



kiwi cane 2024

australian bamboo fly rod makers - a brief history

david hemmings, james jones & fred von reibnitz

why bamboo

- the appeal of bamboo

- **bamboo** had been used as the primary material for making fishing rods up until the 1960s, when its popularity faded with the advent of fibreglass and later, graphite materials (both of which are lighter, supposedly more durable, and easier to manufacture).
- the obituaries for split bamboo were as premature as those for vinyl records and CD's.
- fast forward 60 years and split-bamboo fly rods are better than they've ever been - today's rod makers have more than 150 years' worth of collective experience to draw upon
- the history of Australian bamboo fly rod makers largely silent

research plan - objective

- address the fact that the literature is largely silent on the history of Australian bamboo fly rod makers
- develop a database of knowledge, focusing initially on the rod makers of the 1930s to 1970s, then progress to the contemporary
- as a minimum, create an accessible narrative and catalogue of the history of Australian bamboo fly rod makers, for posterity.



research plan – defining the eras

placing Australian bamboo fly rod makers in context

- **1930 – 1970 the foundation era.** The foundation makers Bill Southam, Malcolm Gillies and Maurie Turville dominated this era. However, there were other makers, including Len Butterworth (Brisbane), Carter & Son (Melbourne), 'Bluey' Powell (Melbourne), and 'Jim' Jarvis Walker (Melbourne)
- **1970 – 2000 birth of the individual artisan.** The most prominent maker in this era was John McGinn, who migrated to Australia from the UK about 1980. Other makers included Tasmania's Peter McKean, who was making rods from the 1990s until his death in 2016 and Victorian Tony Young, who started making rods in 1995 and is still making them, though he has now branched more into rod fittings.
- **2000 – 2023 bamboo fly rod making in Australia is currently defined by a small group of makers** - they are involved in both making and teaching how to make bamboo fly rods, ensuring continuity of the craft through sharing knowledge and experience. David Hemmings, Callum Ross and Nick Taransky all make exemplary rods. (Taransky is best known as Australasia's only full-time maker), Biographies and bamboo fly rods made by David Hemmings, Callum Ross and Nick Taransky have been documented in detail as part of the research

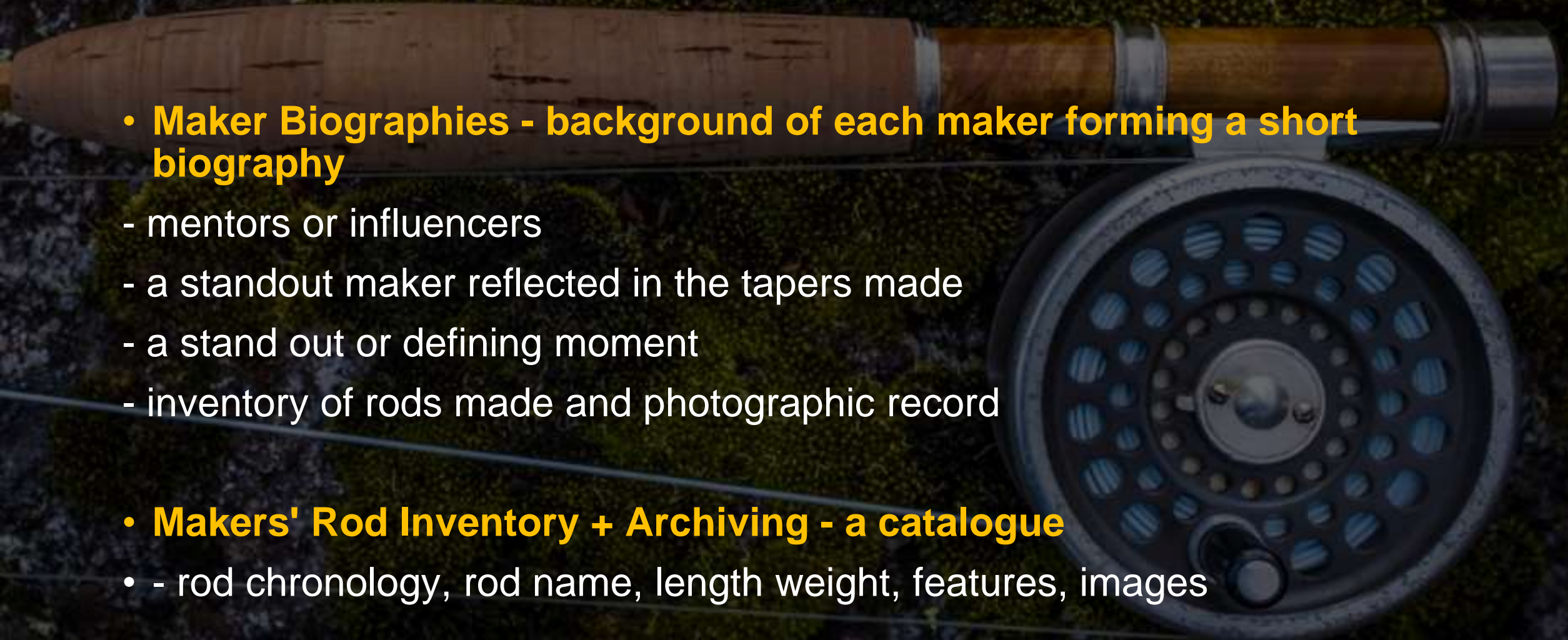
research plan – rod inventory

- **Maker Biographies - background of each maker forming a short biography**

- mentors or influencers
- a standout maker reflected in the tapers made
- a stand out or defining moment
- inventory of rods made and photographic record

- **Makers' Rod Inventory + Archiving - a catalogue**

- - rod chronology, rod name, length weight, features, images



1930 - 1970



GILLIES



SOUTHAM



TURVILLE



McGINN



McKEAN

1970 - 2000



YOUNG



HEMMINGS



ROSS

CONTEMPORARY



TARANSKY

OTHER MAKERS
CARTER & SON
JARVIS WALKER
POWELL
BUTTERWORTH

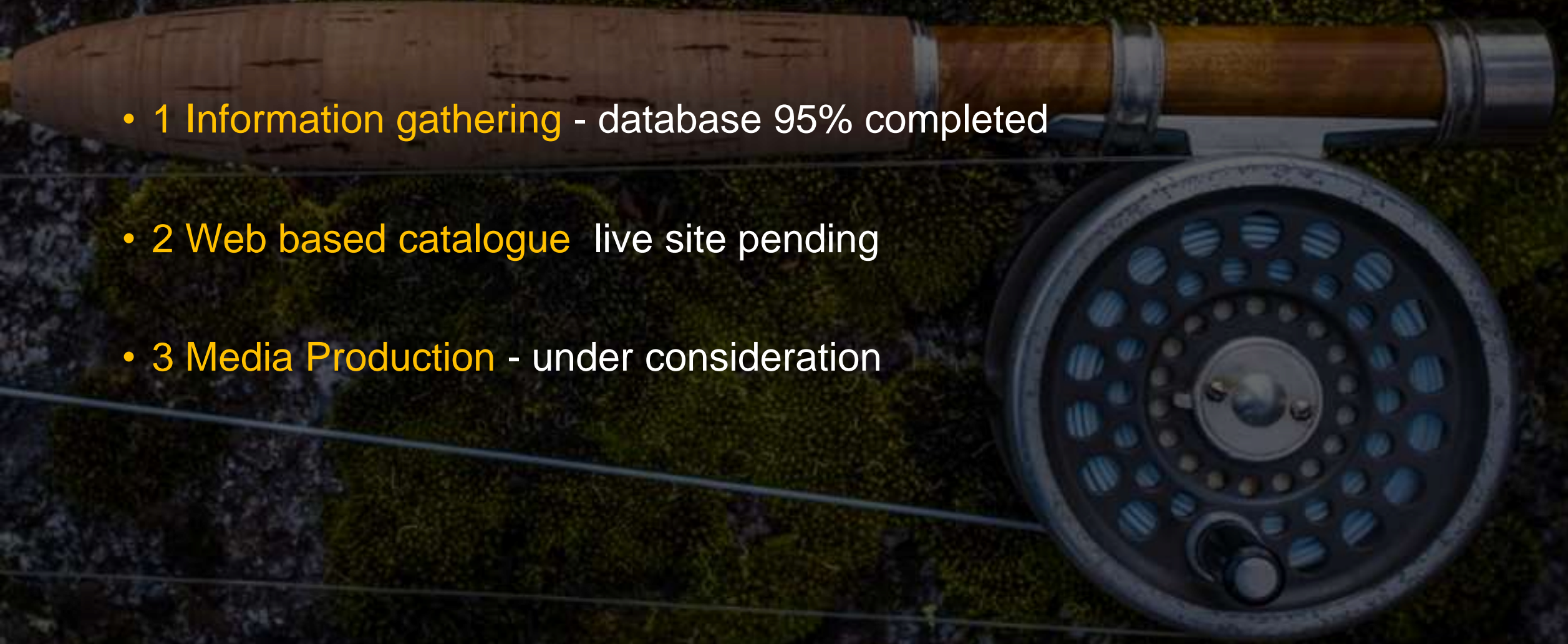
OTHER MAKERS

OTHER MAKERS
ANDERSON
BRADBROOK
CARTER
CROSDALE
GASPAR
McSHARRY
RAMPANT
+

australian bamboo fly rod makers - snapshot

research plan – progress to date

- 1 Information gathering - database 95% completed
- 2 Web based catalogue live site pending
- 3 Media Production - under consideration



next steps

- launch the web site (own URL)
- ongoing refinements and additions to the rod catalogue
- consideration of publication



research plan – underlying narrative

An underlying narrative, has emerged that:

- records and celebrates the lineage of Australian bamboo fly rods (Southam to Taransky).
- in a subtle way, effectively challenges the inherent prejudice against bamboo fly rods being too long, heavy and hard to cast.
- celebrates and discloses the contemporary Australian bamboo fly rod makers, their bespoke/artisan approach & generosity of spirit.
- makes explicit some of the best bamboo fly rods currently being produced in Australia.

