



Busselton Jetty Timeline

The Busselton Jetty is one of the most recognizable icons in Western Australia. It currently stands at 1841 metres in length making it the longest wooden piled jetty in the Southern Hemisphere. It is now used exclusively for tourism and recreation but it has a colourful past as a working jetty.

In the early years of European settlement in the Busselton/Vasse region, agriculture was the main commercial activity undertaken. Crops such as wheat, barley and oats were grown, although wheat quickly became the most successful. Livestock such as sheep, pigs and cattle were also raised. Some of these stocks were exported from the area as early as 1858. The timber industry was also underway at this time with the government offering large concessions and special timber licenses in 1850. This led to the first of the region's timber mills being built in Quindalup in 1858.

American whalers also recognized Geographe Bay as a bountiful source of whales and these sailors regularly dropped off large amounts of whale oil and picked up supplies from the settlers of the South West. A light beacon was erected in 1836 as a navigational aid. This beacon consisted of a spar – 10m high with a barrel containing a lamp on top. This rudimentary light house was affectionately known as 'The Tub' and was located north of the Marine Terrace and Queen Street junction.

1851

The need for a jetty in the Busselton region was first publicly recognized and the government called for tenders.

1861

Action was finally taken when Henry Yelverton made a proclamation that "Vasse port, the first on the coast, needs a jetty". At this time in history, there were no income taxes and the government relied heavily on the tax gained from imports and exports.

1864

Many ships were landing in the bay and thereby avoiding taxes and government charges. Due to this and the recognized benefit of a jetty to the fledgling settlement, tenders were once again called for the construction of a jetty in Busselton. Mr Henry Yelverton won the contract and began construction.

1865

The jetty was completed at the end of 1865 – only 33 years after settlement of the area. This construction was 176m in length. The high tide mark of the jetty would have been situated where the junction of Marine Terrace and Queen Street is today, some 200m from the current tide mark.

Although the industries of agriculture, whaling and tourism all benefited from the improvements to the port of Busselton, the timber industry boomed post 1865.

1870

A lighthouse replaced 'The Tub' and was built 20m high and made of Jarrah. The kerosene lamp projected a light that could be seen for 20 miles seaward. This light house stood until 1933 when it was demolished and replaced with a smaller beacon placed at the end of the jetty.

1872

The jetty required more length for ships which found the waters of Geographe Bay too shallow and so the first extension was made to the jetty for a cost of 88 pounds.

1875

The municipal council deemed this extension inadequate and another 143.3m was added for the sum of 626 pounds. The low water mark at the seaward end of the jetty was now at a depth of 3.6m.

The silting action continued along the beach and the local government was once again under pressure to complete another extension.

1883

Henry Yelverton was once again awarded a contract to complete another extension. The equipment needed included a pile frame, and an iron weight known as a 'monkey and a strong horse'. The jetty was constructed by skidding out two strong beams over the water which supported the pile frame, the horse was used to pull the 'monkey' up through a system of pullies and trips until the weight was high enough to drop onto the pile with enough force to drive it into the sand.

1884

The required equipment was located and the next extension of 229m was added to the jetty.

1887

This was still not enough for the timber industry and a further extension was again called for. Another 353m were added.

1890

A further 40m extension was added to the jetty.

1894

The shallow water soon began to hamper the increasing large ships and more extensions were called for. This was a frustrating exercise for the community, but in 1894 the jetty increased its length by another 130m increasing the final length of the jetty to

1895

A further extension of 150m was made. The water depth at the seaward end was 6.1m.

1896

A further extension of 261.6m was made.

1906

Tourism began to increase in the late 1880's and the jetty was also used as a stopping point for many passenger ships with an official agreement requesting that they stop for at least one and a half hours. This began Busselton life as a tourist town. Facilities were made available for bathing, accommodation, shelter sheds and swings.

1907

The official length of the jetty was 1344m. Its head was 83.3m in length and 11.6m in breadth. In October, a thorough test of the jetty was carried out to assess whether the jetty would be strong enough for railway traffic (using a specially constructed steel trolley loaded with 32 tons of steel rails) and weaknesses were revealed.

1909

The jetty was seen to be inadequate, not in depth as before, but in strength and structure. The idea for a 'skeleton jetty' was proposed and later approved by the government. The skeleton jetty was a rail link running from 166m east of the existing jetty. The rail lines were put in place for steam trains hauling loads of timber, potatoes and coal. Until this time, horse and cart were used to transport goods along the jetty.

1910

Busselton was soon recognized as one of the leading holiday and health resorts of the state due to its picturesque beaches, proximity to amazing caves and temperate weather. Holiday makers who walked the length of the Busselton Jetty claimed it to be as good as an ocean cruise.

1911

The proposed 'Skeleton Jetty' was constructed. The skeleton jetty was a rail link running from 166m east of the existing jetty. The rail lines were put in place for steam trains hauling loads of timber, potatoes and coal. Until this time, horse and cart were used to transport goods along the jetty. These steam trains ran until the 1960's when they were replaced by diesel trains. This Skeleton Jetty is still standing today and is 635m in length and provided a rail link between the land and the jetty.

A further 603m was added to the length of the jetty, of this, the final 168m was constructed as a berthing head and at this point the water depth was 7.6m. In February, intensive dredging of the harbour commenced for two months resulting in the harbour being sufficiently wider and deeper to allow safer berthing of larger ships. In November, extra bollards for berthing vessels at the jetty were installed and mooring buoys placed into position to help secure ships.

The timber industry began to boom and so did the tourism sector. To cater for the jetty's function as an attraction, social amenities were also added. A pavilion was constructed on the jetty and was used for band concerts and other activities. Sea baths were also constructed in the area of water between the original jetty and the new Viaduct. Deemed the finest bathing area in the State, it was secure against the intrusion of sharks and other 'sea monsters'. The length of the baths along the original jetty frontage was 100m, with the piling between the two jetties were 4m deep, 150m wide. The baths also included a platform (16.6m in length and 4.3m in width) on the jetty that accommodated a number of spacious dressing compartments.

1960

As the port of Bunbury began to strengthen, Busselton Jetty began to quiet. The last extension of a mere 16m was completed bringing it to its current length of 1841m. Upon completion it became the longest wooden jetty in the Southern Hemisphere.

1972

The Busselton Jetty was closed as a shipping port. The final ship to use the jetty was believed to be the M.V. Kafitoa, from New Zealand, on her 8th trip into Busselton. She marked the end of the working life at the jetty which in its 100 years, serviced 5000 ships and contributed greatly to the development of the South West.

After an active life as a much needed port, the long jetty now faced demolition due to the high maintenance costs and the navigational hazard it presented to shipping. The government proposed to destroy the jetty but outcry from the community curbed these plans and public meetings to save the jetty were held.

1976

Following a meeting with the 'Save our Jetty' group in October, the Busselton Shire Council confirmed that they would seek ownership of the Busselton Jetty from the State Government's Public Works Department. The Shire believed that they were best equipped to manage future tourist growth and other potential business ventures.

In one of the 1976 meetings of the 'Save our Jetty' group, the idea for the construction of an Underwater Observatory was suggested.

1978

On the 4th of April Cyclone Alby swept down the coast and much of the first 700m of the oldest section aligning with Queen Street was damaged beyond repair. The Skeleton Jetty remained intact, and the government of the day condemned the promenade section of the jetty and removed it.

The tragedy galvanized the local community into a massive clean-up effort. With the intention of rebuilding the damaged section, council trucks, privately owned cranes and hundreds of volunteers worked to move the jetty timbers off the beach. This community effort established the nucleus for a Preservation Society.

1987

The Shire of Busselton surveyed its ratepayers regarding the future of the Busselton Jetty. A resounding 90% of people surveyed considered that the restoration and protection of the jetty was the most important project for the Shire. Consequently, that same year the Government, rather than demolish the remaining structure, allocated \$500,000 to the Shire of Busselton to stimulate the rebuilding of the jetty.

In October, the 'Busselton Jetty Preservation Committee' (now known as the Busselton Jetty Environment and Conservation Association or BJECA) was formed to raise funds to conserve the jetty and establish the infrastructure to make it economically viable. With assistance of State and Federal Government funding it has successfully raised funds in donations and grants for the restoration and maintenance of the jetty.

1989

To provide an on-going source of funds for the jetty, an entrance fee was collected from a caravan initially and in December a kiosk was constructed to facilitate the collection from people using the jetty between 9am and 9pm.

1990

From the collection of entrance fees and other fundraising efforts, the first major reconstruction of the jetty took place at a cost of \$660,000. \$500,000 was granted by the Government. These funds were taken directly from the monies originally allocated for the demolition of the jetty.

1995

A small train service commenced operation on the jetty railway line that had previously been used to transport cargo. For a fee, the train service accommodated up to 40 passengers per trip and took them to the end of the jetty and back. This service provided access for disabled persons, mobility impaired, and provided storage for diving equipment.

Apart from tourists visiting the jetty as part of their South West itinerary, many locals continue to consistently use the jetty for fishing, walking, swimming, sporting events, snorkeling and diving. The jetty is an important part of the social and recreational life of Busselton. The jetty also began to attract divers from all over the world and is now considered to be one of Australia's Top Ten Dive Sites.

1996

A survey is conducted by the 'Busselton Jetty Environment and Conservation Association' (BJECA) indicating that 42% of those surveyed support the construction of an Underwater Observatory on the jetty. The Busselton Jetty is already recognized as one of Western Australia's premier scuba diving locations, and with the combination of the Leeuwin Current and the shade provided by the jetty structure it has created a unique marine ecosystem.

1999

A huge fire ravages the jetty despite the efforts of local emergency crews and volunteer firefighters to minimize the damage. The blaze broke out close to the end and destroyed 70 metres of timbers. The fire was difficult to manage and staff was forced to chainsaw the burning section into the waters of Geographe Bay to control the flames. The cause of this fire remains a mystery, although the most commonly accepted theory is that a stray cigarette butt fell between the timbers.

As the last 150 metres of the jetty was now isolated because of the fire, the proposed plans for the construction of an Underwater Observatory at the end of the jetty were now at risk.

2000

The fire didn't slow the construction of an Interpretive Centre placed near the shore end. The function of this facility is to create a learning environment so visitors and locals alike can appreciate the long and colourful history of the jetty and highlight the richness of the marine environment.

2001

The boat shed style Interpretive Centre opened in January and the merchandise and memorabilia provide a source of income for BJECA to maintain the jetty. Positioned as an entry and fee paying point for pedestrians and train travelers on the jetty, the Interpretive Centre was able to calculate that more than 200,000 people visited the jetty that year.

2002

The fire of 1999 highlighted the need for a method of raising large funds to be funneled back into the jetty. The idea of an Underwater Observatory was warmed to and construction began. The structure was a relatively simple design. Shaped like a large water tank, the Observatory is 13m deep and 8.5m wide, weighing 550 tones and has 11 viewing windows made of concrete and steel.

2003

In March, the Underwater Observatory planned for the end of the jetty, was towed to the site from Jervoise Bay where it had been constructed. It was to be sunk and anchored to the seabed in preparation for opening to the public in the Spring. The creation of a \$3.6 million attraction is testament to the quality of the underwater viewing beneath the jetty with over 300 known marine species that live beneath. The Underwater Observatory opened to the public in December and over 60,000 people visited in the first 6 months.

2004

An Audit is underway to determine the scope and requirement of restoration work to be undertaken as part of a proposed major capital works program to take place in the coming years. These works include, but are not limited to, the final 95m of the jetty, replacement of 600m of Skeleton Jetty and the replacement of the existing wooden sections of the jetty. The estimated cost for these works are estimated at \$10 million.

2008

Led by Premier Colin Barnett, the new Western Australia State Government recognized the importance of the Busselton Jetty to the State by granting \$24 million towards the complete rebuild of the jetty, restoring it to 'as new' condition.

2009

The jetty received \$27.1 million to complete refurbishment on the jetty structure. \$24 million was funded by the Western Australian State Government, \$3.1 million was funded by the Shire of Busselton and \$1.0 million was contributed by the Busselton Jetty Environment and Conservation Association (BJECA).

2010

The jetty remained closed as the refurbishment progressed.

2011

On Sunday 6 February refurbishment was complete and the Busselton Jetty reopened for public access with thousands attending the reopening celebrations. New features include interpretive nodes and fish cleaning bays. Swimming and diving platforms, rain shelters and heritage sculptures are also present along the new structure. On Tuesday 1 March the Busselton Jetty Train became operational for the first time since 2005.

2012

Work continues on section 10 (the area beyond the Underwater Observatory).

