tag and release program which today has become the norm in the pursuit of sport fish all over the world. To quote him, he once said, "too many 'business suits' hanging fish for trinkets and trophies".

The Club's 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary took place during Father Joe's tenure as President and he flagged off the fleet from the sail past from the deck of the largest resident vessel so far seen at Bermagui, Geoff Hammond's "Mia Mia". The presentation of a top class game rod and reel, by Jim Allen of the Compleat Angler, was made to him at the anniversary dinner for his services to Australian game fishing. Soon after the NSW Game Fishing Association's Zones had been newly formed and he was elected Chairman of the Southern Zone for two years in 1977 and 1978. Ultimately he was made a Life Member of the Bermagui Club in 1979.

There are many fishing tales to be told concerning Father Joe, mostly while fishing with his good friend the legendary Johnny Jubb aboard the famous "Vida" and latterly the "Alison" but one worth mentioning and demonstrating the character and jovial nature of the man was when he hooked a very large kingfish on 12 pound line. "I was working away diligently for about twenty minutes at the Pinnacles just south of Montagu Island. The water was gin clear and I seemed to be pulling this thing up and up and finally some twenty to twenty five feet down, it was so clear, I could see this enormous kingfish. I was not doing too badly, I thought, with this twelve pound line to have him up to here. So I continued to haul away as best I could and then in full view and quite casually, my hooked kingfish leaned across and snatched a two pound trevally and snaffled it and I realised the rotter didn't even know it was hooked! So without more argument I broke the line and left him to his meal of trevally". He also fished with such notable anglers as Peter Goadby and Loren Grey, son of Zane Grey, when he visited Bermagui retracing his father's footsteps.

Father Joe moved parishes to Bega and finally into retirement to Canberra where he soon busied himself as a relief Priest and strong promoter of his native country. Meeting numerous Irish dignitaries at the Irish Embassy's Saint Patrick's Day receptions including the Irish Presidents Mary Robinson and Mary McAleese. He continued to visit Bermagui to fish from time to time and rekindle his interests in the Club's progress, which latterly always included staying with fellow Life Members, Adrian and Margaret Crothers. His last official duty was to flag away the fleet in the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Tournament in 1986 aboard Grey Gull accompanied by his illustrious, and extremely sea sick dear friend, proprietor of the Horseshoe Bay Hotel, Bill O'Shea.

The passing of Father Joe Staunton really is the end of a particularly noteworthy era of the Club, game fishing and Bermagui. Most of his old fishing friends and compatriots, he has now joined in a better place.

Father Joe's first love was his church but following a close second was his love of fishing. What subject will his first words be on when he meets St Peter? One wonders which will have the best fishing tale to tell.....

Frank Foster

