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Around the Jetties 9

Editorial

Welcome to the first edition of "Around the Jetties" for 2008. I decided on this early copy prior to the release of the new Fisheries Regulations, now due to be released in February, after the initial date for release was August 2007. This copy brings together information of interest recently released. Readers will see in this issue that in several areas information is not being released to anglers, and there is no better example than the Black Bream Fishtrak transmitter project, which was completed and handed to Fisheries Victoria in September 2007. In this case and that of the Dusky Flathead project, Dr Hindle the project leader stated "*Sorry its out of my control- I can't release information unless approval is given from the funding bodies.*" I wrote regarding the Black Bream Fishtrak, project to Fisheries Victoria in October 2007 seeking information as to when this report would be released. I have not yet had a response. Any reason for this delay is difficult to understand.

Do remember you can add readers to the mailing list by simply contacting the editor. We now have over 80 readers of this publication.

Native Fish Releases

According to the Department of Primary Industries 'Up to a million Murray cod and golden perch are scheduled to be stocked across rivers and lakes in Victoria in the coming months.' Whilst 34,000 Murray cod fingerlings were released into Lake Eildon before Xmas, it is planned that a further 50,000 Murray cod and 200,000 golden perch are to be released in the next couple of months and a further 80,000 Murray cod are expected to be liberated into the Goulbourn and Loddon rivers in January. This is a massive restocking program and Fisheries Victoria should be congratulated on the success of the Snob's Creek breeding program.

Trout Releases.

Fisheries Victoria has also announced through its Fish Fax that 270,000 trout have been released into Victorian lakes with Lake Glenmaggie and Lake Eildon receiving 100,000, whilst Eildon Pondage received 20,000 and Lake Bellfield in the

Grampians received 50,000. VRFish members assisted in the release of these trout.

Fishing Platforms

East Gippsland Shire Council has managed the construction of three fishing platforms along the lower sections of Clifton Creek to improve shore access for anglers. These platforms were constructed with a \$20,000 grant from the Victorian Fishing Licence Revenue Fund. It is expected another three platforms will be constructed in the next six months along this creek with funds sourced from the Commonwealth Governments Recreational Fishing Community Grants Program.. These fishing platforms can be accessed from a walking track from the Eastwood Estate.

Is This Recreational Angling?

In the first week in November I had the unusual and quite amazing report that a large number of Silver Trevally certainly hundreds and maybe even a thousand,

were thought to have entered the Lake Tyers system from the sea, but instead of entering the lake proper had entered a small lagoon at the entrance. This area was about an acre in size, and it seemed as if hundreds of trevally between 3-4lbs for some reason had become isolated in this small area of water. Whilst there was an access to the lake and to the sea from this small lagoon, the fish seemed to have taken residence in this water that was about five feet deep at its deepest and appeared totally reluctant to move out. Word quickly spread and in a matter of a day or so over 150 “anglers” fished shoulder to shoulder for these fish that could be seen cruising around this lagoon. Some anglers actually waded into the water to cast lures at the fish in the hope of foul hooking these wonderful fish. The slaughter of these fish most of which were heavy with spawn, went on for several weeks, until almost no fish remained in the small lagoon.

I believe Fisheries Victoria with very little effort could have netted these fish and returned them to the main lake at Lake Tyers, or the sea, and in this action they would have had the active support and man power of local angling clubs, and hundreds of prime Silver Trevally could have been added to the stock of this species in Lake Tyers. Fisheries Victoria Officers were prepared to patrol the anglers taking part in this slaughter, and they are to be commended for this action, but with a little foresight, effort, and initiative, Fisheries Victoria could have provided a positive outcome, rather than being casual observers of the slaughter of hundreds of wonderful sporting fish. Fisheries Victoria are after all the managers of, and responsible for, the fish stocks of this state.

Closing of Lake Tyers.

On the 30th November Lake Tyers closed to the sea, and very quickly a large sand block appeared where once this lake emptied into the ocean. On my count this opening has operated since the 26th June, which means the lake was open to the sea for 159 days. Which interestingly is very close to the average 164 days open that has occurred since 1963. Now if we work

on averages we should expect 509 days to pass before it again opens to the sea. (Background statistics courtesy of John Harrison and Jack Whadcoat.)

Black Bream and Mercury

Readers will recall that the issue of mercury in black bream in the Gippsland Lakes was raised in this publication in Issue 3 after the Gippsland Lakes Environmental Audit of 1998 stated the situation was alarming. Dr Rose of the Environmental Protection Association suggested that the recent floods may have increased mercury levels and funds should be provided to investigate this matter. Local member Peter Hall MLC took this issue to the relevant Minister and after a wait of some months a reply was received suggesting that recent 1997 monitoring showed mercury concentrations were below the allowable levels. The problem with this response is that the monitoring referred to, took place before the Environmental Audit of 1998 which suggested the mercury levels in black bream were alarming, and close to published health guidelines. The chairman of the EPA Mr Mick Bourke wrote in 2004 that alternate funding was being sourced to examine the 40% rise since the 1980's in the level of mercury in black bream, which again is at odds with Minister Jennings response. The Ministers letter suggested I should approach Ms Dianne Rose at the EPA for further information. Now she is the person who suggested a study was needed into mercury levels in black bream since the 2007 floods.

Thanks to Peter Hall MLC for pursuing this issue, but it does seem to be a case that could have figured in the “Yes Minister.” series, and the real issue of ascertaining the current levels of mercury in black bream, seems lost.

Note. Mr Mick Bourke is now responsible for monitoring the environmental effects of the Port Phillip Bay dredging due to start in February.

More Information on Black Bream Movements

A further interim report from Dr Jeremy Hindell published on the internet on the movement of black bream in the

Gippsland Lakes. The final report provided by Dr Hindell is still in the hands of Fisheries Victoria and despite requests has not yet been made available to anglers. This is somewhat hard to understand given Dr Hindell's final report on this project was provided to Fisheries Victoria in September 2007.

The following is some general information from that internet report.

- Black bream have been found to move throughout the Gippsland Lakes with some fish moving an amazing 2,600kms and at times they have moved with an average speed of 8.7 kms per hour, covering 30kms in a day.
- Fish spend more time in the rivers at the end of autumn, and spend time in the lake itself during the summer. Activity in the rivers was greatest throughout the winter. Peak movements between the rivers and lakes occurred during the transition period at the end of autumn when they move to the rivers and at the beginning of summer when they move back to the lake.
- It would appear that the woody debris in the Mitchell River is more attractive at this time to the same structures in the Tambo River.
- At the start of winter bream started to move into the upper reaches of rivers with many fish reaching the upper reaches in June. Once the 2007 floods occurred the fish moved back to the lake.
- **In the Nicholson River, on the 19th of June with flood waters rising bream suddenly moved to the mouth of the Nicholson River and all fish exited between 6 and 8pm. It is suggested that the rapid flow of freshwater caused this amazing exit of black bream.**

Editors Comment.

Given the indications of bream movements to the rivers at specific times of the year, and exits from river mouths at flood time, it would seem reasonable to suggest that the commercial regulation allowing netting within 400 metres of the river mouths should be examined. We have all had anecdotal reports of large commercial bream catches during flood periods and at the start of the winter movement of bream into rivers. In Around the Jetties No6 there was a report of a commercial fisherman catching 600kgs of black bream at the mouth of the Tambo and a similar report at flood time of large catches at the mouth of the Nicholson River. We await the final report of the movement of black bream in the Gippsland Lakes and River with interest.

The following is a sample of the movements of black bream recorded by Dr Hindell.

This 20cm black bream was released on the 8th May 2007 at Nicholson -
"Moved straight to Nicholson entrance. Then returned to the middle reaches of the Nicholson by the 8th May. Moved back to the Nicholson entrance a few times, always returning to the middle reaches. Moved out of the Nicholson at the end of May. Next detected at the Mitchell entrance end of June. Moved to the Tambo entrance and then to Metung by early July. Went from Metung to the Tambo entrance to Paynesville in 20 hours on the 19th July. Then moved through to Raymond Island."

This interim report provides twelve detailed reports on the movements of black bream similar to this report. As anglers we are being provided with an amazing picture of the movements of black bream that will alter for many of us our previous view of black bream. One of the interesting outcomes of this research may be support of the long held view that black bream spend their entire life in the estuary. This view was first put forward by the legendary Victorian Director of Fisheries, Dunbavin Butcher in his research on black bream in the 1950's.

Dusky Flathead and Transmitters.

Whilst the interim report on the movement of Dusky Flathead provided by Dr Hindell will not be released, according to Robert Krix of Fisheries Victoria, a short report was provided on the internet following representations of this publication, and a number of phone calls. It needs to be remembered that the \$86,000 funding for this project came from anglers licence fees, so it becomes difficult to understand why the Hindell milestone report has not been made available to anglers despite the willingness of Dr Hindell for this to happen.

Some Details from the Media Release 8th November 2007.

- “Between December 2006 and May 2007 35 dusky flathead were caught and implanted with acoustic transmitters. The smallest measured 33cm and weighed 320grms whilst the biggest was 68cms and weighed 2.1kgs” the fish have been tracked with the use of 40 listening stations.
- Now the following statement is of great interest. Dr Hindell states “our research to date reveals that 80 per cent of the flathead have travelled no more than 10kms from the point where they were tagged and released.”
- There were however several flathead that did not fit this general mould. One of these flathead that was tagged and released in January at the mouth of the Tambo swam from there to Metung a distance of 10kms in just two hours. It stayed in the Metung area until May then returned to the Tambo moving up to Johnsonville, and then returned to Metung.

Whilst very interesting to all anglers, this is the only information that has been released and one can only wonder at the reason or necessity to withhold information to anglers of this state.

Editors Comment - Robert Krix is Fisheries Statutory Support Manager, and

is also chairman of the body that allocates funds from anglers licence fees namely the Fishing Allocation Revenue Committee. Dr Jeremy Hindells milestone (interim) reports on dusky flathead I believe are made to Robert Krix, and he was certainly the person who indicated that reports would not be made public until the research was completed in the allocated two years of the project.

Bass in the Snowy

Only one press release has been provided on this project, and this was a statement from the East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority in late 2007. With Bass Fingerlings due to be released in the Snowy River in March or April it would be interesting to know how successful this project has been. I sought answers to this question. Current inquiries reveal that John Pearson of the CDMA believes some problems may have been experienced with this interesting project, and Chris Lewis, also of the CDMA, who has indicated that problems with the recruitment of male bass have been experienced, has reinforced this. The breeding process will take place at the Bullock Island facility and the small fish will be grown to the fingerling stage in private ponds at Orbost. Problems with equipment have also been experienced at Bullock Island and, according to Chris Lewis, the numbers of tourists and boats have meant it has been difficult to catch male bass for the project in the Snowy River. Whilst these problems may delay the release of fish it is expected that a release will take place in mid 2008. This project was always going to face difficulties, and these are currently being overcome, according to those involved.

Release of Fish

Fisheries Victoria has released information (Nov. 2007) suggesting that research has shown the overall survival rate of mouth hooked undersize fish would be at least 85%. This is somewhat more than the figures regularly quoted by the Gippsland Lakes commercial fishing fraternity. The most significant factor is whether the fish have been deep hooked. Researchers found that mouth hooked bream and snapper had only a 1%-2% mortality but

this rose 22%-23% when deep hooked. It was suggested that fishing with a slack line leads to deep hooking so that by using a tight line anglers may reduce the number of deep hooked fish. It was also suggested that the use of larger hooks would also reduce deep hooking and, of course, if a fish is deep hooked the line should be cut to remove the fish.

Fish Tagging in Lake Tyers

I have been supplied with the following interesting information from an angler who is a reader of this publication and also a most active Victag angler spending hundreds of hours fishing and tagging and then releasing ream and flathead in Lake Tyers and other waters..

Many anglers would be aware there are a significant number of tagged dusky flathead and bream in Lake Tyers after the sustained efforts of some Victag anglers. A couple of recent captures are of interest. (Victag anglers catch fish and then tag and release them in the interests of gaining a greater understanding of major angling species.)

Dusky flathead **A88366** was tagged on the 26th November 2006 when it measured 360mm. Incredibly almost to the year the tagged fish was recaptured on the 25th November 2007 in the same location, measured 380mm with a growth of 20mm in twelve months. The growth in some dusky flathead does tend to be slower than one would expect.

And then there was Dusky Flathead **DV13211** that was tagged on the 11th January 2005 when it measured 340mm and recaptured on the 30th November 2007. Again it was recaptured in the same area it was initially tagged, but significantly different to the recapture detailed above, and measured 440mm, a growth of 100mm in two years.

Both these fish have been returned to the water again. Hopefully as these same fish are recaptured and re-released again and again the base of knowledge through these ongoing recaptures will provide some very valuable insights.

Anglers are encouraged to be ever vigilant for the recapture of tagged fish as they bring them to the landing net, and if their days catch allows it they should return these fish to the water again, after making notes of the tag number, along with the size and length of the fish. The phone number for notifying recaptures is on the tag along with the unique tag number for the fish.

Boat Registrations in Victoria.

You have probably noticed the great number of boats on our roads over the Xmas period. This number will grow in the years to come given that in the five years to 2006 the number of powered boats registered in Victoria rose by nearly 12,000. This means that the total number of powered boats in this state at the end of 1996 was 146,991. This does not include the hundreds of other boats that are non-powered. Add to this the fact that fishing is the most popular boating pursuit, and you will see that boat ramps and waterways around this state are going to become much more crowded in the future.

The case for a vastly increased allocation of funds from licence fees for many more boat ramps is compelling.

Until next time

Good health and good fishing.

Lynton Barr

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