



MICHAELA BOLAND



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Ocean harvest

Everyone has their favourite spot, but for this long-distance travelling family, the best seafood of all was on the Eyre Peninsula. You've just got to be on the lookout for sharks

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AT the remote little beach of Point Sinclair, close to South Australia's famed Cactus surf break in the Great Australian Bight, I came across a small memorial plaque bearing the photo of an 11-year-old boy called Wade Gray Shipard.

According to the sign, in 1975 Wade had swum out from the beach to greet an incoming crayfish boat and buy some of its catch for his mum. He never made it — he was taken by a shark. Locals later honoured Wade's memory by building a shark-proof swimming enclosure alongside the jetty.

Almost 40 years later, looking out at the water from the now-deserted little strip of sand, it's easy to imagine the ocean bobbing with fishing boats — and even easier to imagine sharks patrolling its depths.

SA's Eyre Peninsula is scarred by numerous such stories of boys and men losing their lives in the pursuit of seafood sought either for themselves or commercial purposes.

At Streaky Bay, Sophia Edmunds, one of the owners of the second-generation seafood retailer and wholesaler Streaky Bay Marine Products, explained the absence of scallops in her shop display.

"We used to sell plenty and they're still out there," she says, but adds that 10 years ago a scallop diver was taken by a shark. She shrugs; the town of 1000 people lost its appetite for the sweet white shellfish.

That death, of diver Paul Buckland west of nearby Smoky Bay in 2002, is recorded on the website of Ceduna's Business and Tourism Association, alongside the names of 51 others lost during the last century to sharks and in boating mishaps. Many of those individuals were commercial or recreational fishermen.

Not by accident is the rugged Eyre Peninsula peppered with places named Anxious Bay, Denial Bay, Coffin Bay, Point Avoid, Mount Misery and Cape Adieu.

But the trade persists, with the remote stretch of coast, 50 minutes flying time from Adelaide, still as well known for the seafood that lured those fishermen to its depths as



for its headline-grabbing ocean fatalities.

The popularity of Coffin Bay oysters in some of the country's best restaurants is prompting holidaymakers from around the country to book trips to the source.

However, it pays to check ahead of time that what you're hoping for will be available in your preferred part of the coast.

Spurred by memories of visiting Coffin Bay as a child, Sydneysider Melanie Giuffre booked a post-Christmas holiday there with her family, having promised her seafood-loving husband an experience on a par with previous seafood adventures at Port Willunga and Kangaroo Island.

"One of my greatest food memories was getting lobsters straight off the boat at Kangaroo Island, and I was hoping for the same level of freshness at Coffin Bay," she says. "It wasn't that. We didn't have the food experience we were expecting . . . the best seafood we had in Coffin Bay were the pipis the kids dug up off the beach."

Giuffre says the oysters she bought in the town were below par and out of season. Not that she blames local operators for that, but it stands as a warning to people booking trips that they should take the time to check whether their seafood of choice will be in season when they visit. She declined the opportunity to pay \$85 a kg for lobster and the prawns she bought had been frozen.

The Giuffres left Coffin Bay and drove just over 200km north along the coast to spend a night at Streaky Bay, where they were so impressed by the seafood they intend to return next summer.

Craig McCathie is the owner of seafood retailer and wholesaler the Fresh Fish Place in Port Lincoln, the nation's biggest fishing harbour, 23km east of Coffin Bay. He agrees Streaky Bay stands out as a destination for seafood-loving holidaymakers.

The town is small and picturesque, visitors can swim (within shark nets) and feast on local catch at cafe-restaurant Mocean, the Streaky Bay Hotel and Streaky Bay Marine Products.

Giuffre rated Mocean highly, while the flake and blue