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Around the Jetties

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An Anglers Newsletter

No other saltwater fish tests the angler's ingenuity more than catching a big bream. And in no other angling does success depend so much on the size of the line used.

Vic McCristal Fishing in Australia Published 1962

Editorial

In the last issue of Around the Jetties I was surprised to find that the Victorian National Parks Association had a membership of only 3000, yet this body seems to exert more pressure on Government than the over 700,000 anglers of this state when one considers the Marine Parks issue of recent years. The expenditure on fishing by recreational anglers is in the vicinity of \$2.3billion and the industry resulting from this sport is thought to employ over 5000 persons in this state.* Based on these figures recreational anglers should have a far bigger say in their sport and how funds contributed through the General Angling Licence are distributed. This makes it more difficult to understand how a faceless group of eight persons appointed by the previous Government (Recreational Fishing Grants Working Group) can allocate 30% of angler licence fees to employing fisheries officers, and this has to be permanent charge or a gift to the Fisheries Victoria budget. I have seen no objection from in any fisheries magazine or by the recreational anglers peak body to this takeover of funds that anglers originally believed would be applied to restocking and research.

Now lets be clear that anglers have wanted for years more fisheries officers, and I am one of those who believe this is essential, however this should be a direct charge on Fisheries Victoria's budget, and if it has insufficient funds, then anglers should be making this an issue and approaching the Government for support given the numbers of Victorians involved in recreational fishing, and the value to the state of this sport. Recreational fishing brings more to this state than the Grand Prix and it deserves more Government funding rather than the Government acquiescing to the removal of funds from anglers licence fees to employ more fisheries officers.

By the way I fish a couple of times per week and in the last 25 years I have never had my licence or bag inspected by a fisheries officer. The simple action of Government providing \$1.95m to Fisheries Victoria to employ Fisheries Officers would have the effect of releasing the same amount for research and restocking of Victorian Waters. Anglers around this state would appreciate such an action from the new Government.

Recreational anglers need more fisheries officers; it's only the current method of taking licence fee funds to employ officers that many anglers find difficult to support.

(*Figures from a recent Economic Study of Recreational Fishing Commissioned by VRFish and carried out by Ernst and Young.)

The Issue of Funding Fisheries Officers from Anglers Licence Fees

The following is an informative statement provided by **Bob Pearce, former chairman of VRFish**, which provides further information for anglers to consider, and for allowing the use of this statement I thank the

former chairman of VRFish for providing his considered view and some background on the employment of Fisheries Officers using Recreational Anglers licence fees to fund this employment.

Now to Bob Pearce's thoughts-

“From my memory, this issue dates a long way back to the very early days of VRFish, when Pat McNamara was the relevant Minister. Surveys of Recreational Fishers at the time indicated that the one-standout issue of importance was that Fisheries enforcement was inadequate and there was a clear desire to employ more Fisheries Officers. That was the basis of the decision to fund additional Recreational Fisheries Officers at the time, but it got out of hand fairly quickly. Once the money was allocated to Fisheries Victoria, it was thought that they would then recruit ten new Recreational Fisheries Officers. Unfortunately this did not occur and it was not realised for some time that this was the case.

When questions started to be asked some years later, they were not welcomed by Fisheries Victoria. I can recall a number of very prickly discussions that took place on this issue with them. There may have been a time that this funding was used to employ additional Recreational Fisheries Officers but I doubt it. What has happened over the years is that Fisheries Victoria has taken money out of the RFL Trust Account, but has not delivered what they were supposed to have. Essentially this means that the RFL Trust Account has been used to divert extra funding to Fisheries Victoria's budget and that reports to Parliament as to allocations from the RFL Trust Account have been erroneous. In fact Fisheries Victoria should be made to repay the RFL trust Account for the amounts taken but not used to employ the additional ten Recreational Fisheries Officers.

I also agree the time has come to cease taking funds out of the RFL Trust Account for the employment of any Recreational Fisheries Officers. In spite of all the extra money paid from the Trust Account, it is still very rare to see any Fisheries Inspectors at boat ramps or on the water. Also, Governance standards concerning the RFL Trust Account have been appalling and Recreational Fishers have not been getting good value for their investment in Recreational Fishing Licences.”

Editors Comment

Readers should remember that since the inception of the General Angling Licence \$1m was allocated to Fisheries Victoria for the employment of ten Recreational Fisheries Officers. This in itself was a questionable use of Trust Funds. This amount has now been increased to \$1.95m or 30% of the funds received from the General Angling Licence will now be used to fund thirteen Fisheries Officers. This in turn means there will be fewer funds for research and less money available for the buyback of commercial licences should that become an option. **I would suggest this will be a permanent charge on angling licence funds and will not be considered annually because jobs are involved.** This \$1.95m is simply an increase in the budget of Fisheries Victoria at the expense of anglers of this state. Now it needs to be stated that the cost of administering the collection and disbursement of anglers licence fees in 2009/10 was a staggering \$1.1m. This includes costs for professional services and sitting fees for the six meetings of the Recreational Fishing Grants Working Committee. The real cause for concern is that the cost of employing 13 Recreational Fishing Officers and the administration of the General Angling Licence collection and disbursements will take over **\$3m or 50% of the total receipts from angling licences.**

On this basis I wonder whether anglers consider they are getting good value for their angling licence contributions.

Finally the Coalition Policy on recreational fishing states-

“The Coalition would reinvest all revenue raised from fisheries licences back into the recreational fishing industry, along with \$4m over four years for the recreational Fishing Grants program.” Now it remains to be seen if employment of Recreational Fisheries Officers meets the criteria of “reinvesting in the recreational fishing industry.”

The above use of 50% of licence fees for employment of Recreational Fisheries Officers and large administration costs hardly seems to satisfy the policy as enunciated prior to the election.

Commercial Fishing

I read recently in the weekend Australian Weekend Magazine (Dec 18th) “according to a 2006 prediction by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation 2010 is the year the world began eating more farmed than wild caught fish.” Australian aquaculture industries in order of importance are Australian farmed prawns, Barramundi, salmon, oysters and freshwater trout according to Dr Brett Glencross of the CSIRO. Given the growth rate of aquaculture, which is the fastest growing animal food producing sector in the world with a growth rate of 7% then the netting of estuaries in this state is questionable.

Vic McCristal an Angling Icon.

Any of the older readers of this publication would remember the name Vic McCristal. He was the author of a number of books, and many would consider he probably did more than anybody else to introduce fishing with lures to anglers across Australia. I first recall reading his articles in the old "Outdoors and Fishing" magazines from the fifties. Readers would be aware of the Internet site Info@cruiseacatch published by Anthony Gomes from Managrida in the Northern territory. In a recent item the site remembered the contribution of Vic McCristal to angling in this country. It's well worthwhile catching up with this site and reading some of the wisdom of Vic McCristal. I hope in a future issue to bring some of his writing to readers.

In the last issue of "Around the Jetties" I used the opening anglers quote from the book Fishing in Australia, first published in 1962 and written by Vic McCristal. And just to bring back a few memories the following is from 1970, and also written by Vic McCristal-

"The development of lure fishing as a major sport is no accident. These last twenty years (i.e. 50's to 70's). It has grown from a napped infant to a muscular adult, with a growth pattern that parallels the motorcar in timing, quantity, and technology. Fishing today mirrors our technology, and at the same time reflects a basic human need, a need that increases with urban development and population growth. Fishing helps us stay human."

From Great Fishing with Lures by Vic McCristal published in 1970 (Source Info@cruiseacatch)
According to Anthony Gomes, Vic McCristal is still active and still continues to write on fishing and long may that continue.



Sandworm and the Gippsland Lakes

I recently had a former commercial fisherman contact me with a report that there has been some recovery in a patch of sandworm at the cut on the Mitchell River. This is the first indication that shows any practical improvement in the lakes as far as anglers are concerned. It was also pointed out that anglers may not get a great deal of benefit from this improvement due to many bait retailers no longer selling bait sandworm after almost a decade of no sandworm being available to retailers. Almost all anglers now rely on frozen bait or European Shore Crab for their bait. By the way the dire predictions of the lakes soon to be overrun with shore crabs do not seem to have eventuated, and whilst they can readily be seen there do not seem to be any confirmed reports of damage to the Lake Environment.

Allocating Licence Fees to Projects in 2009/10

The Recreational Fishing Grants Working Group held six meetings in 2009/10 presumably to allocate funding to specific projects from the licence fees received from recreational anglers. These six meetings involved funding for sitting fees, sustenance, accommodation, airfares, vehicle hire, venue hire, and personal expenses. The cost of these six meetings was a charge on licence receipts, and amounted to a staggering \$29,138 or \$5000 per meeting. Recreational anglers should draw their own conclusions as to whether this is a fair, reasonable, and economic use of licence fee revenue. Whilst the eight members of the working party remain unidentified to recreational anglers, as a result of a ruling of the previous Government, supposedly to avoid pressure from anglers to support specific programs. I can report the membership covers six geographical areas of the state, with one member from each area as well as one member from VRFish and one member involved in the recreational fishing industry. From the minutes of these meetings reported to State Parliament I have established the independent Chairman is John Diplock from NSW. Evidently it is necessary to bring a person from NSW to ensure independence of the working party. John Diplock was manager of Recreational Fisheries in NSW, however I believe he is now a Fisheries Consultant in a private NSW firm He was manager of the artificial reefs program in NSW from its inception in 2005 until 2008 and he is a joint author of the book "Guide to Stocked Lakes and Dams in NSW." I invited VRFish to provide the names of the members of the Working Party members to publish in this newsletter, as I believe in open Government anglers should be aware of the persons making decisions on the expenditure of licence fee funds, but VRFish declined to provide this information. Perhaps the Coalition Government with its views on open Government might examine the operation and membership of this Working Party as part of its recreational fishing policy, which states in part-
"The Coalition Government would not create any more Marine Parks in Victoria and would make important changes to the management of the states fisheries to support Victoria's recreational anglers."

Perhaps a re-examination of the membership and secrecy of the Fishing Grants Working Group would surely be a good start to a change in management procedures.

Further Evaluation of the Commercial Catch in the Gippsland Lakes.2009/10

I should point out that the published commercial catch statistics only provide the basic statistics, and any evaluations drawn from these statistics are this recreational anglers personal analysis.

Undoubtedly of greatest concern evidenced in the statistics is the declining catch of dusky flathead from 20 tonnes in 2008/9 to 14 tonnes in the Gippsland Lakes 2009/10. This needs to be put in context with the fact that the catch in 2005/6 was 48 tonnes and it has declined every year since. Of course anglers have realised that something was wrong as their catches declined, and it would have been most interesting to have some figures available on the hourly recreational catch rate for 2005/6 compared with 2009/10. Of real concern is the fact that a further decline of dusky flathead of the same proportion of recent years will see almost no recreational catch of this species in the Gippsland Lakes.

It does seem to me that something is very wrong when commercial nets can take any amount of dusky flathead regardless of size, whilst recreational anglers agree to a bag limit and taking only one fish over 60cms. It could be suggested that the regulations affecting recreational anglers are supporting a commercial catch, which may be responsible for the continuing decline in the species. Since 2005/6 commercial nets have removed 147 tonnes of dusky flathead from the Gippsland Lakes, and as there is no upper size limit for commercial fishermen it would be reasonable to believe that flathead over 60cms that are all female breeders would be taken as part of the commercial catch.

I wonder at the reluctance of Fisheries Victoria to raise the minimum size limit of this species despite requests of the angling community in 2008 for a minimum size limit of between 30 and 35cms when new regulations were proposed and ultimately introduced. Every angler knows that a 27cm dusky flathead provides almost no food or sporting value. It was very hard to understand Fisheries Victoria's reluctance to raise the minimum size limit given anglers requests, but it has since been suggested to me that this may have had an impact on the commercial fishermen of the Gippsland Lakes. It should be remembered that after the fishing regulations were published in 2008 the commercial fishermen requested a drop in the silver trevally minimum size limit from 23cms to 22cms and this was promptly acceded to. We have a major problem with a declining population of dusky flathead in the Gippsland Lakes and neither Fisheries Victoria or the Gippsland Lakes Taskforce seem prepared to confront this issue.

The problem of black bream stocks continues and shows no improvement with the average catch from 2002/3 excluding 2007/8 being just 35 tonnes per annum. 2007/8 is excluded as the catch of 144 tonnes was the result of flood events forcing the bream from the rivers, and commercial nets capitalized on this natural occurrence. This in itself may be a matter that is controlled if the new Government meets its election promise of removing commercial nets from the mouths of rivers. To get a hand on the bream situation the five-year average commercial catch, for the five years prior to 2002/3 was 155 tonnes per annum, and this needs to be compared with the current five-year average of 35 tonnes.



The two species most sought after in the Gippsland Lakes by recreational anglers are black bream and dusky flathead and stocks of both species must be considered to be at a dangerous level and added to this the total commercial catch in the Gippsland Lakes is at its lowest level for at least the last 25 years.

One of the few pleasing aspects of these statistics is the massive decline in the catch of European Carp in the Gippsland Lakes which in 2009/10 was a mere 25 tonnes compared with an average of over 400 tonnes for the five years 2001/2 to 2005/6. I suspect this may be due to the increasing salinity of the Gippsland Lakes.

The total value of the commercial catch of all fish species in the Gippsland Lakes was just under \$1m (excluding carp) and this figure was shared between the ten commercial fishermen. What would be of concern to the commercial fishermen is that with declining income from the fishery the value of their licence in any buyback is declining given that the value of black bream alone was over \$1m in many of the previous years. (In 2009/10 it was \$418,000)

Victag and Fish Tagging in Victoria

The following is a summary of a paper provided by Bruce Robinson a former Victag Coordinator.



Victag is a tag and release program managed by the Victorian Branch of the National Sportfishing Association (ANSA) under licence to Fisheries Victoria.

The database has in excess of 68,000 fish tagged and has dealt with about 2300 recaptures. The first fish in the database was tagged in December 1993 and of course this means a substantial amount of data to be managed into the future.

The last project that was lucky enough to get funding was completed under the Commonwealth Governments Recreational Fishing Community Grants Program. The project set the target of tagging 2500 Black Bream in the Gippsland Lakes, and 1000 King George Whiting across Victoria. The majority of whiting tagged have been in Port Phillip and Westernport Bays, and the remainder tagged in the Gippsland Lakes (1.5%) and the area east of Wilson's Promontory to McLaughlin's Beach. (3.4%)

Some of the notable recaptures include-

- 1.** A 600mm Australian Salmon tagged by Scott Gray on the 13/12/2004 off Killarney in Western Victoria was recaptured at 7 Mile Beach Forster NSW 12/6/06 after having travelled 850kms in 545 days.
- 2.** A 550mm Australian Salmon tagged by G, Roberts 27/6/05 in Tamboon Inlet was recaptured at Tura Beach on the 8/9/05 having travelled 159kms in only 43 days.
- 3.** A 360mm Australian Salmon tagged in Portland Harbour by Tony Jones on the 7/1/95 was recaptured off Albany WA on the 5/9/2000 having grown 240ms to an impressive 600mm fish. This salmon was at large for 2068 days and travelled from Victoria to Western Australia in that time.
- 4.** An estuary perch tagged by Brett Geddes on the 6/6/2004 in the upper reaches of the Perry River at the head of the Gippsland Lakes. On the 12/10/2008 David Johnston recaptured it at the entrance to McLaughlin's Beach after 1559 days at large.
- 5.** A black bream tagged by the late Peter Spehr in Lake Tyers on the 2/12/2006 was caught 783 days later on the 23/1/2009 in the Marlo system at the mouth of the Snowy River.
- 6.** A 290mm snapper tagged by Tony Jones near Portland on the 11/1/2001 was recaptured on the 27/1/2006 off Kingston SA with a total length of 480mms. This fish was at liberty for 1,841 days and had grown by 190mms.
- 7.** Another snapper tagged by Tony Jones in Portland Harbour on the 26/1/2000 was recaptured on the 23/12/2009 in Port Phillip Bay. It was at large for 3619 days and had grown by 460mms.
- 8.** A 1500mm Blue Shark tagged by Ken Hines off Port Fairy on the 22/1/2005 was recaptured by a Spanish Long Liner west of Perth on the 9/1/2006. It had travelled 3100kms during 352 days liberty and had grown by 790mms in that time.

9. A 2100mms Blue Shark tagged by Kevin Phillips 26/3/2005 was recaptured by an Indonesian Long Liner off Java on the 7/10/2005 with a total length of 2370mms. This shark had travelled an incredible 4800kms in only 195 days or 24.6kms per day.

Many recaptures are again released and the database has entries for the fish being caught for the second and third time. It is important that if you catch a tagged fish not to remove the tag from the fish, but clean the tag (they do get marine growth on them) get the details off the tag, weigh and measure the fish and gently release it again. Catching a tagged fish is relatively rare and they may provide further information if they are released.

Brian Hayes immediate past president of ANSA Vic. indicated that VICTAG, had never received any funding from Victoria Fisheries nor was it successful when it applied for funding from the Fisheries Revenue Allocation committee. It did receive some funding from the Commonwealth Government through the Federal National Heritage Trust.

Bruce explained that today the program is in maintenance mode at present, “that is maintaining reported captures only. Tagging suspended due to lack of funds, management resources etc.” All previous data gained from almost 70,000 tagged fish were only made available to Fisheries.

I can't help feeling that the thousand of hours of work undertaken by recreational anglers to develop this bank of data deserves some support, and surely from the work of VICTAG we have become far more aware of the movement of our fish species that could be valuable in a range of research issues. I think it is also evident that anglers themselves and the community have become far more interested in our fish stocks as a result of VICTAG and this surely warrants support.

Of particular interest to Gippsland recreational anglers 5683 dusky flathead have been tagged across Victoria and 660 recaptures which is almost a 12% recapture rate, whilst an amazing 18,283 black bream have been tagged with 400 recaptures which is a 2% recapture rate.

Editor

Thanks to Bruce Robinson and Brian Hayes for supplying the material on which this item is based. It again illustrates recreational anglers working towards a better understanding of this wonderful sport.

The Freshwater Catfish

Thanks to Rob Loats of VRFish for providing this excellent report on The Murray Darling Catfish from NSW researchers Meaghan Rourke and Dean Gilligan. *This research was undertaken in 2004 and reissued in 2010. The following is a short summary of that report.

The freshwater catfish was once widespread in Eastern Australia prior to the 1980's. They provided good recreational fishing opportunities and were considered an excellent table fish. In recent times the catfish has suffered a severe decline both in abundance and distribution. This decline seems to be associated with the invasion of carp in the 1970's and 80's.



As a result regulations covering catfish are now very restrictive with angling prohibited in all flowing waters in western New South Wales and Victoria apart from the Wimmera Basin. In 2008 freshwater catfish in the Murray Darling Basin were listed as an endangered species. These regulations are likely to remain unchanged unless there is a substantial recovery in freshwater catfish numbers.

One potential method of increasing the wild population is by stocking rivers and impoundments with hatchery bred fish. Recent advances in mass production techniques have made hatchery production a viable option to produce reasonable numbers of fish for release. Whilst stocking may have some negative aspects it is an important tool for the management of a threatened species. Prior to any restocking program information is required on the genetic structure of the species, as this will enable the establishment of brood stock genetic zones and ensure catfish are stocked into zones where they have the best chance of survival.

In this research fin clips were collected from 831 catfish and 31 populations and the resulting research found considerable genetic variation in the species. In NSW each coastal catchment was identified as a separate broodfish genetic zone, however there was limited genetic variation in the Murray Darling Catchment.

Following this study a number of recommendations were made, which in summary are as follows

The genetic variation of freshwater catfish has been recognised, and the limited genetic variation in the Murray Darling Basin should provide a chance of restocking, whilst in other waters broodstock from individual waters should be used in breeding programs for the restocking of those waters and this study recognises that variation and provides a basis for restocking in the future whilst saving the genetic characteristics of the wild fish.

This research would seem to open the way for serious consideration of restocking given the success of the restocking of Murray cod, trout cod, golden perch, bass and silver perch.

*The research paper was entitled “Population genetic structure of freshwater catfish (*Tandanus tandanus*) in the Murray Darling Basin and coastal catchments of NSW. Implications for future restocking programs.

A Historical perspective on the Fresh Water Catfish



A Catfish Catch of the 1950's when there were no bag limits and no size limits.

Little was it expected that this Murray / Darling species would go into rapid decline with the arrival of the European Carp.

Marine Parks and Funding Concerns.

In the last issue of *Around the Jetties*, Simon Branigan Marine and Coastal Project Officer for the Victorian National Parks Association wrote a letter regarding the concerns voiced by recreational anglers with the Victorian National Parks Association and its moves to increase Marine Parks in Victoria. This week The Victorian Auditor General in a report to State Parliament indicated that of the \$38.1m provided to Parks Victoria between 2002-2009 for expenditure on Marine Parks only \$3.8m or 10% of that amount could be shown by Parks Victoria to have been actually spent on Marine Parks. The Auditor General went on to say that “Parks Victoria has not used dedicated funding for marine Parks and its staff are not required to record how much time they spend on their activities.” That is activities associated with Marine Parks and at the same time concern has been expressed at the lack of firm scientific data on the benefits of Marine Parks. I think it fair to suggest that the Victorian National Parks Association will have some problem with suggesting increasing the number of Marine Parks when it would seem Parks Victoria has difficulty looking after the current parks and utilizing the funding provided for these parks.

VRFish was quick to provide a media release on this issue with a call on the Victorian Government “to work with stakeholders to develop a more holistic approach to the environmental management of our marine areas that would ultimately replace the piecemeal system of Marine Protected Areas that are ineffective and only serve to divide the community.”

Bob Pearce wrote prior to the announcement by the Auditor General that he was deeply involved as chairman of VRFish in the process of Marine Parks. In his view the process was basically a sham, and the issues raised by recreational anglers were largely ignored. He went on to say, “the process did not include anything much in the way of scientific evidence to justify the implementation of the parks and there has not been any independent scientifically based information to suggest that there has been any benefit from the Marine National Parks that exist today.”

Tracks into Lake Tyers

On Monday the 21st of February a group including Chris Rose Regional Manager East Gippsland, Will McCutcheon Chief Ranger, and Hayley Menheere Project Officer, Parks Victoria, and Christopher Collins CEO of VRFish representing the interests of recreational anglers were led on a tour of the tracks on the east side of Lake Tyers by John Harrison. This tour aimed to inspect the current state of the tracks and to examine some work that has already been undertaken by Parks Victoria, which had included the closure of at least one track. As a member of the Lake Tyers reference Group I accompanied this party.

It needs to be stated that this was the second tour as one had been undertaken a week previous by three local anglers, and again John Harrison, who had previously discussed the issue of the tracks with the Lake Tyers Angling club, provided the four wheel drive and knowledge of the tracks. The matter of maintaining track



access to the eastern side of Lake Tyers and the question of track rationalisation is of great importance to bank anglers who do not have easy access to Lake Tyers. General concern was expressed at the state of the tracks, which in some cases are heavily eroded and a four-wheel drive is needed for safe access. It does seem that this is a responsibility of Parks Victoria.

The Team at Crystal Bay discussing Tracks

Left to right- John Harrison, Will McCutcheon, Hayley Menheere, Chris Rose and Christopher Collins

The following is a short statement from the Parks Victoria East Gippsland Manager Chris Rose.

We have discussed the results of the internal review and the Chief Ranger Will McCutcheon “will be in touch shortly to put a proposition to the angling club and some revised options that reduce access less than the original proposals, while still aiming to protect the features and values we discussed on site. I would hope they are received well by the club.”

Editor

I think it important that the proposals when provided are also evaluated by VRFish on behalf of anglers generally and in particular it is important that aged and infirm anglers have access to Lake Tyers by these tracks, particularly when it is an acknowledged Fisheries Reserve and this means maintaining the current tracks to provide reasonable safe access is a major priority.

Fishing Forums

Fisheries Victoria will again conduct twelve forums across Victoria to listen to the concerns and ideas of anglers. The first meeting will be held at Frankston on the 11th May and the last at Bendigo on June 13th. The East Gippsland Forums will be held at Port Albert on Tuesday the 21st June and at Bemm River on Wednesday the 22nd June. A similar forum was held in Bairnsdale in 2010.

Fisheries Research Report

The following report that I have summarized covers the results of angler monitoring of a number of Victorian waters, which include Anderson Inlet, Mallacoota Inlet, Lake Tyers, Glenelg River estuary, Kiewa River and the Hopkins River estuary. This summary will deal in the main with Mallacoota and Lake Tyers.

(Conran, S. Bruce, T. K. Bridge, N.F. Grixti.D)

“Since 2006 a number of formal Fishery Management Plans have been established to guide the management of recreational only fisheries in selected Victorian estuarine and fresh waters.” In these waters volunteer angler diary programs have been a cost effective method of monitoring trends and assessing key target stocks. The angler diarist provide information on catch rates, length and age structure, of the target fish and the relative strength of year classes.

Data from the angler diary program suggest that key target fish in the selected waters associated with this report whilst varying from year to year show no signs of long term decline. Average catch rates for the majority of species remained relatively constant in these waters.

Dusky flathead catchrates were low during 2009/10 particularly in Mallacoota Inlet. Whilst there is no indication of a continuing persistent decline in Mallacoota Inlet or Lake Tyers, low catchrates combined with a reduction in the proportion of large dusky flathead, that is greater than 50cms suggest the dusky flathead population in both waters should be closely monitored in the future. Ongoing use of the “research angler” particularly to monitor dusky flathead is still required and is the most cost effective method available.

(A research angler targets the same species in the same waterbody over time. These recreational anglers are participating in an instructed fish-sampling program.)

(The general angler diarist varies their species, and information from a number of diarists is used as an indicator of trends.)

Angler diarists are volunteers with a high degree of fishing expertise and an excellent knowledge of their preferred fishery

The followings a summary of data collected by research anglers in Mallacoota Inlet and Lake Tyers 2009/10.

Mean Catch Rates= fish caught per angler hour fished.

2009/10 Dusky Flathead

Mallacoota Inlet (0.4) Lake Tyers (1.0) Catch rates were lower than the average over the last 5 or 10 years

2009/10 Black Bream

Mallacoota Inlet (4) Lower than the 5 (4.5) and 10 (4.3) year average

Lake Tyers (3.9) Higher than the 5 (3.7) and 10 (3.1) year average

In the same year the Glenelg Estuary had a catch rate of 5.3 fish per angler hour.

Over the last ten years there has been a decline in the proportion of large dusky flathead in Lake Tyers and Mallacoota Inlet.

The decline in large dusky flathead in Lake Tyers and Mallacoota Inlet is likely to be the result of increased targeted fishing on large flathead in recent years. It is noted that 50% of female dusky flathead reach maturity at 56cms and 4.5 years according to recent NSW research (Gray and Barnes) The Minimum Legal Length for dusky flathead in Victoria is 27cms. (NSW 36cms) and (Queensland 40cms) If the Victorian and NSW dusky flathead mature at similar rates then many females are removed before they can reproduce, and this may impact on future recruitment of dusky flathead.

Further research into egg production and sexual maturity of female dusky flathead in eastern Victorian estuaries is needed to provide management procedures to protect this species into the future.

In Lake Tyers in 2009/10 8-research anglers caught 1701 black bream on 112 trips with a catch rate of 3.86 fish per hour. 2 dusky flathead research anglers in 9 trips caught 127 dusky flathead with a catchrate 0.98 fish per hour

In Mallacoota Inlet in 2009/10 1-research angler in 12 trips caught 193 black bream with a catch rate of 3.98 fish per hour. In the same water 2 research anglers in 12 trips caught 127 dusky flathead with a catchrate per angler hour of 0.37 fish.

A Point of Interest

Catchrates of mulloway in the Hopkins and Glenelg estuaries are low at one fish every three hours, and this has been the same for the last ten years. The mulloway is a fast growing fish and can reach 98cms in six years. Most fish caught in these estuaries are juvenile that is less than 70cms, and it is thought that maturing mulloway leave the estuary and spend their adult life in coastal marine waters.



Photo Shows a Mulloway taken in the Glenelg River during a research fishing exercise.

Editors Comment

This report gives figures to catch rates and provides optimism for the future of recreational angling in Lake Tyers and Mallacoota. I was interested in the reports comments on mulloway in the Glenelg and Hopkins estuaries. Mulloway are also present in both Mallacoota and the Gippsland Lakes although they are a rare catch and much of the information is anecdotal. Mulloway have been caught at Mallacoota weighing up to 25kgs and similar catches have taken place off Metung in the Gippsland Lakes. Local fishing identity Pat Milito is said to have caught a 112lb mulloway in a bait net at the

entrance to Chinamans's Creek, but this was in the 1950's. It is said that an even bigger fish was caught in his bait nets at one time but had to be cut out, as it was too big to handle. A visiting anglers photograph was featured in the Bairnsdale Advertiser with a 57lb mulloway caught on Pettmans beach by a surf angler, so you never know when you may hook into a mulloway.

Dr Mathew Taylor's (NSW Fisheries Scientist) report to Fisheries Victoria on Marine Stocking of fish suggests large mulloway have been caught in Lake Tyers, however he believes mulloway should not be stocked in Lake Tyers because of the lack of juvenile habitat. I have no confirmed reports of mulloway catches in Lake Tyers, however this does not mean they have not occurred in the past. One of the most interesting comments of Dr Taylor was that estuary perch should also not be stocked in this water and states that there is "a current small interest by anglers fishing in Lake Tyers" in estuary perch. I found this difficult to accept, as I know of several submissions to the Lake Tyers Management Plan seeking stocking of estuary perch in Lake Tyers. Readers of this publication will recall that in the early eighties over a tonne of estuary perch were caught in commercial nets in this lake. Perhaps we should be examining why such numbers of estuary perch are no longer caught in this beautiful estuary. (Dr Taylor has received over \$200,000 to investigate stocking of Lake Tyers with Eastern King prawns.) Now this is probably a matter that has small angler interest for Lake Tyers anglers. The Glenelg estuary continues to be considered by many to be the mulloway capital of Victoria.

Contributions- Your contributions to this angling newsletter are most welcome and we look forward to publishing your items of interest

Readers- Don't forget you may get a friend or an interested angler onto the mailing list for Around the Jetties by simply sending us an email with details of the person you are nominating and his email address or a letter with details of a mailing address.

**Good Health and good fishing
Lynton Barr**

It is hoped in the next issue of Around the Jetties to have a profile of Pat Milito who has over 60 years experience of fishing and bait catching in the Gippsland Lakes and Lake Tyers.

Your Opinion Is Urgently Wanted

This publication believes more Fisheries Officers are needed but should not be funded from the General Angling Licence at the expense of research and stocking. What is your opinion?

Please drop a note, phone, or email to this newsletter and tell us what you think. No names will be published but your opinions on this matter will be. This is important.