

Belly boarding in Australiasia



Dr. Barry Hutchins at Yallingup. Photo Clay Bryce.

Western Australia

There is limited information regarding bellyboarding in Western Australia. Peter Kidman recalls riding bellyboards around North Cottesloe in the late 1950s. These boards were inspired by a shape made by Don Bancroft who was making a shape of a woman out of ply and used the torso for a bellyboard. Kidman and friends added handlebars and had the boards painted in the colours of their favourite board clubs. Kidman believed his boards would have been known to Don Vidler, through Ken Vidler who he swam with. Tony Wegener from Scarborough and later City Beach recalls the introduction of flippers "reinvented" body surfing: "At first the purist body surfers looked down on the use of swim fins. Not manly enough. But then the magic started. The first "chest boards" were fabricated out of plywood, slightly upturned at the front. They were about the size of the first foam plastic boogie boards and looked like some of Jon Wegener's models. Some of the early chest boards had handles attached to the top front. Surfers at City Beach started making plywood hand paddles thinking that it would improve their take-off. They soon discovered that the hand paddles could be "hand planes". Using swim fins and two hand planes an expert body surfer could make incredible three point rides with the body stiff and only feet and hand planes in the water" (Wegener 2015). Niel Chappel is reported to have also ridden a chestboard

Two existing Vidler boards, which are likely to have been ridden as bellyboards (due to their thinness) suggest an experimental approach to surfcraft. Colin Vidler (2010) advised that Neville Kenyon and Don Vidler initially made the boards before Ron Vidler replaced Neville. The boards were described by Vidler as transition boards between rockerless bellyboards of the time and later kneeboards. These boards were made in Scarborough, soaked in a swimming pool built by their father in 1957. Colin advises that the boards were "Made of marine ply, cut to shape, including a V cutout at front of board. The ply was then

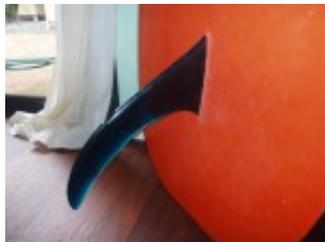
submerged in water for a couple of days (parents swimming pool) and then clamped to one half of a plough disk to obtain the "spoon" and left clamped a few days. The V was then filled in with, I think, foam and was then glassed so as to retain the spoon. Boards then sanded and sprayed with Estapol. They were heavy but they used to go pretty good and fast". The boards were manufactured over a four-five year period, from the late 1960s to the early 1970s. Colin noted the boards were made "so they could buy a Kombi (of course) deck it out and do the East coast surf trip, before getting regular jobs. Ken, Colin and Jeff Vidler won Australian lifesaving titles in ski events while Ken was a 1980 Moscow Olympian (Galton 1984).



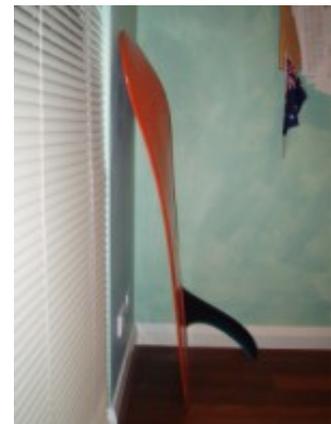
Vidler-Kenyon bellyboard. Currumbin Surfworld museum. Carl Tanner collection.



Vidler-Kenyon logo. Currumbin Surfworld museum.



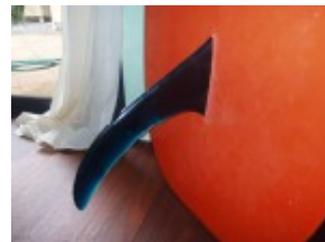
Vidler bellyboard. Henry Marfleet photo and collection



Vidler bellyboard profile. Henry Marfleet photo and collection.



Vidler bellyboard.
Currumbin surfworld museum. Henry Marfleet collection.



Vidler bellyboard.

Len Dibben (2010) a longtime surfboard manufacturer in the Western Australia reports making approximately 6 -10 single fin bellyboards, from both balsa and polyurethane foam. Dr. Barry Hutchins (Hutchins 2009b) moved to Western Australia in 1972 and surfed around Margaret River and Yallingup from 1972-1974, while Steve Bredemeyer rode a bellybagger around Scarborough and Trigg Island around 1994. Around the same time Kev McManus from Victoria surfed both the south-west and north-west coast on fibreglass bellyboards.

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