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Around the Jetties No 31 January-February 2010

“A fine school of Luderick entered the lakes on Wednesday... After filling all the baskets they had (137), there were about as many fish left, which were allowed their liberty again....It only required ten fish to fill a basket, weight being 5-6 pounds each, and a single fish cut up like a salmon, but in thin slices, will make a good breakfast for a family of 7-8.”

(Gippsland Mercury 18th July 1878) from Peter Synan’s “Highways of Water”

EDITORIAL

I welcome all readers to our first issue of 2010. In this year I would hope to produce issues of “Around the Jetties” bi-monthly and of course as always I greatly appreciate anglers’ views, letters and articles. In the last three years many issues that have been raised by readers have been given publicity and these includes items like fishing jetties, yank flathead, decline of bait availability, access to the mouth of the Tambo, and European Shore Crabs to name a few. In this issue I am very pleased to include a letter from the Director of Fisheries Victoria, Anthony Hurst, who puts forward information on a number of topics raised in recent issues of “Around the Jetties.” I feel sure readers will welcome the permanent appointment of Anthony to the position of Executive Director of Fisheries Victoria. (He had been Acting in this position for almost the last six months.) The introduction to this issue taken from Peter Synan’s excellent book “Highways of Water” provides a reminder of what fishing the lakes provided in the early years. By the way this is a great book for your bookshelves.

Executive Director of Fisheries Victoria Responds to Some Issues in Recent Editions of Around the Jetties.

I was very pleased to get a thoughtful letter providing information from the Director of Fisheries Victoria, Anthony Hurst specifically on some matters raised in this publication. The following information is published from his letter with his approval.

1. Black Bream

“In relation to black bream I can advise that extensive monitoring of black bream shows that recreational fishing has little effect on the population of this species. However Fisheries Victoria would respond quickly to review the existing harvest rules for this species if monitoring showed any significant decline in the numbers of bream.”

2. Silver Trevally

“The change to a 23cm size limit for Silver Trevally earlier this year was part of a move to reduce the number of size limit categories for recreational fishers. There are no sustainability concerns surrounding the Silver Trevally fishery in Victoria. Fisheries Victoria initiated consultation with the main recreational and commercial fishery advisory bodies in response to feedback from commercial fishers that the increase in the size limit had caused unforeseen environmental and financial impacts.

Fisheries Victoria is committed to providing high quality opportunities for recreational fishing, as well as an opportunity for all Victorians to buy fresh seafood from our local commercial fisheries. My decision to revert to the 20cm length reflected the positive response received among both recreational and commercial stakeholders through

the consultation process, including a supportive response from VRFish. I would be happy to provide information on this matter as well as other matters in your newsletter.”

3. European Shore Crabs

“I acknowledge your concern expressed regarding European Shore Crabs in Victoria. At this stage, I can advise that Fisheries Victoria is actively consulting other relevant states and Commonwealth fisheries agencies on how best to address this matter.”

4. Recreational Fishing Grants working Group

“I am pleased to advise that a new Recreational Fishing Grants Working Group is being established to advise the Victorian Government on how fishing licences should be allocated to projects that improve recreational fishing. This group will consist of people who can collectively provide a good range of knowledge, experience, and views from across the state covering the coastal, estuarine, and freshwater native fish and salmonoid recreational fisheries.”

5. Government Funding

“Separate to the Recreational Fishing Licence Funds, the Victorian Government is spending \$13.5 million to further enhance recreational fishing opportunities and facilities in Victoria as part of the 2006 election commitments.”

6. Fishing Forums

“Fisheries Victoria has held nine open forums around Victoria (including sessions at Bairnsdale and Mallacoota to ask recreational fishers for more ideas on how to better improve their fishing experience. We will be conducting a large-scale random survey of people who hold recreational fishing licences to get their views. If you would like any more information on the Victorian Government funding for enhances recreational fishing including a list of programs this commitment is delivering, please visit www.dpi.vic.gov.au/enhanced_fishing”.

I welcome the care that you express, as an avid angler and conservationist, for the sustainable use of Victoria’s fisheries. Please feel free to publish this letter in the next edition of your newsletter.

Yours sincerely

Anthony Hurst 9/11/2009

A/Executive Director Fisheries Victoria

Editors Comment.

The question of decline in black bream numbers will be explored later in this edition. I am very pleased that the Executive Director clarified that he sought an opinion from VRFish on the reduction in the size limit for Silver Trevally and was given a “supportive response” from the recreational angler’s peak body. I wonder why recreational anglers were not consulted on this matter by VRFish or the reasons for the change explained by the peak body.

On European Crabs

The problem of European Crabs in Victorian waterways and in particular the Gippsland Lakes was noted in the Executive Director of Fisheries letter. An article on these crabs was introduced in this publication in October last year (issue 29) as the matter seemed to have received no publicity and anglers in many cases were unaware of the potential of these crabs to change marine environments. It is very pleasing to see Fish-e-Fax issue 261 for January 2010 Fisheries Victoria leading with an article seeking anglers assistance “to help curb the spread of a marine pest.” Anglers are being encouraged to not use this crab as bait, and if you do, only to use it in areas where it was caught. Fisheries Victoria will be working with other stakeholders to see how the spread of this crab can be controlled. As was pointed out in the original article the NSW introduced regulations to control this crab have been far more rigorous than in Victoria. Fisheries Victoria should be congratulated for publicising the dangers that this crab brings to our marine waters and hopefully this is a first step to developing a unified approach to the problem.

The following are news items that may be of interest to recreational fishers.

Patrol finds massive illegal net The West Australian 7/11/2009

There have been calls for better safeguards for fish stocks in international waters off Australia after the revelation that authorities had confiscated a 130 kilometre fishing net off Antarctica this year. The huge net found 4000 kilometres south of Perth had 29 tonnes of Antarctica tooth fish in it. These gillnets are nicknamed "death curtains" as they snare fish by the gills and are banned under the treaty governing Antarctic fishing. The net was found by the crew on the Ocean Viking (remember this boat and asylum seekers) at a depth of 1500 metres. West Australian trawler Southern Champion was called to deal with the net of which 9kms was recovered and the rest destroyed. Whilst not illegal at the moment there is a strong move to ban gillnets in Antarctic waters. Australia is taking up the matter with the European Union. There were two large boats in the area but neither boat-accepted responsibility for the net. The European Union gave two Spanish boats permission to use gillnets in this area between Australia and New Zealand. Nets left in the area will continue to kill fish for years.

Monitoring of Gippsland Lakes Scaled Back The Age 19/11/2009

Environmental monitoring of the Gippsland lakes will be scaled back this summer at the same time that Melbourne begins to take a bigger share of the regions freshwater. Authorities have confirmed the number of stations monitoring salinity oxygen levels etc. has been reduced from 13 to 5. The lakes are gradually becoming saline changing the ecological character of the region. Professor Barry Hart, chair of the Gippsland Lakes Taskforce said a new system of environmental monitoring had been developed and there would be no slackening of effort. He also indicated it was also possible that some stations may be reinstated in a couple of years.

Tuna Breeding Bid Hailed The Australian 18/11/2009

A breakthrough in breeding southern blue fin tuna in captivity has been named the world's second best invention of 2009 by Time Magazine. Clean Seas Tuna, which spawned a tank full of southern blue fin tuna in Port Lincoln in March, said it was beaten only by NASA's Ares 1 rocket. Time described the break through as possibly securing the future of an aquaculture industry for the endangered species.

Snapper in Port Phillip Bay Fish Fax 23rd November 2009

Recreational anglers have the opportunity to catch "big red" snapper which have arrived in the bay on their annual spawning run, according to Fisheries Victoria. Fisheries scientists anticipate that strong spawnings in 2003/4 and 2004/5 should see the good snapper fishing continue for the next few years.

Shrimp Measured by Volume Bairnsdale Advertiser Nov. 30th 2009

"Under new arrangements the collection of swimming shrimp by recreational fishers is now subject to a volumetric limit of half a litre. Executive Director of Fisheries Victoria, Anthony Hurst said the change removes the need for anglers to actually count small live shrimp which can be quite difficult and time consuming. The daily bag and possession limit of 100 for bass yabbies will remain."

Editor. This matter was discussed at a local meeting with the Acting Executive Director Anthony Hurst, on the 14th of July and the problem of counting shrimp was put to him in a most graphic manner by several local anglers and the suggestion for a volumetric limit was made. It is most pleasing to see this change was instituted by Fisheries Victoria. This was reported in Around the Jetties in September.

Seagrass Research Coastline Magazine Summer 2009/10

In October acting Premier Mr Rob Hulls joined Environment and Climate Change Minister Gavin Jennings to announce the Seagrass and Reef Program which includes \$3 million in funding for seagrass research." This research is to take place in Port Phillip Bay. Funding for this project was provided by the Port of Melbourne Corporation, as part of the conditions for the Channel Deepening Project.

Editor Lets hope the research in Port Phillip Bay into seagrass can be applied to East Gippsland estuaries.

Fish Stocks Hit The Australian January 10th 2010

Daniel Pauley professor at the Fisheries Centre University of British Columbia wrote, "a study published in the journal Science, forecast that by 2048, all commercial fish stocks (worldwide) will have collapsed. Whether or not that year or even decade is correct, one thing is clear, fish are in dire peril." He went on to say that today Governments provide nearly \$30 billion in subsidies each year to keep fisheries going. This massive subsidy causes overexploitation of the world's fish stocks

Ban on Recreational Catch of Mako Sharks

The Hon. Peter Garrett Am, MP, Federal Minister for the Environment recently announced a ban on the recreational take of Mako Sharks without any reference to the Australian recreational fishing community, despite the fact there seems to be no evidence that this species is in any way threatened. Several local anglers have expressed their concern to me on this matter. The Recreational Fishing and Trailer Boat Advocacy Group have written to the Minister on this matter, and I can provide a copy of this letter to any readers interested in this issue. Thanks to Bob Pearce of the Advocacy Group for making this letter available. VRFish have also taken up this matter and have

published information on the internet from the Victorian Game Fishing Association. For more information see www.vrfish.com.au . This ban without discussion with stakeholders such as charter boat operators and the Game Fishing Association of Victoria is to be introduced on the 29th of January.

Local News

In the Bairnsdale Advertiser December 14th 2010 is this photo of Ron Brymer who has contributed to this publication with a fine estuary perch he caught. The attached description suggested this fish had been caught in Lake Tyers. Actually Ron has never caught an estuary perch in Lake Tyers and this fish was caught at Marlo.



This raises a couple of points namely have any anglers caught estuary perch in Lake Tyers in recent years? I have been advised from several sources that commercial fishermen caught a small number of estuary perch annually prior to 2003 when commercial netting in this lake, and that in the early eighties a number of boxes of estuary perch were taken adjacent to Blackfellows Arm.(Statistics suggest 1.5 tonnes were taken commercially between 1978-2003) Secondly when the Management Plan for Lake Tyers was being developed several submissions were put forward suggesting stocking of estuary perch in Lake Tyers, given that snags and environment in the arms thought suitable for perch, by the writers of these submissions, however this was not accepted as part of this plan. I found this decision somewhat unimaginative given that in 1999 Lake Hamilton in the Western District was given a trial stocking of estuary perch fingerlings and recently Lake Bolac in Western Victoria was approved for stockings of estuary perch when water levels recover. One could hardly imagine less likely waters for the stocking and survival of estuary perch, than these two lakes, or more likely waters than Lake Tyers.

Economic Study of Recreational Fishing in Victoria

VRFish Victoria's peak recreational fishing body representing recreational anglers engaged Ernst and Young to undertake economic research to assess the economic contribution of recreational fishing to the states economy. In a series of major outcomes of this report it was estimated that in **2008/9 721,000** Victorians participated in recreational fishing. This is far higher than the Department of Primary Industries estimation of around 500,000 participating each year. The number of fishing trips was estimated at an average of 12 per year per fisher, and the total number of fishing trips taken by all fishers was estimated at 8.7 million. The average expenditure per trip per fisher was estimated at \$250. The average number of locations fished by each fisher per year was 2.8.

64% of recreational fishers reside in the Melbourne metropolitan area and the age group that finds fishing a most popular pastime is the 45-54 year age group however it is almost equally spread over all age groups.

The direct expenditure involved in fishing was valued at **\$2.3 billion dollars** whilst the recreational fishing industry contributed to **5,200 jobs in Victoria**.

In Gippsland the recreational fishing industry produces **\$172.9 million** annually and provides **1,100 jobs**.

VRFish is to be congratulated for having this survey undertaken for it provides an indication of the economic importance of recreational fishing in this state. In Gippsland where commercial fishing continues a survey such as this makes the case even stronger for the buyout of the remaining commercial licences in the Gippsland Lakes as having economic importance for East Gippsland jobs, business and tourism.

Well done VRFish.

Shrinkage of Black Bream after Death

I was surprised at a recent meeting of Fisheries personnel and recreational anglers to hear the matter of fish shrinkage after capture mentioned. I wrote on this matter in 2004 in my book "The Challenge to Save a Fighting Fish" dealing with the problems associated with the status of black bream. In 1999 a case was brought against a commercial fisherman for having undersize fish in his catch of black bream. This is not surprising as many bream sent to the Victorian fish market are very close to the minimum legal size, and this view was reinforced with a statement in the Fisheries Assessment report of 1996 that most of the commercial catch "now consists of fish just above the minimum legal length." This case was not pursued following a study undertaken by A.K. Morison into the "Post Mortem Changes in the length of Black Bream" dated December 1999. From a sample of 71 bream the study found the average shrinkage in black bream after 24 hours was 5mm. It was also found the shrinkage within 1-2 hours was 2.5mm. This information was made available to commercial fishermen through the Seafood Victoria Newsletter, but similar advice as far as I am aware was never provided to recreational anglers. At the time I was informed by a Fisheries Manager with whom I discussed this issue that fish shrinkage may apply to other species including King George whiting and freshwater species. I have not heard in recent years the subject of fish shrinkage mentioned until this recent meeting nor have the implications if any for recreational anglers ever been publicised as far as I am aware.

Movement of Black Bream Between Estuaries

Over the years there has been debate on the suggested movement of black bream between estuaries. Dunbavin Butcher later to become the first Director of Fisheries Victoria and John Ling carried out a study in 1944 on the movement of black bream by tagging 990 bream in the Gippsland Lakes and 1460 bream at other places along the East Gippsland coast. In the report of this study it was stated "there was no evidence to show that bream moved out of the Gippsland Lakes, and fishermen with more than 40 years experience of netting along the ocean beach close to the entrance have never taken black bream in the open sea." The recent tracking of black bream movements using transmitters also provided no evidence of movement of black bream out of and between estuaries, however there are always exceptions.

A black bream was tagged and released by Peter Spehr in Lake Tyers on the 21/12/06. It was caught 783 days later in the Marlo system at the mouth of the Snowy River and it had grown 30mm.

Bruce Robinson VICTAG Coordinator (VRFish "Fishing Lines")

It would appear that current evidence of black bream movement indicates almost no movement between estuaries, and any such movement is extremely rare. However on two occasions I have heard a commercial fisherman describe the movement of black bream, dusky flathead and other species out of Lake Tyers when it initially opens. They suggest the fish exit to clean up on sand and rocks off Lake Tyers and within a couple of days they return to the lake. I have seen no firm evidence or any research that would substantiate the situation described by these commercial fishermen, but both were very definite when describing this event. Firm evidence should not be too difficult to obtain as both fishermen suggested both black bream and dusky flathead were taken by trawlers off the entrance to Lake Tyers in the first days following the opening.



Despite considerable research from 1944 to modern times, no firm indication of a movement of black bream between estuaries has been evident apart from those isolated examples. This means the status of stocks of black bream in estuaries are dependant on the maintenance of the current stock within each estuary.

Regarding Black Bream Numbers

The Executive Director of Fisheries Victoria in his letter at the commencement of this publication states "Fisheries Victoria would respond quickly to review the existing harvest rules for this species if monitoring showed any significant decline in the numbers of bream." I would think most recreational angler would believe that apart from the Bemm River black bream numbers have declined alarmingly in the Gippsland Lakes and tributaries and there would seem to be considerable evidence that this was also the view of Fisheries Victoria.

In 1996 John Strong, Fisheries Planning Officer, suggested, in the Lakes Entrance Post of 1996, as a result of statistics showing a drop in the commercial catch of black bream to 89 tonnes in 1996/7, it was possible that black bream stocks in the Gippsland Lakes were close to collapse and **"if this were the case this would have repercussions for both recreational and commercial fishers as well as businesses that depend upon the recreational fishery."** Dr Murray MacDonald, Manager of Bays and Inlets, reporting on a Fisheries Survey stated, **"Compared with previous surveys of anglers it indicated that from the 1980's to 1990 the catch rate dropped 40%."**(Lakes Entrance News 1997) Dr MacDonald also stated in 1997 that, **"in a study over the past two years, over 1200 recreational anglers were interviewed and approximately 60% had not caught a fish."**

Recreational anglers were very aware of the decline in black bream stocks and argued against the continued commercial netting of black bream. In 1996 a bag limit of five fish was introduced and the size limit was increased from 24-26cms and for the first time a catch limit was introduced for commercial fishermen of 730kgs or 22 standard boxes of black bream per month. The rationale for this change was stated in Victorian Fisheries publication as being, **"to protect the small remaining adult bream stocks so that sufficient reproductive capacity is maintained to ensure stock rebuilding occurs when conditions are favourable."**

In 1998 the black bream size limit was increased to 28cms by fisheries Victoria in an attempt to provide a couple of years spawning opportunity before the bream reached the minimum legal length.

In 2002/3 the collapse in bream stocks became even more evident when the commercial catch of black bream dropped from 154 tonnes to 28 tonnes in the one year and indications are that black bream stocks have not improved since that 2003 collapse in the Gippsland Lakes.

At a black bream Stock Assessment held in July 2005 the background statement from Fisheries Victoria said, **"The absence of any strong year class since 1989 is likely to keep catches in both commercial and recreational fisheries at or below current levels in the foreseeable future."**

The commercial catch rate in that year was a mere 31 tonnes. Commercial fishermen boycotted this meeting.

This brief outline would seem to indicate an ongoing decline in the Gippsland Lakes stock of black bream identified and monitored by Fisheries Victoria, with particular emphasis on the fact that the last significant recruitment of black bream was in the spawning of 1989 and 1995. The last black bream assessment was undertaken on 27th June 2009, however an official report of this meeting is unlikely to be available until at least June 2010. Research angler John Harrison provided a report of this meeting at the request of this publication, which was published in Around the Jetties, July 2009 and I conclude with a statement from his report that, "There is a need however, to determine the tipping point at which the survival of black bream stocks is problematic."

Given the decline since 1996 and the concerns expressed by Fisheries Officers and scientists, it would seem we are close to that tipping point in the Gippsland Lakes and there may be a need to now "review the existing harvest rules" including commercial netting of the North Arm and river mouths, recreational bag limits, and closed areas to protect spawning fish. This is a matter of continuing concern.

Restocking Gippsland Lakes with Black Bream

On the 7th April 2004 the Minister responsible for Fisheries, Mr Bob Cameron released 14,000 black bream fingerlings in the Gippsland Lakes. Readers may recall the publicity with this release. This undoubtedly indicated the Governments awareness of the crisis facing black bream in the Gippsland Lakes. What was positive about this fish release was that it proved black bream could both be restocked and farmed in Victoria. This had previously been tried and found successful over a previous decade in Western Australia where black bream reached minimum legal size in two years when farmed. This also meant that farmed black bream could replace the need for commercial fishing of black bream in the Gippsland Lakes. Since 2004, as far as I am aware, nothing has been published on this exercise or restocking of black bream generally in Victoria. No further releases of black bream have taken place in Victoria, and I understand that Fisheries Victoria no longer has the capacity to breed fingerling black bream, having disposed of the brood stock of black bream. Whilst this was probably just a photo shoot for the

Minister of the day, it is difficult to deny the importance of considering restocking black bream into Gippsland waterways in the future remembering that for every kilogram of fish caught by recreational anglers there is expenditure in the community of around \$200.



The Minister for Agriculture 2004, Bob Cameron, releasing Black Bream fingerlings in the Nicholson River

Fishing Pressure on Lake Tyers.

On the 29th December 2010 I undertook a simple survey to look at angler numbers from boats on Lake Tyers. From between 9.30 and 10.00am on the above date there were 37 boat trailers at the No2 ramp, 18 at Fisherman's Landing, 8 at Mill Point and 8 at Nowa Nowa. This rough survey indicated that more than 80 boats were fishing Lake Tyers on this morning, when one considers boats that had entered from other points including private land and from tracks such as Cameron's or the Trident. This raises the question of fishing pressure on small estuaries such as Lake Tyers and also reflects on the decline of angling in the Gippsland Lakes and tributaries.

Future Fish Foundation Projects

The trial of artificial reefs in Port Phillip Bay continues, and a scientific study over the next few years will determine the benefits of these reefs to recreational fishing. Currently commercial exclusion zones apply to the reef areas. Future Fish is commissioning a study as to where future reefs should be located if the Port Phillip venture is successful and to this end \$10,000 has been invested by Future Fish. Perhaps areas such as Bancroft Bay Metung should be putting forward a submission to Future Fish for consideration in the future, as a site for a reef in a popular estuary.



Artificial Reefs are made up of concrete reef balls that have been placed in geometric patterns. It is estimated these reefs will have a life span of three hundred years.
Photo from
Future Fish Foundation

The other project creating considerable interest is the study being undertaken to examine the feasibility of establishing a barramundi fishery in the Hazelwood Pondage in Gippsland. Future Fish is investing \$50,000 in the "Barramundi in Hazelwood" project. Future Fish believes if this project is approved after a comprehensive scientific assessment, "Victorians could be enjoying a recreational barramundi fishery within two years." (Future Fish Foundation News)

East Gippsland Small Estuaries Fisheries Assessment Workshop.

This workshop was held in Orbost on the 3rd of December 2009. The thirty odd participants included Fisheries Officers, fisheries scientists and recreational research anglers and the area to be covered were the estuaries extending from Mallacoota to Lake Tyers. This took in the Bemm River, Wingan Inlet, Tamboon, the Betka River, the Yerung and the Marlo estuaries as well as the larger Lake Tyers and Mallacoota estuaries which had Fisheries Management Plans undertaken in 2006/7. This assessment workshop aimed to provide information for the East Gippsland Fisheries Management Plan currently being developed, on the status of fish stocks in these smaller estuaries. The workshop could have had wide implications for recreational fishing in the above named areas. (A draft copy of the East Gippsland Management Plan is due for release and comment in mid 2010.)

Part of the day was identifying cost effective ways of undertaking an assessment of fish stocks in these waters and it was evident that considerable importance would be placed on the work of recreational research anglers and the angler diary scheme as well as creel and phone surveys as being most cost effective methods of providing information for the fisheries scientists. It was noted that previously when some of these waters were fished commercially, the commercial catches provided key basic information on the stock status but since the removal of commercial netting the importance of research angler findings and the angler diary programs have greatly increased. Fisheries Victoria adds to recreational angler information with telephone, and boat ramp surveys. (Mallacoota and Lake Tyers.) It was suggested it is a constant challenge to keep track of catch rates using a cost effective method.

The angler diary program commenced in 1997 and today over 300 anglers are contributing towards providing a sound source of information on the status of fish stocks, and it was suggested without the diary program and research anglers in some areas Fisheries Victoria would be "flying blind" with regard to particular species. Details of a couple of research anglers give an indication of the information being provided to Fisheries Victoria by recreational anglers.

John Kirk fishing the Bemm River has collected data from 1972, and he measures and records each fish he catches. He also has dispensation that allows him to catch small fish (less than 10cm) and the data he collects allows Fisheries Victoria to determine fluctuations in fish reproduction. John fishes for two weeks three times per year in the Bemm. The work of John Kirk and his targeting of black bream in the Bemm River provides a major monitoring tool.

Research anglers John Harrison and Peter Spehr are providing detailed information on Lake Tyers fish stocks sending dusky flathead and bream otoliths to Fisheries Victoria as well as recording details of all fish caught, many of which have been released after measuring. They also provide information on water salinity, and temperatures on a regular basis.

Lindsay Williams has provided similar information on Estuary Perch in the Bemm River. These outlines provide an indication of the work undertaken by recreational research anglers who provide detailed information to Fisheries Victoria to assist in establishing the status of fish stocks.

The following information provided by research anglers and Fisheries Victoria was the cause of some concern. In Lake Tyers the dominant year class of black bream was 1998 and at the moment there seems to be a lack of small fish with reports that only 1% of fish being sampled are under 20cms, whilst only 10% are under the legal minimum length. It was noted by a research angler that the salinity level in Lake Tyers was high (32 parts per thousand) which was similar to seawater, and there was a lack of seagrass in the system. (both of these may have an effect on black bream reproduction in Lake Tyers although this was not mentioned at the assessment.)

Of greater concern was the reduction in the catch of large dusky flathead with research anglers noting that it was now somewhat rare to catch a dusky flathead over 50cms. (Dusky flathead over 90cms were relatively common 4-5 years ago.) It was suggested that information on this change in status is already available from research anglers and

angler diaries. Ageing and length distribution suggest the oldest dusky flathead in Lake Tyers is 10 years, (Mallacoota 15) and dusky flathead are a fast growing species that reach minimum legal length within 1-2 years. The question was raised whether the NSW research into dusky flathead could be applied to this species in Victoria, however Fisheries Victoria stated the findings may differ between the states and a complete acceptance of the work done in NSW might not be applicable to Victoria. Fisheries Victoria indicated that from their research that catch rates in Lake Tyers for dusky flathead were 1.64 fish per hour whilst for Mallacoota the catch rate was 3.5 fish per hour.

The Manager of Bays and Inlets, Dr Murray MacDonald, suggested there was a need to develop a robust indicator or trigger point to indicate when and if action should be taken on the reduction of numbers of larger flathead in Lake Tyers. It seemed that the material made available at this assessment on dusky flathead was not sufficiently convincing, in his view, for any immediate action. He also indicated that more information would be required over a period of time on the age distribution of black bream in Lake Tyers before any conclusions could be drawn as to the lack of small bream currently in the black bream stock.

Concern was also expressed at a decline in the catch rate of estuary perch at the Bemm River, and the lack of specific year classes. The estuary perch reach minimum legal length within 3 years and the oldest estuary perch is recorded at 36 years of age. It was again indicated by the Manager of Bays and Inlets that insufficient information was available to undertake any specific action on the suggested decline in estuary perch other than further monitoring...

With regard to the other small estuaries there was little information and no specific recommendations could be made on waters such as Tamboon, or Wingan Inlet, the Betka River and Yerung.

Editors Comment

It was unfortunate that **no recommendation** for any specific action could be made to the East Gippsland Fisheries Management Plan, other than noting that further consideration on the decline in size of dusky flathead in Lake Tyers, and the decline of estuary perch in the Bemm River was needed. This further consideration would seem to involve further information being derived from diaries and research anglers. It would appear that the East Gippsland Fisheries Management Plan would be completed without any real input from this workshop, or the research anglers who contributed to the workshop.

It was also unfortunate that much of the research material from Fisheries Victoria was on computer, which was in most cases quickly flashed on the screen. At the assessment workshop it would have been most helpful if research statistical material had been made available to participants in printed form some days prior to the workshop. (No printed material was provided to participants, either before, during, or after this workshop.)

Since the workshop I have on two occasions sought a hardcopy of the statistics presented, however this was denied on the basis that the statistics are "a work in progress." One of the statistics I sought was the commercial catch in Lake Tyers 1978-2003 when commercial fishers were bought out. It is very difficult to consider this statistic compiled seven years previous, a "work in progress!!!"

Disclaimer. Whilst I have attempted to provide statistical information for recreational anglers from this workshop, the fact that this material was not readily available in a form that can be checked may lead to some figures being misinterpreted. If this has occurred I apologise.

We can provide a large print version of "Around the Jetties" to any reader having problems with the size of the print. Remember your contributions to this newsletter are welcomed.

**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