Fifty-six I sailed on board
A ship called Byron One
She's carried trawler men on deck
And a harpoon whaling gun

Chorus (after each verse):

Oh you trawler men, come on
Forget your snapper and your prawn
For it's out of Ballina we'll sail
Fishing for the humpback whale

A tractor for a whale winch
And the ship's an old Fairmile
Twin diesels turn the screws around
She'll whale in a fine old style

Keep a sharp look-out me lads
The whale he's on the run
And we'll drive him into Byron Bay
And we'll shoot him with our guns

The harpoon and the line fly through
Very deep into the whale
She split the timbers of the ship
With a flurry of her tail

The rigging struts are snapped in two
We reel beneath the blow
The gunner fires a killer shot
And that humpback sank below

Make her tail fast to the bows
We've got no time for bed
For four and twenty hours each day
We kept that factory fed

The flensing men upon the land
Some had been jackeroos

They skin the blubber from the whales
Like they’re skinning kangaroos

A hundred whales and then fifty more
Through the factory we did send
And then the orders came – knock off me lads
Your season’s at an end

Back into Ballina we steered
Tied up and stowed the gear
All hands headed for the pub
And we filled ourselves with beer

A *shanty* is a type of work song that was once commonly sung to accompany labor on board large merchant sailing vessels. The term shanty most accurately refers to a specific style of work song belonging to this historical repertoire; however, in recent, popular usage, the scope of its definition is sometimes expanded to admit a wider range of repertoire. Of uncertain etymological origin – one of the earliest and most consistently offered derivations is from the French *chanter*, “to sing” -, the word *shanty* emerged in the mid-19th century in reference to an appreciably distinct genre of work song, developed especially in American-style merchant vessels that had come to prominence in decades prior to the American Civil War. Shanty songs functioned to economize labor in what had then become larger vessels having smaller crews and operating on stricter schedules. The practice of singing shanties eventually became ubiquitous internationally and throughout the era of wind-driven packet and clipper ships.

Shanties had antecedents in the working chants of British and other national maritime traditions. They were notably influenced by songs of African Americans, such as those sung whilst manually loading vessels with cotton in ports of the southern United States. Shanty repertoire borrowed from the contemporary popular music enjoyed by sailors, including minstrel music, popular marches, and land-based folk songs, which were adapted to suit musical forms matching the various labor tasks required to operate a sailing ship. Such tasks, which usually required a coordinated group effort in either a pulling or pushing action, included

weighing anchor and setting sail.

The shanty genre was typified by flexible lyrical forms, which in practice provided for much improvisation and the ability to lengthen or shorten a song to match the circumstances. Its hallmark was call and response, performed between a soloist and the rest of the workers in chorus. The leader, called the shantyman, was appreciated for his piquant language, lyrical wit, and strong voice. Shanties were sung without instrumental accompaniment and, historically speaking, they were only sung in work-based rather than entertainment-oriented contexts. Although most prominent in English, shanties have been created in or translated into other European languages.

The switch to steam-powered ships and the use of machines for shipboard tasks, by the end of the 19th century, meant that shanties gradually ceased to serve a practical function. Their use as work songs became negligible in the first half of the 20th century. Information about shanties was preserved by veteran sailors and by folklorist song-collectors, and their written and audio-recorded work provided resources that would later support a revival in singing shanties as a land-based leisure activity. Commercial musical recordings, popular literature, and other media, especially since the 1920s, have inspired interest in shanties among land-folk.

Among these, the Ballina Whalers, composed by Pete Truin, Jamie Doe and Sam Brookes, are three musicians clinging to the hull of a musical tradition stretching back over hundreds of years. Using just their voices they explore ballads, shanties and seafaring songs that tell tales of whaling ships, lost loves, roaring storms and hardship out at sea.

Fast becoming one of the most sort shanty bands around, the last few years have been extremely busy for the band: their debut EP *‘Lowlands’* – part of a proposed trilogy – was released in December 2012 on Hectic Eclectic Records. It was recorded live by the band and is available for digital download. Following the success of the ‘*Lowlands* EP’ launch, the band just finished recording their second EP due for release in November 2013.

In the song *The Humpback Whale* tells the story of a whaling and of the strenuous effort of fishermen to have the best. And, after fatigue, seafaring adventure ends victorious in front of a glass of beer.