



Lynton.G.Barr
P.O.Box 23
Swan Reach 3903
Victoria
Phone 03 5156 4674
Email- delbarr1@bigpond.com

March 2009

Around the Jetties 23

An Anglers Newsletter

The most indispensable item in any fisherman's equipment is his hat. This ancient relic with its battered crown preserves not only the memory of every fish caught, but also the smell.

**Corey Ford
"Tomorrows the Day" (1942)**

Editorial

This issue has been largely devoted to the new fishing regulations part of which, the size and bag limit, have been included in the latest copy of the Victorian Recreational Fishing Guide 2009/10. Further information will be attached to the next issue based on a copy of the entire regulations

It was brought to my notice that some Gippsland Lakes commercial fishermen and their families have received written threats. I am appalled at this act which does nothing for the status of recreational angling and in reality destroys the ability of recreational anglers to mount a cogent argument for buyout of the remaining commercial licences, when one of the parties to any discussion is being physically threatened. I understand this matter is in the hands of the police as it should be and hopefully they may achieve a positive outcome both for the sake of commercial fishermen and their families but also for recreational anglers who all feel a sense of guilt at such cowardly actions. Whilst this publication argues for the complete buyout of commercial angling licences in the Gippsland Lakes, such arguments can only be mounted by the use of logical scientific and angler based anecdotal information.

New Fishing Regulations

I am providing to readers an outline of the new regulations dealing with species of importance to Gippsland anglers. These new regulations are to provide for size and bag limits for the next decade, and are designed to meet the aims as expressed by Dr Peter Appleford Director of Fisheries Victoria of "the ecologically sustainable development of Victoria's fisheries resources." (Fisheries Victoria Management Report 2008) I would doubt that these new regulations will achieve this aim and I have found them disappointing with regard to some species but that's a personal comment. Some of the comments on the individual species were published in a special edition of the publication in June 2008, however I think they may be even more relevant today with the final size and bag limits announced. One reader described the treatment of size and bag limits as a non event, and given that not one size limit for fish listed in this

newsletter changed from the draft released in May 2008 to the final draft released in March 2009, one would have to agree.

Black Bream (all species)

Previous size limit was 28cms in Gippsland Lakes and tributaries, and 26cms in other waters in the state.

(New Size limit 28cms across the state with a bag limit of 10 fish.)

The 28cm size limit for the Gippsland Lakes was introduced from the 18th December 2003 with the specific aim of providing some years of spawning potential before reaching the minimum legal length. This was accepted by recreational anglers as a way of safeguarding the black bream stock, which was in a parlous state in the Gippsland Lakes following the drop in the commercial catch from 154 tonnes in 2001/2 to a mere 28 tonnes in 2002/3. The application of this increase in length across the state is to be applauded and this action may assist a long-term recovery of the bream stocks in the Gippsland lakes and tributaries and prevent a similar collapse in other waters across the state. In the draft it was proposed that the bag limit should be 5 black bream but in the final document this was increased to 10 and this is somewhat disappointing given the bream situation in the Gippsland lakes and tributaries.

*Having recognised the case for bream to spawn before reaching legal size given suitable conditions, perhaps the same criteria **could be applied to all species** to ensure stocks are maintained over the next decade At the moment there does not seem to be any published basis for determining minimum sizes nor any criteria that can be applied across all species*

Luderick

Previous size limit was 22cms with a bag limit of ten fish

(New Size Limit 23cms with a 10 fish bag limit.)

This action of increasing the minimum size from 22cms to 23cms would seem to have no logic and little support..

The male Luderick reaches maturity at 22cms but the female does not reach maturity until 26cms. This means that these fish reach minimum legal length without having the opportunity to spawn. It would seem that a 28cm size limit would allow for at least one spawning of the fish prior to the fish reaching minimum size. In NSW the size limit is 27cms and this was increased from 25cms in 2007. I wonder at the 1cm size increase when VRFish representing recreational anglers across the state suggested a 28cm size limit. .

Estuary Perch

Previous size limit was 25cms, with a bag limit of 10 of which no more than 2 can be Australian bass.

(New Size Limit 27cms with a bag limit of 5 fish of which no more than 2 can be Australian bass.)

According to Cadwallader and Backhouse's excellent book "A Guide to the Freshwater Fish of Victoria," Estuary perch do not reach maturity until reaching 26cms in the case of male fish and 31cms in the case of females. With this recommended minimum size these fish will never have the opportunity to spawn before reaching minimum legal size and so provide an increasing stock. For this reason the size limit should be between **32 and 35cms** and the importance of this is recognised by the NSW size limit of 35cms, which undoubtedly takes into account the criteria of sexual maturity in the species. The value of this species is recognised by the 5 fish bag limit for estuary perch/bass, and an increased size limit would add to securing the viability of this species. A chance has been lost to provide sustainability for this species.

"What a fine fish this is. It has everything an angler could desire-it takes a large range of baits and lures freely. It is a splendid striker and fights well when hooked: moreover it is delicious to eat." Roughley "Fish and Fisheries of Australia"

Australian Bass

Minimum legal size 27cms with a bag limit of 2 fish in all waters other than Lake Bullen Merri, where it is 5.

Dusky Flathead

Previous size limit was 25cms with a bag limit of 5 fish with only 1 over 60cms.

(New Size limit 27cms with a bag limit of no more than 5 fish with only 1 over 60cms)

The treatment of dusky flathead in this regulations draft is almost inexplicable. With a 27cm size limit these fish would be taken before they had spawned, and given our general lack of knowledge of this species it seems strange that this fish is treated in the same manner as the prolific sand flathead when it comes to size limits,

where it is estimated it yields over 400 tonnes of fish to anglers in Victoria bays. The dusky flathead on the other hand is an estuarine species that has the ability to become a trophy species. The only reason for the treatment of this fish with a 27cm size limit would seem to me to be an attempt to cater for the commercial estuary fishery which in the last few years has targeted this fish as bream stocks have declined. Logic suggests that we as recreational anglers should strongly argue for a minimum size of at least 36cms to assist with the sustainability of this wonderful species, which given recent history will come under considerable threat in the next decade. The NSW size limit is currently 35cms and after a major research project undertaken in 2008, there is a move to increase the size limit to 40cms. At 35cms this new research suggests only 5% of dusky flathead spawn. At 27cms minimum size limit in Victoria no dusky flathead will have spawned before reaching the minimum size. The treatment of this fish is difficult to understand and its sustainability with regulations such as these must be questioned.

Silver Trevally

Previous size limit was 20cms with a bag limit of 20 fish

(New Size limit 23cms with a 20 fish bag limit)

This again means that in many cases these fish will reach minimum size before having the opportunity to spawn as maturity is reached in this species between 18 and 25cms. In NSW the minimum size limit is 30cms implemented in September 2007. The catch of silver trevally by recreational anglers in the Gippsland Lakes appears small, however in 2006/7 commercial nets accounted for 47 tonnes of this species.

King George Whiting

Previous size limit was 27cms with a bag limit of 20 fish

(No Change)

This seems reasonable as King George whiting are thought to breed outside the Gippsland Lakes and immature fish about 2cms enter the lakes grow to a reasonable size and then leave the lakes to spawn in areas thought to be west of Cape Otway. The small fish entering the Gippsland lakes are at the mercy of the currents and winds. The numbers of whiting available in the Gippsland lakes varies from year to year. This size and bag limit would seem to be reasonable. No minimum legal size length for grass whiting, however a bag limit of 20 fish applies.

Mullet

Previous no size limit with a 40 fish bag limit

(No Change)

This would seem to be reasonable given the use of mullet as bait fish and the general numbers of mullet that enter waters such as Marlo and at times the Gippsland Lakes. They are regarded as one of the most abundant and widespread fish of coastal waters and estuaries. In the 80's over 100 tonnes of mullet were taken in commercial nets in the Gippsland lakes today only about 20 tonnes are taken.

Snapper

Previous size limit was 28cms with a bag limit of 10 fish with only 3 to exceed 40cms.

(No Change)

Other Species

The Minimum legal size for **Australian Salmon** of 21cms has been retained, as has the 23cm minimum legal size for **Tailor**. Both species have a bag limit of 20 fish.

Leatherjackets

No minimum size limit and a bag limit of 20 fish will ensure that the sale of very small leather jackets continues as has been highlighted in this publication previously. This is a species often caught by young anglers and a minimum size limit of 22cms would ensure a continuing fishery and protection of very small fish from commercial nets and recreational fishing.

Flounder

No change with minimum legal size 23cms and a bag limit of 20.

Gurnard

No minimum legal size limit with a bag limit of 10

Garfish

No minimum legal size limit with a bag limit of 40.

This probably covers most species that anglers fishing estuarine waters and surf beaches would target. Undoubtedly of greatest concern would be the new regulations applying to dusky flathead.

Marine and Inland Waters

The new regulations again specify in the Victorian Recreational Fishing Guide that any angler wishing to know what waters are marine and what waters are inland should “refer to the 1995 Fisheries Act or contact the DPI Customer Service Centre on 136 186.” In October 2002 I wrote to the Director of Fisheries Victoria about this expectation that anglers should read the 1995 Act to establish which waters are inland and which waters are marine. He replied “I have noted the potential confusion that could be generated by not defining the terms in the guide. This matter will be rectified in future editions.” Nothing has been achieved after seven years and the commitment of the then Director of Fisheries and so the potential for confusion remains.

For Gippsland anglers the Gippsland Lakes, Lake Tyers, the lower lake of Mallacoota and the Wingan Inlet are classified as marine waters and four rods are allowed in these waters. In all inland waters 2 rods are allowed.

Out of interest I contacted the Fisheries Victoria Customer Information Centre and inquired regarding the definition of marine and inland waters. The reply took over 10 minutes to obtain as the information officer sought the answer from the new regulations.

Cost of Regulations

To obtain a complete copy of the new regulations which includes any changes to commercial fishing regulations you would need to obtain a copy of the regulations from the Info Victoria Bookshop at a cost of \$30.10 plus \$6.50 postage. Given this charge few anglers will see the extent of the regulations covering fishing in this state

Carp in the Fishing Guide

For the first time a picture of a carp has been included under Freshwater Scale Fish, in the Recreational Fishing Guide 2009/10 with a general statement that this fish “must not be returned to the water alive, given noxious status.” The point has been made a number of times in Around the Jetties including issue 22, when it was stated that with an estimated 330,000 carp being caught annually in this state this fish should be pictured in the recreational Fishing Guide. Fisheries Victoria should be congratulated for at last recognising that carp are a fish of our waterways and some guidance should be given for the treatment of this noxious fish.

Growth Rates of Dusky Flathead

John Harrison a regular contributor has provided this fascinating item, and also the magnified photo of a dusky flathead otolith and I am sure readers will be interested in this information relating to a tagged dusky flathead recently recaptured in Lake Tyers, as it adds a little more to our understanding of this wonderful sporting species. This fish was tagged by Peter Spehr, on the 17/12/2004 with a measured length of 660mm. The fish was recaptured by research angler John Harrison on the 9/1/2009 with a measured length of 820mm and a weight of 3.20kgs (7.11lb). The fish was a female and when the otoliths were removed the fish was found to be 10 years old. In four years the fish had grown 160mm giving an average growth rate of 40mm per year.

The photo attached is of an otolith of this fish showing the ten age rings.”

Thanks to John for this information and the photo.



What is an Otolith?

The otolith in fish is made up with layers of calcium carbonate and is found just behind the eyes of the fish. The growth of the fish results in rings in the carbonate similar to the rings on a tree. By counting the rings it is possible to determine the age of the fish in years. Scientists use otoliths to discover growth rates, which in turn allows understanding of spawning, recruitment and population structure of the species. John Harrison as a research angler removes otoliths from both bream and flathead and provides these to Fisheries Victoria for research as well as providing information on deep hooking and thus survival rates of fish. Peter Spehr mentioned in the above article is a recreational angler who has tagged thousands of fish in Gippsland waters with particular emphasis on Lake Tyers. Recreational anglers such as these are making a major contribution to our understanding of fish species in local waters.

Fish Stocking

Fisheries Victorian has announced that despite the drought there has been a significant increase in the number of trout stocked in Victorian waters. In 2007 200,000 trout were stocked whilst in 2008 over 360,000 trout were stocked. The largest stockings occurred in the Hume (50,000) Lake Purrumbete (45,000) and Lake Bullen Merri (30,000).

Sale of Fish

An Altona Meadows man who admitted illegally catching fish for sale over a seven month period lost his court battle to keep his \$7000 boat and fishing gear. He was also fined \$500 and ordered to pay \$800 compensation for the illegally taken fish as well as having costs of more than \$1,000 awarded a

Closure of Lake Tyers

Lake Tyers closed on the 20th of February after being open for 66 days. This is the third shortest period open since 1963. The average time open since 1983 has been 160 days.

Thanks to the contributors to this newsletter, and we are always looking for material from readers.

Fishing Licences

Form A THE FISHERIES ACTS A 6677

TROUT FISHING LICENCE.

Date 17-9-1935

of J. A. Peerson

is hereby licensed to fish for non-indigenous trout during the open season therefore ending 30th April, 1936

F. LFW15,
Chief Inspector of Fisheries and Game.

Fee Paid 5/-

Signature of Licensee [Signature]

Issued by [Signature] 17/9/35

NOTE: This Licence will have no force or effect until it has been signed by the Licensee. It must be produced when required by any Inspector of Fisheries or member of the Police Force, failing which the holder is liable to a penalty of Five Pounds (£5). The minimum legal length for trout is eleven (11) inches. Be careful in the use of fire, carelessness may have serious consequences.

Reader John Delzoppo has added more information to the search for the introduction of fishing in Victoria. In the last issue due to some research by Robert Krix and Natalie Pearson it was established that an inland angling licence was introduced in 1950. Now John Delzoppo has added to this with a collection of licences that was in his collection dated 1935. You may remember that it was indicated in last month's issue that a Fisheries (Trout Licence Act) 1932 may have been the act that introduced the first fishing licence in the state, and this act was specific to trout. John is going to follow this and attempt to get a copy of the

Tough Bream

John Burke has provided an interesting article from a 2006 Fishing World magazine entitled "Tough Bream" that suggests fisheries research in NSW indicates that mouth caught yellow fin bream can survive significant exposure and playing time prior to release. NSW Fisheries had been in 2006 studying the fate of key species released and attempting to improve survival. Their study suggests 96% survival for mouth hooked fish as compared with 53-80% survival for hook ingested fish. Fish that were caught hooked in the mouth and exposed to the air for between 2.5 and 5 minutes had a survival rate of 97.3%. (201 yellow fin bream were used in these experiments.) The couple of fish that died were bleeding from the mouth when landed and the subsequent air exposure caused the blood to clot around the gills. NSW Fisheries was to undertake studies on hook design to increase the percentage survival of fish hooked in the mouth, and secondly the long-term fate of yellow fin bream who have swallowed a hook., and the rate of hook decay.

From the current experiment it would seem anglers have sufficient time to carefully handle a hooked fish prior to release, and the short period out of the water will not affect the breams chance of survival. I am assuming that black bream and yellow fin bream results would be similar.

Thanks to John Burke for providing information that adds to material already printed on this topic.

Fisheries Research

I wonder at the sharing of research between states. A case in point is the major research project into dusky flathead of July 2008 undertaken by the NSW fisheries, in which over 7000 dusky flathead were sampled. It was found that a dusky flathead minimum size limit of 35cms would only see 5% of female dusky flathead spawn before reaching the minimum legal size. To allow 50% of female dusky flathead to spawn at least once, this research suggested that a minimum legal size of 57cms would be required. If this research is accepted, by Victorian Fisheries, and it seems to be a major report, it is almost impossible to understand the minimal increase in the dusky flathead legal size from 25 to 27cms. It is equally difficult to understand the 1cm increase in the minimum legal size of Luderick. To resolve much of this concern and in the interest of open government, it seems inherent for Fisheries Victoria to provide the reasons and research upon which these decisions have been made, and, who were the panel that made these decisions. That is the very least that anglers who have contributed detailed papers to this project can expect.

Next Issue

The next issue will deal again with artificial reefs and would they be applicable to the Gippsland Lakes and a more thorough look at other aspects of the 2009 Fisheries regulations that are not generally available to anglers plus other issues that may arise.

Please remember you can recommend a friend to receive "Around the Jetties" in 2009 and we welcome new readers whether individuals or angling clubs.

We can provide a large print version of "Around the Jetties" to any reader having problems with the size of the print.

Good health and good fishing
Lynton Barr

Opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the author unless otherwise acknowledged.

MATERIAL FROM THIS NEWSLETTER MAY BE REPRODUCED BUT IT WOULD BE APPRECIATED IF THE AUTHOR AND PUBLICATION WERE NOTED.