

Oyster



Bower Bird Films P/L and Non'D'Script

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One Line Synopsis

The bursting flavour of a Sydney Rock Oyster releases the salty taste of the lake but gives nothing away in regards to the fragile environment it grew up in or the story of the family, the farm, the hard work or sacrifices put in by the farmer who raised it.



One Paragraph Synopsis

In enviable weather, on the south-east coast of Australia, a punt glides over Merimbula Lake towards an oyster lease, with passionate young oyster farmer Dom at the helm. It's a romantic picture of tranquil beauty and a life close to nature, attuned to the rhythm of the tides. But Dom and a few fellow locals swear the water's getting warmer and the storms more severe. With the lake full of the famous gourmet's delight, the Sydney Rock Oyster, which takes three years to mature, they are only one big storm or heatwave away from disaster. As it's highly vulnerable to pollution and changes in water temperature and salinity. There are diseases too and the threat of competition from a much faster growing non-native species, the Pacific Oyster. With the need to protect their livelihood an alternative crop is required. Is it the Pacific Oyster? Or could clams be the answer? Oyster follows Dom and Pip into their home, their work-shed, out on their punt and into the water, to see what it's like to be raising two energetic young boys, while you're working big hours to keep a few million oysters alive, and any decision you make to deal with the global pressures of the fickle luxury markets, climate change, environmental damage and increasing disease could have far reaching consequences.



Synopsis

In enviable weather, on the south-east coast of Australia, a stainless steel punt glides over Merimbula Lake towards an oyster lease, with passionate young oyster farmer Dom at the helm. It's a romantic picture of tranquil beauty and a life close to nature, attuned to the rhythm of the tides.

But Dom whose been on the lake all of his life, the son of an oyster farmer, swears the water is getting warmer, storms more severe, and diseases is becoming more of a worry. Indeed, the oyster has been called the canary in the estuary, for the death of an oyster can reveal environmental changes or pollution that might have gone unnoticed.

Dom is the lake warden – he monitors the water and oysters for disease. His degree in Aquaculture hasn't prepared him for the shock when the samples he's collected are dead. His parents reassure him that they and the oysters have weathered droughts, floods and tough times, but conditions are changing, and there's tension in paradise over what's happening in the lake. With disease making people sick and the blame being put on the oyster farmers. It is Dom's job to close the lake in the height of the oyster season.

The Sydney Rock Oyster, is slow growing and vulnerable to pollution, changes in temperature and increasing diseases. In the oyster's three year life, it has to be hauled out of the lake thirty-six times, put through the industrial grader, double checked by hand and then back out into the lake until it's grown to a size that looks good on a plate. Dom and Pip know the care, frustration, sense of humour and hard physical work that it takes and they've got two lovable energetic young sons to bring up as well. Closing the lake is hard on everyone.



style and approach

Oyster is a feature length documentary capturing the daily routines, chaos and drama of a lively, hard-working second generation oyster farming family on Merimbula Lake on the south-east coast of Australia.



Dom Boyton, Late-30s

Dom is a pretty no nonsense straight talking kind of guy, a farmer. He loves growing things and is always excited about new things to grow which may explain his almost unwavering decision to support the growing of Pacific oyster in the lake. Dom is concerned about the environment and very aware of what the potential dangers of this are. He is also well educated in how to prevent this spread and sees the growing of both varieties as a bit of a safety net should one get wiped out there is always the other.

He loves his wife Pip and they have a very healthy 'working' relationship where the majority of their time is spent at work. Their two kids, Solomon (Sol) aged 11, and Edison (Eddy), aged 7, are bundles of energy and at times hard to control. The family work hard to create family time away from work but these moments are few and far between.

When Dom was a young child, his parents Shelley and Chris decided to increase the size and scope of their oyster farm because Dom as a young child had many allergies and was seen to be a slow learner and they thought that the farm may provide an opportunity better suited than study or some more academic field. Dom now holds a degree in Aquaculture and has sat on environmental boards and held responsible roles on farming councils.

By documenting a specific microcosm of a farming family on Australia's south-east coast, *Oyster* presents its audience with a story, a landscape, an environment and characters who face practical, ethical and personal decisions about things that matter to them – feeding their family, getting the boys to school, running the farm, looking after the lake, keeping their crop of oysters healthy and figuring out whether harvesting new crops will protect their livelihood.

This local story goes to the heart of matters of global urgency – climate, sustainability, farming, the health, livelihood and education of rural communities, and the challenges and uncertainties that come with of farming a luxury product.



Pip Boyton, aged 30-35

Pip is very much a partner in the working life of the farm and running the business, as well as being very much the wife and mother of the family. It's Pip who makes sure everyone is everywhere when needed.

Pip loves her family and fights to gain more and more moments where they can spend time together away from work.

Pip knows everyone in the village, has an opinion on everything and is never backwards in coming forwards when it comes to issues she is passionate about and there aren't too many issues she isn't passionate about. She has fought the Department of Education over the educational facilities made available for her high functioning autistic son, is quick to make council meetings on issues that will directly affect the farm, family or local community and is very active in a fundraising campaign to raise funds for her friend's cancer operations, along with raising awareness of the disease.

Observational in style, *Oyster* stands back to watch and witness. The film's director Kim Beamish likes to sit as close to his characters as he can so as to become really intimate with the world they are experiencing. This intimacy invites the audience in, as if they are almost becoming a character too, a part of what is going on, and a part of the character's experience.

Dom and Pip Boyton are the main characters of *OYSTER*. Dom and Kim Beamish used to play together as boys, creating a life long rapport and a level

of intimacy and trust which gives personal colour to the film and adds to the audience's involvement in the story.

Oyster will not seek to tell the audience what to think about the ethics, morality or politics of the decisions that face Dom and Pip Boyton but, rather, will present their story. It is a story that shows what is happening for Dom and Pip, and their fellow farmers and community. The story leaves it to the audience to make their own decisions.



Solomon (Sol), aged 11, Dom and Pip's elder son

Sol is full of energy and would like to work on the farm everyday if he could, although the work bit he is not so fond of.

Sol has learning difficulties, diagnosed as High Functioning Autism (HFA).

Sol's difficulties may not be so manageable as his father's have been, but most people would not notice, other than him being a bit cheekier than most and often away in his own world. He finds it hard to connect with new people in his life.

Sol loves fishing, playing cricket in the back yard, as long as it all goes his way, hanging out with Dad at the shed and teasing his younger brother.

Edison (Eddy), aged 7, Dom and Pip's younger son

Eddy is very smart and active. Loves his sport, especially AFL and the Collingwood Football Club (unfortunately). He and Pip barrack for Collingwood, while Dom and Sol barrack for the Sydney Swans.

Ed is very easily worked up by Sol and does not really understand that Sol has his own issues.

Eddy loves creating worlds in his computer game, Minecraft. When their Mum, Pip, was away in China for a few weeks, Eddy helped Sol build a world just for their Mum with all the things she loves and would want in it.

Ed is pretty clever about the oyster farm and knows most of what is going on and why.

He is more than likely to be the face of the third generation should that happen, although Dom and Pip are adamant that it should be a choice not a definite progression.

Oyster depicts the changes of rhythm as characters shift space and pace. The noise and mundane routine of tasks like loading the sacks of oysters in the refrigerated trucks is forgotten as Dom, Pip and the boys settle in at home to a

meal. Later, exhausted, Dom is asleep on the couch, the television streaming cable, as Pip plays CandyCrush and updates her Facebook account.

When Dom takes the punt out on the water, the mood shifts again, to the vibrant colours in the wide open spaces of the lake and the sky. Pre-dawn, sunrise, the heat of noon, sunset, midnight – the oyster farmer harvests by the rhythm of the tide.

The good times build up with a slower pace: clean water, good sales, family time, right decisions. Then the noise comes, the loud voices, the fast pace that breaks the good times down: bad decisions, storms, disease taking hold, family tension.

This build up and break down – both visual and aural – is like the waves when their rhythm is building. It's as if we are awaiting that perfect wave at the back of the set. Will it be good or bad?





directors statement - kim beamish

Oysters and the Boyton family have been a constant throughout my childhood, my first career as a fine dining chef, and now as a filmmaker. Whilst I did not grow up on the south-east coast, its coast line and lakes mean a whole lot to me as many of my family have, and still do, live there.

My mother and Shelley Boyton have been best friends since before my birth and I have played as a young boy with Dom in the same places, nooks and hideaways that the oyster shed provides, and in which our children are now starting to play with one another.

I have always heard the stories of the farm, its troubles and triumphs, and been humbled by this family's persistence and stubborn work ethic, which has led me to make this film.

Oyster is an observational film which tracks the intertwining stories of the family members alongside the stories of the oysters and the environment they live in. There are no interviews, no explanations, just the drama of life unfolding in the present tense.

Dom and Pip embraced the idea and took me in like there had been no time apart. Instantly showing a level of trust and honesty which allowed me to create an emotional film that immerses the viewer in the changing lives of a working class Australian farming family.

My filmmaking inspiration comes from many in the documentary world such as Kim Longinotto, Abbas Kiarostami, Bob Connolly, the Sensory Ethnographic Lab at Harvard and the observational style. I like to sit close with my characters and become a part of every conversation, every story, every movement so as to bring the audience in close and create an intimacy that the audience can feel they are a part of.

With Oyster there are the wide open spaces of Merimbula Lake and all of its natural beauty which provides a quiet intimate backdrop to the work done by hand, waist deep in lapping waters.

The use of rhythm and pace play with the good times and bad. The highs of a healthy cropan d decisions gone right will play gradually against the speed of the lows, bad decisions and tensions within the family.

The image, the timing and the sound of each location bring the audience into a world they may not have experienced – a world from which they will be able to create their own opinions and make their own decisions.

Bios and Filmography

KIM BEAMISH – DIRECTOR/CO-PRODUCER

Short Biog:

Kim Beamish (Non'D'Script) is an award winning Australian filmmaker whose last film 'The Tentmakers of Cairo' won the 2015 Margaret Mead Filmmaker Award at the Margaret Mead Film Festival and Prix Buyens-Chagoll at the Visions du Reel Film Festival.

Kim's film 'Just Punishment' which he co-produced and directed was instrumental in the campaign to change the mandatory sentencing laws in Singapore after it told the story Van Nguyen's appeal and ultimate execution for drugs trafficking on the island State.

He has been a board member of OPEN CHANNEL (2003-4) in Melbourne, Victoria as well as an educator and tutor in cinematography and editing at the University of Canberra.

At present Kim is developing several projects including Oyster, BANG! and A History of the Passport.

Filmography:

Director/Producer:

The Tentmakers of Cairo (2015) – Visions du Reel (Prix Buyens-Chagoll), Margaret Mead Film Festival (Margaret Mead Filmmaker Award), Canberra International Film Festival, Screened as part of the Faith after the Pharaohs exhibition at the British Museum, London. Just Punishment (2006) - Guangzhou International Documentary Festival, FIFO Pacific Documentary Film Festival, DocumentaryEdge NZ, HRAFF. Globalisation 101 (2000) – SKA TV

Pat Fiske – PRODUCER

Short Biog:

Pat Fiske (Bower Bird Films Pty Ltd and Paradigm Pictures Pty Ltd) has been producing and directing documentary films since the early 1970s and has been a prominent member of Australia's independent filmmaking community. Her films have won many awards and screened in countless film festivals around the world. In 2001, she was awarded the prestigious Stanley Hawes Award for her outstanding contribution to the documentary industry in Australia at the Australian Documentary Conference in Perth.

In the 1970s and 80s, Pat Fiske was on the boards of Filmnews and the Australian Screen Director's Association (ASDA now ADG). Since the early 1990s to today, she has been on the Advisory Panel for the Sydney Film Festival. From the late 1990s, Pat has mentored many emerging filmmakers by either producing or consulting on their projects or helping them through difficulties. In 2001-2002 she was the Documentary Consultant at SBS Independent for 18 months.

Pat was Co-Head of the Documentary Department at the Australian Film, Television and Radio School (AFTRS) from 2002 to 2008. Through the Documentary Department, Pat was one of the initiators of [Ozdox](#), the Australian Documentary Forum, which provides a monthly forum for documentary culture and has been successfully operating since 2003. [Ozdox](#) is managed by a committee of filmmakers and supported by ADG and AFTRS. From 2007 to 2010 Pat worked part time as a curator for the [Australian Screen Online](#). At present she is developing several projects and producing *When the Camera Stopped Rolling*.

Filmography:

Series and Supervising Producer:

Call to Country (2012/2013) – 5 part series for NIDF (National Indigenous Documentary Fund) – *Don't Miss Da Bus, Rainforest Warriors, Menny & the Bundaroos, Buckskin, Eloquent Flower* – ABC scheduled late 2013

Producer:

Oyster (2017) Canberra Intl Film Festival

Love Marriage in Kabul (2014) Sydney Film Festival and Canberra Intl Film Festival Audience Award for Best Documentary, Finalist Walkley Awards 2014

<http://lovemarriageinkabul.com>; *Scarlet Road* (2011) SBS,

<http://www.scarletroad.com.au>; *River of No Return* (2008) – SBS, Oceanic

Documentary Film Festival Special Jury Prize and Montreal First Peoples Film Festival 2nd prize Rigoberta Menchu Community Awards 2009; *Beats Across Borders*

(2006); ***Selling Sickness*** (2004) SBS; ***Business Behind Bars*** (2001) – a two part series 2001 – SBS, Walkley Award 2001.

Director/Producer:

An Artist in Eden (2005) – ABC; ***My Favourite Australian*** x 2 for the National Portrait Gallery (2005) – ABC; ***Look At Me*** (1992); ***Following the Fenceline*** (1998) – ABC, Melbourne International Film Festival Award for Outstanding Achievement in a Video Production; ***Rocking the Foundations, a history of the NSW Builders Laborers' Federation and the Green Bans*** (1985) – ABC, AFI Awards for Best Screenplay and Best Editing 1985, Adelaide Fringe Film Festival Best New Independent Australian Film 1986. In 2017 ***Rocking the Foundations*** was completely restored by the National Film and Sound Archive.

Director:

Night Patrol (1997) – ABC; ***'Doc', a portrait of Herbert Vere Evatt*** (1995) – ABC, New York Festivals Bronze World Medal, History and Society category and Dendy Awards Highly Commended 1996; ***For All the World to See, a portrait of Professor Fred Hollows*** (1992) – ABC, AFI Award Best Documentary 1993; ***Australia Daze*** (1988) – ABC; ***Endo What?*** (1992)

Co-Director:

Larrikin Lad (2012); ***Leaping off the Edge*** (2001) – ABC; ***Woolloomooloo*** (1978), AFI Awards Special Award in the documentary category 'for it's deeply committed presentation of an important social document' 1978.

END CREDITS

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Pat Fiske

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**A Very Special
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