

Basic Detail Report

ANMS1265

Title

Collection of 126 documents relating to Denis George

Date

1968-1999

Primary Maker

Denis George

Name

Archive series

History

Denis George (1917-2001), a post-World War II Greek Migrant, was a self-taught pearl maker who found his own way to culture pearls and spent decades from the 1950s to the 1980s experimenting and trying to improve his products. His ambition was to culture a unique Australian pearl. He produced pearls mainly from 'Pinctada maxima' (gold lip pearl) and 'P. Margaritifera' (black lip pearl). He was a maverick in the Australian and Papua New Guinean pearl industry because he refused to collaborate with Japanese pearling companies who dominated pearl culture by keeping their technique secret and forming joint ventures with nationals. Denis George was never commercially successful but his achievements were remarkable. Not only did he develop his own way to seed pearl oysters, but he also pioneered the culture of pearls from 'Pteria penguin', a bivalve known as Butterfly Shell which was not then a recognised pearl shell. He was recognised in Japan for his pearling achievements, but was not well known in Australia. His efforts extended beyond his own individual interests, in lifelong attempts to establish locally owned and run pearl culture industries in Australia and Indo-Pacific countries. He also strove for recognition of the naturalist William Saville-Kent as the true originator, around 1890, of the cultured pearl technique which the Japanese later claimed as their own and developed as an industry.