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Around the Jetties 3

Comment

Thank you to those who contacted me over Around the Jetties 2. The comments were excellent. I was asked why I was writing this newsheet? The answer simply is that no publication provides serious factual information for anglers or provides an area for discussion and up to date information. I hope this newsheet might cause the angler who reads the newsheet to think and perhaps feel a little better informed about current issues affecting him or her.

A request: Would any readers who have email facilities please provide your email address, and I will provide this newsheet via email, thus saving some postage etc.

This is an irregular communication, and depends on relevant issues to make up angler news.

Your comments and views are most welcome as are items for inclusion and I am happy to provide this newsheet to other interested anglers.

Restocking of Black Bream

A recent study (2006) of the restocking of black bream in the Blackwood River Estuary in Western Australia has yielded excellent results leading to the following statement in the report.

"The results of this study show that hatchery reared black bream can be used to enhance the population of this commercially and recreationally important species in the Blackwood River Estuary where stocks had become depleted."

For restocking 56 male fish and 50 females were taken from the estuary as brood stock, and in two years nearly 300,00 juveniles were released back into the estuary. After 3 years the majority of fish released had grown to 26cm and sexual maturity. In 2003 about 90% of the fish caught in the estuary were stocked black bream.

The leader of the study concluded "this study shows that restocking provides managers with a further viable option for countering the effects of a decline of black bream in an estuary." This study should provide Fisheries Victoria, our fisheries managers with an option for the Gippsland lakes, given the continuing depleted state of Black Bream stocks.

In 2000 in the Gippsland Lakes the commercial black bream catch was 181 tonnes, whilst the average for the last four years has been 31.5 tonnes. Now that is depletion and every angler realises the current parlous state of the fish stock, however funding a restocking program with commercials able to remove bream in nets with no catch limit is not an option..

Another Study

The University of Wollongong is studying the black bream and the yellow fin bream prior to considering any restocking program in NSW, due to the possibility of the two species hybridising and the effects of this hybrid species on wild stocks, etc.

Mercury and Black Bream.

The Gippsland Lakes Environmental Audit of 1998 stated that when considering black bream in the Gippsland Lakes " the mercury problem does require further investigation as the

evidence indicates rising mercury levels in fish and sediment concentrations are approaching alarmingly high levels.” According to this report there had been an apparent rise in mercury levels of 40% since the 1980’s. I took this matter up with Dr Dianne Rose Manager of Marine Science after being referred to her by the Environment Protection Authority in July 2004. She wrote as follows

“The reported increase in mercury in fish from the lakes will be evaluated using the risk based assessment methodology established by the new state environment protection policy of 2003. The risk assessment will be a consultative process involving scientists, local management authorities, Government agencies and members of the local community. I will endeavour to keep you informed regarding the progress of the studies.”

I am still awaiting the provision of any information on this matter, which I consider has implications for every user of Gippsland Lakes fish.

Atlantic Salmon in the Gippsland Lakes

I was interested to read a report in the Victorian Fishing Monthly magazine quoting Gary Leonard, a local commercial fisherman that he had caught an Atlantic Salmon in his nets. On talking to other anglers and a fisheries scientist we agreed this report was most unlikely to be factual as no one could see how an Atlantic salmon could enter the lakes system given that most are produced in Tasmania in fish enclosures. The general view was that he had netted a sea run trout, which are occasionally caught in the Mitchell River. These fish are silver and generally similar to an Atlantic salmon.

Decline in Size of Tyers Flathead

Several regular dusky flathead fishermen, myself included have noticed a marked decline in the general size of dusky flathead caught in Lake Tyers. Currently the average fish is probably 38-42cm, which is considerably less than four years ago when my diary suggests the average size was 45-50cm. There are also far less large flathead being caught. Most years I would catch and release about ten flathead between 8-12lbs, but this year we have not boated a flathead over 60cm. Does this mean the lake is under pressure with a vastly increased number of fishermen or is it environmental caused by the fact that the lake has not been open for almost four years?

In NSW for long-term sustainability of dusky flathead the minimum size limit was increased to 36cm and a further increase to 40cm is proposed. In Victoria the current minimum size limit is 25cm, and that is for all flathead including dusky flathead. Surely Fisheries Managers in Victoria should be providing better protection to Dusky Flathead by having a more realistic minimum size limit, comparable with NSW. It is also rather strange that recreational anglers in this state willingly accept a bag limit of five fish, for long term sustainability of the species, yet there is no catch limit for commercial fishermen. These current regulations make a joke of sustainability.

Lake Tyers and Sand.

Recently when it was suggested that Lake Tyers should be artificially opened I objected along with others at the reasons and timing. I believe it will be opened artificially in April. There is a question as to whether Lake Tyers will ever open naturally again due to the sand build up on Lake Tyers beach. I am informed that this is a result of the recent predominant south westerly winds and the movement of sand to keep the entrance to the Gippsland Lakes open which in turn has deposited additional sand along Lake Tyers beach raising its height. It seems that if Lake Tyers rose to the current sand level on the beach, which is necessary for any natural breakout there would be major flooding, and this raises the point of whether a natural opening will occur in the future given the current sand build up.

At the Queensland Bribie Island Aquaculture Research Centre 750,000 dusky flathead fingerlings have been produced for an estuary stocking program. This is one of a number of fish being artificially grown to fingerlings at this centre and includes the successful growth of snapper.

Tagging Flathead in the Gippsland Lakes

Dr Hindell senior fisheries ecologist with Pirvic has announced that 20 dusky flathead have been tagged in areas of the Mitchell and Tambo Rivers and close to Lakes Entrance. Most fish are in the 30-40cm range, although one fish of 70cm was tagged. It is hoped this study will find whether dusky flathead move between estuaries, and which habitats are most important for spawning.

Dr Hindell states that "all dusky flathead with an acoustic transmitter are also tagged externally with a yellow T tag. The external tag carries details for fishers to report catching a fish." Anyone returning information on a dusky flathead caught and released will be provided with an account of the movements of the fish. Sometime during March details will be obtained from the listening stations and the first information on movements will be charted. Please carefully return any fish with the yellow T tag to the water to assist the ongoing study.

I was talking to the research team at Metung last week, and was told up to now only one dusky flathead has been recorded and this fish travelled up and down the Mitchell River and across to Paynesville.

In a NSW study of dusky flathead it is suggested that all dusky flathead over 2kgs are female and should be returned for the future of the fishery.

Reel Action

I recently received a media release from **Reel Action**, which has with Rex Hunt Futurefish Foundation applied for over \$700,000 from State and Federal funds on behalf of recreational anglers. The state funds are to be derived from the General Angling Licence Revenue Fund. I understand that **Reel Action Recreational Services** is a company, and as such it must be receiving payment for providing the submissions and undertaking the projects, but the amount of this reimbursement is not mentioned. I am concerned that nowhere is VRFish mentioned as supporting these applications (Other groups are mentioned) and yet VRFish is supposedly the peak recreational body in this state. This application seeks 30% of the funds available from licence revenue, and this could impact on the ability of clubs and bodies to obtain funding for important projects. Finally I am concerned at the nature of the projects listed, and I will deal with only one of the eight projects listed. This project is to take place in the City of Casey, and is a "Kids fishing Day". On this day every youngster attending will receive a free rod, reel, line, lure and cap, and Lee Raynor and Paul Worsteling from the IFISH TV program will attend. Now it is said that Worstelings Tackle World at Cranbourne is providing the tackle at cost. (Just imagine the TV advertising value of such a program both for Reel Action and Tackle World.) I believe there are many major and urgent projects that warrant funding rather than providing gear for a group of youngsters who attend a fishing day. Funding is suggested for another 13 "Kids come try fishing days" around the state, but it is unknown whether each of these will provide free gear to youngsters.

Nowhere in these projects is there any attempt to provide funds towards improving fish stocks, which is perhaps the starting point for a successful recreational fishery and if we are not careful there may be a lack of fish for those kids to catch in the future. It's a matter of priorities. There is also a project to provide communication links between all recreational fishers and recreational organisations. Again VRFish is not mentioned and I would have thought the Peak Body should be addressing the issue of communication to anglers. This would seem to me to be a challenge to VRFish's role in this state and anglers should perhaps

watch this issue with some concern. It may also be a wake up call for VRFish, which has hardly been active in establishing sound lines of communication with the anglers of the state who it supposedly represents. The results of these applications will be known in April.

David Kramer Managing Director of Reel Action Recreational Fishing Services was formerly executive officer of VRFish and for three years was a member of the Fisheries Allocation Committee that allocated funds from the General Angling Licence.

In 2006/7 three tonne of shrimp valued at \$63,000 were taken from the Gippsland Lakes for bait by commercial bait fishermen . Now that's a lot of shrimp.

Black Bream Stock Assessment.

Dr Murray MacDonald Fisheries Victoria Director of Bays and Inlets has informed me that it is unlikely that any black bream Stock Assessment will take place this year. He suggested that other species would be subjected to a stock assessment. I wonder if those other species are facing a similar crisis to that facing black bream. I also wonder whether VRFish has been informed of this decision.

Bag and Size Limit Review

Dr Macdonald has indicated that later in the year there will be a total review of fisheries regulations including bag and size limits. Dr MacDonald suggested that Fisheries Victoria would provide a draft of suggested bag and size limits and then call for comments on this draft. I had hoped they would call for initial submissions from anglers and then develop the draft from these submissions. This would seem to me to be far preferable, and involve the fishing community as a whole in developing a paper on size and bag limits for final approval from the public.

VRFish has recently called for submissions on size and bag limits and prepared a document on this topic. I am not sure whether copies are available to the public. I must say I do have some concern with its suggested 21cm size limit and 20 bag limit for Australian salmon, . **“In NSW and WA the bag limit is 4 and 5 salmon while in SA the minimum size limit is 35cm.”** This was taken from my submission to VRFish, which recommended a 28cm size limit and bag limit of 10, however strangely in the final document VRFish stated they did not have a submission on Australian salmon. (I am aware of at least one other submission that included suggestions for Australian salmon.) I do applaud the suggested increase in the size limit for luderick from 22cm to 28cm. This has been long overdue and would ensure this fish has an opportunity to spawn before attaining legal size, which can only benefit the recreational fishery. Sadly I would doubt whether Fisheries Victoria would support such a move, as it would impact on the commercial fishery.

Some Bits and Pieces

Graeme Merryfull caught a 4 1/2 lb Australian salmon in Lake Tyers this week. On a light bream rod this was a top catch. The bait was a pilchard fillet.

I saw a lovely bag of 1-2lb luderick caught from a boat at Metung on Labour Day weekend. The angler was using green weed and a float and fished close in and around the jetties.

Alec Milledge reports some good duskies taken when fishing from his jetty at Metung. He uses soft plastics and seldom misses out on a meal of this fine fish.

Max Nicholson of Metung reports the sighting of a group of Mulloway around the yacht club area of Bancroft Bay. This sighting was confirmed by a number of people.

Lake Tyers Fisheries Reserve Management Plan

I wrote a detailed submission to the steering committee of the Lake Tyers Fisheries Reserve Management Plan critical at the membership of this committee and of the draft report that was in my view 95% word for word with the Mallacoota plan. I believe the committee had little knowledge of Lake Tyers, and given that only twenty submissions were received classed as verbal and written little information was received. (The question arises as to how a verbal submission is distributed to eight committee members.) Nowhere were those who submitted a submission listed nor was the attendance at committee meetings of those charged with preparing this draft noted. The chairman Duncan Malcolm confessed at the original public meeting that he knew nothing of fishing. Of the eight-committee members only Graeme Evans represented recreational anglers as a VRFish member, and he has provided no comment on the procedures, or written report. The committee included a planner for Parks Victoria, and a natural resource planner for the East Gippsland Shire. A member of the Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust, and an indigenous Liaison Officer of the East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority together with Dr Murray MacDonald of Fisheries Victoria and Nick Phizacklea of the Fisheries Co-Management Council made up this committee. I understand no additional evidence was called from the Lake Tyers or other angling clubs, the charter boat operator who fishes the lake daily, or even research anglers who have fished Lake Tyers over many of years. I feel the anglers of Gippsland who fish and love Lake Tyers have been largely unrepresented in developing a management plan for this important lake. I sent a copy of my response to this plan and an accompanying letter to VRFish in November 2006, but as yet have not had a written response.

Interesting-Duncan Malcolm chaired the Mallacoota Management Plan Steering Committee, and both the Catchment Management and East Gippsland Shire representatives were the same as those on the Lake Tyers Plan. The final plan should soon be released for both Mallacoota and Lake Tyers. The Mallacoota report was 58 pages and the Lake Tyers report was 57 pages in length **most of which is word for word.**

Lake Tyers Habitat Meeting

In 2005 there was a meeting at Orbost to discuss the habitat of the main species sought by anglers in Lake Tyers. I and another angler attended this meeting by invitation with a number of local authority representatives, few of whom had any knowledge of Lake Tyers. There was no reading matter or information forwarded to participants. This meeting was further complicated by the fact that almost no research existed as to the habitat requirements of dusky flathead or their breeding and they were one of the two major species to be discussed. Dr Leanne Gunthorpe and Dr Murray MacDonald were Fisheries Victoria representatives. From that one day a report will be written probably by Dr Gunthorpe and published, the value of which given the available input will be debatable. The next day the Fisheries Victoria and probably local authority representatives travelled to Mallacoota to undertake a habitat meeting with a further report to follow.

One must query the value of some of these meetings and reports. The habitat discussion for Mallacoota again included dusky flathead and again it is acknowledged we know little of this species which makes it exceedingly difficult to discuss and prepare a paper on habitat.

Black Bream and Estuary Openings.

Recently a letter in a local paper from a former commercial angler indicated that he believed black bream from Lake Tyers when the lake opens go to sea for several days to clean themselves after life in a closed estuary. I had previously heard this same view advanced by another commercial fisherman at a black bream stock assessment. It was suggested that commercial fishing boats operating off Lake Tyers take a considerable catch of black bream

when this short migration occurs. A Fisheries Victoria spokesperson doubted this movement, but it seems that most commercial fishermen have little doubt this occurs.

Sorry for the critical comments in this newsheet, however I firmly believe that anglers inclusion in decision making is currently often simply tokenism, and the Victorian Government, and Fisheries Victoria should develop a policy that actively includes anglers and draws upon their wide experience when policy and management of the recreational fishery is being discussed and regulations are being developed.

Following the past four Black Bream Stock Assessments I have provided detailed accounts of the discussion undertaken on those days and provided these reports free to anglers, and this has at times been the subject of critical comment by Fisheries Victoria, however this material at least informed and allowed comment. It was my reports in 2005 that drew attention to the boycott of the stock assessment by commercial fishermen, and the closed meeting between commercial fishermen and Fisheries Victoria from which recreational anglers were excluded, and in the previous year the subject of deathrates in commercial mesh nets was publicised leading to considerable debate and a study of deathrates.

(These reports were printed with the assistance of Craig Ingram's office in the interests of open information for anglers and in most cases this was the only information available on matters discussed at these meetings.)

Road to Tambo River Mouth

In 2002 the East Gippsland Shire, the Catchment Management Authority, and the Department of Sustainability employed a consultant, at a cost in excess of \$30,000 to develop a for the **Strategic Management Plan for the East bank of the Tambo River**. One of the recommendations of his draft report is the closure of the road to the river mouth of the Tambo River. This road was constructed with a grant to the Johnsonville Angling Club in 1995, with a view to catering for angler access to this part of the river, and in particular for the frail and elderly anglers who would be able to use their car to drive beside the river. As part of the project several thousand trees were grown and planted by the angling club and Swan Reach Primary School students, and these trees now provide a wonderful backdrop for this area of the river. The reason for the proposed closure of this area to vehicular traffic is the fact that the parties to this consultancy cannot seem to assess who is responsible for maintenance of this road. Whilst a draft consultants report has been available since 2004, no final report has been made available, and as late as last October a number of East Gippsland Shire councillors were not even aware of the consultancy or draft report. Lets hope a final report is soon available and the matter resolved.

**Kind regards and until next time good fishing
Lynton. G. Barr (Mach 2007)**