



Ian Robert Turner

16 September 1946 – 3 April 2002

It is with great sadness that I write of the passing of Ian Turner who drowned tragically at Penrhyn, Cook Islands, on 3 April 2002.

Ian was Australia's first local pearl technician. When I began working in the Australian pearling industry in the early 1980s, Ian had already established his reputation as a technician. Even six years later, when I began seeding round pearls, technical knowledge was not readily forthcoming. It is easy then to imagine the difficulties Ian must have faced in acquiring his seeding skills, and the dedication it must have taken for him to master his craft. He moved to Broome from Melbourne in 1975 with a mechanical engineering degree and lured by the warmth as well as by work on pearling luggers. He worked with Broome Pearls for some years and was introduced to pearl-seeding in 1979 by a technician named Hyuga, and later he honed his skills with Mizuno, a business partner.

Ian had a quiet nature, yet he was always enthusiastic about his work and always willing to share his knowledge. I remember, as a new freelance technician, tentatively phoning him one day when we were both in Broome between respective jobs. He immediately invited me around and spent an intensive hour talking operating technique with me, sketching diagrams to illustrate his points, and being generally encouraging. It was a surprising and welcome change from the customary technicians' reticence.

Over the years Ian worked in many remote places away from Australia, including Kish Island in Iran, Dongonab Bay in the Sudanese Red Sea, several atolls in French Polynesia as well as Manihiki and Penrhyn Atolls in the Cook Islands. Ian always thought deeply about his work, took pleasure in making big pearls, and liked to experiment to improve his technique. His past career as mechanical engineer remained useful too, as he made many of his own operating instruments.

In recent years I also began working in the Cook Islands so Ian and I saw each other from time to time. He taught his daughter Zoe to seed and demonstrated his work to interested locals. Once I visited the seeding house on a small *kaoa* in Manihiki lagoon, where Ian worked and preferred to live. On the wall behind his operating table were many pearl-oyster shells with different characteristics upon which Ian had written interpretive notes in felt-pen as a guide to the farm workers. I was reminded of my Broome visit years before and could see that he was still sharing his knowledge.

We grieve with Ian's family. At the time of his death, Ian was soon to become a grandfather so we also mourn that he will not see his first grandchild. Yet, in another sense, Ian will always be remembered and respected as one of the grandfathers of Australian pearling. Rest in peace, grandfather.

Berni Aquilina

