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Around the Jetties 25

An Anglers Newsletter

The years will bring their Anodyne,
But I shall never quite forget
The fish that I had counted mine
And lost before they reached the net

Colin Ellis

“The Devout Angler” 1963

(anodyne – as a drug relieves pain; mentally soothing - the years diminish the pain)

Editorial

Over Easter we travelled across Victoria, and I was amazed as we left Gippsland at the number of boats heading to Gippsland and east. We estimated that one in every five cars was trailing a boat. This became understandable for as we headed west to Horsham and beyond, every lake seemed totally dry. I was surprised at Lake Wendouree at Ballarat with its fishing platforms two metres above the grassland that was the lake. Pine lake, Green lake, Tailors lake, Burrumbeet and many more seemed to be totally dry. Add to this the condition of the Hume Weir at 3% and Lake Eildon 10% full and it is easy to understand the move of thousands of boating and fishing holidaymakers to the Gippsland waters. This is good for tourism, but it is going to place far greater pressure on fish stocks in the Gippsland lakes and rivers. For this reason it is pleasing to note a forum on restocking taking place involving the new Acting Executive Director of Fisheries Victoria. Already fish stocks in the Gippsland area are considered to be under great pressure and the basic estuary species of black bream, dusky flathead have declined. In 1996 additional controls were introduced by Fisheries Victoria to “ensure the conservation of severely depleted stocks of black bream in the Gippsland lakes and tributaries.” This included a quota on commercial fishermen and a bag limit of five fish per day for recreational anglers however, the situation today might even be worse than 1996, and certainly the fishing pressure is greater. This is a challenge for Government, Fisheries Victoria and recreational anglers in the immediate future, and restocking may be part of the answer.

Improved Fish Habitat in the Snowy River

The East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority is currently carrying out work in the Snowy River for the improvement of fish habitat. The Authority will be installing between 50 and 80 logs around the first and second islands and the banks of the Snowy Estuary. The presence of instream woody debris is a typical and vital element of south East Australian rivers which contributes to a number of the physical and biological components of waterways, To support a range of fish species (and a range of life stages) each large wood installation will contain a range of micro habitats including:

- A part of the installation that is intertidal. This area of the installation will be rapidly colonised by a range of benthic invertebrates such as barnacles and mussels. These invertebrates create a type of biological reef, which in turn provides habitat for small crustaceans, which are an important source of food for sporting fish, both small juvenile and adult.
- Refuges of a range of size, from small holes to fine branches to larger hollows that can be colonised by black beam estuary perch and luderick.
- Vertical structure around which pelagic species such as trevally can aggregate and
- Horizontal structure, if possible 0.5- 1 metre off the bottom, underneath which species such as bream and estuary perch can shelter.

The logs will be installed on the river and island banks and piles will be used to secure them. Both will be visible and will not present a danger to boats.

\$41,083 funding for this project was derived from the Recreational Licence Fishing Trust and the rest of the funding is from the Broader Snowy Restoration funding.

The above report provided by Jasmine Butler

Catchment Planner

East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority

Editors Comment

The East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority deserves congratulations for firstly applying for this funding and then applying it to a project that will greatly enhance fish habitat. I am sure recreational anglers are delighted to see their licence fees used in a manner that will directly provide benefits to both anglers and fish stocks generally.

Adopt a Stream Grants Program

This is a program aimed at enhancing fish habitat in rivers and streams. It's an opportunity for fishing clubs and community groups to support fisheries habitat.

Applicants can apply for a grant to-

- run a rubbish collection day to remove rubbish from stream sides.
- control weed species such as blackberries.
- plant native vegetation along stream sides.
- install instream structures such as wooden debris and boulders

If an active stewardship role interests your club or group then this dollar for dollar program could be for you.

Editors Comment

I wrote to Dr James Andrews, Program Leader Fisheries and Aquaculture regarding the possibility of an artificial reef in Bancroft Bay .Dr Andrews sent the above information in relation to that letter. This matter was first raised by Alex Milledge of Metung and reported on in the February issue of Around the Jetties. Dr Andrews indicated that three trial reefs are being installed in Port Phillip Bay, and of importance Fisheries Victoria is working with NSW on artificial reef research. I wonder whether the Adopt a Stream Grants could be applied to artificial reefs in Bancroft Bay, given the dollar for dollar grant cost could be met. This may be worth pursuing with Fisheries Victoria by interested residents of Metung.

Lake Tyers Fish Deaths

Frank Millito has reported further fish deaths in the Nowa Nowa Arm of Lake Tyers and upwards of 50 black bream floating on the surface of the water. Some of these fish were close to 3lbs according to Frank. I discussed this with Dick Brumley Senior Fisheries Management Officer at Lakes Entrance. Dick believes this could almost have been predicted given the nature of the disease. (There was a detailed Fisheries report on this disease in issue 24) It probably can also be predicted that these deaths will decrease as the waters of the lake cool in coming months, and of course it needs to be remembered that fish deaths from this disease have occurred previously in local rivers. The last time was in 1949. Frank did report also that the sea eagles of the area were having a wonderful time and he saw a sea eagle pick up a large bream with the utmost ease.

Little Black Discs

By Concerned Angler

I had an interesting experience just after Christmas. I was catching a mixture of fish but predominantly flathead and bream. Because I measure and record every fish I catch as part of my Research Angler work it becomes a real up front and personal approach with every fish. I closely scrutinise every fish I catch as a consequence. I use a wet

towel as the base for my measuring station. One morning a small black disc with a clear outer ring about 3-4mm in diameter appeared on the towel. It sort of looked like the retina of an eye but I had no idea how it got there. It had me intrigued but I went back to my fishing. Some hour or so later a couple more of these discs simultaneously appeared but from where I was still not sure but was pretty sure it was from the fish. I was alerted to watch for the source of these discs.

Then later still that morning I was measuring a bream and looking for the source of the discs when the bream excreted 10 or so of these discs. The source of the discs was now clear but the nature of the breams diet was not so I saved a sample. These discs have never appeared on subsequent fishing days.

The sample was despatched to Fisheries at Queenscliff and through the solid endeavours of Pam Oliveiro who spoke to staff in the benthic lab, the answer came back that the discs appear to be the operculum of a gastropod. What the heck is that you say? Let me try and explain.

Gastropods are an invertebrate animal that includes snails and slugs. The typical gastropod shell is a conical spire composed of tubular whorls and contains the visceral mass of the animal. The opening in the shell is where the head and foot of the animal protrudes and can also be withdrawn back into the shell. The foot bears a horny disc, called the operculum, on its posterior dorsal surface. The operculum neatly fills the shell aperture and thus acts as a protective door or lid.

I am sure we have all looked at life left stranded by receding water lines such as where tides have receded and lakes lowered. These gastropods are frequently left stranded when the water level lowers. I certainly will be taking a closer look at these conical gastropods when next I see them.

Obviously there is at least a very small window in the summer when the opportunist bream crack them open which is a fair feat in itself.

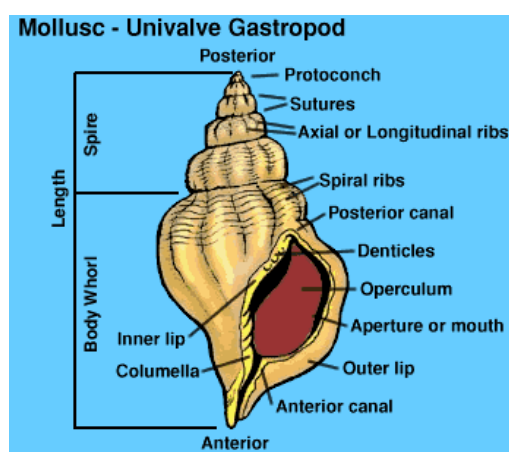
The challenge for the angler is to identify the very small window when these shells become part of their diet and how to thread a hook through the conical shell. Good luck I say!

Special thanks to Pam and the staff of the benthic lab.

Editors Comment

You can always count on this contributor to provide some thought provoking material, and in all my years fishing of fishing I have never noted a gastropod as part of a breams diet. This of course does fit the description of bream. Roughley in his classic book Fish and Fisheries of Australia states "So great a range of food will the bream eat that I have heard it referred to as a scavenger. Not the bream surely, I prefer to think of it as tolerant towards its food and somewhat cosmopolitan in its taste." Roughley also points out that black bream have little trouble in cracking oysters open in NSW, and can cause considerable problems on oyster leases (See Diagram).

Gastropods are soft bodied animals, with a head, foot, **visceral** body mass and a **mantle**, often protected by a shell.



Many gastropods are able to withdraw into a spiral shell and close off the **aperture** with a covering door or lid, called an **operculum**. Others like the **limpet**, have a cone-shaped shell,

Reports Outstanding

Fisheries Victoria has not yet released the following reports, despite the funding in some cases coming directly from anglers through their contribution via Recreation Fishing Licences.

1. The Commercial Catch Statistics for 2007/8 normally released in booklet form in November of the current year. These annual reports are now 5 months overdue from what has been regarded as a normal date for publication. .
2. "Habitat Utilisation and Movement of black bream" provided to Fisheries Victoria in September 2007 but still not released.
3. 2002/3 "Movement Patterns of Estuary Perch in the Snowy River" Funded \$82,000.
4. 2003/4 Study detailing "Movement of Bass in the Snowy River" Funded \$37,000.
5. 2005/6 Study to detect "Impacts of recent changes to Fishing Pressures on Lake Tyers and Mallacoota. Funded \$58,400.

Recreational anglers and those interested in this states fisheries would be most interested in the information these reports could provide.

Editors Comment

The lack of Commercial Catch Statistics removes the one current method that is available to compare the trend in fish stocks in the Gippsland lakes. In the case of dusky flathead the commercial catch of dusky flathead in 2005/6 was 47 tonnes the largest catch since 1985/6. In the following year the catch had dropped by 25% to 34 tonnes. Anecdotal information would suggest there has been a further substantial drop in dusky flathead stocks (based on this method of comparison) but this will not be known until the statistics are released by Fisheries Victoria, On June the 30th this year figures will be gathered for the 2008/9 commercial catch when the 2007/8 statistics have not been released. In the past these commercial catch statistics have been used as a base figure by Fisheries Victoria to determine the status of fish stocks, and actions to protect stocks have been based on these figures. It is hard to understand given recreational anglers concern at the status of dusky flathead in the Gippsland Lakes why these figures have not been made available.

Seagrass Decline Documented

Gippsland Ports and Harbours have undertaken three studies (2006, 2008, 2009.) of the nature and distribution of seagrass in a study area encompassing the Narrows, North Arm, Cunninghame Arm and Hopetoun Channel. The area covered by seagrass decreased by approximately 67% in the study area between April 2007 and February 2008. The decrease in seagrass habitat in The Narrows and Hopetoun Channel was likely to be a result of the scouring effect of flood waters, whilst the decrease in seagrass beds in the North Arm and Cunninghame arm were likely to have been caused by plankton blooms causing reductions in light. There has been a 94% reduction in the Inner Channels study area between April 2007 and February 2009. There are no longer seagrass beds within the study area in the Narrows, North Arm, or Cunninghame Arm.

Taken from "Lakes Entrance Existing Conditions: Seagrass Monitoring, and Marine Habitats"

K.Stewart and M. Edmunds February 2009

Thanks to Andrew Fullard Program Manager for Lakes Entrance Sand Management Program for the provision of these reports. Further comment on these reports will be made in future issues.



Healthy Seagrass



Dead Seagrass covered with silt

Photographs from the report

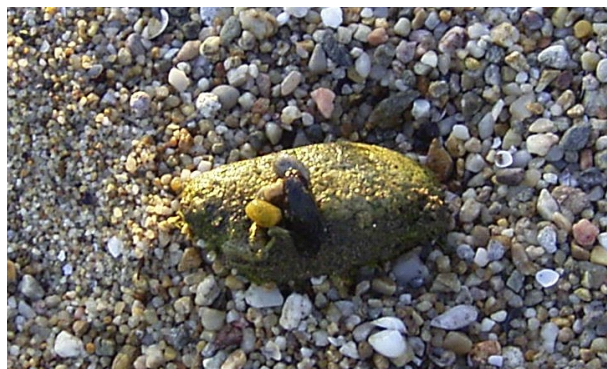
Editors Comment.

Gippsland Ports and Harbours are to be congratulated on these three detailed studies. These papers provide a definitive picture of a small area of the Gippsland Lakes, and whilst this study cannot be translated to represent

the entire lake system, with the study undertaken by the Gippsland Lakes Taskforce a picture is emerging of a major seagrass decline.

An Observation

In the last week after a SW gale some fresh seagrass was blown onto the Lake King Beach. I have also observed a number of swans feeding 50 metres from shore and presume some seagrass is returning in these areas. I have also observed in a couple of stony areas very small mussels attached to these stones and they seem to have appeared in the last three weeks. Readers will recall the fresh water from the 2007 floods were regarded as responsible for the total decline in mussels as well as other molluscs and seahorses. Are these observations an early sign of some form of revival in the Gippsland Lakes?



Tiny Mussels appearing on rocks Lake King

Fishing Regulations

In the current fishing regulations there is a section stating that a commercial fisherman **fishing in or next to the Gippsland Lakes, must not take from the lakes more than 8 wrasse in any one day**. I looked up in Sea Fishes of Southern Australia the wrasse species, and found almost 50 varieties of wrasse. Now I wonder has any recreational angler ever caught a wrasse in the Gippsland Lakes and if so what species. Can you help?

I found it interesting that the regulations provide a specific section for bait fishing in Lake Tyers, and this includes the use of bait pumps and 30-metre seine net. In my years fishing Lake Tyers I have not seen bait fishing taking place, but access is obviously available for bait fishermen. It appears that the use of spider crab traps, shrimp dredges and mussel rakes are not approved in this water.

There is a section in the regulations which specifically states that a person who takes fish that are not noxious and not wanted fish, must return those fish to the water with the least possible injury or damage. This is important of course for recreational anglers who are becoming much more concerned for the preservation of fish. This same condition applies to commercial fishermen as part of a commercial fishing licence. I have seen this being ignored by commercial fishermen on two occasions and as a result hundreds of dead undersize fish were fed to the waiting cormorants. I must say I have seen numerous recreational anglers also ignore this regulation, and undersize fish have suffered and in odd cases been deliberately fed to waiting pelicans. I think responsible recreational anglers are hoping this is changing, in both sectors particularly given declining fish stocks.

The Value of Recreational Fishing

The annual expenditure on recreational fishing in Victoria lies between \$396m and \$1.037m depending on which study you accept according to a 2004 study. In a national fishing survey conducted in 2001 it was stated that each kilogram of fish caught by anglers had an associated expenditure of \$133 per kilogram caught, whilst another survey put the figure of \$200 being spent by anglers for every kilo of fish caught. The commercial fishing industry in Victoria had an average first sale price of \$3.44. In 1997 a study suggested 27,000 jobs in Victoria were attributable to recreational fishing. Figures like these provide a basis for further discussion on the buyout of commercial licences in bays and inlets based on the economic return to the community from recreational angling. *Statistics from a "Review of Recreational Fishing Issues in Victoria" by Pepperall Research and Consulting Pty Ltd August 2004.*

Editors Comment

I think there are times when my wife can readily understand a \$200 expenditure for every kilo of fish placed on our table. More seriously in the 2007 Commercial Catch Statistics commercial fishermen fishing the Gippsland Lakes

received \$3.42 for each kilo of dusky flathead \$1.60 for Australian salmon, \$1.40 for luderick, \$4.80 for tailor, \$3.60 for silver trevally and \$10.70 for black bream. From these figures it is easy to understand why considerable netting pressure is placed on black bream in the Gippsland Lakes and it is equally obvious that the other species yield a paltry return when compared with what each kilo would yield if allocated to the recreational community.

Bairnsdale Advertiser April 5th 2002

This quotation came as a result of a public statement at a meeting in Metung regarding commercial netting.

“Commercial fisherman Mr Mackenzie stated he “did a shot at Pelican Island that morning and took 320kgs of silver trevally and 20kgs of yellow eye mullet and six King George whiting,” he went on to say that to not get a bream is a matter of some concern.

In 2002 silver trevally returned \$2.80 to the commercial fisherman on average and most recreational anglers would at that time have caught less than 10 silver trevally in a year whilst fishing in the Gippsland Lakes. When one considers the return to the community for each kilo of fish caught by recreational anglers (\$200 per kg) according to the National Institute of Economics and Industry Research, then this is a waste of a scarce resource. The return to Mr Mackenzie of this catch of silver trevally would have been \$896, whilst the return to the community of those fish if caught by recreational anglers would have been \$64,000. Obviously this is a simplification of the returns from each sector, however it does provide an indication of the importance of the recreational sector to local economics.

Recreational Fishing Forum on Marine Restocking.

Fisheries Victoria has for many years maintained a freshwater stocking program that has provided 1.4 million fish annually into Victorian waters. One of the 2006 election commitments of the current Government was to increase the number of fish stocked into Victorian streams by 30% over the next four years. A marine stocking program was not included as part of this election commitment. NSW is already stocking marine species and this forum will discuss the opportunities for a marine stocking program in this state. In NSW the recreational fishing licence has contributed \$700,000 towards a number of projects related to marine stocking and in 2006 over 80,000 Mullet were stocked in NSW waters. This is an interesting forum for recreational fishers will discuss with Fisheries Victoria the possibility of trialling marine stocking in this state. The forum will take place in Traralgon on the 13th May. Those invited to attend this forum include the Acting Executive Director of Fisheries Victoria, and includes research scientists from NSW where marine restocking is already in place. I did not see a VRFish representative listed amongst the participants. I think all recreational anglers will be hoping for a positive outcome with further discussions to follow this forum leading to some initial stocking of marine fish.

Material taken from the Forum Program Description.

- ***Editors Comment***

Whilst this is a progressive step, I have doubts that any stocking program would be applicable to the Gippsland Lakes despite the parlous state of bream stocks and the possible continuing decline of dusky flathead. The Gippsland Lakes are an obvious candidate for marine stocking, however the continuing commercial netting of these species in this system would obviously create doubts about the effective results for recreational anglers of a stocking program that would almost certainly be financed by funds derived from recreational anglers licence fees. Restocking with black bream has already been undertaken successfully in Western Australia, and surprisingly on the 7th April 2004 the Minister for Fisheries at that time released 14,000 black bream fingerlings in three locations of the Gippsland Lakes. This was undoubtedly a media occasion but it did show the possibilities of restocking available with this species. Unfortunately no further program or discussion was undertaken and the matter of restocking waters with black bream then seemed to lapse. If this forum raises this issue again it will be a considerable step forward and the organisers and Fisheries Victoria are to be congratulated for this initiative.

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

Attachment

Reasons for New Fish Regulations

Fisheries Victoria has provided to all who forwarded a submission on the new regulations a summary of the reasons for the change or otherwise. This is most helpful when trying to understand the reasons for adoption of some changes and the rejection of others. I have provided the Fisheries summary on estuarine species that affect all who fish the Gippsland area.

Proposed Changes in Draft Regulations	Reasons for Proposed Change	Community Feedback	Final Decision
Bream Decrease the recreational bag limit from 10 to 5 fish per person and increase in size limit from 26 to 28cm.	Based on feedback from some recreational stakeholders. The increased size limit was based on sustainability concerns	Opposing submissions cited adverse effects on tourism due to stricter catch limits in combination with increased size limits. Submissions received generally supported an increase in size limit.	Retained existing daily bag limit of 10 fish. The new proposed size limit was adopted.
Luderick Increase the minimum size from 22 to 23cms.	Simplification of regulations, and aligns with 23cm standardized size class.. No social or scientific reason for the previous size limit.	Submissions generally supported an increase in size limit.	Adopted proposed change.
Dusky Flathead Increase the minimum size limit from 25-27cms	Sustainability concerns. Simplification-alignment with 27cm standardized size class.	Submissions received generally supported an increase in size limit..	Adopted proposed change.
Estuary Perch Increase minimum size 25-27cms	Sustainability concerns, and alignment with 27cm class size.	Submissions generally supported an increase in size limit.	Adopted proposed change.
Australian Bass Increase the size limit from 25-27cms	Sustainability concerns and alignment with the 27cm standardized size class.	Submissions received generally supported an increase in minimum size.	Adopted proposed change.
Silver Trevally Increase the size limit from 20-23cms	Simplification of regulations with standardized 23cm size class. No social or scientific reason for previous size limit	Submissions generally supported an increase in the size limit.	Adopted proposed change.
Snapper. Size limit of 28cms to become permanent as well as the daily bag limit of 10 fish with only 3 over 40cms.	These conditions were introduced in 2007 after discussion	Submissions generally supported the proposal.	Adopted the proposed change

Editors Comment.

There seems to be two main criteria that have been used for assessing change to fisheries regulations with regard to minimum size limits, namely sustainability and simplification of regulations by having size limits largely of 23cms or 27cms and the term standardized class size is regularly used. I would have thought the argument of sustainability would suggest minimum size limits being set so that species would have an opportunity to spawn prior to reaching minimum size. In 1945 Dunbavin Butcher suggested that the black bream minimum size should be set to allow bream to spawn, prior to reaching minimum size, and this was part of the argument for the increase to 28cms first introduced on the 18th December 2003. It just seems logical for this argument to be applied to other species. It

seems equally illogical for the luderick minimum size limit to be increased by 1cm and the reasons being for the simplification of regulations and so luderick can be in a standardized year class.
I apologise if some readers have a copy of this information, however it is published so all readers will see some of the reasoning behind changes to fishing regulations regarding size and bag limits.