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Around the Jetties 10

“Fishermen most value the fish that are hard to take, and value least those that are offered to everybody on a fishmongers slab.”

Arthur Ransome ...Rod and Line 1929

A Newsletter for Anglers

Editorial

Like others I continue to be concerned at the current delays in providing information to anglers. Some of this delay is attributable to Fisheries Victoria and also the Government's need to vet all information being released to the public.

- We know Dr Jeremy Hindell's final report on black bream movements in the Gippsland Lakes, using transmitter, was provided to Fisheries Victoria in September 2007. Dr Hindell thought we should be able to get access to that report a month later; however six months later it is still unavailable.
- Most important to anglers is the Commercial Catch Bulletin, which gives details of the commercial catch in the Gippsland Lakes 2006/7. Previously this was published each November, however I am informed it could be some months before it is available this year. This bulletin gives anglers an indication of movements in black bream stocks and was for many years the base of information for black bream assessment days. It is now 9 months since the information for that bulletin was available on the 30th of June 2007. If it goes much longer it will be almost a year out of date when published.
- Finally we have the current issue of Fisheries Regulations covering in part bag and size limits. This was to be initially released for public comment in August 2007, and then November and later February. All these times have passed and the fishing public have not even been given a statement for the 7 month delay in the release of this important document. I could add other delays to the above list however that is enough to show a major problem with the release of information to the public from Fisheries Victoria and the Department of Primary Industry.

By the way according to the VRFish Monthly Report the draft regulations mentioned earlier are due to be released in early April. The existing regulations gazetted in 1998 have been extended for twelve months by the Minister to cover the delays being experienced.

Bait Bust

Fisheries Victoria caught an unlicensed bait seller in Melbourne suburbs with 3832 bass yabbies in his possession. This chap had been under surveillance for almost six months according to the Fisheries Fish Fax of January. His boat and equipment has been seized and he will face the court in due course. At \$5 per dozen the bass yabbies seized would have a value in excess of \$1500. The current bass yabby catch limit for anglers is 100. Congratulations to Fisheries Victoria.

Blue Green Algae in the Gippsland Lakes

As readers would be aware, in late December the Gippsland Lakes and later Lake Tyers have been affected by a major blue green algal bloom, which has even spread to the rivers flowing into the lakes. The Gippsland Coastal Board Chairman, Duncan Malcolm has indicated that fish prawns and mussels are still fit for human consumption, but it seems the algal bloom has only had a limited effect on recreational anglers fishing these waters. This statement reflects the difference in the current algal bloom from the toxic 2002 bloom known as Nodularia. In 2002 thick toxic scums formed on the water, and it is thought that today's less toxic *Synechococcus* bloom may be the result of greater water salinity. In 2002 the sale of prawns and mussels caught in the Gippsland lakes was prohibited and the commercial scale fishery was closed for 12 weeks. Certainly the bloom in 2002 appeared far worse visually, and the smell during the decomposition phase wasn't the best. It would seem we have been lucky in some respects that this year we have had the less toxic form of algae. The algae should disappear at the end of autumn as cool weather and winds tend to dissipate the bloom. Marine biology consultant Jonathan Smith quoted in the Advertiser (Feb. 15th) believes we need far more research into the current algal species, and perhaps our Government and Minister for the environment should be considering funding a major study on the algal blooms of the Gippsland Lakes. This has been an ongoing request since the last major outbreak in 2002.

Of interest however, is the view of a lakes commercial bait fisherman of many years standing, who believes that the prawn season in 2008/9 should be excellent. He bases this prediction on his experience over many years, and suggests the decomposed algae provide a food source for prawns, but this is not the case for all fish species of the Gippsland Lakes.

Fish and Blue Green Algae

Commercial fisherman Arthur Allen in the first weeks of the algal bloom suggested in an interview on the ABC that the algal bloom was good for black bream and other species and there had never been more young fish around than was being seen during this bloom. He went further to suggest that small fish actually ate the algal bloom. Listeners I am sure would have had the impression that algal blooms are good for fish stocks of the Gippsland Lakes. I would make the comment that I find this hard to understand, given that science suggests when the algae eventually decomposes, the decomposition of the algal cells consume oxygen and can lead to massive fish deaths due to a lack of oxygen in the water. Of more lasting concern is the adverse effect of algae on the seagrass beds. The algae can kill seagrass beds due to turbidity and these beds are important habitat for fish, and provide cover and protection during the breeding cycle. Given these facts it would seem that blue green algae has an adverse impact on the fish species of the Gippsland Lakes.

Professor Graham Harris in a paper to the State Environment Committee (2006) stated-

“Seagrass beds are probably the most valuable ecological assets in the lakes because of their importance in promoting the breeding of fish. Most seagrasses will only grow well in clear water.”

“Increased nutrient loads lead to increased frequency of algal blooms in the water, increased turbidity and the growth of algae on the leaves of sea grasses.” All of which contribute to the death of seagrasses, and affect the black bream and other fish of the lakes.

Black Bream in the Gippsland Lakes

By the way there would seem to be no connection between the number of small black bream and the current algal bloom as could be inferred in the comments of the commercial fisherman's interview.

I think anyone associated with the Gippsland Lakes has been aware of the increased number of small bream currently being seen over the last eighteen months. The same applies to Lake Tyers where anglers currently comment on the number of small bream regularly seen, and the same observation applies to Marlo where the rivers currently seem alive with small fish.

It is too early yet to suggest there has been some alleviation of the black bream problem in the Gippsland Lakes, but it is evident that this year has seen the best recreational angling in local rivers in the last six years.

As mentioned in the editorial of importance when assessing the current black bream situation, is the Commercial Catch Bulletin, published by Fisheries Victoria, which will provide the commercial catch figures for 2006/7, and these figures will provide a guide to the status of black bream health because they can be compared with previous years.

Previously these figures were published every November; however Fisheries today can give no indication when these figures will be published, as they are yet to go to the Minister. It is becoming more difficult to obtain information from this Government and Fisheries Department and as time slips by these figures become less relevant. Given that Fisheries Victoria no longer has a black bream assessment day, these figures are really the only guide available to anglers to assess the black bream situation.

Worth Remembering

The black bream commercial catch in the Gippsland Lakes has averaged a low **31.75** tonnes per annum over the last four years when from 1981-1991 the average commercial catches of black bream was greater than **200** tonnes per annum.

The commercial Dusky flathead catch in the years 2000-2005 averaged **11.8** tonnes per

annum, however in 2005/6 **47** tonnes of dusky flathead were taken in commercial nets.

This was the biggest catch of dusky flathead in the Gippsland Lakes in 25 years and remembering that 25 years ago there were 37 commercial fishermen compared with the ten today.

The question as to whether the stock of dusky flathead can be sustained with this vastly increased commercial catch pressure remains unanswered.

It is thought that both the above species spend their entire lives within the estuary, so it is unlikely that stocks of either species can be supplemented from fish entering the lakes. It is also an anomaly that recreational anglers have a dusky flathead bag limit of five fish, with one fish exceeding 60cms, whilst the commercial fishermen have no quota or limit on the amount of dusky flathead they can catch.



I like most anglers totally support the recreational bag limit on this species as responsible management, but the lack of any limit on the commercial catch of dusky flathead must be considered as management that is risking the future stock of this marvellous estuary fish, and any savings created by the recreational bag limits may well simply increase the commercial catch. In other words recreational anglers willingly support conservation of dusky flathead, with bag and size limits, whilst the commercial sector takes advantage of this to exploit the dusky flathead stock with no catch limits.

It should be remembered that the average commercial catch of Dusky Flathead between 1990 and 2000 in the Gippsland Lakes was mere 5 tonnes per annum. (Compare 2006/7 catches of 47 tonnes)

A Moment in History

In 1896 the Bairnsdale Fish Protection Society and Bairnsdale Angling Club attempted to have all commercial fishing in the Rivers and Gippsland Lakes stopped. The Society suggested the fishermen could use the beaches to obtain large catches, and the fish could be kept alive in the lakes until ready to be transported to market.

John. D.Adams

“History of the Tambo Shire.”

Another Fish Tracking Project

A project to track black bream in the Yarra and Maribynong estuaries is currently being undertaken. Twenty black bream caught in the Yarra River were implanted with acoustic transmitters to track their movements through the estuaries. Receivers have been installed in the Patterson, Mordialloc and Werribee Rivers to track any wider movements of the bream out of the estuaries.

The final report on this project will be most interesting, however it may be some considerable time before anglers and the interested public get a chance to read the final report, remembering the final report on movements of black bream in the Gippsland Lakes was submitted to Fisheries Victoria in September 2007, by Dr Jeremy Hindell and still has not been made public, after a delay of six months.

A Good Catch

The Kreymborg brothers Rudolph and Herman based at Metung, in 1918 took 800 boxes in one night's netting at Tamboon. It took six horses with drays to bring the fish out to the railhead at Orbost. Perhaps there was good reason for concern at commercial overfishing in the estuaries of East Gippsland over 80 years ago.

Seal in Lake Tyers

The seal that was commented upon in a previous Around the Jetties is still present in Lake Tyers and seems to be quite at home. When fishing the Glasshouse area recently I noticed the seal in the main the main lake some 200 metres from my boat. Sometime later we landed a couple of fish and next thing the seal was 10 metres from

my boat. He looked at our boat, then rolled in the water and returned to his mid lake area where he spent the next hour or so lying on his back with his flippers in mid air.



This seal is a lovely addition to the wonderful wildlife of this magic lake.

A Book on Fly Tying

Many years ago I commenced fly fishing and then progressed into fly tying, which I found a wonderful pastime particularly on winter evenings when accompanied with a glass of north eastern red. The book, that led me from tying the simple Black and Peacock Spider fly to later the more demanding Royal Wulf and many hundreds of flies in between, was George Rowney's wonderful book "Pursuit of Fly Tying".

I recommend this book to all interested, as it is a book that takes the beginner step by step into the world of trout and saltwater flies. George was a teacher at Melbourne High School for many years, and an esteemed member of the Southern Fly Fishers Club.

Whilst I seldom now fish flies preferring the more leisurely approach to fishing, this book remains one of my all time favourites, and I love this very simple approach to a wonderful pastime. If you have a son or friend interested in fly-fishing, and tying their own flies, then this is the book to start. By the way books on fly tying have been written in the English language for almost 500 years.

Bait and the Gippsland Lakes

I find it interesting that anglers can no longer get sandworm, shell, or shrimp from local bait suppliers, and at the moment even local prawns, that have been a standby for many anglers for years, are not readily available. I recall some years ago a local bait man vigorously questioning a Fisheries Victoria Manager on the current policies

with regards to the number of bait licences and conditions, he suggested that without action the bait industry in the Gippsland Lakes would die. Over recent years, Fisheries Victoria has seemed to devote little attention to this important industry and many of the ten licences are not currently being used.

Perhaps its time for an independent inquiry into the bait industry to ensure in the future this industry will survive and provide a service to recreational anglers. Currently one of the most experienced licence holders is working locating portable toilets rather than operating his licence, and other bait licence holders have moved to other jobs not associated with the provision of bait.

It is important that the reasons for the decline in this industry are examined. There would also seem to be a decline in seagrass, which in turn makes it difficult for anglers to catch their own shrimp and crab bait and this particularly affects the elderly anglers in our community.

Major Breakthrough in Tuna Farming.

Recently in the Australian newspaper (March 5th) was an account of an important achievement by Clean Seas Tuna, in that they have bred southern blue fin tuna in captivity at Arno Bay in South Australia. Clean Seas Chairman said "This will be a staggering industry of immense proportions in the future."

This is the tuna that is exported to Japan and sold between \$30 and \$50 per kilo. Because the company will not have to catch wild tuna on a small quota in the future it could mean 1000 more jobs and protection for the wild stock of southern blue fin tuna. Of course this will also mean more fish available for the sport of big game angling for southern blue fin tuna, and given the excellent fishing off Portland in recent years will in the long term add to the availability of fish for this sport. This breakthrough is being reported on ABC televisions This Day Tonight this week.

Water Storages

Water storages around the state still reflect the low rainfall in other areas of the state.

Lake Eildon 18.4%

Dartmouth 17.4%

Cairn Curran 6.2%

Hume 13.5%

Lake Mokoan 6.4%

Laanacoorie 11.3%

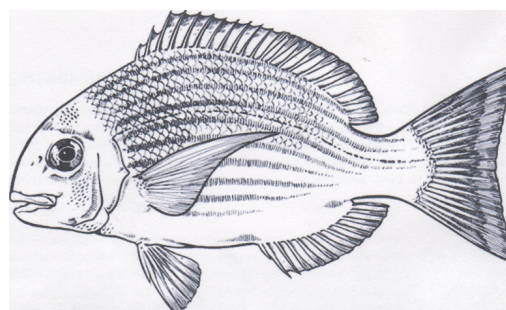
Add to this picture the statement from the CEO of the Murray Darling Commission that she believes the northern rains will have no noticeable effect on Murray River levels, and the concerns for fish survival at the Murray mouth and in the Coorong will remain and increase. It can be seen the problem is ongoing with no answer in the foreseeable future apart from a massive wet season across this state.

It did happen in 1973/4 and we saw the lakes of this state full and overflowing, including all those massive mallee lakes such as Hindmarsh and Albacutya with enormous numbers of fish yabbies and ducks. Rocklands Reservoir, in the Western District, filled and the fishing for redfin and trout was excellent, however on a sobering note, Rocklands today has a 2% water level. Bring on those rains.

Lake Mokoan

Murray cod and Golden Perch are currently being removed from the very low Lake Mokoan with most fish being released into the Goulbourn River This is part of the program to replace Lake Mokoan with swampland similar to the original Winton Swamp.

Tarwhine



A couple of years ago when fishing from my boat in Lake Tyers I caught a Tarwhine of about 30cms. I had not previously caught this species but since then I have heard of

several other anglers catching an odd Tarwhine.

Tarwhine can be mistaken for yellow fin bream, however whilst their fins are yellow, the fish also has yellow speckled ribbons running the length of their bodies. They also have a more rounded head profile than the bream. They are, according to the Queensland Department of Fisheries, about 44cm when they reach maturity. Their habitat stretches from Fraser Island off the Queensland coast to Lakes Entrance. They can also be found in Western Australia around Albany.

They are a coastal marine fish inhabiting reefs to 35m and at the same time may be found in estuaries. I would be most interested to have any information on other angler's catches of Tarwhine to establish just how common this species is in our area.

Visit to the Curlip Project

Last week I travelled to Orbost to have a look at the progress of the building of the Curlip. This project was written up in Around the Jetties Number 6 2007.

I was amazed at the progress that has been made and the boat is now fully sheathed in timber with a cabin being constructed on the main deck. The large rudder is in place and the lines of the Curlip with its high stern are now most evident. This boat is due to leave the boat shed on the 8th October and is to be launched on the 15th of October if all goes to plan.

Currently the project has been underway for 281 days, and when I visited there were a number of voluntary workers flat out working under the guidance of the shipwright. This boat is 65 feet in length with a width of 24.5 feet. The boat, despite its weight of 45 tonnes, only has a draft of 3 feet.

The 1930's Twin Pressure Marine Motor with its 10 cylinders has now been installed in the Curlip, following its restoration by students from Orbost High School. This project is at a wonderful stage and a visit to the Boat Shed at Orbost to see this remarkable community effort is well worthwhile, and if you have an interest in boats you will be amazed at what has been

achieved by this band of dedicated volunteers.

By the way I asked Gil Richardson, Chairman of the project, "would the boat be able to get through a span of the Brodrigg River Bridge." He replied "we have calculated that it should have more than 4 feet clearance on either side when going under the bridge." He did quickly add that they are going to check their measurements. The Boat shed is open Tuesday to Friday 9am-4pm and Saturday 10am-1pm, and entry is by a gold coin.

(Those folk receiving this email have attachments of photographs of the Curlip and The Bass Project. Those receiving by post have a sheet of photos attached.)

The Snowy Bass Project Update

This morning I was given a guided tour and detailed briefing on the Bass breeding project at Seamac on Bullock Island in the company of Dick Brumley, Fisheries Management Officer at Lakes Entrance, and had the project explained by Frank Milito, foreman of Snowy River Native Fish Hatchery, who is an absolute enthusiast for this important project.

Bass have not been recruiting regularly and year classes are missing, it was to overcome this deficiency that the bass breeding program was undertaken with the hope of releasing 50,000 bass annually back into the Snowy River.

It was hoped that the first release would be in March April of this year, but this is now impossible and a later release is expected. Bass have previously been bred in Cowes and released into Blue Rock dam and Glenmaggie Reservoir, however, the private business that undertook this project is no longer operating so that the work at Seamac becomes even more important for the future of this wonderful species of fish. The Snowy River Hatchery has leased 40% of the Seamac facilities on Bullock Island to undertake this project whilst at the same time operating several holding ponds at Orbost.

Brood fish have been caught by members of the Orbost Angling Club, and also by Frank Milito and David Hewitt of the Native Fish

Hatchery. These fish have been caught using hook and line however it is hoped that in the future to net or use electric fishing methods to catch the brood fish. At the moment Frank Milito has ten beautiful brood female bass in a tank, the biggest being about 2.8kgs, and these fish are very quiet and have settled well in this environment. What is currently urgently needed are several male bass to allow the breeding process to commence.

These male fish must be carefully screened to ensure they are not a bass–estuary perch hybrid, and this is not a simple matter but both time consuming and costly. A number of bass are in the holding ponds at Orbost awaiting the screening process to be completed, and Frank Milito is hopeful that a couple of these fish may be the males that he is seeking to allow breeding of pure Snowy River bass to commence. Any fish that are proved to be hybrids are again released into the Snowy after full certification has taken place.

A fascinating aspect of this project is the breeding of tanks of rotifers, which are a living organism that are bred to feed the small bass when they are first spawned. (They look like a small cloud in the water.) In the wild these organisms occur at a rate of about 5 rotifers per ml of water, however in the tanks at this facility they have them occurring at the rate of 100 per ml of water. This is acknowledged as a major achievement in itself. The rotifers are fed with algae so the facility also breeds algae to feed these small organisms whilst waiting for the brood stock to breed, so a number of large tanks are devoted to this process.

The bass are removed from freshwater and placed in tanks of saltwater, which in turn replicates the movement from the upper stream of freshwater to the saltwater estuary to breed. Frank indicated that providing food for the brood stock was initially a major problem as they were such big eaters and often they would consume a kilo of shrimp at one feeding, however they are now being fed on some frozen food as well as the fresh and this has eased the problem of providing food.

This project now waits on the provision of suitable pure bass male fish for breeding to take place and there is a tremendous sense of optimism and enthusiasm at the prospect of having in the future fingerlings of bass in the tanks at Seamac.

An interesting sidelight is that the brood female fish are fed at times to resemble the tides changing which means different feeding hours on most days and nights.

I came away from this morning with great enthusiasm for the project myself and I think this is infectious when one sees the work that has been done and the aspirations of the team for the future. I would also think the project is lucky to have an enthusiast such as Frank Milito to handle the actual breeding project.

Dick Brumley (Fisheries Victoria) acknowledged the project had some early problems but then it was entering an unknown, and now the project has drawn together anglers, members of Fisheries Victoria, the CMA and the DSE as well as community members who have confidence in the ultimate success of the project.

Dick Brumley confided that when success is achieved in this project he would like to see what has been learned applied to the same type of project only on this occasion for bass in the streams of the Gippsland Lakes, but that is well in the future.

Circulation

Currently the circulation of this publication has reached almost 100.

Until next time

Good health and good fishing.

Lynton Barr

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 were noted.



Curlip Rudder with Paddles ready to be mounted where the ladders are between the struts. The struts and the timber edge around them prevent the paddles being damaged by overhanging branches or jetties.



The engine being lowered into position



Volunteers on the job.



Dick Brumley and Frank Molito at the SEAMAC site



Female Bass Brood stock