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Cray McGill [00:00:11] Well, funnily enough, my, my dad got me into it. As, I guess, a lot of anglers dads got them into it. But, um, he made, he wasn't a fisherman himself. But he actually made the mistake we're on holidays, and I was about four or five years old. And he made the mistake of, um, deciding to take me fishing one day. So he took me out at about nine, 10 o'clock in the morning. And, apparently, I loved it. The next morning, at about eight o'clock, I was shaking him saying, "Dad, wake up. Let's go fishing." The morning after that, we were away for about a week. He said the morning after that, I'm shaking him in about six o'clock, saying, let's get up. The next morning, I was shaking him at five thirty, and he said it just got earlier and earlier, until I got to the point where he just said, we're not getting up any earlier. But uh, yeah that was how I got my start. I loved it from day one. And I can't can barely even remember that.

Interviewer [00:01:00] Did you start fishing on saltwater or freshwater?

Cray McGill [00:01:06] Started on saltwater. Yeah. Yeah. My personal preference in fishing, is freshwater. But I've spent most of my life saltwater fishing, right from the start, and I guide on saltwater now too.

Interviewer [00:01:18] What species of fish do you go for when freshwater fishing in Australia?

Cray McGill [00:01:24] A little bit of everything. So, I've spent a little bit of time in New Zealand trout fishing. I've fished in the Top End of Australia, on the billabongs, and the rivers, for barramundi, Saratoga, catfish, Archer fish. Sooty Granta. Basically anything that lives in the freshwater, I love catching. Back here in Sydney, we fish for Australian bass, out of a, you know, I've got a number of boats, but my favourite's still my canoe. And I just love being, it's more the environment, than anything, when I go freshwater fishing. I just love being on the river, or the lake, or whatever, in that small environment with the, you know, the trees and the palms or wherever you happen to be, the billabongs. You've got the lilies, and. So half of it is the environment and the fish are just a bonus, really.

Interviewer [00:02:13] For you, is part of fishing just being able to get out into nature?

Cray McGill [00:02:18] Well, how many times do you go fishing and not catch anything? You're not going to keep going back if it's just the fish, you know what I mean? It's got to be the environment. It's, you know, a lot of the time when I'm freshwater fishing, I'm camping. So, you've got the campfire at night, and a couple of beers with a mate, and then, you know, you're up early on the river, and yeah it's the whole, it's the whole scene.

Interviewer [00:02:36] Have you ever had any close calls with dangerous Australian wildlife?

Cray McGill [00:02:43] I've had some close calls with Tasmanian tiger snakes. Very, very close calls; uncomfortably close. And I've had a few close ones with crocodiles too, actually. I'm absolutely amazed at the crocodile's ability to stalk you, in, in, even in clear water. I've had a croc get within three metres of me, in crystal clear water, where I thought I was 100% safe. That there was no way that anything that could stalk up on me in water this clear in this shallow, without me seeing it. And it got to within a few metres of me.

Interviewer [00:03:16] What, what happened? How are you still here?

Cray McGill [00:03:18] It was a bit stupid, actually. It was dumb behaviour. We were crabbing in this creek. It was only sort of, maximum, knee-deep. Right across the river, and right up the creek. And we were, uh, wading in the river, netting crab, mud crabs. And we saw the croc, actually, a long way up the river. And I just assumed there was no way that thing could get from there to me, without us seeing it. It was crystal clear water, on a sand bottom. Um, we saw it again. It was about half as close to us, again, and I just thought the same thing. No way it can get to us. Next thing I know, it's there. And, luckily, I had, the net that we were using to catch the crabs, was a big, heavy duty, barramundi net. And I jammed that into the water, and sort of made a big splash, and made a distance between me and him. And that sort of spooked him, and it took off but I didn't do it again.

Interviewer [00:04:15] So he would stalking you?

[00:04:16] 100%. 100%. And the thing, you know, it made me realise that; in dirty water, which is mostly what they live in, the dirty billabongs, the dirty Top End rivers, you have absolutely no chance. You have no chance. If that animal can get that close to me, in crystal clear water, on a sand bottom. In the muddy rivers, where you normally find them, you have no chance. You do not go in the water in the Top End of Australia. It's as simple as that. And if the crocs don't get you, the box jellyfish are gonna get you with a shock, they're gonna get you. Box jellyfish are the most poisonous thing in the world. They'll kill you in 20 minutes. So yeah, you just don't go in the water.

Interviewer [00:04:53] Will you tell us a bit about the irukandji jellyfish?

Cray McGill [00:04:59] Irukanji are bad. They, um, their stings that bad, that if you don't die, you want to. Yeah. And you often do, so. That's something that's only come on the scene fairly recently, we never used to hear much about them, but I think a lot of the time, people assumed that maybe they'd been stung by a box jellyfish. They never actually got to see the jellyfish. They're so tiny. So, yeah, look, basically, once you get, once you get into the tropics. So, anywhere from Rockhampton, North. You just, you just don't go in the water. It's not, it's not worth the risk. There's too many things there.

Interviewer [00:05:32] Will you tell us a bit about fishing in the blue Mountains?

Cray McGill [00:05:37] We've actually got some quite good trout fishing in the Blue Mountains. Um, the problem that we've got in Australia is, the reliability of the water. So we get a lot of droughts. A lot of the rivers dry up completely. They get too hot. So the trout do struggle. Probably our best, our best trout fishing, here in Australia, is either the snowy, snowy region, a little bit further south. Or Tasmania. But if you really want trout, in this region, you go to New Zealand. Yeah. And they've got that water reliability over there. They get plenty of rain.

Interviewer [00:06:10] Will you tell us a bit about your guiding business?

Cray McGill [00:06:15] So I'm a fishing guide, here in Sydney Harbour. I started in 1992, which is that twenty seven, twenty eight years ago, now. So been, been doing it for a while. It's a full time job for me. Basically, when I started here on the harbour, I was the first ever fishing guide on Sydney Harbour. There were other guides in Australia, but mostly barramundi, top end, that sort of thing. And trout guides. But there was nobody guiding on Sydney Harbour. So I guess I've got, got the honour of saying I was able to start that up, yeah, and it was a bit of a gamble, I guess, of course, like most new

businesses. But it went well. No competition for 10 or 15 years, which was really nice. A little bit different now. There's plenty of guides out there now. But, you know, that's all right. Competition keeps everybody on their toes. And I operate out of a small center console boat, five and a half metre center console, open boat, targeting primarily kingfish, yellowtail kingfish, but basically anything that comes into the harbour, we get a lot of surface fish, small tunas, Australian salmon. And then all the fish that lives on the reef, and the reef, and the bottom, flathead, bream, snapper, John Dory. Blackfish. So yeah, wide range of stuff.

Interviewer [00:07:34] What types of fishing do you do?

Cray McGill [00:07:39] A mix. Yeah so different things at different times of the year, um, winter time, probably, more bait fishing. Summertime, you get more of the game fish, little Chase lures. A lot of live baiting, so we'll go out there and catch squid. And insects, that's sort of, if your after kingfish, that's really, you pretty much got to get your squid, if you want to get the Kingies. But they will take lures too, but you've got to be a little bit more experienced, to get them on lures.

Interviewer [00:08:05] What's your favorite and the most challenging fish to catch?

Cray McGill [00:08:12] Personally, personally, I like any fish that lives in in the snags, in cover. Where you're working lures. You've got to get them close into the cover. There's a very good chance, if you hook it, the fish is gonna go straight back into that cover, so it's a, you know, a quick, a quick sort of, rapid violent sort of fight, where you win or they win very quickly. So things like barramundi, Saratoga, Australian bass, Mangrove Jacks, all those sort of fish. And then from a charter perspective, I guess, I'd have to say the Kingfish. It's a big fish, and we get them up to 50 or 60 pounds here in the harbour. They're a great looking fish. They're a really hard fighting fish. And a fantastic eating fish, sashimi or cooked. Yeah. So I'd have to say Kingies.

Interviewer [00:09:01] Do most of your clients practice catch and release fishing or do they keep their fish?

[00:09:08] It's a mix. I'd say these days, primarily, for, they're just fishing for fun. So most of my customers are more than happy to let most of what they catch go. Yeah, most of what they catch, they're happy to let it go. They don't mind taking a feed, every now and then. But, for example, we've got a bag limit of 5 on kingfish. But, generally, we'll only take one or two, even though we might catch, catch five, or 10. You know, guys will just say, "Yeah, look, one's enough for me." So yes. So, I think the sport aspect of fishing is becoming a lot more prominent these days, but there's still guys who enjoy going out and getting fish for a feed, and there's nothing wrong with that either.

Interviewer [00:09:48] Yeah, no, I agree. I think there's certainly. Depending on the species. I think some species you've got to watch more, if they're harmed, but if it's a stable fishery, there's no reason why you shouldn't.

Cray McGill [00:10:00] No, and we're pretty well regulated here, with size and bag limit. So any fish that is looking a bit, you know, might be getting towards being threatened, or whatever, they either stop catching them at all, or put a heavy bag limit on the more. And most of the guys stick by that, too. So, yeah, it's pretty well managed here.

Interviewer [00:10:15] How do you think Australia is doing in regards to managing its fisheries and wild areas?

Cray McGill [00:10:22] We're pretty good. I guess the limiting factor here in Australia, is the money. You know? We're a huge country, with not a big population. So getting the funding, you know, like I know in US that, you know, they've got a lot of money to do good, good research. And good conservation management. I think, the aim, aim here is the same. But getting the money to do it is, you know, is a problem. But I would say overall, it's a, it's a pretty well managed fishery.

Interviewer [00:10:51] What concerns do you have for the future of Australia's fisheries? Do pollution, agricultural runoff, and climate change pose risks?

Cray McGill [00:10:56] Pollution. Agricultural runoff, yeah, are major concerns. Um, climate change, I believe it's happening, but I just don't know how it's going to affect the fish, are they going to shift? Are they going to adapt? I guess it's a concern. But at this stage, I just. It's not as clear cut, how climate change is going to affect fishing, as say, pollution's very clear cut, how it affects fishing. So yeah, all concerns. Um, commercial overfishing is a problem. I'm not, I'm not anti-commercial fishing, I know it needs to exist. But we do have some unsustainable commercial fisheries in Australia, that need to be looked at. So that would be another major concern.

Interviewer [00:11:39] What makes fishing in Australia special?

Cray McGill [00:11:47] I guess the thing about Australia is, is that we still, we still have pretty good freedom here. You know, I can grab a four wheel drive, and I did this when I was younger, and I can take off for six months. And I can go to the Top End of Australia, and I can fish pretty safely, right, anywhere I want to go. And, you know, we've still got pretty good fishing. We've got fantastic variety too. So we've got everything from, you know, the cold water trout, right down south, through to the tropical barramundi. We've got some great game fishing. We've got a great marlin fishing, off Cairns and off Bruins. Yeah. So we've sort of got a bit of everything. Good, good fresh water through to good blue water. And, you know, you can fish in the rainforest, you can fish in the desert.

Interviewer [00:12:30] What does fishing mean to you?

Cray McGill [00:12:37] When you fish. Every, everything else. You forget anything else. If you've got a problem, an issue, or whatever. You can go fishing for two or three hours, and your mind's clear. I just think it's that escape, but, for me too, the places that it leads you to, you know? I love, I love my camping and my outdoors. And I've been to places that I would never have been, I've been into the deepest jungles of New Guinea, pursuing Papuan Black Bass. You know? And things like that, and I just. It's hard to put your finger on, really, isn't it? Exactly what it is, it's just. It's just in you, really. That's, that's all I can say. It's just in you, or it's not.

Interviewer [00:13:18] How important is it to get more youth involved in the sport of Angling?

Cray McGill [00:13:24] I think it's critical. I think it's critical and we've, we do have a lot of good programs, here in Australia, aimed at doing that actually. In fact, our fisheries department run a lot of programs to get, to get kids out into it. Now look, I think, I think everybody is aware of that, a lot of the anglers, you know, do everything they can to get

their kids, their kids involved. But yeah, I do, I do think it's critical. Because the thing is too, is that, it's one of those things that just keeps kids out of trouble. It keeps them off the street, and out of trouble. And with kids, you know, more and more turning to electronics, and you see these kids just stuck on their machines these days, and I don't think that's healthy. Where I think fishing is a very healthy pursuit.

Interviewer [00:14:06] Do you think there's a connection between being an Angler and helping to protect wild areas?

Cray McGill [00:14:12] Hundred%. In fact, I've said this too about things like wildlife. When I was a kid, you were allowed to keep pretty much any wildlife, so you could get in the local creek, and you could catch some frogs, and you could keep the frogs at home. That gave you an affinity with the frog. And then later on, when you're older, and you hear that the frogs are endangered. You want to protect that. You want to look after that, right, because you had a connection, when you were a kid. Now, there's moves to stop kids doing that. You know, you've got to get expensive licenses, and so kids aren't getting that connection, and it's the same thing with the rivers, and the environment. If the kids aren't out there, doing it, and seeing it. They don't care about it.

Interviewer [00:14:47] What do you love about guiding?

Cray McGill [00:14:55] I don't think I could do anything else. I can't work for a boss. I've tried that. It's just doing, doing what I love, and, I mean. I'm sort of, what I do here on the harbour too, I'm sort of over that, on a personal level. I've got no real desire to go and catch kingfish, but to be able to take people out there, and just see the happiness that they get. And it reminds me of what I used to, to get from it. And it's job satisfaction too. You know, you get people on the good fish, and I've had people say to me, this has been the best day of my life. That's, that's, that's good. And I'm in the outdoors and I couldn't be in office.

Interviewer [00:15:32] So kind of sharing that, that moment with people?

Cray McGill [00:15:34] Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. Yeah.

Interviewer [00:15:36] As a guide is there a perfect age to teach a child to fish, and is there a difference between teaching a man and a woman?

Cray McGill [00:15:42] I don't think there's any right age. I think you should start as young as you can. But, you know, I've got, I know plenty of people who started later in life, and are just as passionate about it, as well. But. It's one of those things, you're never going to know everything about fishing. It doesn't matter whether you start at age five, and die at 120, you're not going to learn everything. So, you know, it's one of those things that, it's limitless. As far as looking for new avenues, and new interesting fishing. As far as a difference between men and women, there's not, there's not a lot of women fishing. To be honest. But the women that do fish, are every bit as good as men, and, in fact, I'll tell you something too, about my women customers. They listen a lot more than the men do. You know, if I tell them something, and they, they're there to learn, and they, where the guys, a lot of guys, maybe it's a bit of macho a bit of ego, you know. Don't want to listen. They know how to do it. That's something I've noticed.

Interviewer [00:16:38] Do you think it's important to get more women introduced to the sport of Angling?

Cray McGill [00:16:47] I look up. I'm impartial. If they want to get into it, fine. Same with guys. I don't want to, necessarily, see any more any less men or women.

Interviewer [00:16:55] Over the years, how have you seen fishing in Australia change?

Cray McGill [00:16:55] If anything, if anything. Well, certainly in Sydney. Per capita, there might be less people fishing. Probably got less time, and things are just tougher these days. But what I have found is that the people who are fishing, are a lot more intense about it, than, you know, it's not, it's not as casual as it used to be. From the actual fishery itself. From that perspective. Interestingly enough, I've seen a big turnaround from where the city used to be, the degraded, overfished place, and the country, where I used to fish as a kid, was was sensational fishing. I've seen that turn around. Completely. Where, where the fishing in the city has become very good, and I don't know if this goes for all capital cities in Australia, but certainly it does for Sydney. And now, some of our country regions have got some real problems, with their fisheries.

Interviewer [00:18:00] Why do you think that is?

Cray McGill [00:18:03] I think there's been a focus on, um, cleaning things up. Here in Sydney. I think as far as illegal fishing, a lot less of it goes on in Sydney, because there's just so many eyes on the water now. I think there's a lot of black market that goes on in the country, in the regional areas. I think overall, it's less regulated in the regional areas. Not, not that, not that it's technically less regulated, but I just think there's just not enough people out there to keep an eye on what's, what's going on. Pollution too. I've seen pollution in Sydney cleaned up dramatically, over the last 20 years. Where in the country, you know, things like agricultural runoff have increased as farming has increased. So there has been there has been a noticeable turnaround there, and it's quite ironic, because, when I was a kid, the dream was always to get out of Sydney, to go on holidays, and go fishing. Because the fishing was so much better. It's almost the opposite now, we've got people coming in from the country, and even as far as the Gold Coast in Queensland, coming to Sydney to fish here. Because it's so good.

Interviewer [00:19:04] That's impressive. Well I guess it speaks to what can happen.

Cray McGill [00:19:08] If it's, yeah. The potential is there, and it's amazing how quickly the fishery turns around too. We've had a program here in Australia, where the the the funds from recreational licensing are used to buy commercial fishing out, in certain areas, so they'll buy all the commercial fishermen out, and the fishing recovers in about eight years. It's getting back to what I describe as very good fishing. So even in quite a degraded fishery. If it's looked after properly, it can recover very quickly.

Interviewer [00:19:42] Will you tell us a bit about Fish Aggregating Devices?

Cray McGill [00:19:48] So, it's anything basically artificial. So they might sink a reef. They might sink one of the, recently they sunk one of the old warships, up off Terrigal. But that was just for diving. But they do it for fishing. Or the fisheries department, and once again have been using the recreational liscence money, to put floating fish attracting devices like this, which attract things like you, know, mahi mahi, dolphin fish. Yeah.

Interviewer [00:20:15] So those are things that give shelter to small fish which then...

Cray McGill [00:20:21] Yeah. Yeah. As you know, fish like structure. From one reason or another, I mean dolphin fish you find a log floating around out there, there'll be dolphin fish. So it just does the same thing. It just reproduces that.

Interviewer [00:20:29] If you could go anywhere in the world to fish, where would you go and what would you fish for?

Cray McGill [00:20:35] Look, I guess what I do, what I do, is I'd follow in the footsteps of Jeremy Wade. Because I love my freshwater fishing. South America, top of the list. I'd like to fish in Japan too.

Interviewer [00:20:47] Would you go for arapaima? What would you fish for?

[00:20:50] Yeah. Arapaima, number one. And peacock bass. Yeah. Yeah. On the top of the list. Any of those big fishing, that I just love freshwater fishing, and the Amazon just fascinates me. Also quite a keen, I keep a lot of aquariums at home, so I like doing a bit of collecting of small aquarium fish too. So I'd love to go to the Amazon, to do that. And double up there. But, um, Japan interests me too. I love the finesse techniques that they use over in Japan. You know, they IU the Sweetwater fish that they catch, where they, yeah, they put the hooks in the other fish, and swim it out and attacks it.

Interviewer [00:21:25] They're supposed to be very territorial, I guess.

Cray McGill [00:21:27] Very territorial. Yeah, but it's a primary one of those little lagoons. Ultimate.

Interviewer [00:21:31] Have you ever tried Tenkara fishing?

Cray McGill [00:21:37] No, the closest thing we've got is Saratoga. You know the Saratoga? Very, very similar species. In fact, I think they were a parallel. Parallel evolution. Where, I understand, two fish evolved totally separate of each other, but end up looking quite similar, because they've evolved in similar environments. There's the arapaima. There's the Saratoga, and there's the Arrowana? In, in, I think it's Eurasia. Or somewhere up there, anyway. Yeah, they're all very similar fish. They're the old bony, bony fish. Ancient fish.

Interviewer [00:22:12] Do you have any words of advice for future anglers?

Cray McGill [00:22:19] Look, I think we've pretty much covered it. I mean, you know, the main message, really, with fishing all the time, is just look after it, isn't it? Appreciate it. Look after it, leave something for the for the future.