



A tribute to the formidable Pam Williams

Pam Williams, the founder of Wanganui Trawlers, which later became Wanganui Seafoods, passed away on October 5, aged 88.

Born Pamela Pearce, she was the only daughter of six children, home-schooled with her brothers in the Waitotara Valley near Whanganui, until she went to boarding school at Woodford House in Havelock North.

After marrying, she ran a successful Romney Stud until her marriage ended in the 1960s, which is when Pam Williams became a true force to be reckoned with.

In a decade where most women didn't even work out of home, Williams bought a fishing trawler and with her lawyer, Gordon Swann, began what was to be a business empire for five decades.

Former CEO of Seafood New Zealand, Tim Pankhurst, finally got Pam Williams to agree to an interview last year, something that required dogged determination.

He wrote in his article for Seafood New Zealand magazine that, "statues are out of favour, but if Whanganui ever commissions one, it should be to honour Pam Williams. Made of Steel."

From the first trawler, *Stella Maris*, the company grew into New Zealand's second biggest privately-run fishing business, and sixth largest quota holder, exporting to 36 countries.

In true Ma Williams fashion, she told Pankhurst that if he wanted to see the *Stella Maris*, it was at the bottom of Cook Strait.

The next vessel was *Supernova*, then *Oceana*, then *Kaikohe* in 1977.

The next four vessels were operated in a joint venture with a Korean company, Oyang Fisheries, after Williams lobbied Ministers for some deepwater quota once the 200 nautical mile Exclusive Economic Zone was formed. Those vessels were named *Oyang No 3*, *No 5*, *No 85*, and *No 86* and it was these trawlers that Williams claimed were the first to discover orange roughy on the Challenger Plateau.

Pam Williams, who no staff called 'Pam', rather 'Mrs Williams', became a close friend of other pioneers in the industry. Pankhurst tells the story of the first meeting with Solander founder Charles Hufflett. "Our first encounter in 1966 was a stern telling off," he says. "I was skipper of the *Sea Harvester II* and fished this large vessel inside the rolling grounds off Whanganui. Pam told John Treadwell, then managing director of Sealord, that large vessels should not be 'poaching' on inshore grounds used by her fleet. "I received a clear instruction not to trawl there again." But they later worked together in a politically charged sector undergoing rapid expansion. "These were times of great administrative change and Pam was a stalwart in fighting those which were impractical.

"Armed with a large handbag she was a force to be reckoned with. Even the youthful Peter Talley would keep his distance."

There was a close relationship with Sealord in the early days and a mutual respect.

Current Deepwater Group chair Tom Birdsall worked with Williams on industry issues and also trod carefully. "Pam was ferocious and did not take prisoners," he says.

Ever well-dressed and immaculately groomed, Williams traversed the male-dominated industry for 50 years.

In an obituary in the Whanganui Chronicle, her daughter Nicola tells how Williams used to fly Tiger Moths.

"She loved flying and she was a very good sportswoman. She played a lot of sports and she could pick up a tennis racquet after not touching one for years and play a fierce game."

Her family has held a private farewell which included a flyover by pilot Richmond Harding in his de Havilland Tiger Moth.

The family plan to hold a larger memorial service in Whanganui on November 26 with the proviso that the Covid-19 restrictions are at level 1.

***This column has relied heavily on an interview conducted by Tim Pankhurst. The industry is grateful he persevered and provided us with a true account of a remarkable woman.**



A message from Deputy Director General, Fisheries New Zealand, Dan Bolger

I want to thank everyone in the seafood sector who has responded to the challenges presented by COVID-19 with hard work and professionalism.

Thanks to your efforts we continue to produce the high-quality seafood New Zealand is known for around the world.

There can be no one-size-fits-all solution for an industry as diverse as seafood. The challenges you've faced have been as varied as the many different roles within the sector, from the fisher working in confined spaces at sea to the worker processing seafood on the factory floor, to aquaculture farmers and scientists.

We all make contributions to the fight against COVID in our own ways, but there is one thing we can all do to make a difference, and that is getting vaccinated.

In my own family, we all chose to get vaccinated as soon as we could. We wanted to do all we could to keep our wider family, friends and community safe.

I want to thank those in the seafood sector who have taken the time to do likewise. You are doing your bit for your sector, for your community and for all of us. I'd urge anyone who hasn't been vaccinated to make the arrangements, and get it done.

If you'd like to find out more about the vaccine, the [Unite against COVID-19](#) website has a wealth of information.

I'd also recommend this [business toolkit](#) for up-to-date information about how businesses can keep their people safe and support the national vaccine programme.

By protecting yourself against the virus, you are contributing to a brighter future for all of us.

Now the delta variant is throwing up fresh challenges, and the seafood sector can play a leadership role to protect people in coastal communities across Aotearoa.

That means a big push to make sure our family and friends are kept safe.

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