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Around the Jetties 7

An East Gippsland Anglers Newsletter

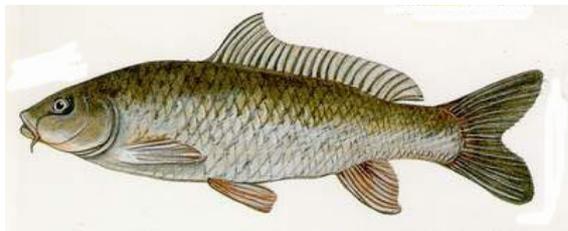
Editorial

This copy is somewhat late, however as stated in the last "Around the Jetties" I have held off sending this issue out until I received a copy of the proposed bag and size limit draft regulations, and it just so happens that Fisheries Victoria is a month late in getting this information out for public comment and at the time of writing, this important document is still not available to the anglers of the state and it has been suggested it might not be released until the New Year. I can't believe that is possible, however if a release of the size and bag limit document does occur I will send out an "Around the Jetties" newsletter with details and comments on the draft policy immediately. You will remember that only peak bodies have at this stage been able to contribute to the draft, and anglers across the state await with interest the release of this document and the possibility of making a contribution to the final decision on size and bag limits.

Again remember, any new readers of "Around the Jetties," can be introduced, by current readers by simply providing the name and address or email address of an interested person. Your input or comments on material in "Around the Jetties" would be most welcome as would letters with views or articles that could provide added interest. Currently our mailing list is close to 80 readers.

First in Last Out (An alien species)

Cyprinus carpio



Recently published in *Cyprinus*, the excellent newsletter on carp and pest fish which is an initiative of the Murray Darling Association is the fact that research in South Australia indicates that carp are always the first into wetlands when waters rise and the last to leave wetlands when waters fall and native fish have long departed. When you think about this, how often we see backwaters attached to rivers particularly in the north of the state that are low and yet alive with carp, which are often trapped in these circumstances. The following item illustrates this fact.

Protection of Carp

Talking about carp in backwaters, in 1982 I was travelling with my son and wife past the Waranga Basin Reservoir, when we saw fish movement in a very shallow backwater that was right against the road. We stopped and were surprised to see literally hundreds or perhaps as many as a thousand large carp rolling in this shallow water that appeared to be less than a foot deep. We talked about this fascinating sight as we travelled on to our home, which at that time was in Wangaratta. My son an outdoor type, was so interested in what we had seen that he returned to the backwater the following day with his hunting bow, and arrows attached to the bow with nylon fishing line. With this somewhat primitive equipment, he shot and retrieved eight enormous carp that weighed 12-15 lbs each. He brought them home and we hung them on the clothesline to take a photo before disposing of them, and were amazed as thousands of eggs spewed from each of the dead fish. I rang the Fisheries and Wildlife Department with the suggestion that the backwater should be cut off from the main lake which was a very simple matter of netting a couple of large pipes under the railway line, and this would mean probably mean hundreds of carp would not be able to return to the

Reservoir. Not only were Fisheries Victoria not interested in isolating the hundreds of breeding carp, they warned against the use of a hunting bow to catch carp, even though they were classed as a noxious fish, and stated anyone found shooting carp with a bow and arrow would be prosecuted. The Hon. David Evans MLC took up the issue of using a bow or spear to hunt carp, when he raised the question in the Victorian Parliament, supporting the legality of using a bow or spear to take noxious fish. The Minister for Fisheries of the day defended the Fisheries Department regulation, that *“the use of spear guns or hand held spears is prohibited in on or next to inland waters,”* and it is still an offence today to shoot carp in inland waters with a bow or spear, even though they are regarded as noxious and a threat to our waterways. (The same would apply to a gun or rifle.)

Interestingly the only comment on the European Carp in the current Recreational Fishing Guide is the statement, *“Some common freshwater pests that have been declared noxious include common carp.”* No pictures or other information on this noxious fish are provided to anglers in this publication, and given the impact of carp on our waterways, I find this omission surprising.

Fact- a carp of 2 kilograms can produce 80,000 eggs whilst a carp of 6 kilograms can produce 1.5 million eggs (*“Managing the Impacts of Carp.” Koehn, Brumley, and Gehrke*)



This European carp was caught in England where they grow to 60lbs. In Australia the record carp is 14.5kgs or 33lbs weight.

Of Interest

In 1996 commercial fishermen of the Gippsland Lakes realising they faced a declining black bream catch, sought a subsidy of 50 cents per kilo from the Government to catch up to 1500 tonnes of carp, and argued that carp were becoming acclimatised to saline water. They also argued that carp were responsible for the declining black bream catches and suggested carp eat the bream eggs, whilst acknowledging this statement had never been proved. Whilst the commercial fishermen readily gained the support of the Bairnsdale Business and Tourism Association, the community and politicians did not support this plea for a subsidy, or the case put forward regarding carp and salinity or the effect on black bream in the Gippsland Lakes. Generally the public were more concerned with the unregulated commercial catch of black bream, which at that time had collapsed from 130 tonnes in 1994/5 to 89 tonnes in 1995/6. Whilst recreational fishermen had long been concerned at the state of the bream fishery, this massive decline in a year of the commercial catch was the first proven indicator of a major collapse in bream stocks. The case for a subsidy to support commercial fishermen catch carp quickly lost any support, and has not again been raised. Of added interest is the fact that in recent years Bell Industries, the major carp fishery in this state, have not been able to catch sufficient carp in the Gippsland Lakes to supply their overseas markets and in 2005/6 it was less than 50% of the normal catch of in excess of 400 tonnes.

Although this search for a carp subsidy occurred only a decade ago, this recent history provides an interesting background to the current state of the black bream fishery.

Meeting with President of VRFish

Since the publication of the last Around the Jetties, I have had an opportunity to meet for

several hours with the Chairman of VRFish, Robert Pierce. This was a most worthwhile meeting and I was delighted to see a draft of a new "Fishing Lines" publication to be available to anglers in the near future. It was stated that over 7000 copies would be distributed, and that in the first edition fishing writer Steve Cooper, would be a contributor. It is hoped that in the future further editions of this publication will establish lines of communication with anglers, and with advertising it will be a cost neutral publication. If this does occur it will be a major step in gaining the support of an informed angler group in this state.

Robert Pierce indicated that VRFish was still under considerable pressure from groups who would like to control VRFish whilst having no democratic base in the recreational fishing community. At the same time Fisheries Victoria is looking to restructure areas such as VRFish and the Co-Management Council, and there does not seem to be certainty about the future of VRFish and its role. As Robert Pierce left he stated that when we meet again he hoped that VRFish would continue to be in existence. This is a matter that should concern all recreational anglers, and it is vitally important for VRFish to have certainty and independence in its future if it is to adequately represent the recreational anglers of this state. I would repeat the fact that VRFish has faced three independent examinations in recent years of its role and membership, and surely this should provide certainty for its future. This was a most worthwhile meeting that gave me a better understanding of the problems facing VRFish and its representation of the interests of recreational anglers. Rob Pierce spoke that evening at a meeting coordinated by the Twin Rivers Tourist group to discuss the effect of declining recreational angling on tourism in the area.

I have a personal view that if the funding of five Fisheries Officers was deleted from the distribution of the General Angling Licence

Cormorants



Funds, and those funds) saved (approx \$400,000) were used by VRFish for publications and the provision of information for anglers across the state it would be the best investment that Fisheries Victoria, and the State Government could make in the future of recreational angling. An informed and concerned recreational angling community is a guarantee for the future.

The General Angling Licence currently funds ten fisheries officers and costs \$843,000

Current Changes to Rules in NSW

The Department of Fisheries NSW has announced the following rule changes and these will affect Victorian anglers who travel north.

1. Leaving a line unattended or using what is commonly known as set lines, will be prohibited in NSW from the 3rd September. An angler must be within 50 metres of his line.
2. Increasing the minimum length of Murray Cod to 55cms on the 1st December 2007, and 60cms from the 1st December 2008.
3. A new closed season for Australian bass and estuary perch in rivers and estuaries from June 1st to August 31st to protect breeding fish each year.

Comment. I believe the abolition of the use of set lines is long overdue. An interesting change is the introduction of a closed season for Australian bass and estuary perch during the breeding season in NSW. Perhaps this is a step that Fisheries Victoria should be urgently investigating for inclusion in its new rules and regulations. By the way blackfish or luderick have had their minimum length. increased from 25 to 27cms in NSW. In Victoria it is currently 22cms but hopefully that will change under the proposed new regulations



Estuary Perch

In 1997 I was interested to read in a local paper a commercial fisherman suggesting that the Great Black Cormorant ate its own weight in fish each day, and he went onto state there

were 10,000 cormorants on the Gippsland Lakes. He further added that “culling of the Great Black Cormorant would have a bigger impact on black bream stocks than size and bag limits placed on commercial and recreational fishermen.” This type of statement was not new and William Carstairs in the 1890’s declared “cormorants and shags destroyed more fish than fishermen caught.” Cormorants have been considered a long term problem with fish stocks since settlement of the Gippsland lakes and have certainly provided a hot topic for discussion over the years. Some of the older readers of this publication will remember in the fifties when shooters were provided with cartridges to shoot cormorants.

Of course the community of today will never accept a culling of this bird, however in 1957 things were quite different and a study of black cormorants, was undertaken by John McNally in which 1995 cormorants were shot with emphasis on the Gippsland Lakes, to obtain information on their feeding habits, and in each case their stomachs were examined. The survey was carried out between 1949 and 1955. Most emphasis was placed on the Great Black Cormorant where the stomachs of 1224 birds were examined. This study was probably the most important ever undertaken in that it can never be duplicated with so many birds being killed to obtain up to date knowledge.

In the results McNally obtained, the average weight of the Black Cormorant was 5.5lbs, and he stated “it is difficult to visualize even the largest species, the black cormorant consuming more than 2lbs of fish per meal,” and he ventures even this figure is probably extreme. Of this amount of food, he found that bream amounted to about 30% and mullet 23% of the fish taken. So on the basis of this survey it is probably reasonable to conclude that the **Great Black Cormorant eats about 1 kilogram of fish per day, of which 300 grams are bream and 230 grams are mullet.** This definition of the daily food intake of the black cormorant is important together with estimated numbers as the basis for any discussion on this birds effect on fish stocks in the Gippsland Lakes. A point of interest is the fact that 57% of what the little Pied Cormorant (black and white) eats in inland waters is yabbies. It should be added that McNally believed the numbers of cormorants varied greatly, with the greatest numbers being on the

lakes in the spring season. One of his final conclusions was that the shooting of these cormorants was of little effect in the overall picture of the Gippsland Lakes. By the way the biggest fish found in the stomach of a black cormorant during this study was a 1lb 6oz bream, but most of the bream were undersize

Over 40 years later Patrick Coutin and Jim Reside undertook another study of the Great Black Cormorant, in 2001, following continuing public debate of the role of this bird on fish stocks of the Gippsland Lakes. In the next “Around the Jetties” we will look at their recent conclusions about this predator, and its role in the Gippsland Lakes. Prior to the Coutin and Reside 2001 study several aerial surveys were undertaken to calculate the number of cormorants on the lakes at that time, but that’s for the next “Around the Jetties.”



I did have a photo that I cherished from a very old Fisheries Victoria Magazine probably dating from the early fifties, which showed a dead Great Black Cormorant with a 1lb 7oz brown trout that had been removed from its stomach lying beside it. I found this same photo in Lance Wedlicks 1962 book on trout and reproduce it in this newsletter .

Talking Other Matters

I recently read the following in a book I was reading- “My father Tommy Garnett, recently returned from Burma, took to study the Great Tits of Alice Holt in Surrey. Chris Perrins continued to work on the tits for sixty years in what has become one of the longest continuous studies of bird populations ever undertaken.” Now one could be forgiven for thinking this was other than a bird study. T.R. Garnett who wrote for the Age newspaper in the eighties provides this quote from his book

called "Bits and Pieces" which provides a number of essays on a wide variety of birds. What a wonderful thought, sixty years study of tits. Now you old fishermen settle back in your seats, and I apologise for this segment of "Around the Jetties."

A Matter of Yes Minister

Thanks to Peter Hall MLC for taking the issue of mercury in black bream to the Minister for Primary Industry. Peter has forwarded a letter he received from the "Acting Manager of Ministerial Correspondence" indicating his letter has been referred to the Environment Protection Authority. Just one small problem, the Environment Protection Authorities Dianne Rose was the person requesting the funding for further studies in this matter following the floods. You know there was a time when you would actually get a reply from a Minister, rather than the Acting Manager of Ministerial Correspondence.

And Another Communication

Henrie Ellis editor of the magazines SE Fishing and NE Angling has indicated in a complimentary email, that items from "Around the Jetties" 6 will appear in SE Fishing No 75, and NE Angling No 50. It is pleasing to see information from "Around the Jetties" being used by well-known and respected magazines.

And Another Thing

Reader Murray Mitchell a former Fisheries Officer with a wide experience in a number of countries emailed to say that Eel Tailed catfish, a subject of the last newsletter had been released in New Guinea in 1963, but stocks were destroyed at a later date. He also mentioned during his time in New Guinea carp were widely distributed to provide protein in local diets.

I can recall as late 1970 catching large numbers of Eel Tailed catfish with my father in law in Frenchman's Creek, which was the connecting creek from the Murray River above Wentworth into Lake Victoria. We kept the fish in keeper nets until the night before we travelled home when they were killed and packed in ice. They were a great eating fish apart from the slimy skin, which had to be removed to reveal the firm white flesh, and this put many people off the fish. In this creek at that time they were together with redfin the predominant fish caught. Today both catfish

and redfin are a very rare catch in this creek. How time changes our fisheries.

Fishing in the Tambo River

One morning during the last week of school holidays I together with my son and a friend fished the upper Tambo River. Between us we landed eleven 30cm bream and a couple of luderick on live shrimp. This is a bit unusual for me, as since the collapse of the black bream stock in the lake system I have tended to fish either Lake Tyers or the Marlo area despite living within 400 metres of this wonderful river.

Now from simple observation I suspect there have been more people in the last week or so fishing the Tambo, than I have seen in the last five or six years, which would seem to indicate there are a considerable number of size fish in the river at this time, and this has not been the case in recent years. Of added interest for me was as well as catching a number of size fish we caught numerous small fish and released numbers of fish in the 25-26cm-size category, which would seem to indicate a fairly strong year class to follow the current size fish. All of the 30cm fish we caught were heavy with roe and milt and I wonder whether this may mean a start in the improvement of black bream stocks. The numbers of fish which appear to be moving into the river to spawn again raises the vexed and difficult question of a possible closed season for black bream, to optimise their spawning potential. It has also been reported with some anecdotal authority that two weeks ago a commercial fisherman took 600kgs of black bream at the mouth of the Tambo River. There is no doubt there has been a reasonably strong movement of black bream into the river and their movement upstream can be clearly seen by the corresponding anglers movements along the riverbank. Of course when one sees such evidence of a possible spawning, and large concentrations of fish in the rivers, as well as raising the question of a closed season for black bream, it also raises the question of the need for a black bream Stock Assessment Meeting, of commercial and recreational interests. Such a meeting to study whether there is an actual stock increase, and how the increased numbers of fish might be supported, to achieve a restoration of the black bream stock, to previous levels prior to the collapse.

Of great interest will be the release of the commercial catch of black bream statistics for the past twelve months, and to ascertain whether this prime indicator reflects an improvement in the stock of black bream in the Gippsland Lakes and rivers. We might have some preliminary evidence regarding bream stocks that provides cautious optimism for the first time in 4-5 years that the black bream might show some recovery.

Changes to Snapper Fishing Regulations

From October 1 the minimum length for snapper in Victorian waters will increase from **27-30cms**. The bag limit will remain at 10 with a **maximum of 3 fish over 40cms** instead of the 50cms previously. Fisheries Victoria has taken these steps after consultation with a large number of anglers and receipt of over 1000 submissions. The aim of the regulations is to conserve stock, and to stop recreational anglers selling commercial quantities of snapper, which is illegal. The increase in size limit will affect anglers fishing Lake Tyers in the future if there is an influx of undersize snapper into the lake, as occurred after the last opening.

Bass Yabbie Catch Regulations.

Whilst it doesn't greatly affect bait gatherers in this area some of our readers are in areas where Bass yabbies are an important sought after bait. In late August Fisheries Victoria introduced a **bag and possession limit of 100 Bass yabbies** for recreational anglers following concerns that large quantities of this popular estuarine bait were being sold illegally. Interestingly Fisheries report that Bass yabbies have become popular with freshwater anglers fishing for golden perch. There are some bass yabbies in the Gippsland Lakes but they are not generally a sought after bait, but from time to time they are advertised in bait shops in the area. Any one found with over 100 Bass yabbies in their possession risks an on the spot fine or could face charges in court with a maximum \$2000 fine.

Phone Call

I had a ring from Rob Pierce Chairman of VRFish in the first week of October to say he was unable to provide any indication as to when the draft on bag and size limits

would be released.

It does seem that it is difficult for Fisheries Victoria to maintain any schedule for the release of information. Alison Gibson VRFish Administration Officer has stated that if the first week in October deadline could not be met, then Fisheries Victoria had indicated the release of the draft could be held over until the New Year.

Rob did indicate that flathead tails were selling for \$35 a kilo in the city.

This is just another reason to be concerned at the increased commercial catch in the Gippsland Lakes of dusky flathead. Remember the commercial catch of this species was 2 tonnes in 1999/2000, and had risen to a startling 47 tonnes last year. This is a 96% increase in the catch of dusky flathead in the last six years. The question arises as to whether the Gippsland lakes can support this massive increase in the commercial catch without a collapse similar to that faced by black bream, given that the species is thought to breed and spend its whole life in the estuary.

A Good Catch

One of our readers John Bourke from Lakes Entrance was recently photographed in the Lakes Post with a 2.47kg brown trout. John was looking particularly pleased and so he should have been as this fish was caught in the Brodribb River above Lake Curlip in what he described was snake country. This fish at over 5lb in the old scale was one of two trout, the other at around 4lb that John caught, and both were sea run trout, with the colour of the flesh bright pink and in every way similar to a Tasmanian Atlantic salmon. Both fish were caught on lures and this provides evidence that these fish entered the Marlo estuary from the sea and travelled up the Brodribb River through Lake Curlip to the upper Brodribb. Congratulations John on a fine catch that would be the envy of many anglers.

Sea Run Trout

It is believed that a small number of young brown trout in rivers with access to the sea occasionally after a period of freshwater residence migrate to saltwater to take advantage of abundant food sources. These fish develop a silvery coloration. They can quickly put on weight and return to the freshwater probably as 2-4lb fish. After a period in freshwater their original trout coloration seems to return. Today in the 2006/7 Fishing Guide this phenomena is recognised with the declaration of "Sea Run trout waters" in which no closed season applies. In our area the Mitchell River below the Highway bridge and the Tambo River downstream of Bruthen are classed as Sea run trout waters. Interestingly, the Brodribb River where this brown trout was taken is not regarded as a Sea run trout water.

Finally world renowned big game angler Zane Grey wrote "I prefer a good fresh sea run trout of 3-4lbs in a river on a single handed rod to anything else," and this puts John Bourke in a special class being one who has experienced what Zane Grey thought was an ultimate fishing experience.

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.

Until next time

Good health and good fishing.

Lynton Barr

