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Around the Jetties 5

An East Gippsland Anglers Newsletter

Editorial

I thank all those who have indicated they would like to be on the permanent mailing list of this newsletter, and the very positive comments provided by many readers. It would appear that the newsletter will have a distribution covering a diversity of over 60 readers. If you have not responded and wish to be added to the mailing list please return the slip on this newsletter, or contact me at the address above. In future newsletters will only be mailed to those on the permanent mailing list or persons recommended as interested readers by them. The newsletter will be occasional, in other words as I find information of interest I will put a newsletter together, but I would imagine about six newsletters would be printed annually. I would encourage any readers who would like to contribute material or letters to please do so by mail or email. Such contributions would add to the breadth of views expressed. Occasionally items appearing in this newsletter might also appear on my page entitled "Around the Rivers" in the Fur and Feather Magazine. Both the material in that magazine and in this newsletter are provided with no financial return to the writer in the interests of a wider discussion of current fishing issues amongst anglers.

Lynton. G. Barr

Lake Tyers Opening

John Harrison a research angler for Lake Tyers and whose home overlooks the entrance to Lake Tyers made this observation of the current opening suggesting the lake *"entrance appears very shallow and the scouring which usually occurs has been limited which is disappointing as I had hoped some of the sand build up south of the mud islands may have been removed. I suspect we have had less of a clean out than typically occurs with a man made entrance."*

I have discussed this opening with a number of other Lake Tyers anglers and they generally agree this opening may not last, although the amount of water entering the lake with the continuing rain creates another unknown. It will be interesting to watch developments at the entrance over the next couple of weeks. John has also provided added information noting that the lake opened in September 92, and again in September 93 for a short time and in November 95. This information together with that provided in Around the Jetties 4, provides details of all openings since 1992.

Research Angler

A small number of anglers have over recent years provided flathead heads to the Queenscliff research centre whilst in John Harrison's case he has provided hundreds of otoliths for research with black bream and dusky flathead. Now otoliths are located in the head of the fish and may be carefully removed. They are small and on the surface have rings similar to tree rings. By counting the rings it is possible to determine the age of the fish, and by measuring the thickness of the otolith it is possible in some cases to determine the rate of growth. This of course means that PIRVic using this material at their Queenscliff research centre can determine breeding patterns and to some extent the health of the fish stock. PIRVic is said to be leading the world in this technology, which is being applied to many deep sea species such as Orange Roughy. This is a case of an angler assisting Fisheries Research in their studies of the fish stocks of our lakes and rivers. (PIRVic= Primary Industries Research Victoria (Marine and Freshwater systems.)

I understand however that insufficient funds have been available to carry out work on the flathead otoliths and heads from Lake Tyers.

An Observation.

John Harrison raised the observation at the recent Lake Tyers Assessment day that the dominant year classes of black bream in Lake Tyers namely, 98/99, 01/02 and 02/03 according to statistics provided by Fisheries Researcher Simon Conran correspond to the lake being opened during the spawning period October to January and John suggested this pattern should be examined, unfortunately little interest was shown in this correlation by Fisheries Victoria, however it is an interesting observation. It is probably true that the spawning of black bream in 98/99 and 01/02 are probably providing the basis for the current bream fishery in Lake Tyers with the majority of fish being caught 28-30cms in length.

An Anglers Report (You Have to be Keen)

A very keen fishing mate Graeme Merryfull went fishing in Lake Tyers in the cold early morning, a matter of only a week after the opening of Lake Tyers to the sea. Whilst he was the only boat out he was successful, and landed several very good tailor around the 48-50cm mark, three bream around the 30cm mark and two flathead. Now what I found interesting is the fact that tailor were still present in the lake, and Graeme stated he had several good tailor bites from fish that were not landed. Peter McDiarmid from his charter boat also indicated a number of tailor being taken. I had expected with the opening of Lake Tyers that the tailor and snapper would be out to sea immediately. Perhaps they will still leave the lake in the days ahead. (The bait for the tailor was a filet of pilchard and this has proved a very good bait for both tailor and flathead and the odd snapper.)

A Question of Timing

On the 22nd December 2006, the Director of Fisheries, Dr Peter Appleford, in a press release announced that black bream do survive well after mesh netting in commercial nets with only a three percent mortality. Fisheries Officers and scientists went on board commercial boats to observe the retaining and release of undersize fish. The next phase according to Dr Appleford was the "placing the undersized bream in holding tanks and monitoring them for three days before release. Attached to the document describing this procedure on the internet report was a picture of holding tanks which most would presume was part of this project. In actual fact this photo was of holding tanks on the Glenelg River

used in a Post Release Survival Project for hook caught black bream undertaken on the Glenelg River with the results released at the 2004 Black Bream Stock Assessment together with photos. This 3% deathrate in mesh nets was a controversial result, and this is based upon the statement of a commercial fisherman in the Lakes Post of the 12th November 2003 that the deathrate in gill nets in summer "was estimated at 40% of netted fish." A similar report appeared in the Bairnsdale Advertiser on the 10th November 2003. Two commercial fishermen who reported even higher deathrates supported this expressed opinion of a high summer deathrate in mesh nets at the 2004 Black Bream Stock Assessment. The question now arises as to when the Fisheries Survey of mortality in mesh nets was undertaken. Was it in the mid summer or mid year, and this question assumes considerable importance if the commercial fishermen's statements re summer deathrates in mesh nets are to be compared with the results publicised by the Director of Fisheries.

Remember the size limit of black bream in the Gippsland Lakes was increased from 26cm to 28cm with the collapse of the fish stock, but there was no change in the commercial mesh net size. This means fish between 26 and 28cm formerly retained now have to be released. Many would argue that with the increase in fish size there should have been an appropriate increase in mesh size for commercial fishermen, which would have solved this problem.

Analysis Of Commercial Catch Statistics

Dusky Flathead and the Gippsland Lakes.

An interesting result published in the latest Commercial Fish Production Bulletin for the Gippsland Lakes for 2005/6 was that of Dusky Flathead, where the ten commercial fishermen netted 47 tonnes. This tonnage exceeded that of any species taken from the Lakes in 2005/6, with the exception of carp, and was the largest catch of dusky flathead in the last 30 years. The return to the commercial fishermen for dusky flathead was a mere \$2.90 per kilogram. The catch of black bream for this year was a paltry 37 tonne returning \$10.43 per kilogram.

To show how the lakes have changed one only needs to compare these figures with those of a decade ago when in 1995/6 the catch of Dusky Flathead was 6 tonnes and returned \$1.50 per kilogram and the catch of black bream was 130 tonnes that returned \$7.56 per kilogram .

Overall the 226 tonnes of all species other than carp caught in the Gippsland Lakes in 2005/6 returned to the commercial fishermen under \$4 per kilogram. It would seem to me that this simple analysis of these most recently publicised commercial catch figures,

makes a compelling case for a complete buyout of commercial licences in the Gippsland Lakes. A fish tonnage that returned \$896,000 to the commercial sector if allocated to recreational anglers and tourists would return a hundredfold to the Lakes community and tourism generally.

Of considerable concern to me is the current emphasis on dusky flathead in the commercial catch **with no catch limits**, yet the recreational anglers are limited to 5 fish with only one to exceed 60cms. (Recreational anglers in the interests of a sustainable recreation fishery readily accept this bag limit, but many believe that in the Gippsland Lakes their observation of bag limits have little impact on the stock of dusky flathead when the commercial catch is unrestricted.)

Given the lack of any definitive research on this important recreational species I believe this current commercial catch of Dusky Flathead is a fishing pressure that this fish stock may not be able to sustain, It would be a shame if the Dusky Flathead suffered the same fate as the Black Bream of the Gippsland Lakes.

Dusky Flathead Size Limit

The current Dusky Flathead size limit in Victoria is 25cms, and VRFish is suggesting to Fisheries Victoria that this limit should be increased to 28cms in the current Bag and Size Limit Review of Fisheries Regulations. The NSW size limit for Dusky Flathead is 36cms. I think most anglers would agree this minimum length is far too small and 30-35cms would be a better option for this important species.

VRFish has not indicated the number of submissions it received regarding bag and size limits, other than to say, “the majority were from individuals.”

A Rare Travelling Dusky Flathead.

T.C. Roughly in his wonderful old reference book “Fish and Fisheries of Australia, states the dusky flathead ” spends its life in estuaries and very rarely leaves them.” This has been the general opinion of anglers and researchers and I think this view is still generally accepted. Given the number of small 10-15 cm dusky flathead caught in Lake Tyers prior to its opening there is no doubt the species was breeding in Lake Tyers. It is interesting that the first record of a dusky leaving an estuary and undertaking a significant movement before capture occurred in 2005 when a tagged dusky (Tagged December 2004) left Wangan Inlet and was recovered fifty miles distant off the entrance to the Mallacoota Lake. This would seem to be an exception, and the stock of this

species within a lake is considered the basis for any future fishery.

Tagging of Dusky Flathead

A program of tagging dusky flathead has been carried out by a small group of anglers over recent years. In Lake Tyers and East Gippsland waters Peter Spehrs has tagged hundreds of dusky flathead. Should you catch a tagged flathead or other species phone the number on the tag with information on your fish including where caught, date and fish length, and within a week or two you will receive information in the form of a certificate which will cover where your fish was tagged and by whom, as well as how far it has travelled. This information provides great interest for the angler as well as adding to the store of information on fish movements.

VRFish’s Submission re Lake Tyers Draft.

I was interested to discover on the internet that VRFish had made a submission re the Draft Lake Tyers Fisheries Management Plan. In one part of this brief two page submission (remembering there were only 5 submissions.) they call for an assessment of Estuary Perch stock in Lake Tyers and stock enhancement via a breeding program. The response from Fisheries Victoria indicated that “recreational anglers indicated that estuary perch is currently not amongst the most popular target species in Lake Tyers” Of course this is correct, as few are currently caught however it is thought that this species could be a prime sporting fish in the environment of Lake Tyers given that commercial fishermen had indicated a small stock of this sporting fish present in the snags of the Nowa Nowa Arm. Its only a few years ago that Fisheries Victoria released 1,000 estuary perch into Lake Hamilton in the Western District, and I would suggest any release in Lake Tyers with its snags and cover would have a far greater chance of success than the Lake Hamilton release. I still can find no angler suggestion that has been accepted in this Management Plan, and this is a rather sad commentary on the vision of a partnership between the recreational anglers of this state and its Fisheries Managers. .

I wonder how many Gippsland anglers have been made aware of VRFish’s submission on their behalf regarding Lake Tyers.

A Puzzling Outcome

In the VRFish submission to Victorian Fisheries on Bag and Size limits I find the following puzzling outcome. In the case of Estuary Perch the following statement appears in the VRFish submission. **“All submissions received requested an increase in size limit,”** and despite this there is no change

recommended in the VRFish submission which means the 25cm size limit is endorsed by the Peak body. One wonders at the value of providing submissions to the Peak Body when all submissions are ignored without comment. (*The CEO of VRFish indicated he would get back to me on this matter. At the time of printing there has been no contact.*)

Estuary perch Size Limit. It is argued similar estuary fish such as bream, luderick and bass should have a minimum size limit of 28cm. I think most anglers would agree this great sporting fish should be treated the same as the black bream for both size and bag limit. Cadwallader and Backhouse in their book "A guide to the Freshwater Fish of Victoria" indicate that estuary Perch do not become mature until the male reaches 26cm and the female 31cms. The VRFish recommended size limit would mean that these fish could be taken before they had ever spawned.

Review of VRFish

It has come to my attention that a review of VRFish as Victorian anglers peak body will be undertaken, and the cost of this review will be met from Recreational Fishing Licence revenue. It is not known who will undertake this review nor what the terms of reference will be. It should be noted that several years ago a review of VRFish was undertaken and submissions called for and I understand this cost in the thousands and was financed from Recreational Licence Funds. (I provided a detailed submission on request but never heard another thing from this review.) Last year a further consultants report was arranged but according to Bob Pierce the VRFish Chairman this report never saw the light of day because of the errors of fact it contained. Now with the suggestion of a third review the future of Victorian anglers peak body would seem to be at considerable risk. The question arises as to what parties are inspiring these reviews, and the legitimacy of using Recreational Licence funds to pursue such actions. My simple thought would be that these funds might be better used in undertaking vital Dusky Flathead research.

VRFish and Australian Salmon

I do get a little irate with VRFish when I read in their submission to the Bag and Size Limit Review of Fisheries Regulations that that **no submissions** were received for the Australian Salmon size or bag limit, when I know of two submissions including my own covered this species. *In my submission I noted the NSW and WA bag limit of 4 and 5 salmon and*

suggested a bag limit for this state of 10 with a size limit of 28cm.

Given VRFish did not take into account at least two submissions regarding Australian Salmon, it was disappointing to see a minimum size limit of a mere 21cms and a bag limit of 20 recommended by VRFish in other words endorsing the current size and bag limit.. I would have thought both the bag limit and size limit proposed by VRFish do not reflect modern attitudes to this species, and are certainly not in line with some of the thinking in other states. (*I emailed VRFish on the issue of "no submissions," and the CEO indicated the submissions had been received and were not included due to an administrative mistake.*)

Whilst being a little concerned at the VRFish submission on size and bag limits, I regard it as most important that we have a Peak Body to represent us in such a vital area as a change in Fisheries Regulations.

Anglers Ignored

It was disappointing to find that individual anglers or clubs were not invited to contribute to Fisheries Victoria's initial Bag and Size limit inquiry, and therefore VRFish's submission despite its shortcomings represented all recreational anglers in the state. This decision of Fisheries Victoria ignores the majority of unaffiliated anglers in this state. **Anglers must remember that in August, Fisheries Victoria will release a draft on size and bag limit and regulation alterations, and then and only then will anglers have a chance to provide input. I urge anglers to use this opportunity.**

A look at the Recreational Fishing Licence Revenue.

I provide the following simple outline of the Recreational Fishing Licence Revenue and its disbursement. I am sure many anglers are unaware how this system works, and how the money raised from the thousands of licence fees are used. Material in this section is taken from the report to the Victorian Parliament.

The amount received from fishing licence fees in 2004/5 was just over \$4million.

The expenditure was as follows.

\$1 million to the commercial fishermen of Lake Tyers and Mallacoota. (the second of three such payments after the cancellation of licences.)

\$843,000 to employ ten Recreational Fisheries Officers. (2 of these officers in Gippsland)

\$400,000 Cost and expenses of administration of Recreational Fishing Licences.

\$319,000 to fund the Recreational Peak Body.

This meant that only \$1.3 million was left to fund fishing grants across the state.

Some Personal Comments

1. Employment of ten Fisheries Officers now seems to be a permanent charge upon the licence fund. Initially I argued against using funds to employ Fisheries Officers as I view this as a normal charge on the Fisheries Budget. The funding for ten Fisheries Officers was originally supported by VRFish, however I understand VRFish now opposes this allocation of such a substantial amount of the Recreational Angling Licence to Fisheries Victoria. As far as I am aware anglers are the only sportsmen who finance officers to ensure compliance with the regulations covering their activities. In Gippsland the two licence financed Fisheries Officers in 2004/5 had 2500 contacts with anglers re possession/size/ and compliance matters.

2. Funding for cancellation of commercial Licences will continue to be a charge on the Recreational Licence fund with a further buyback in Westernport being announced. Anglers I feel sure would continue to welcome such a use of their licence fees.

3. With the above two major items removed from the revenue of the licence fund and administered by others and \$319,000 administered by VRFish, it would seem that less than \$1.5 million remains to be apportioned to individual projects and in 2004/5 this was to 46 projects. I find it interesting that it cost \$400,000 or 30% of the available funds to administer the 46 projects allocated \$1.3 million.

4. It should be noted that a considerable amount of funds now go to fish releases and whilst most anglers would highly regard such projects one would have to be concerned at the \$24,000 cost of releasing 600 2kg brown trout and 400 3kg rainbow trout into Eildon Pondage, but even more interesting is the \$38,000 to study if this release is more effective than large releases of fingerlings, and to determine the percentage of these large fish being caught.

(A quick calculation suggests the cost for each of these fish released in Eildon Pondage is \$24 with a further \$38 per fish to establish whether the release is more effective than releasing fingerlings.)

An interesting allocation of \$32,000 from the RLF is to The Department of Primary Industries at Snobs Creek to study the introduced woody debris and determine whether they have been successful in restoring fish habitat of species of interest to

recreational anglers in the Goulbourn Tambo, Delatite, Mitchell and Snowy Rivers.

A considerable amount of the \$1,3 million currently available for disbursement is going to research projects that would probably never have been undertaken without the funds from the Recreational Angling Licence, and these major projects have the potential to have a major impact upon recreational fishing in the future. It is my long held belief that more funds should be provided to research and that a good start would be for Fisheries Victoria to accept responsibility for its Fisheries Officers whose role is largely compliance, and meet their costs from the Fisheries annual budget, and this simple action would return almost a further million of Recreational Fishing Licence funds to urgently needed fisheries research.

In my view the most irrelevant allocation from the Recreational Licence Fund was \$4000 a year over the next two years made to **Flathead Fred's Fishing Enterprises** to conduct fun fishing shows for adults and children to educate them in safe and sustainable recreational fishing practices.

.The committee (6) that makes these allocations from submissions is made up as follows.

- (a) 2 members of the Fisheries Co-Management Council
- (b) Two people nominated by the Secretary, Department of Primary Industry.
- (c) Two people nominated by the recognised peak body for recreational fishing-VRFish.

The Chairman of VRFish Bob Pierce recently resigned from this important committee.

PETA and Fishing

PETA= People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals

And finally did you know that "Linda McCartney starred in PETA's first nationwide anti-fishing television commercial, declaring September 25 as National Fish Amnesty Day." This was a day to encourage anglers to break their fishing rods and give up this cruel sport.

PETA is already active in the Australian wool industry and this year started a challenge to Queensland rodeos. I am sure fishing in this country will be challenged in the future.

Dead Zones

Reported in the Age Weekend Magazine July 21st 2007 was a report from the UN Environment Program of dead zones in the worlds seas, which have been documented as containing no fish life.

Whilst there are no sea dead zones in Australia, of concern is the naming of four estuarine zones in Australia including the **Gippsland Lakes** and the **Tuggerah Lakes** in NSW. In the estuaries these dead zones come about from the influx of phosphorous and nitrogen rich fertilisers entering the lakes through the rivers and in turn feeding massive algal blooms which in turn dies off and decomposes using up the oxygen in the process. There are now an estimated 200 dead zones that cover 100,000 square kilometres around the world. (When you think about it there is really very little fish life in the Gippsland Lakes given their massive size and sea links.) This situation according to the report is reversible as occurred in the Black Sea, The dead zone in this sea almost disappeared when fertilisers became too expensive for farmers to use.

I believe we have a good chance of a massive algal bloom in the Lakes this summer following the recent floods which have undoubtedly poured additional nutrients into the lake system Reports such as this UN report seem to get little coverage in our media and no discussion from those charged with protecting our lakes and their fish stocks.

Mercury in Black Bream

I have received a letter from the Manager of Marine Science in the EPA Victoria with a draft report that

unfortunately is not for publication at this time, however the Manager of Marine Science Dianne Rose makes the following observation. “The pilot study identified flood events as a possible factor in elevated (mercury) levels in fish. As such it may be possible to attract alternate funding to provide updated information on this issue should additional funds become available to look at the impact of the recent floods.” The sediments of Lake Wellington have been identified as a possible source for mercury contamination. You may remember that a CSIRO report 1998 stated “mercury levels in fish and sediment concentrations are approaching alarmingly high levels.” This is a matter that should be investigated as part of the flood impact on the Gippsland Lakes.

Late News

The twin Rivers Bream Competition fished on the weekend of the 21st and 22nd of July involved 500 anglers who caught and kept 300 bream and 117 bream that were caught and released. This amounts to about 12 hours fishing for each fish caught. A spokesperson for this competition said the quality of fish was much better probably due to the fact sandworm as a bait was unavailable. The catchrate of one fish for each twelve hours fished is very similar to the rate experienced in previous years according to my figures.

OPINIONS EXPRESSED IN THIS NEWSLETTER ARE THOSE OF THE AUTHOR MATERIAL FROM THIS NEWSLETTER MAY BE REPRODUCED BUT IT WOULD BE APPRECIATED IF THE AUTHOR AND PUBLICATION ARE NOTED.

Last Opportunity

Cut off and return to the address at the top of page 1 if you wish to be placed on a Permanent Mailing List

Please place my name on the permanent mailing list for “Around the Jetties.”

Name

Address.....

.....

Phone..... email.....

Caution The launching ramp at Lake Tyers is currently subject to strong tides, and at low tide the ramp is very difficult to either launch or retrieve boats due to the low level of water. It is also necessary to be aware of sand bars in the launching ramp area.

Reported. I have an unconfirmed report from several separate sources, that over 190 boxes of bream and luderick were taken in Jones Bay by commercial fishermen last week. I am informed that catches like this are associated with the movement of fish during flood events.

Remember your contributions would be welcomed.

Until next time, best wishes and good fishing
Lynton Barr