



## Impact of World War II on the home front Tuncurry's Italian fishermen

### Tuncurry's Italian fishermen (1889)



*Photo supplied courtesy of the Great Lakes Museum. Some of the Italian fishermen with their catch on Old Government Wharf, Tuncurry in the 1930s. Seated at left is Enrico Bonventi, Joe Fazio is with the basket, Johann Fazio with the bream and flathead and Vince Fazio with the crabs. The boy in the background is Conrad Amato.*

The Tuncurry-Forster area is proud of its Italian heritage and the significant contribution Italian people have made to the community. Since 1889, families such as Fazio, Sciacca, Amato and Bonventi have called Tuncurry and the surrounding lakes their home. These fishermen worked continuously and brought stability to the local industry. It is said they introduced the Mediterranean style of fishing that still forms the basis for present day methods.<sup>1</sup>

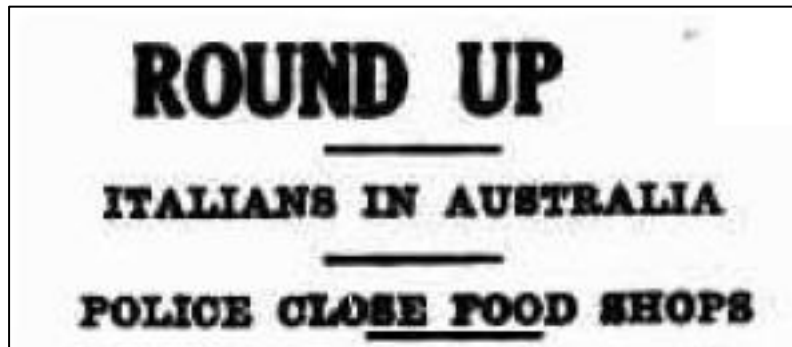
To read the full story about these Italian families and their arrival to Tuncurry visit <http://www.greatlakesmuseum.com.au/?p=443>.

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<sup>1</sup> Tuncurry's Working Waterfront – The Italian fishermen  
<http://www.greatlakesmuseum.com.au/?p=443>

## Hostile or Friendly Foreigners? (June 1940)

10 June 1940 fascist Italian dictator, Benito Mussolini, declared war on France and Great Britain.<sup>2</sup> His declaration set off a wave of consequences across the world which impacted locally here in the NSW MidCoast. With Britain and France as Australia's allies, the move by the Italian dictator stirred up much discontent and gave licence for racist attitudes to surface. The *Northern Champion* newspaper published an article on 15 June 1940<sup>3</sup> titled:



The article outlined a military order empowering the Commissioner of Police to close all refreshment shops conducted by 'enemy aliens' in NSW, particularly focusing on 'unnaturalised' Italian and German people. The article gave a warning at the end stating that 'every precaution is being taken to protect the premises of friendly nationals, such as Greeks and Assyrians.'

Many Italians living in Australia at the time were anti-fascist, however, during this dark period anti-Italian sentiment was rife. Up to 5000 Italians living in Australia were imprisoned in internment camps.<sup>4</sup> Stories circulate today that after its closure in 1938 the Tuncurry Reafforestation Prison briefly became an internment camp for local Italians.

Read the full article on National Library of Australia's website Trove:

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/>

Read about the Tuncurry Reafforestation Prison Camp

<https://midcoaststories.com/2018/06/tuncurry-reafforestation-prison-camp/>

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<sup>2</sup> This day in history <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/italy-declares-war-on-france-and-great-britain>

<sup>3</sup> *Northern Champion*, 'Round up', 15 June 1940.

<sup>4</sup> The conversation: When ethnicity counts: civilian internment in Australia during WW2.

<https://theconversation.com/when-ethnicity-counts-civilian-internment-in-australia-during-ww2-3273>

## Fisheries Matter (October 1940)

Newspapers reported several disturbing stories about attitudes to Italian fishermen in the Forster region. The article below is from the *Wingham Chronicle and Manning River Observer*, 'Fostering Forster', 25 October 1940.

### Fostering Forster

The meeting at the instance of Mr A J Campbell, licensed fisherman, considered matters in regard to the use of the waters of Wallis Lake by members of the Italian community.

At some length, Mr Campbell made very serious allegations of what he termed the "bombastic and aggressive action" of many of the Italian fishermen. They were always docile, he said, when the inspector was about but when away they were hard to tolerate. He alleged they worked in crews of six and eight men, and over-ran smaller Australian crews of two and four. Repeated complaints made to the State Fisheries Department had proved of no avail. The recent opening of the rivers that feed Wallis Lake had given these Italians the only sanctuary the fish could use for their breeding grounds. In the fishing grounds at night the Italians made the night hideous with their national songs and noisy laughter. Would they, he asked, as Australians, be permitted to carry on like that in Italy? The Australian fishermen in the waters of Wallis Lake had about 60 dependents, living wholly and solely on the fishing industry, and it was very hard for them to see their living grabbed from them by "these Italians who have no stake in the place and just flit from one fishing centre on the coast to another, living 'under their hat,' and taking the plums of the industry from the Australian fishermen." Continuing, Mr Campbell said he had prepared a letter for submissions to a Sydney weekly paper, and the letter, having been read, it was decided to adopt same and vouch its correctness...

1. That all Italians unnaturalised be interned, or at least removed from the Cape Hake watershed.
2. That naturalised Italians operating in the local waters be permitted to do so only between sunrise and sunset.
3. That only English language be spoken by Italians.
4. That notification of the intending hauling places by Italian fishermen be reported to the Fisheries Inspector daily.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Wingham Chronicle and Manning River Observer*, 'Fostering Forster', 25 October 1940, pg 1.

**Questions:**

1. In light of these articles, what were some of the consequences of WWII on the local area?
2. Do you think these consequences have had an impact on modern-day Tuncurry and the surrounding areas?
3. World War II is long over, but does Australia struggle with similar issues today? Explain or provide an example.

**Further links:**

National Archives of Australia: Wartime internment camps in Australia

<http://www.naa.gov.au/collection/snapshots/internment-camps/introduction.aspx>

The Conversation: When ethnicity counts: civilian internment in Australia during WW2.

<https://theconversation.com/when-ethnicity-counts-civilian-internment-in-australia-during-ww2-3273>

The Conversation: Why Australia must apologise to Italians interned during WWII

<http://theconversation.com/why-australia-must-apologise-to-italians-interned-during-world-war-ii-4582>