

# A lifetime in fisheries – the story of Stan Crothers

Stan retired on 3 April after over 30 years with fisheries.



Stan Crothers accepts a farewell gift from MFish CEO Wayne McNee.

**“I was locked in a blast freezer full of frozen cartons of blue cod fillets and left for dead. I fought my way out by ramming one of the cartons into the fan that drove the cold air around and then used the same method to bang the hinges off the freezer door.”**

“Once out I collapsed, freezing cold and half-conscious, before dragging myself to the factory manager’s place for a cup of tea. I then drove into town to report it to police. Nothing ever came of it as I couldn’t prove who locked me in. Maybe it was just an accident,” he said with a wry smile.

## WHERE IT ALL BEGAN

Such an experience would break many people – especially if it happened early on in your career and you were fresh out of university. But not Stan Crothers.

For Stan, the experience was simply one of many that he experienced while working as the sole fishery officer in the Chatham Islands during the mid-70s. While it was a challenging time, it set him up for a career in fisheries and he’s content to sum up his time there as ‘character building’.

“It was a real adventure and it was tough. It was the end of the crayfish boom and the beginning of paua. Pretty wild-west. Essentially, I was the person standing in the way of others making lots of money. Many of the locals made life difficult for me and my family. I had to decide which way to go. I could either tolerate the situation and do my job or I could turn a blind eye and get on with the people around me.”



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In the 1980s Stan became responsible for the design and implementation of the compliance regime of the quota management system (QMS) which forms the backbone of fisheries management today. He then took a secondment to the National Marine Fishery Service in Washington DC – and it was there he honed his interest in policy development.

It put him in good stead for dealing with the challenges that Māori later made to the quota management system during 1988 and 1989.

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And more he did. His work later contributed to what we know today as The Fisheries Deed of Settlement and the associated customary fishing regulations.

“The fundamentals of the Fisheries Deed of Settlement are sound – as are the fundamentals of the QMS. What we have now are two interrelated pillars of our world-leading fisheries management system.”

He chose the first option. And it’s that experience he credits for helping him to learn a lot about himself and giving him an early understanding of human behaviour. It also formed the foundation that has kept Stan Crothers in the fisheries business for most of his life – propelling him through the ranks from fishery officer to senior management.

#### MEMORABLE ACHIEVEMENTS

Stan moved on to set up the compliance systems for the soon-to-be-established Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). He trained many fishery officers over a three-year period and worked his way up to the job of Chief Fisheries Officer.

He professionalised the fishery officer group by bringing in uniforms, setting up new policies and procedures, and generally changing the whole way fishery officers went about doing their work.

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An example of a fishery officer's uniform  
– first introduced by Stan in the 1970s.

#### MINISTRY OF FISHERIES


In the early 1990s Stan headed the taskforce which went on to establish the stand-alone Ministry of Fisheries. He spent nine months putting together a structure and systems and overseeing a complex staff and asset transfer process so that the Ministry of Fisheries could open its doors in July 1995.

He was also at the helm of other improvements to fisheries, including such initiatives as establishing a framework to out-source or devolve non-core government services, establishing FishServe to run the quota administrative systems, and helping improve the economic and environmental performance of the seafood sector.

#### RETIREMENT AND REFLECTIONS

So where to now for a man that clearly has fishing running through his veins? Stan has chosen to get together with a bunch of like-minded retired fisheries people from around the world, and set up a not-for-profit organisation. The aim of the organisation is to work on improving fisheries management for developing countries. “A way of giving back the investment that the system has made in me,” he said.

All this from a man who says, “My intention was never to become a suit or a Wellington bureaucrat – what a thought! It was the ‘70s – sex, drugs, and rock and roll!”

For more information on the QMS or Fisheries Deed of Settlement, visit the Ministry's website: [www.fish.govt.nz](http://www.fish.govt.nz) 

#### ADMINISTRATION '70s-STYLE

“Things were so different and inefficient. It could take days to replace a biro. You had to sign a pen out, and when it ran out of ink, go and ask for a replacement and sign that out too.

If you punctured a tyre it could take a couple of days to sort because of the requisition forms involved and the various steps required for clearance.

Going anywhere down south from Wellington took a couple of days because at first we had to go by boat both ways, but then things got better and we could boat one way and fly back. If we stayed overnight anywhere though it generally meant staying in a ‘dive’.

We’ve come a long way. To me, Gliding On and Yes Minister weren’t comedies; they were documentaries.”