

[Angus's boat](#) (minor revision April 2023)

<https://www.wrft.org.uk/files/Angus'sBoatPeterCunningham16Apr23-1.m4a>

Words by Peter D Cunningham & Dorje Khandro  
(aka Joanie Bones), © 2022

Music by Peter D Cunningham, 2022

**[4 bars piano]**

**V1**

Angus's boat  
was built for the sea,  
to glide through the waves  
far from land, to be free,  
to carry a man,  
and a line and a song;  
boat of wood and of arms,  
row to where you belong.

**[2 bars piano]**

**V2**

Once there were plaice,  
too big for the pan,  
and herrings and herrings,  
by cran and by cran,  
and salmon that leap  
as they enter the net.  
We're singing this song,  
so we can not forget.

**Chorus**

That once there were shoals,  
enough to provide,  
a fish for your tea,  
at the top of the tide.  
Now Angus's boat  
sits high on the shore,  
bow facing the waves, but  
to sea goes no more.

**[4 bars piano]**

**V3**

Angus's boat,  
was built strong and light  
For cod and for herring  
by day and by night,  
For riding the swell,  
in calmness and storm,  
to harvest the fish, and  
come safely back home.

**V4**

Tide after tide,  
and year after year,  
the boat went to sea  
with the simplest of gear,  
for finding the fish,  
and setting the bait.  
When you lowered the line,  
there was not long to wait.

**Chorus**

'Cos once there were shoals . . .

**[4 bars piano, with rest on last half]**

**Mid sect**

The decision was made  
by political sway  
to remove the protection and open the way,  
for big diesel boats  
from far away docks,  
with their heavy mesh trawl no regard for the  
stocks  
Into the shore  
and right up to the edge,  
the seabed was torn  
by the teeth of the dredge  
The whiting and cod  
had nowhere to hide  
from relentless pursuit  
As the fishery died [pause . . . ]

And boats returned empty  
And fishermen cried.

**[4 bars piano]**

**V5**

Some shook their heads,  
the big fish were gone.  
Instead of the haddock,  
they fished for the prawn.  
And some turned to creels,  
for lobster and crab;  
no chance of a turbot,  
no chance of a dab.

**V6 (different chords)**

The governments' eyes  
turned away from the wild  
the seabed was damaged  
the water defiled  
by waste from the farms  
where salmon are caged  
Precaution abandoned,  
good sense disengaged

**Chorus**

But once there were shoals . . .

**(PIANO INTERLUDE)**

**V7**

Year after year,  
the boat sat by the burn  
awaiting the day  
when the cod would return,  
and the boat could be launched,  
rowed out through the sound,  
to glide through the waves,  
where the fishes were found.

**Chorus tune: (quiet)**

But age how it creeps,  
you hardly would tell  
Except that you flinch,  
at the thought of a swell,  
and pulling the oars  
is harder, you tire;  
and sometimes you'd rather  
just sit by the fire.

**[4 bars piano]**

**V8**

To the child by the shore,  
on a warm summer's day,  
exploring the rock pools,  
we've something to say:  
Learn about sea life,  
the wild and the free;  
Let's learn to look after,  
Our wonderful sea.

**Chorus (1<sup>st</sup> time)**

Where once there were shoals . . .

**Chorus (2<sup>nd</sup> time)**

Yes, once there were shoals  
As big as the sky  
fish, man and boat  
far from land,  
tell me why  
does Angus's boat  
sit high on the shore,  
bow facing the waves, but  
to sea goes no more?

Bow facing the waves  
But to sea goes no more.

[end]

**Notes:** The song is based on a tune which dates back to around 2005 and subsequently played by local ceilidh band Melvaig Mist (Duncan Maclean, Catherine Urquhart-Taylor, Tracy McLachlan, Roger McLachlan and Peter Cunningham), influenced by folk songs including 'Blow the Wind Southerly'. It was called Angus's boat as it was inspired by a wooden row boat which belonged to fisherman Angus Bain and sat on the shore at Big Sand, by the Sound of Longa below Angus's House. The boat was built by Loch Torridon at Alligin by Murdo MacDonald (according to Derek Roxborough). Peter often met Angus on the shore (especially between 2002 and 2005) and they usually talked about fishing; in 2012 a conversation with Angus was recorded by Sue Pomeroy as part of the WRFT herring stories project. Angus died in 2018. Donnie Chisholm now has the boat but it is no longer seaworthy.

In 2021, Peter approached Dorje Khandro for help to put words to some of his songs. This was one of the first that we worked on together; the words developed early in 2022 to tell the story of the collapse of the fin-fish fishery around Gairloch associated with the removal of the three-mile limit in 1984. The song was first recorded on smartphone with Dorje singing early in 2022, and subsequently with both Peter and Dorje (aka Joanie Bones) singing for Sara Nason (Little Green Island films). Thank you to very many people for encouragement, especially Katherine Vine, Elaine Jack, Fiona MacKenzie, Emma Watson, Katie Grant, Chloe Hall, Kitty Bell, Kris Wall, Andrew & Carol Tollyfield and Ginevra House.

#### Plaice

The British record rod caught plaice from a boat was taken in the Sound of Longa in 1974 by H Gardiner, presumably within 2km from where Angus launched his boat! The Sound of Longa still has many areas of seagrass and a diverse marine fauna.

#### Dab

The British record rod caught dab from a boat was taken in Loch Gairloch by R Islip in 1975. R's brother Stuart is lived by the harbour in 2021 and early 2022 . . .

#### Herring

Herring spawned around the mouth of Loch Gairloch in Angus's days and were fished for my many local people prior to collapse in stocks in 1970s. Local people fished for herring traditionally for various purposes using drifting gill nets set overnight, either from the surface or on the seabed. Herring spawn on the seabed; there are still late winter early spring spawning herring which enter Loch Gairloch prior to spawning just outside. See Wester Ross Fisheries Trust website.

#### Salmon

Angus fished for salmon at the Big Sands nets nearby; the nets were operated from the fishing bothy (which still exists) at the far end of the beach. If a hundred salmon were caught in a day, the netting team were given a bottle of whisky in addition to their usual pay [check].

‘Remove the protection and open the way’

This was the inshore fisheries act (Scotland) of 1984, which removed the ‘three-mile limit’ to mobile fishing and led to much activity with trawlers targeting stocks of fish which had previously been only subject to line fisheries.

‘seabed was torn by the teeth of the dredge’

The Sound of Longa was still open to scallop dredging as of March 2023, a threat to remaining seagrass patches. SNH / NatureScot proposed to extend a seabed protection area through the Sound of Longa to Melvaig and Rhu Reidh.

Whiting

Derek Roxborough told a story of how after the overwintering whiting stocks were discovered near the Crowlin Islands, they were fished out within a very short period of time; classic boom and bust ‘plundered’. PS. Derek first heard Angus’s Boat sung at the ceildih house (Gairloch Museum) on 6<sup>th</sup> March 2023, and said he knew both Angus (especially when he worked on salmon nets with Angus); and the boatbuilder, Murdo Macdonald, when he lived in Torridon.

Cod and haddock

Were a mainstay of line fisheries prior to the removal of the three-mile limit. There are some signs of recovery of both species.

Turbot

Ala Mackenzie told me that turbot used to be caught just out from Carn Dearg at the opposite end of the beach at Sand from where Angus kept his boat. Ala referred to the location as Turbot bank.

Prawn

*Nephrops* have provided main focus of both trawl and creel fishery in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to date. Prawn burrow into muddy seabeds and probably do best where populations of their predators including cod are reduced and there are dead and dying animals to scavenge upon (e.g. discarded bycatch).

Peter met Ala Mackenzie and Stuart Islip outside harbour centre on evening of 5<sup>th</sup> Jan 2022, they had not met each other before! Stuart said his brother Robert caught the dab. Was good for them to meet each other as they will have lots of stories to tell each other from 1970s. Ala remembers the boat the Islips fished from. He also remembers going out in Angus's boat, including to take sheep to Longa so need to ask lots more questions another day . . . Ala confirmed location of Turbot bank straight out from Carn Dearg, also said he used to see seahorses on far side of harbour area when he was a child . . .